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CLASSICS

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Between the clouds

Charlie Siem *violin*
Itamar Golan *piano*

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Notes

Polish-born and French-trained Henryk Wieniawski (1835-1880) was one of the great violin prodigies of his time, renowned for his blend of Gallic elegance and Slavonic fire. From an early age he became the archetypal wandering musician with gruelling concert tours leaving little time for composition. During a visit to Russia between 1851 and 1852, he completed his Polonaise No. 1 in D major, Op. 4 [1], a bravura work encapsulating the very essence of his artistic sensibility. Its charming main theme, not without a certain swagger, alternates with episodes of yearning and closes with a final authoritative paragraph.

There followed a period of extensive touring in Europe culminating in

a series of concerts in London where, in addition to playing chamber music with the Beethoven Quartet Society alongside Joseph Joachim (who considered Wieniawski 'the craziest risk-taking virtuoso I've ever heard'), he met his future wife Isabella Hampton. To her he dedicated *Légende*, Op. 17 [5], confessing he loved her 'more deeply than the finest Stradivarius or Guarneri'. Written in 1860, this *billet-doux* unfolds in poetic fashion, bearing its romantic vein and salon-like composure with consummate ease.

Ten years later, after Wieniawski had returned to Russia for the prestigious position as principal violinist of St Petersburg's court orchestra, he produced his Polonaise Brillante

No. 2 in A major, Op. 21 [12]. More complex and expansive than the first, the new work is no less virtuosic, its outer brilliance framed by a more pastoral lyricism yet not without expressive demands.

Leopold Godowsky (1870-1938) was a Polish born, American naturalised *wunderkind* who won lasting repute for his Berlin debut in 1900. It launched his European career until the outbreak of war in 1914 forced his return to the United States where his family had emigrated in 1884. Almost entirely self-taught, many consider his playing to be unsurpassed to this day, while as a composer he wrote some of the most complex music for the piano yet conceived, prompting Rachmaninov to declare he was 'the only musician of his age who has given a lasting, a real contribution to the development of piano music'.

His major works include the Passacaglia on Schubert's 'Unfinished' Symphony, the 53 Studies on Chopin Études (deemed almost unplayable by all but the most prodigiously gifted pianists) and a suite of 30 evocative miniatures known as *Triakontameron* of which 'Alt Wein' [2] is among the most popular. Published in 1920 and subtitled 'thirty moods and scenes in triple measure', the picturesquely entitled pieces form a series of poignant reminiscences. Nostalgia for pre-war Vienna in 'Alt Wein' is made explicit by Godowsky's suggestive phrase below the work's title: 'Whose yesterdays look backwards with a smile through tears'.

The spirit of Vienna can also be heard in the music of the Austrian composer/violinist Friedrich (Fritz) Kreisler (1875-1962). His recitals regularly included his own pieces, admitting to these pastiches of

Corelli, Pugnani, Vivaldi and many others and claiming in 1935 it would be 'impudent and tactless to repeat my name endlessly on the programmes'. Over fifty years earlier he had been, at seven, the youngest student ever enrolled at the Vienna Conservatory and after further study in Paris enjoyed an international career in Europe and the US where he eventually acquired American citizenship in 1943.

Amongst his compositions there are two operettas and a violin concerto, yet it was his falsely attributed recital pieces for violin and piano that became staples of the repertoire. When Schott published a modest collection of these works in 1910 they sold in their thousands. They include *Tambourin chinois*, Op. 3 [3], a work reflecting the prevailing vogue for all things oriental. Inspired by a visit to San Francisco's Chinese

Theater, this 'free fantasy in the Chinese manner' is notable for its ebullience and soulful central episode. Kreisler's *Recitativo und Scherzo-Caprice*, Op. 6 [4] is the composer's only known work for solo violin and was written for the Belgian violinist Eugène Ysaÿe. Issued in 1911, its two sections are strongly differentiated; one declamatory and marked by the interval of a tritone, the other a parade of techniques requiring no small degree of virtuosity. It is in works such as the delightful *Schön Rosmarin* (Lovely Rosemary) [9] where the spirit of Vienna is most affectionally evoked. This exquisite miniature surely breathes the same air as any Johann Strauss waltz, its pre-war charm and melodic gift undeniable. Its appearance in a 1905 collection entitled *Alt-Wiener Tanzweisen* (Old Viennese Dance Tunes) was deliberately

misattributed to Joseph Lanner and included two companion pieces; the uplifting *Liebesfreud* (Love's Joy) [10] and the wistful *Liebesleid* (Love's Sorrow) [11], both stylish examples of the composer's elegance.

It was Kreisler who in 1910 premiered the Violin Concerto of Edward Elgar (1857-1934) some ten years after its composer had secured his first major success with the *Enigma Variations*. From that same year (1899) Elgar completed *Chanson de Matin*, Op. 15, No. 2 [6], a work of considerable freshness and charm sketched some years earlier. Determined to avoid the financial shortfall of his *Salut d'Amour*, Elgar urged Novello's to take care of *Chanson de Matin*, 'It's not much, but don't lose it [!] because I can sell it'. He later arranged it for small orchestra, and it was first performed in this version at the Queen's Hall

on 14 September 1901. At the same concert appeared his 1897 *Chanson de Nuit*, Op. 15, No. 1 [7] also conceived for violin and piano. It was originally called *Evensong*, to reflect its devotional reverie, but Novello's recommended the commercial advantages of a foreign name to which Elgar somewhat grudgingly responded '*Chanson de Nuit* was best, but I dislike a French title'.

Unlike Elgar, the talent of Pablo de Sarasate (1844-1908) was recognised early on when he gave his first violin recital in northern Spain aged eight, later catching the ear of Queen Isabella II whose patronage enabled him to study at the Paris Conservatoire. After solo debuts in the French capital and London, his renown as an international violinist flourished, and his ability to draw large audiences and command huge fees owed much

to his technical facility and purity of tone. While George Bernard Shaw was less impressed by Sarasate's interpretative insights, Carl Flesch asserted 'The history of violin playing cannot be imagined without him'.

Sarasate's own compositions were designed mainly to showcase his technique and his 54 opus numbers all feature works for the violin, either with the piano or orchestra. Best known amongst these are the *Zigeunerweisen* (1878), four books of *Spanische Tänze* and his *Carmen Fantasy* (1883). His 1899 Introduction et Tarantelle, Op. 43 [8], originally for violin and piano, is a work of considerable appeal and scintillation. Like so many of his works, it is divided into two sections; a slow and eloquent *Moderato* (where soaring phrases extend across the whole range) yields to a passage of rapid arpeggios that leads to

a brilliant *tarantella*, providing the soloist with an exhilarating workout.

The works of Niccolò Paganini (1782-1840) were also written for himself to play. Hailed by Robert Schumann as the 'turning point of virtuosity', his reputation as the greatest violinist of his age was secured after a series of recitals given in Vienna in 1828; thereafter, people flocked to hear him and the promise of his own compositions. Of these his six violin concertos and the formidably demanding 24 Caprices for Solo Violin are his most renowned. The Cantabile, Op. 17 [13] – his only piece conceived for violin and piano – abandons daring acrobatics for long-breathed melodic contours, redolent of the opera house, that have conferred lasting popularity.

Paganini's compatriot, Bologna-born Tomaso Antonio Vitali (1663-1745) established himself as a violinist

with the orchestra of the Este court in Modena and as a composer of music for the violin. He is chiefly associated with the Chaconne in G minor [14], brought to wide attention by Ferdinand David (remembered for premiering Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto) who attributed the work to Vitali after discovering its manuscript in Dresden's Sächsische Landesbibliothek. Following a published edition in 1867, Vitali's Chaconne gradually secured popular recognition through numerous arrangements. Despite unfolding in a typically Baroque manner with a set of elaborate variations on an eight-bar theme over a simple ground bass, its startling modulations to remote keys does much to challenge the authenticity of its creator.

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) made highly effective use of a chaconne in his String Quartet No. 2 in 1945. Just a couple of years before there appeared his first volume of folk song arrangements, including *The Sally Gardens* [15], written during his 'exile' in the United States when he and Peter Pears gave regular recital programmes. Britten went on to compose more than 50 folk-song arrangements, elevating the form to the level of art song. *The Sally Gardens* is a traditional Irish song whose haunting beauty is much enhanced by its simple, yet imaginatively conceived accompaniment, and perfectly captures the feelings of lost love outlined by W.B. Yeats. This arrangement for violin and piano is no less intimate.

Notes by David Truslove

Charlie Siem

Charlie Siem is one of today's foremost young violinists, with such a wide-ranging diversity of cross-cultural appeal as to have played a large part in defining what it means to be a true artist of the 21st century.

Born in London, to a Norwegian father and British mother, Siem began to play the violin at the age of three after hearing a broadcast of Yehudi Menuhin playing Beethoven's Violin Concerto. He received a broad and thorough education from Eton College, before completing the intellectually demanding undergraduate degree programme in Music at the University of Cambridge. From 1998 to 2004, he studied the violin with Itzhak Rashkovsky in London

at the Royal College of Music, and since 2004 has been mentored by Shlomo Mintz.

Siem has appeared with many of the world's finest orchestras and chamber ensembles, including: the Bergen Philharmonic, the Camerata Salzburg, the Czech National Symphony, the Israel Philharmonic, the London Symphony, the Moscow Philharmonic, the Oslo Philharmonic, the Rotterdam Philharmonic and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. He has worked with top conductors including: Charles Dutoit, Edward Gardner, Zubin Mehta, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Sir Roger Norrington, Libor Pešek and Yuri Simonov. International festival appearances to date include: Spoleto,

St. Moritz, Gstaad, Bergen, Tine@Munch, Festival Internacional de Santa Lucía, and the Windsor Festival. Siem's regular sonata partner is renowned pianist Itamar Golan.

Highlights of the previous seasons included: concerto debuts in Mexico, Munich, and Milan; recitals in Norway with Itamar Golan; a debut with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and Maestro Charles Dutoit; and an eight-concert debut recital tour of Australia, culminating with a performance at the Sydney Opera House. Charlie Siem enjoys a strong presence in China, where during the 2016/2017 season he was named Cultural Ambassador of Nanjing, and gave fifteen concerts at major venues across the country (including

Beijing, Harbin, Nanjing, Shanghai, Xiamen, and Xuzhou), a tour of the Bruch Concerto with the Israel Philharmonic and Maestro Zubin Mehta; Siem's USA concerto debut (Sibelius Concerto with Jacksonville Symphony and Music Director Courtney Lewis); a tour of China with the Czech National Symphony Orchestra; and a South American recital tour with Itamar Golan.

Charlie Siem has a varied discography and has made a number of recordings, including with the London Symphony Orchestra (Warner Classics, 2011) and Münchner Rundfunkorchester (Sony Classical, 2014).

A great believer in giving to worthwhile causes, Siem is an



ambassador of The Prince's Trust. He is also a Visiting Professor at Leeds College of Music in the UK, and Nanjing University of the Arts in China. He gives masterclasses around the world at top institutions such as the Royal College of Music in London, and the Accademia di Musica in Florence.

Passionate about bringing classical music to new audiences around the world, in addition to his classical performance career Siem has revived the age-old violinistic tradition of composing virtuosic variations of popular themes, which he has done alongside artists including: Bryan Adams, Jamie Cullum and The Who. In 2014, he wrote his first composition – *Canopy*, for solo violin and string orchestra – which was commissioned by the USA television station 'CBS Watch!' and recorded with the English Chamber Orchestra.

Siem has also had numerous collaborations with fashion brands including: Armani, Chanel, Dior, Dunhill, and Hugo Boss.

Charlie Siem plays the 1735 Guarneri del Gesù violin, known as the "*D'Egville*".

Itamar Golan

For more than two decades, Itamar Golan has been partnering the most outstanding instrumentalists of our time. His work has brought him great critical acclaim, and he is one of the most sought after pianists of his generation, playing on the most prestigious stages around the world.

Born in Vilnius, Lithuania, his family emigrated to Israel when he was a year old. There he started his musical studies and at the age of 7, gave his first concerts in Tel-Aviv.

He was repeatedly awarded scholarships from the American-Israel Cultural Foundation which enabled him to study with Emanuel Krasovsky and his chamber music mentor, Chaim Taub. Later under a full

scholarship from the New England Conservatory of Boston, he was chosen to study with Leonard Shure.

Since his earliest years, Itamar Golan's passion has been chamber music but he has also appeared as soloist with some of the major orchestras, including the Israel Philharmonic and the Berlin Philharmonic under the direction of Zubin Mehta, Royal Philharmonic under the direction of Daniele Gatti, the Orchestra Philharmonica della Scala, the Vienna Philharmonic under the direction of Riccardo Muti and Philharmonia Orchestra under the direction of Lorin Maazel.

Over the years, he has collaborated with Vadim Repin, Maxim Vengerov,

Julian Rachlin, Mischa Maisky, Shlomo Mintz, Ivry Gitlis, Ida Haendel, Kyung Wha Chung, Sharon Kam, Janine Jansen, Martin Frost and Torleif Thedeen among many others.

He is a frequent participant in many prestigious international music festivals, such as Salzburg, Verbier, Lucerne, Tanglewood, Ravinia, and has made a numerous recordings for big labels as Deutsche Grammophon, Warner Classics, Decca, Teldec, EMI and Sony Classical.

In 1991, Itamar Golan was nominated to the faculty of the Manhattan School of Music, making him one of their youngest teachers ever. Since 1994, he has taught chamber music at the Paris



Conservatory. Itamar resides in Paris, where he is involved in many different artistic projects.