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NAXOS

Georgy L'vovich
CATOIRE
(1861-1926)

Complete Works
for Violin and Piano

Violin Sonata No. 1
Violin Sonata No. 2 'Poème'
Elegy

Laurence Kayaleh, Violin • Stéphane Lemelin, Piano

Georgy L'vovich Catoire (1861-1926)

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The Russian composer Georgy L'vovich Catoire (or sometimes 'Katuvar') is primarily remembered in his homeland not for his original works, but for his rôle as a music theorist and teacher. Like many of his more famous countrymen – Mussorgsky, Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov and others – Catoire received only patchy musical training, and meanwhile completed a Mathematics degree at Moscow University in 1884. But no less a figure than Tchaikovsky encouraged him to pursue a musical career, remarking that Catoire was 'gifted with a powerful creative talent... I persuaded him to take up his studies seriously.'

Catoire had learned the piano with Karl Klindworth, a pupil of Liszt and an ardent Wagnerian, who was responsible for preparing the piano scores of the *Ring*. Klindworth ignited in Catoire a similar passion for Wagner's music – but this was a deeply unpopular view to hold in a Russia which was just beginning to assert its own, distinctly anti-German, cultural identity. Whilst the newly-founded Conservatoires in St Petersburg and Moscow (both established in the 1860s) were encouraging the study of Western European music, the composers of the 'Mighty Handful' were adamant that a new, truly Russian musical style must be developed.

Catoire spent several months in 1885 in Berlin, attempting to further his studies; but when he was unable to find suitable teachers, he sought out Russian musicians instead, eventually finding allies in Anton Arensky and Alexander Taneyev. (Arensky, in particular, was more sympathetic to Catoire's interest in Wagner.) He composed steadily, if not prolifically, over the course of the next thirty years: his oeuvre includes solo piano works, a small body of chamber music, a *Symphony in C minor* and a symphonic poem, a cantata based on Lermontov's *Rusalka*, and a *Piano Concerto*. He was appointed Professor of Music Theory and Composition at the Moscow Conservatoire in 1917, and held this position until his death nine years later. Catoire was greatly respected as a teacher – Kabalevsky was probably his most famous pupil – and also devoted much of his time

during these last years to the writings of two large theoretical texts which drew on Western European music analysis and presented the techniques in a pedagogical format, to be used to teach composition and musical construction to students. Most Russian music theory books still owe a debt to Catoire's writing.

As a Wagnerian, Catoire's music is rich with chromatic harmonies and sweeping melodies – and his piano writing seems to owe much to Arensky (who taught Rachmaninov) and Chopin. In later years, he also became interested in the music of the French Impressionists, and several of the pieces on this disc seem to bear traces of Debussyan harmonies and colours.

We begin with Catoire's *Violin Sonata No. 1 in B minor, Op. 15*, published by 1906. This is a substantial three-movement work, with a particularly expansive first movement. This *Allegro non tanto, ma appassionato* begins with grand rhetorical gestures from both players – sweeping downwards arpeggios in the piano, and upward-leaping passages for the violin – which give way to a more lyrical, impassioned development of this material. The music feels wildly unstable, the bassline of the piano seemingly in a constant process of ascent or descent by semiquavers which removes any clear sense of progressing through related keys as the movement unfolds. Catoire constantly varies the rhythmic groupings within the piano part, dividing beats into threes, fours, fives and sixes as the accompaniment swells and dips up and down the staves.

The second movement, a *Barcarolle*, provides some much-needed tranquillity after the opening stormy *Allegro*: the violin and piano exchange a gentle, rather mournful theme, the players both answering each other and duetting as the movement progresses. Following a powerful central climax, the music gradually subsides, the piano playing a series of seventh chords which seem reminiscent of Debussy. In the final few pages of the score, the violin's melody often sits between the high-wandering triplets of the piano's right hand and its bassline.

Finally, the closing *Allegro con spirito* is full of rhythmic play, the piano leaping up and down registers and striking offbeat chords to confuse the sense of pulse. Catoire even varies time signatures, sometimes just a bar at a time, to further blur the metre. There is a lightness and bounce to this movement, mercurial both in its rhythms and its constant alternation of major and minor harmonies. Towards its conclusion, we return to the arpeggiated flow and grandeur of the *Sonata's* opening.

Both Catoire's violin sonatas bear dedications to musical associates: the *First Sonata* to Nikolay Medtner who, like Catoire, had a great interest in German musical models; and the *Second Sonata* to Alexander Goldenweiser, who had also studied with Arensky and Taneyev, and was a colleague of Catoire at the Moscow Conservatoire. This *Sonata No. 2 in D major, Op. 20* bears the subtitle '*Poème*', and was considered at the time to be one of the most beautiful and effective works for this medium.

Unlike its predecessor, the *Second Sonata* (1906) is a single, through-composed work. Although it can be divided roughly into three sections (*Andante, Allegro moderato, Allegro risoluto*), Catoire provides countless instructions to the performers to vary the tempo and character of the music, which gives the impression of a constantly evolving musical entity, rather than a sectionalised work. Throughout, the influence of Debussy

is tangible: the opening harmonies of A major undermined with a repeated F natural seem to conjure the world of *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (a little over a decade old at the time). The central *Allegro moderato* brings with it a greater sense of propulsion and energy, after the dreamy opening *Andante*; whilst the final segment of the *Sonata* becomes ever more passionate and agitated, tumbling through keys until, in the very last bars of the piece, the home key of D major is reached. Catoire laces these final measures with B flat, gently ruffling our sense of closure in the same manner as the Impressionist harmonies of the opening.

The final piece on this recording, the *Elegy in D minor, Op. 26*, was probably written in the early 19-teens. This beautiful little miniature begins with a series of completely disorientating cross-rhythms and stresses, and a curiously floating series of chords which trace, but never entirely land on, a D minor chord. As with the *First Sonata* there is a strong sense of the violin and the piano as duettists, their melodic lines woven together as if in conversation. Rather than building to a climax and falling away, the *Elegy* seems rather to grow warmer and more expansive before receding into a more fragmentary presentation of material, the harmonies of Catoire's French models absorbed into his own flowing, lyrical style.

Katy Hamilton

Laurence Kayaleh



Laurence Kayaleh has performed as guest soloist with many distinguished orchestras, including the Zurich Tonhalle, Russian National Orchestra, National Orchestra (Washington), Orchestre Lamoureux (Paris), Montreal Symphony Orchestra, and the major orchestras of Cleveland, St. Louis, Caracas, Basel and Mexico City, under such conductors as Slatkin, Pletnev, Dutoit, Kogan, Venzago, Nowak and Wakasugi. *Le Figaro* world-renowned critic, Pierre Petit, used the phrase "L'Archet Royal" to describe her golden tone. She has performed at the Bolshoi and Tchaikovsky Halls (Moscow), Pleyel and Gaveau Halls (Paris), Suntory Hall (Tokyo), Victoria Hall (Geneva), Verdi Hall (Milano), Teatro Teresa Carreño (Caracas), Place des Arts (Montreal), The John F. Kennedy Center (Washington) and at The Tsu Center (Japan). A guest of major festivals – Lucerne, Blossom, Cervantino – she has shared concerts with Viktor Pikayzen, Ida Haendel and Igor Oistrakh. She has recorded the complete works for violin and piano by Medtner (8.570298-99) and Honegger (8.572192) for Naxos. She plays a 1742 Guarneri which belonged to the eminent violinist and pedagogue Carl Flesch.

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Stéphane Lemelin



Pianist Stéphane Lemelin is well-known to audiences throughout Canada and tours regularly in the United States, Europe and Asia as soloist and chamber musician. His repertoire is vast, with a predilection for the German Classical and Romantic literature and a particular affinity for French music, as evidenced by his more than twenty-five recordings, which include works by Fauré, Saint-Saëns, Debussy, Poulenc and Roussel, as well as many lesser-known French composers. Stéphane Lemelin studied with Yvonne Hubert in Montreal, Karl-Ulrich Schnabel in New York, and Leon Fleisher at the Peabody Conservatory and holds a doctoral degree from Yale University. He is Professor of Piano and Chair of the Department of Performance at the Schulich School of Music of McGill University in Montreal. A dedicated pedagogue, he has been invited to give master-classes around the world. Stéphane Lemelin is the founder and Artistic Director of the Prince Edward County Music Festival.

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Tchaikovsky encouraged Georgy L'vovich Catoire to pursue a musical career, remarking that he was 'gifted with a powerful creative talent'. Catoire's passion for Wagner was intense and this infused his music with rich chromatic harmonies and sweeping melodies. His works for violin and piano are some of his very finest. The *Violin Sonata No. 1 in B minor, Op. 15* is a substantial and compelling piece, full of grandeur and constantly evolving rhythms. Like its successor, the raptly beautiful, single-movement *Violin Sonata No. 2 in D major, Op. 20*, subtitled *Poème*, it shows the influence of French Impressionism.

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Sonata No. 1 in B minor, Op. 15 (1906)	28:12
❶ I. Allegro non tanto, ma appassionato	13:21
❷ II. Barcarolle: Andante	6:50
❸ III. Allegro con spirito	8:01
❹ Sonata No. 2 in D major, Op. 20 'Poème' (1906)	19:51
❺ Elegy in D minor, Op. 26 (pub. 1916)	4:28

Laurence Kayaleh, Violin
Stéphane Lemelin, Piano

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