

ROUSSEL

Violin Sonatas Nos. 1 and 2 String Trio

David Bowlin, Violin • Tony Cho, Piano
Kirsten Docter, Viola • Dmitry Kouzov, Cello



Albert Roussel (1869–1937)

Violin Sonatas Nos. 1 and 2 • String Trio

Although he remained an outsider in French music, Albert Roussel, born at Tourcoing on 5 April 1869, embraced almost all the stylisms of his era while forging a highly personal idiom. As an academically gifted student, he was sent by guardians (his father dying in 1870 and his mother in 1877) to Paris in 1884, where he pursued musical studies at the Collège Stanislas. His early manhood was spent in the French Navy, where he rose to the rank of lieutenant and visited the Near East and China; experiences that left a notable mark on his music. Resigning from the Navy in 1894, he then settled in Paris to study music in earnest. It was a measure of his ability that, having entered the Schola Cantorum to study with Vincent d'Indy in 1898, he was invited to take over the counterpoint class after little more than four years and tutored a new generation of composers that included Erik Satie, Edgard Varèse and Bohuslav Martinů.

Roussel destroyed virtually all his compositions of the 1890s and only made his public debut as a composer in 1902. Thereafter, he built up a select catalogue (59 opuses) that falls into three main periods. From 1902 to 1913, he absorbed those Impressionistic tendencies to be found in Debussy and Ravel, evident from his *First Symphony* [Naxos 8.570323] and the large-scale choral work *Evocations*, before he arrived at an idiom of refinement and subtlety in his ballet *Le Festin de l'araignée* [8.572243]. The years around the First World War were occupied with an ambitious opera-ballet *Padmâvatî*, its Hindu-derived scenario testament to the composer's imagination, while its complex harmonic language facilitated an exploration of new musical territory evident in works written during 1918–25, such as the *Second Symphony* [8.570529], the single-act opera or 'intermezzo' *La Naissance de la lyre* and the *Second Violin Sonata*.

This period of soul-searching was succeeded around 1925 with an idiom that, though related to the prevailing neo-Classicism, feels wholly personal in its resourceful harmonies, intricate counterpoint and its energetic rhythms. Notable works include the comic opera *Le Testament de la Tante Caroline* [8.660479], ballets *Bacchus et Ariane* [8.570245] and *Aeneas*, the *Third* and *Fourth Symphonies* [8.570245 and 8.572135], and chamber works *String Quartet* and *String Trio*. His growing success outside France saw a triumphal visit to the United States in 1930, yet his failing health was taking its toll. Following a heart attack, he died at Royan on 23 August 1937 and was buried overlooking the sea – his music 'realised for its own sake'.

The three pieces heard here afford a viable overview of Roussel's chamber music as well as his output overall – respectively exuding a decided earnestness, a quizzical ambivalence then a searching resignation no less evident from other of this composer's works written at much the same time. Common to all three is a technique and craftsmanship that enabled Roussel to realise his creative goals with a conviction matched by relatively few of his contemporaries.

Roussel had actually completed a violin sonata as early as 1902 but this piece – premiered at the Salle Pleyel in Paris by Henri Sailler with Blanche Selva on 5 May that year, was later destroyed. What is designated as his *First Violin Sonata* was written during 1907–08 then given its first performance by Armand Parent with Marthe Dron on 9 October 1908. Dedicated to his teacher D'Indy, this is the most substantial of all its composer's chamber works; the three movements playing for more than 30 minutes and with a pronounced seriousness throughout.

The opening movement begins with a moodily eloquent theme which expands at some length on violin, piano attentive in its support. Presently the music becomes more animated, heading to a more plaintive theme in which interplay between the instruments is at its most felicitous. Intensive development of elements from these themes ranges considerably whether tonally or texturally, building towards a heightened restatement of the first theme which moves directly into that of its successor. Its liveliness soon subsides into a lengthy coda, motifs encountered earlier quickly subsumed into a mood which is sombre and even fatalistic in overall manner.

Poised between scherzo and intermezzo, the central movement commences with a delightfully jejune tune whose unaffected mood and strummed pizzicatos imply a folk or popular aspect. This duly makes way for a middle section centred on a theme whose subdued demeanour and spare textures make for a decided contrast; one which is duly underlined with the return of its carefree predecessor. Here the music briefly has greater impetus on its way to a lissom close.

The final movement sets off with surging piano figuration, then a theme for violin both agile and decisive. An almost bitonal response from piano introduces a second idea whose '*moto perpetuo*' quality leads into spirited repartee, which also takes in more an overtly expressive theme for the duo. This is presently countered with a return to the opening theme, before all the ideas heard previously are brought together for what becomes a culmination of no mean emotional power. From here the music moves swiftly and surely to its decisive conclusion.

By the time he essayed his *Second Violin Sonata* in 1924, Roussel was well established in his native France, with two symphonies, an opera, a ballet and a major choral work to his name. Dedicated to his fellow composer Guy Ropartz and premiered at the Salle Gaveau in Paris by André Asselin with Lucie Cafferet on 15 October 1925, the work is little more than half the length of its predecessor but with no less sense of purpose – the three movements outlining a progress to tensile affirmation, and never letting up on that abstraction typical of his maturity.

The opening *Allegro* plunges straight in with an impetuous theme – one whose tonal fluidity is paralleled by its textural variety. Its successor is more focussed but hardly less restive in its soaring eloquence, after which there is less formal development as such than a continuous evolution of both themes which accentuates their essential qualities prior to the serene close. The central *Andante* typifies a searching inwardness found in much of the composer's work from this period, violin musing over a stepwise piano accompaniment that builds to a climax of some intensity, before subsiding towards a return of the initial mood then a pensive close. The final *Presto* launches with syncopated interplay between the instruments, replete with its audibly jazzy inflections alongside a tendency to motoric rhythm, which confirms Roussel's awareness of his contemporaries Stravinsky and Prokofiev. Most of what follows consists of dextrous development of this idea, and if the movement overall might seem too lightweight a finale, its formal precision and lively expression proves all of a piece with what went before.

Premiered by the Pasquier Trio (brothers Jean on violin, Pierre on viola and Étienne on cello) in Paris on 4 April 1937, the *String Trio* was to be Roussel's last completed piece (he died just over four months later) and exemplifies those qualities of concision and asceticism found in the composer's late work. Once again there are three movements but the seamlessness with which those compressed outer movements flow into then out of the longer central movement, along with their motivic concentration, gives the feeling of an integrated and unbroken unity.

The opening *Allegro moderato* is moderately paced and restrained in its discourse, though this does not preclude the three instruments from generating a considerable impetus through their intensive interplay. Here too the salient ideas – more motifs than actual themes – seem less significant than the refined nature of the overall texture. This is hardly less evident in the central *Adagio*, one of its composer's most profound and searching statements as it pivots between music of an almost Classical poise with that of a pronounced 'modern' sensibility. Building towards a climax of sustained intensity, this ultimately dies down to a close of muted regret. From here the final *Allegro con spirito* seeks to redress the emotional balance with its nonchalant aura, assuming a dance-like agility while touching on more equivocal issues before it heads to a resolute close.

Richard Whitehouse

David Bowlin

Photo: Tanya Rosen-Jones



Violinist David Bowlin is on the violin and chamber music faculty at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, where he also serves as chair of strings. First Prize winner of the 2003 Washington International Competition, Bowlin has performed extensively as a soloist, with premieres of violin concertos written for him at Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart Festival, Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall and the Aspen Music Festival. As a chamber musician, Bowlin has undertaken many tours with Musicians from Marlboro, and performs regularly with both the Oberlin Trio and the Bowlin-Cho Duo with pianist Tony Cho. Bowlin is a founding member of the acclaimed International Contemporary Ensemble and a former member of the Naumburg Award-winning Da Capo Chamber Players. He has performed as guest concertmaster with The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, the Marlboro Festival Orchestra and the Iris Orchestra. Bowlin has appeared at many other festivals, including the Kneisel Hall Chamber Music Festival, where he has been a faculty artist since 2013.

www.oberlin.edu/david-bowlin

Tony Cho

Photo: Tanya Rosen-Jones



Pianist Tony Cho enjoys a multifaceted career as a recitalist, chamber musician and vocal coach. He has collaborated with numerous artists at venues such as Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall, Zipper Hall (Los Angeles), Ganz Hall (Chicago), Meany Hall (Seattle) and the Honolulu Museum of Art, among many others throughout the United States and abroad, and at music festivals in Aspen, Brevard, Bowdoin, Idyllwild, Kneisel Hall and Quad Cities as well as at the International Chamber Music Festival in Thessaloniki, Greece. Cho has held collaborative piano and coaching positions at The Juilliard School, University of Southern California, Chapman University and the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, where he currently serves on the chamber music faculty. He has held appointments at several opera houses, including those of Central City, Glimmerglass, Hawaii, Long Beach, Santa Barbara, Sarasota, Tulsa and Virginia, serving as assistant conductor and coach. A native of South Korea, Cho is a graduate of Oklahoma State University, the University of Cincinnati and the University of Washington.

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Kirsten Docter



Photo: Lisa-Marie Mazzucco

Kirsten Docter is associate professor of viola and chamber music at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music. First Prize wins at the Primrose International and American String Teachers Association Viola Competitions launched her on a career that has included a 23-year tenure with the Cavani String Quartet, concerts at major series and festivals, and numerous appointments as a masterclass clinician and teacher. Festival appearances include performances at the Aspen Music Festival, Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, Yale Summer School of Music, Art at Norfolk and the Seattle Chamber Music Society. She has collaborated with Itzhak Perlman, Jaime Laredo, Alisa Weilerstein, Stephanie Blythe, Nathan Gunn and Alessio Bax, as well as members of the Cleveland, Juilliard, Takács, Emerson, Borodin and Amadeus string quartets. Docter formerly served on the chamber music and viola faculty of the Cleveland Institute of Music and the University of Michigan. Her summer faculty appointments include the Perlman Music Program and Bowdoin International Music Festival.

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Dmitry Kouzov



Photo: Daniil Rabovsky

Cellist Dmitry Kouzov has performed worldwide as an orchestral and chamber musician and a recitalist. He has appeared as a soloist with the St Petersburg Symphony Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine, South Bohemian Chamber Philharmonic, Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra and Johannesburg Philharmonic Orchestra, among many others. He has also performed as a guest artist at many international festivals including Verbier, Schleswig-Holstein, Seoul International and Janáček's May. Kouzov has recorded for Delos, Onyx, Naxos, Marquis and Albany, including concertos by George Walker, Shostakovich and Sean Hickey, as well as the complete C.P.E. Bach viola da gamba sonatas and Schumann piano trios. Two of his most recent releases include *French Favorites* with pianist Peter Laul and duos by Eisler, Widmann and Ravel with violinist Ilya Gringolts, both on Delos. Kouzov is currently an associate professor of cello at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, and was previously on the faculties of The Juilliard School and the University of Illinois.

www.oberlin.edu/dmitry-kouzov

Although he is best remembered for his highly regarded stage and orchestral works, Roussel also composed a significant body of masterful yet relatively unknown chamber music. The Romantic early *First Violin Sonata* is an epic journey of soaring majesty, while the later *Second Violin Sonata* is dramatic and succinct, sharing its dynamic neo-Classical style with the *String Trio*, Roussel's last completed work.

Albert
ROUSSEL
(1869–1937)

Violin Sonata No. 1 in D minor, Op. 11 (1907–08, rev. 1931) 32:13

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| 1 | I. Lent – Très animé | 12:00 |
| 2 | II. Assez animé | 10:16 |
| 3 | III. Très animé | 9:35 |

Violin Sonata No. 2 in A major, Op. 28 (1924) 14:40

- | | | |
|----------|----------------------------|-------------|
| 4 | I. Allegro con moto | 5:02 |
| 5 | II. Andante | 4:50 |
| 6 | III. Presto | 4:32 |

String Trio, Op. 58 (1937) 13:21

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|----------|---------------------------------|-------------|
| 7 | I. Allegro moderato | 3:52 |
| 8 | II. Adagio | 6:38 |
| 9 | III. Allegro con spirito | 2:49 |

David Bowlin, Violin • Tony Cho, Piano 1–6

Kirsten Docter, Viola 7–9 • Dmitry Kouzov, Cello 7–9

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