



# Joshua Bell in recital

Wednesday 27 February 2019 7.30pm, Hall

**Beethoven** Violin Sonata No 4 in A minor,  
Op 23

**Prokofiev** Violin Sonata No 2 in D major,  
Op 94a

**interval** 20 minutes

**Grieg** Violin Sonata No 2 in G major, Op 13

**Joshua Bell** violin  
**Sam Haywood** piano

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# Welcome

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A warm welcome to this evening's concert given by one of the most acclaimed musicians of our time: violinist Joshua Bell. In partnership with Sam Haywood he presents three highly contrasting sonatas.

We begin with Beethoven and his Fourth Violin Sonata in A minor, which has tended to be somewhat overshadowed by the enormously popular Fifth (the 'Spring'). It's a work of extraordinary concentration, the outer movements full of energy, contrasting with a central Andante that breaks all the rules in melding slow movement and scherzo into one.

Prokofiev's Second Violin Sonata was written during the Second World War, but you'd

never guess from its playful, essentially sunny demeanour. It was originally a flute sonata and we have the great Soviet musician David Oistrakh to thank for persuading Prokofiev to refashion it for violin.

Joshua Bell ends with the second of Grieg's three violin sonatas, works that deserve to be far better known. This G major work perfectly melds a mastery of traditional form with the folk idioms of Norway that so beguiled the composer.

It promises to be a very memorable concert. I hope you enjoy it.

Huw Humphreys, Head of Music, Barbican

# Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

## Violin Sonata No 4 in A minor, Op 23 (1801)

1 Presto

2 Andante scherzoso, più Allegretto

3 Allegro molto

Beethoven's A minor Sonata, Op 23 was originally intended as a companion piece to the famous 'Spring' Sonata, Op 24. Beethoven worked on the two pieces simultaneously and they appeared together in October 1801 under the single opus number of 23. Only a quirk of publishing led to their separation in a new edition the following year: the violin parts of the two works had clearly been assigned to different engravers and, through an oversight, they had been prepared in different formats – one vertical, the other horizontal. In order to spare the expense of re-engraving one of the parts, the two sonatas were simply reissued individually with consecutive opus numbers. Both bore a dedication to the banker and art collector Count Moritz von Fries, who was one of the richest men in Austria and who may have commissioned the sonatas. The following year the Count invoked Beethoven's wrath when, without authority, he handed over the String Quintet, Op 29 which the composer had written for him to the Viennese firm of Artaria. Under Beethoven's agreement, the quintet was to have been published in Leipzig by Breitkopf & Härtel – the first work of his to appear under their imprint. The Count was implicated in the lawsuit Beethoven instigated over the pirated edition, though he was conveniently absent on business at the time. All of this did not, however, prevent Beethoven from subsequently dedicating his Seventh Symphony to Fries.

The two violin sonatas offer a vivid illustration of the degree to which Beethoven was able to reinvent his creative persona with each new work he undertook, and the terse and austere Op 23 Sonata could scarcely offer a stronger contrast to the relaxation of its better-known companion piece. Its outer movements are characterised throughout by stark, linear

textures in which the piano is largely confined to bare two-part writing. In view of the dramatic forcefulness of so much of their material, it is notable that all three movements end *pianissimo*, as though all energy were spent.

The key of A minor is one that Beethoven seldom used. His greatest A minor work is the late String Quartet, Op 132, but the main portion of the opening movement in the 'Kreutzer' Sonata, Op 47 is also in A minor, and in its powerful piano writing, as well as its inclusion of a sustained, chorale-like theme, the finale of the Op 23 Sonata contains strong pre-echoes of that later movement. As for Op 23's opening movement, it derives much of its intensity from the fact that it remains in the minor virtually throughout, with only a brief passage in its central development section offering a momentary glimpse of F major serenity. Surprisingly, the development also includes a stable theme in the home key – a tarantella-like idea Beethoven seems at one stage to have thought of using as the movement's main subject. Both the nature of this theme and the manner in which it is approached lend the moment the aspect of a false reprise, and in order to strengthen the illusion, the true recapitulation is drastically curtailed.

The middle movement's curious tempo marking of *Andante scherzoso, più Allegretto* indicates its function as slow movement and scherzo rolled into one. Beethoven had a lifelong fascination with such hybrid forms and the implications of the piece are further complicated by the nature of the opening subject, whose symmetrical halves, complete with quasi repeats, bring into play

the additional background of a variation theme. That background is contradicted by the delicate fugato that follows and by the eventual appearance of a contrasting second subject.

The rondo finale owes its strangely unsettling effect to the relentlessly unchanging nature of its theme, as well as the abruptness of the material presented in its short intervening

episodes. The contrast afforded by the A major first episode is, indeed, of a degree that few other composers would have ventured. It exploits one of Beethoven's favourite jokes – an apparent lapse of ensemble between the two players. He was to take up the idea again, to more blatantly comic effect, in the scherzo of the 'Spring' Sonata.

Programme note © Misha Donat

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# Sergey Prokofiev (1891–1953)

## Violin Sonata No 2 in D major, Op 94a

(1943–4)

**1 Moderato**

**2 Scherzo: Presto**

**3 Andante**

**4 Allegro con brio**

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The origins of Prokofiev's Second Violin Sonata lie, according to Izrael Nestyev, in his admiration for the artistry of French woodwind players, in particular for the 'heavenly sound' of flautist Georges Barrère (whose platinum instrument famously inspired Edgard Varèse). The sonata was originally written for flute and piano in 1943, after a lengthy gestation period. It is not known whether Prokofiev had any particular Soviet exponent in mind, but the first performance – on 7 December that year – was given by one Nikolay Kharkovsky, with Sviatoslav Richter accompanying. Richter noted that flautists 'seemed in no great hurry to perform it', and at the instigation of David Oistrakh, Prokofiev transcribed the sonata for violin and piano, Oistrakh and Lev Oborin giving the premiere of that version in June 1944.

Prokofiev was busy with several major projects during the Second World War, including his three finest piano sonatas (Nos 6, 7 and 8)

and his opera on Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. It was in his nature to seek relaxation from such intense labours in a vein of childlike simplicity, of which the Second Violin Sonata is a prime example. Little or nothing in the abundance of sunny, melodious ideas betrays the wartime circumstances of its composition. Admittedly the overall character gains a sharper edge through the transfer of the solo line from flute to violin, and the idiomatic resourcefulness of the new version represents a minor miracle of the art of transcription. But the original's subtlety of tone remains intact.

In several respects the opening Moderato recalls Prokofiev's 'Classical' Symphony, which is in the same key and features the same initial harmonic side-slips. But the mood here is more mellow (Richter himself observed that Prokofiev's temperament had become less acerbic by this stage of his life). There is an abundance of playful wit in the Scherzo second

movement, shaded by hints of roughness as it seems that bigger boys have come out to play.

As in the First Violin Sonata, the slow movement is outwardly subdued but not without a touch of fatalism in its circling figurations. Not for the first time in his output, the playfulness of Prokofiev's finale extends to a gentle parody of pedagogic exercises for the piano. But neither this nor the exuberant acrobatics of the

opening and closing pages represent the core of this movement. For that we need to turn to the central lyrical section, whose graceful melody Prokofiev's friend and admirer Francis Poulenc quoted in his Oboe Sonata of 1962, dedicated to Prokofiev's memory.

Programme note © David Fanning

**interval** 20 minutes

## Edvard Grieg (1843–1907)

### Violin Sonata No 2 in G major, Op 13 (1867)

**1 Lento doloroso – Allegro vivace**

**2 Allegretto tranquillo**

**3 Allegro animato**

Why aren't Grieg's three violin sonatas as well known as those of Brahms? The three he wrote are quite extraordinary pieces, each one representing a different aspect of the composer – from the relatively early first two (youthful and nationalistic respectively) to the outstandingly rich Third of two decades later. Perhaps their relative lack of familiarity to the wider world comes down to the simple fact that you think of Grieg and don't immediately think 'chamber music' – in fact out of all his music, only five pieces are finished chamber works – the Quartet, Cello Sonata and these three violin sonatas. So what was it that got Grieg so excited (relatively speaking) about the violin sonata? The answer: Ole Bull, violinist, composer and Norwegian national treasure. Both men were born in Bergen, though Bull was a generation older than Grieg. And as a violinist Bull was reckoned by Robert Schumann to be on a par with Paganini. Bull proved a seminal influence on Grieg, persuading his parents to let him study at the revered Leipzig Conservatoire at the age of just 15. But equally key was the fact that Ole Bull was influenced by the traditional Norwegian Hardanger fiddle,

which he incorporated into his own music. This was a deliberate political statement, one of nationalism, given that Norway was at this time part of Sweden.

In his three violin sonatas, Grieg very much made the traditional form his own, rather like Chopin in his piano sonatas. The First Sonata has a youthful verve befitting the fact that he was just 22 when he wrote it. The Second, however, despite having been written just two years later, shows a leap in terms of maturity and compositional daring that is very striking. Here we have Grieg the nationalist composer, melding Classical form with a language that is very distinctly non-Austro-German.

Grieg wrote the sonata while on honeymoon with his wife Nina in 1867 and it's perhaps not far-fetched to associate the joy that underpins much of the music with this happy time.

That said, it begins in a bleak G minor, Lento doloroso, the piano setting the scene with bare fifth harmonies (shades of the Hardanger fiddle)

and what sounds like a snippet of folk music, to which the violin responds with cadenza-like writing and an almost improvisatory freedom. All gloom is banished as we come to the Allegro vivace, now in the major, which is introduced by a cheeky idea recalling the energetic *springar* – a Norwegian folk dance – combining triplet and dotted rhythms, the violin responding with a playful boisterousness that it maintains even as the music dips to *pianissimo*. The mood becomes more subdued for a gentler second idea, marked *tranquillo*, in B minor, though this is offset by a third idea, more upbeat and in D major. Grieg then develops all three but keeps matters concise and even as we reach the recapitulation his imagination seems inexhaustible, as he continues to vary the melodies, building the music to a brilliantly upbeat conclusion, the final bars marked *Presto*.

In the slow movement a dotted folk-like theme is initially presented by the piano before being taken up and then elaborated on by the violin. The movement's tempo marking – Allegretto tranquillo – seems slightly at odds with the yearning, harmonically unstable nature of this

melody, an instability that is emphasised by shifts in tempo. Contrast comes from a middle section, in E major, whose melody echoes the shape of the opening theme but with Grieg now exploiting the treble register of the piano. There is a particularly luscious passage when, after a climax, we have a moment of silence before the piano re-enters, *pianissimo* and with rolled chords to which the violin then responds by taking the melody right up into the stratosphere. The return of the E minor opening section sounds all the more dolorous after such beauty.

The dartingly energetic rondo finale is set in motion by the pianist playing open fifths – again recalling a *springar*. Against this the violin by turn dances, cajoles, becomes ardent, then playful once more. Grieg constantly surprises us with his mercurial switches of mood which ultimately lead to a speeding up that, like the first movement, culminates in an irrepressible *Presto*.

The sonata was premiered by Grieg's compatriot Gudbrand Bøhn, with the composer at the piano, in the autumn of 1867.

Programme note © Harriet Smith

# About the performers



Bill Phelps

Joshua Bell

## Joshua Bell violin

With a career spanning over 30 years as a soloist, chamber musician, recording artist, conductor and director, Joshua Bell is one of the most celebrated violinists of his era. Since 2011 he has served as Music Director of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, succeeding Neville Marriner, who formed the orchestra in 1958.

His interests range from the core repertoire to commissioned works, including Nicholas Maw's Violin Concerto, his recording of which received a Grammy Award. He has also premiered works by John Corigliano, Edgar Meyer, Jay Greenberg and Behzad Ranjbaran.

He is committed to expanding the social and cultural impact of classical music and has collaborated with a wide range of artists, including Chick Corea, Wynton Marsalis, Chris Botti, Anoushka Shankar, Frankie Moreno, Josh Groban and Sting. This spring he joins his longtime friends cellist Steven Isserlis and pianist Jeremy Denk for a 10-city American trio tour.

He maintains an avid interest in film music. Last year marked the 20th anniversary of *The Red Violin* (on whose Academy Award-winning soundtrack he features as soloist), an anniversary he celebrated with screenings of the film together with live orchestra at various summer festivals and with the New York Philharmonic. In addition to six *Live From Lincoln Center* specials, he is also featured on a PBS Great Performances episode, *Joshua Bell: 'West Side Story' in Central Park*.

Through music and technology, he seeks to expand the boundaries of his instrument. He has partnered with Embertone on the Joshua Bell Virtual Violin, a sampler created for producers, engineers, and composers. He also collaborated with Sony on the Joshua Bell VR experience.

Joshua Bell is an exclusive Sony Classical artist and has recorded over 40 discs, which have won Grammy, Mercury, Gramophone and ECHO Klassik awards. Last June he, together with the ASMF, released Bruch's *Scottish Fantasy* and G minor Violin Concerto.

In 2007 a Pulitzer Prize-winning *Washington Post* story on Joshua Bell performing incognito in a Washington, DC metro station sparked a conversation regarding artistic reception and context. It inspired Kathy Stinson's 2013 children's book, *The Man with the Violin*, and a newly commissioned animated film. He launched the 2017 Man with the Violin festival at the Kennedy Center and next month presents a Man with the Violin festival and family concert with the Seattle Symphony Orchestra.

He also maintains active involvement with Education Through Music and Turnaround Arts, which provide instruments and arts education to children who might not otherwise experience classical music firsthand.

Joshua Bell was born in Bloomington, Indiana, and began the violin at the age of 4, going on to study with Josef Gingold aged 12. Two years later he made his debut with Riccardo Muti and the Philadelphia Orchestra, and at 17 made his Carnegie Hall debut with the St Louis Symphony. He received the 2007 Avery Fisher Prize and was named *Musical America's* Instrumentalist of the Year in 2010 and an Indiana Living Legend. He received the 2003 Indiana Governor's Arts Award and a 1991 Distinguished Alumni Service Award from his alma mater, the Jacobs School of Music.

Joshua Bell performs on the 1713 Huberman Stradivarius violin, with a François Tourte 18th-century bow.



Sam Haywood

### **Sam Haywood** piano

Sam Haywood has performed to critical acclaim in many of the world's major concert halls. He embraces a wide spectrum of the piano repertoire and is equally at home as a soloist, chamber musician and Lieder accompanist. He has had a regular duo partnership with Joshua Bell since 2010 and often performs with cellist Steven Isserlis.

He has recorded two solo albums for Hyperion: the piano music of Julius Isserlis (grandfather of Steven) and Stanford's preludes. His interest in period instruments led to a recording on

Chopin's own Pleyel piano, part of the Cobbe Collection.

In 2013 he co-founded Solent Music Festival. The annual Lymington-based festival features highly varied programmes and projects in the local community. Guest artists have included The King's Singers, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Steven Isserlis, Anthony Marwood, Mark Padmore and the Elias Quartet.

Sam Haywood was mentored by David Hartigan, Paul Badura-Skoda and Maria Curcio. Following his early success in BBC Young Musician of the Year competition, the Royal Philharmonic Society awarded him the Julius Isserlis Scholarship. He studied both at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna and at the Royal Academy of Music, of which he is an Associate (ARAM).

Sam Haywood is also active as a composer and has written several miniatures for piano. *The Other Side* was recently premiered in the Vienna Konzerthaus and the *Song of the Penguins*, dedicated to Roger Birnstingl, is published by Emerson Editions. His invention 'memorystars' can significantly reduce the time needed to memorise a music score.