

Ma'ayan Tsadka, *Efshariut Shel-I* (2012)

This piece for solo violin uses the violins open strings as its main pitch material, also using the notes a half-step away from each open string. As it moves from one string to another, the pitch material increases. Listen for the timbral differences between articulation of the same note in different places on the instrument.

–Notes by Zachary Ragent

Sergei Prokofiev, *Five Melodies, Op. 35, bis*

Prokofiev fled Russia in 1918 to escape life under the new communist government, and at first he intended to make the United States his home. His two years in this country were unhappy, however, and in April 1920 he moved to Paris, which was then the musical capital of the world. But Prokofiev quickly returned for a tour of the United States, and on that tour he visited a place he particularly liked: California. It was in California in December 1920 that Prokofiev composed a sort of novelty, a set of *Five Songs without Words* for the Russian soprano Nina Koshetz; the première took place in New York City on March 27, 1921.

Songs without words were not unheard of—Rachmaninoff's famous *Vocalise* had been composed only eight years earlier for the soprano Antonina Nezhdanovka—and as a form it emphasizes the sound of the voice and its ability to sustain a lyric line. In 1925, while living in Paris and working on his ballet *Le Pas D'Acier*, Prokofiev returned to his wordless songs and arranged them for violin and piano. In fact, this took almost no arranging at all: he simply edited the soprano's vocal line for violin, and in this form the music becomes a set of lyric miniatures for violin and piano. This music is full of the characteristic pungency of Prokofiev's harmonic language in these years, so full of accidentals that it seems to hover uneasily between different keys, and the melodic line can be angular and twisting. But there is a haunting, bittersweet lyricism about these short pieces that makes them very appealing: Prokofiev's arrangement in effect creates five brief songs for violin.

–Notes by Eric Bromberger

Moritz Moszkowski, *Guitarre, Op. 45, No. 2* (Arr. Sarasate)

Though transcribed from the German pianist Moritz Moszkowski's piano composition, Sarasate's playful, light treatment of the theme showcases the many tonal colors and effects of the violin to a brilliant result.

–Notes by Zachary Ragent

Johannes Brahms, *Sonata No. 3 in d minor, Op. 108*

Brahms spent the summer of 1886 at Lake Thun in Switzerland. He had just completed his *Fourth Symphony*, and now—in a house from which he had a view of the lake and a magnificent glacier—he turned to chamber music. That summer he completed three chamber works and began the *Violin Sonata in D Minor*, but he put the sonata aside while he wrote the *Zigeunerlieder* (“Gypsy Songs”) and *Double Concerto for Violin and Cello*, grumbling that writing for stringed instruments should be left to “someone who understands fiddles better than I do.” He returned to Lake Thun and completed his final violin sonata in the summer of 1888.

Despite Brahms' customary self-deprecation, his writing for stringed instruments could be very convincing, and the *Third Violin Sonata* is brilliant music—not in the sense of being flashy but in the fusion of complex technique and passionate expression that marks Brahms' finest music. The violin's soaring, gypsy-like main theme at the opening of the *Allegro* is so haunting that it is easy to miss the remarkable piano accompaniment: far below, the piano's quiet syncopated octaves move ominously forward, generating much of the music's tension. Piano alone has the second theme, with the violin quickly picking it up and soaring into its highest register. The development of these two ideas is disciplined and ingenious: in the piano's lowest register Brahms sets a pedal A and lets it pound a steady quarter-note pulse for nearly 50 unbroken measures—beneath the powerful thematic development, the pedal notes hammer a tonal center (the dominant) insistently into the listener's ear. Its energy finally spent, this movement gradually dissolves on fragments of the violin's opening melody.

The heartfelt *Adagio* consists of a long-spanned melody (built on short metric units—the marking is 3/8) that develops by repetition; the music rises in intensity until the double-stopped violin soars high above the piano, then falls back to end peacefully. Brahms titled the third movement *Un poco presto e con sentimento*, though the particular sentiment he had in mind remains uncertain. In any case, this shadowy,

quick silvery movement is based on echo effects as bits of theme are tossed between the two instruments. The movement comes to a shimmering close: piano arpeggios spill downward, and the music vanishes in two quick strokes.

By contrast, the *Presto agitato* finale hammers along a pounding 6/8 meter. The movement is aptly titled: this *is* agitated music, restless and driven. At moments it sounds frankly symphonic, as if the music demands the resources of a full symphony orchestra to project its furious character properly. Brahms marks the violin's thematic entrance *passionato*, but he needn't have bothered—that character is amply clear from the music itself. Even the noble second theme, first announced by the piano, does little to dispel the driven quality of this music. The complex development presents the performers with difficult problems of ensemble, and the very ending feels cataclysmic: the music slows, then suddenly rips forward to the cascading smashes of sound that bring this sonata to its powerful close.

—Notes by Eric Bromberger

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