

Tasmin Little



INTRODUCTION

Hello and welcome to my website! Some of you who are listening to this will have downloaded my free recital *The Naked Violin* and I'm delighted to introduce you to the next part of my project, entitled *Partners in Time*. If you already know which works you would like to hear my introductions to, please click directly on the composer to hear the introductions and musical illustrations. For those of you who are new to these pieces, I'll give you a brief introduction now, then please listen to the overview that follows and after that you can choose the pieces that interest you most.

My idea for *Partners in Time* was to develop the concept I began with the *Naked Violin*, where you can hear a violin programme with a variety of works of completely different styles, rather than a single style or works entirely by the same composer. *Partners in Time* explores a range of music spanning two hundred years, from a sonata written by Bach in the early 18th century to a set of folk dances excitingly arranged by Bartok just before the second world war. The title *Partners in Time* refers to the chronology of the development of the relationship between Violin and Piano, and in this disc you will have a chance to hear how different composers responded to the two instruments and the way in which they chose to represent the violin and piano, highlighting their similarities as well as their immense differences!

Partners in Time also refers to the fact that musicians who play this kind of intimate music need to have an innate understanding of each other's musical personality - a rapport, if you like - as well as a sense of adventure and a freshness that all exciting music needs! John Lenehan and I have worked together for many years and we really enjoyed creating this disc - in many cases, we spontaneously explored entirely different ways of playing the pieces which I hope has led to a feeling of a live performance. Finally *Partners in Time* is also a "Perfect recital programme" and is one which I have chosen for many of my upcoming concerts.

As with the *Naked Violin*, I have made this recording using the two violins that I most frequently play in concert - my own 1757 Guadagnini and the "Regent" Stradivarius of 1708. If you would like to know more about these instruments, please visit my *Naked Violin* page and click on the spoken introduction "Which Violin?"

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE WORKS

John and I begin our recital with a great showstopping piece - *Praeludium and Allegro* - written by the legendary violinist and composer, Fritz Kreisler. It's passionate, exciting and full of bravura - if you are new to the classical violin and piano, and enjoy the buzz of whirlwind activity, you will enjoy the Kreisler immensely. It lasts just over five minutes and builds up to a very exciting conclusion.

The Bach is very contrasted and begins in a far more serene style. The opening is peaceful, the second movement is upbeat, the third is haunting and melodious and the last is great fun. If you enjoyed my Bach on the *Naked Violin*, then this piece for violin and keyboard will most likely be something you will also appreciate.

Next comes the Mozart sonata, which is a very bright and bubbly work in three movements. The slow movement has a beautiful theme played on the piano and, in fact, as Mozart was a great pianist, it's easy to see why he features the piano so strongly in the whole work. Mozart is often appreciated by people as the perfect composer from the

classical era - a child prodigy himself, many young people enjoy Mozart's music for its freshness and openness.

However, some people find his music too harmonically "straight" and lacking in romantic passion, so if you listen to the musical examples and it's not for you, try the next piece instead, Grieg's sonata in G major. Grieg's music is very different indeed from both the Bach and the Mozart - written over a hundred years later, classical music had by this time developed enormously in many ways. Apart from the introduction, the sonata is very exuberant and even the melancholy middle movement has great bravura.

Tchaikovsky is a composer known to many people for his extravagant and over-the-top orchestral works, such as the famous 1812 overture complete with canon effects!

However, this next piece shows Tchaikovsky's more intimate side and is a beautifully simple and heartfelt melodic outpouring, called simply Melodie.

I wanted to end my recital with a set of dances by Bartok which show many sides to the violin. Each one has a different "trick" if you like and they pack a lot into a mere 6 minutes or so! Watch out for number 3 which consists entirely of a violinistic tool called harmonics - a wonderful effect which makes the violin sound like a pan-pipe or piccolo! And for sheer testosterone, check out the last two dances - it's all over in just about a minute, but what a ride!

KREISLER

Kreisler was a famous and popular violinist of the early 20th century, but for nearly thirty years, he played the Praeludium and Allegro in concert whilst pretending it had been written by the Italian 18th century violinist and composer, Gaetano Pugnani! Whether he did so to escape the critic's criticism, who knows, but it caused quite a stir when he confessed that not only had HE written the Praeludium and Allegro, but he had also penned quite a number of other works that he had not admitted to!

I love this piece as an opening to a concert because it packs such a punch! Have a listen to the first few bars!

MUSICAL ILLUSTRATION

The middle section of the Praeludium is more thoughtful and takes the form of a fantasy which builds up before a reprise of the first idea comes back, ending with passion and strength. The next part of the piece, the Allegro, is in a musical form called Rondo, where the idea first heard is brought back at different points in the movement, usually after a new idea has been played. Here's the Theme

MUSICAL ILLUSTRATION

The music builds up to a superb and wild climax in the form of an extended virtuosic improvisation, somewhat like the cadenza of a concerto.

MUSICAL ILLUSTRATION

BACH

After the impetuous and passionate ending of the Kreisler, the sublime opening of this Sonata for keyboard and violin by Bach is a most peaceful contrast. In the first movement, the violin takes central stage which is somewhat unusual for a work of this period, as in duo sonatas the keyboard played a more dominant role until Beethoven began composing his sonatas, at the beginning of the following century. The musical line is very ornate and is partnered by a restful rocking accompaniment in the piano.

MUSICAL ILLUSTRATION

The movement that follows is more indicative of the role that the keyboard more traditionally took at this time - the piano introduces a sprightly theme which is taken up by the violin a few bars later and begins a conversation that alternates back and forth between the two players for the rest of the movement.

MUSICAL ILLUSTRATION

After the happy mood of the second movement, the music become much more thoughtful and Bach takes us to the relative minor key of C sharp minor. The piano introduces a slow and tranquil bass line that runs inexorably throughout the movement and is the unifying factor below which piano top line and the violin take it in turns weave the line and intertwine the haunting melody.

MUSICAL ILLUSTRATION

At the end of the movement, Bach finishes with a quiet cadence which leads us directly to the Finale, another bright and vivacious movement with rushing semiquavers and conversation flowing effortlessly between the keyboard and violin, and leading to a triumphant conclusion.

MUSICAL ILLUSTRATION

MOZART

Like Bach, Mozart was primarily a keyboard player and all of his sonatas reflect his obvious love for the instrument. Once again, the sonatas are for piano and violin, rather than the other way around, and this is immediately apparent in the opening of this bubbly sonata.

The violin shadows the piano line, rather than providing an accompanimental alternative, but later there is more give and take, even though the keyboard is almost always the first to introduce any new material.

MUSICAL ILLUSTRATION

The second movement is very lyrical in style and quite a romantic for the period - the bass line gently rocks while the piano portrays the theme with the violin providing the inner line. The movement is in rondo form, with the theme reappearing various times and each time it is more and more ornate, almost like a set of variations.

MUSICAL ILLUSTRATION

Then Mozart does a rare thing in this sonata, which is to allow us violinists to have a theme entirely of our own and it provides an almost operatic interlude

MUSICAL ILLUSTRATION

The last movement is in Rondo form as well and is quite a cheeky movement. I love Mozart when he is in a witty mood and the whole movement is very playful. Once again, he chooses to allow the piano to open with the theme but the violin wants a bit of the action and quite quickly takes over!

MUSICAL ILLUSTRATION

My favourite bit in this movement is the little part in A minor followed by a rather brash and swaggering section. You can almost see the different characters on the stage, like a *comedia dell'arte*!

MUSICAL ILLUSTRATION

GRIEG

Although Grieg, like Bach and Mozart, was a pianist, he wrote three sonatas for violin, the first two written between 1865 and 1867 when he was in his early twenties. There is a feeling a real exuberance about this piece and the tunes seem to flow readily and effortlessly, combining lyricism and drama. It is the only major work that I know where each of the themes is in 3/4 and perhaps this is why the feeling of dance pervades the whole sonata, whether it is a slow and stately dance, as in the second movement, or the fast and furious romp of the last movement! The only part of the work which is not in the time signature of 3 is the very opening which bears little relation to anything else in the piece. Grieg marks it *Lento Doloroso* - slowly and painfully - and this melancholy opening belies what is to follow, but it allows the protagonists to be introduced individually. - after the piano's introduction, the violin enters in a bravura cadenza.

MUSICAL ILLUSTRATION

Grieg is wonderfully adept at setting scenes and there is a wistful section that follows, making the listener wonder where the music is taking us. There is a real feeling of a journey being undertaken here....

MUSICAL ILLUSTRATION

When the main theme begins, the mood of the piece is at once obvious and the excitement is tangible

MUSICAL ILLUSTRATION

The second subject has just as much sense of purpose but is more introverted in character

MUSICAL ILLUSTRATION

The middle section of the movement is surprising, as Grieg focusses only on the triplet motif from the theme before developing the theme of the second subject in a rather mysterious way

MUSICAL ILLUSTRATION

After the development section, the main theme returns in what is called the Recapitulation and we hear the second subject once more before the music builds to a climax and finishes with a flourish

MUSICAL ILLUSTRATION

The second movement is in the relative minor key of E minor and is introspective and stately in feeling. Once again, the piano introduces the theme and the violin takes it up afterwards.

MUSICAL ILLUSTRATION

The middle section of this takes us to the brighter key of E major for quite a folksy, almost naive melody..

MUSICAL ILLUSTRATION

Then the first theme returns for a restatement which leads to a final coda section and the movement ends with tragic resignation.

However, Grieg breaks this mood instantly with a rustic Hornpipe opening to the last movement which is almost reminiscent of a Hurdy gurdy. I love this theme which joyously bounds along and cheekily leads you up the garden path, only to coquetishly take a step back every so often...

MUSICAL ILLUSTRATION

The middle section takes us to E flat major and a more tranquil theme where clouds temporarily block the sunny atmosphere

MUSICAL ILLUSTRATION

But these clouds disappear in a brief storm and the first subject appears once more, gaining momentum to a wonderfully joyful conclusion. What a life-affirming piece!

TCHAIKOVSKY

After such a large canvass in the Grieg, I enjoy the simplicity of this charming Melodie from a set of three pieces composed by Tchaikovsky entitled Souvenir d'un lieu cher. Tchaikovsky had originally intended this theme to be the slow movement of his violin concerto but his brother and a violinist friend of his persuaded him against this idea and instead he used the piece as the ending of his Souvenir d'un lieu cher. It is certainly romantic and one can only wonder what he might have intended to do with the orchestra, had it survived as part of the violin concerto!

MUSICAL ILLUSTRATION

BARTOK

These six Bartok Romanian Folk Dances are a wonderful way to introduce people of any age to the variety of tone colours and different effects that the violin can produce. They were originally written for piano but were transcribed for violin by a close friend of Bartok's called Zoltan Székely. I met Székely once when I was studying at the Banff school of Fine Arts and I had the pleasure of playing the Ravel violin sonata to him - he was a quiet man and softly spoken - in fact it was hard to reconcile this gentle old man with the fantastic passionate performance I have heard of Bartok's 2nd violin concerto with him as soloist!

I won't play sections of every single dance as they are very short, but I'd like to play a little bit of the third dance which uses the effect of harmonics so atmospherically, almost making the violin sound like a woodwind instrument and invoking exotic thoughts.

MUSICAL ILLUSTRATION

Bartok really knows how to finish things up with a bang - this final couple of dances are a stunning conclusion, I hope you'll agree!

MUSICAL ILLUSTRATION

That's a brief outline of the works you'll find on my disc Partners in Time - I really hope you have enjoyed my introductions and that, if this repertoire is new to you, it has given you an insight into some of the most varied and marvellous works for the violin and piano.