NORTHSTAR RECORDING by BERT VAN DER WOLF

CLAUDE DEBUSSY | LEOŠ JANÁČEK
KENNETH HESKETH | OTTORINO RESPIGHI

The Great War Centenary

Michael Foyle violin
Maksim Štšura piano

SUPER AUDIO CD

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CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862-1918)
Violin Sonata in G Minor L 140

[1]	Allegro vivo	**4:55**
[2]	Intermède: fantastique et léger	**4:20**
[3]	Finale - très animé	**4:29**

LEOŠ JANÁČEK (1854-1928)
Violin Sonata JW VII/7

[4]	Con moto	**5:21**
[5]	Balada	**4:55**
[6]	Allegretto	**2:35**
[7]	Adagio	**4:52**

KENNETH HESKETH (b. 1968)

[8] Inscrizione (derivata) - A Lie to the Dying		**8:44**

OTTORINO RESPIGHI (1879-1936)
Violin Sonata in B Minor P 110

[9]	Moderato	**9:09**
[10]	Andanto espressivo	**8:34**
[11]	Passacaglia. - Allegro moderato ma energico	**8:03**

total time 66:04

The Great War Centenary

'Music expresses that which cannot be put into words and yet cannot remain silent', wrote Victor Hugo in 1864. Half a century later, his words had never felt more pertinent. Every composer writing during World War I found a unique way, through their music, to describe and protest against the horrors that were tearing civilisation apart.

'Claude Debussy - *musicien français*' was the quietly defiant signature that the composer gave to his unfinished cycle of six chamber sonatas, a project partly acting as a tribute to the French Baroque harpsichordists Jean-Philippe Rameau and François Couperin. The third in the set, *Sonata for violin and piano*, transpired to be his final musical offering to the world, composed as the German bombs fell around his home in Paris in 1917. Overtaken by cancer and traumatised by the futility and barbarism of the war ('when will the hate be exhausted?'), Debussy was dead within a year.

Yet if his words speak of despair, the *Sonata* itself glows with an almost optimistic light, sprinkled with humour and charm, and where a mysterious nostalgia lurks momentarily in darker corners, an over-riding charisma sweeps the work through to its joyful conclusion. Debussy explained to his lifelong friend Robert Godet that 'works that seem to fly through the air [have] often been wallowing in the shadows of a gloomy brain.'

Even at the outbreak of the war, Debussy had written to his former pupil Nicolas Coronio that 'French art needs to take revenge quite as seriously as the

French army does!' In this *Sonata*, Debussy elegantly abolished the structural chains with which German composers had regulated the model for sonata form throughout the nineteenth century, and infused the piece with fresh, luminous and glowingly pure material. In his own words, the Sonata was created 'not so much for myself, but to offer proof, small as it may be, that 30 million Boches cannot destroy French thought ... I think of the youth of France, senselessly mowed down by those merchants of '*Kultur*' ... What I am writing will be a secret homage to them.' Created in the depth of morbidity, Debussy's parting musical gift is a subtle, dignified and heroic celebration of youth and *joie de vivre*.

A sense of patriotism in the war years links Debussy with the foremost Moravian composer of the day, Leoš Janáček. Janáček was a lifelong nationalist and along with other Russophiles harboured desires that the war might free Silesia and Moravia from the grip of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In a letter to Otakar Nebuška the composer recalls starting the *Sonata for violin and piano* in the summer months of 1914 as he and his wife Zdenka 'were expecting the Russians to enter Moravia.'

The second movement, completed before the rest of the work and published separately in 1915, is a folk-inspired *Balada*, where soaring melodies evoke the beauty of the composer's native land. But the rest of the *Sonata* seems to depict the sounds of war in all their elemental brutality. While composing the work, Janáček wrote that he 'could just about hear sound of the steel clashing in my troubled head...' The first and third movements clatter and grind with grim determination, the piano's trills and rhythmic tremolos depicting savage machinery amid the violin's *sforzando* shrieks and stabs. The last movement, which unusually is the slowest, sees the broad melody in the piano part constantly interrupted by violent outbursts from the violin. But although in the beginning these interjections are marked *fortissimo, feroce*, they are to be played with a mute, sounding like stifled shouts of anguished resistance. By the end they are *pianissimo,* as if choked, resigned and desolate, leaving the listener with a sense of unease.

Janáček repeatedly revised and rearranged the movements before settling for the final version in 1921. By that time, with the birth of a new Czechoslovakia at the end of the war, the composer had been elevated to the status for which he had always dreamed: an artist for the nation in the eyes of its people.

Commissioned for this recital programme to reflect on the centenary of The Great War from our own times, Kenneth Hesketh's *Inscrizione, derivata,* subtitled 'A lie to the Dying' is a quasi-meditation on death, perhaps of anxious thoughts and the spasms of failing corporeality weaved conspicuously into a narrative of disquieting melancholy. The performers are asked to play 'as if writing on water' in the first half of the piece, and subsequently 'as if writing on sand.' The composer writes:

This duo for violin and piano piece is part of a current cycle of works that have the idea of *Memento Mori/Vanitas* and memorial at their centre (*Of Time and Disillusionment* and *In Ictu Oculi* being the two other representative works).

The violin and piano function in various dialectic modes (oppositional, symbiotic, hierarchic). There is a sense of the ritualised, cyclical and meditative space in the piece but not without sporadic violent outbursts. Gradually dissipating levels of energy (often intentionally different between soloist and piano) informs the dynamism and shape of the piece.

While Debussy and Janáček wrote their violin sonatas in the twilight of their careers, Ottorino Respighi was only in his thirties when the war broke out. His 1917 *Sonata for violin and piano* is a deeply personal work of great intensity which shows Respighi's successful attempt to challenge the Germanic compositional hegemony in chamber music. He eloquently deploys a clear and inventive sonata form in the first movement while the spacious piano introduction in the second gives way to opulent harmonies enveloping the concentrated expressivity of the violin's line. The final *Passacaglia* looks back on the last movement of Brahms' *Fourth Symphony*, where the Baroque ostinato structure underpins a dark and passionate narrative of ensuing variations. Respighi's mastery in colourful orchestration, evidenced by his famous *Roman Trilogy* tone poems, is foretold in this Sonata, with the composer elevating the duo's texture to a sound-world that is almost orchestral in scope. This is a work of Romance written in the time of hate, a reminder that the past and the future remain beacons of hope in desperate times.

Foyle-Štšura Duo

Praised for 'playing of compelling conviction' (The Daily Telegraph) and 'astonishing mutual feeling, understanding and responsiveness' (Seen and Heard International), Foyle-Štšura Duo won the Beethoven Piano Society of Europe Duo Competition and the Salieri-Zinetti International Chamber Music Competition in 2015.

Since then, they have performed recitals in Wigmore Hall, Purcell Room, Buckingham Palace, Bridgewater Hall, Usher Hall, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, as well as for the New York Chamber Music Festival, Cervantino Festival in Mexico and Evgeny Mravinsky Festival in Tallinn and St. Petersburg. Their performances have been broadcast on BBC Radio 3, NPO Radio 4 and Estonian Klassikaraadio.

Formerly Park Lane Group, Kirckman Concert, Making Music and Live Music Now artists, receiving masterclasses from Stephen Kovacevich and Maxim Vengerov, they are now City Music Foundation Ambassadors. In 2018 they record their debut CDs – complete works of Penderecki and Lutosławski for Delphian Records and a World War One recital release for Challenge Records.

Michael Foyle (violin) won The Netherlands Violin Competition 2016, giving an acclaimed performance of Szymanowksi's Concerto No.1 with the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra. In 2017-18 he returns to the Rotterdam Philharmonic and Polish Baltic Philharmonic with Korngold's Concerto, and makes his Cadogan Hall debut playing Prokofiev's Concerto No.1 with English Chamber Orchestra. Other London appearances this season include performances of the Beethoven, Dvorak, Elgar and Tchaikovsky concerti.

Born in Ayrshire in 1991, Michael gave his concerto debut in Edinburgh Festival Theatre aged eight. He went on to win the BBC Young Musician of the Year Tabor Award 2008 and the Royal Overseas League String Competition 2013, before studying at the Vienna Konservatorium with Pavel Vernikov and in London with Maureen Smith and Daniel Rowland. Upon graduation from the Royal Academy of Music, he was awarded the Regency Prize for Excellence and the Roth Prize for the highest violin mark of the year. He has premiered solo and chamber works by over 25 living composers. Michael plays a Gennaro Gagliano violin (1750) on loan and is represented by Interartists Amsterdam. In addition to his solo and chamber performances this season, he is invited as Guest-Leader of BBC Symphony Orchestra and as Violin Professor at Royal Academy of Music.

Maksim Štšura (piano) won First Prizes at the Beethoven Intercollegiate Piano Competition (2013), the Estonian Piano Competition (2008), the Steinway-Klavierspiel-Wettbewerb in Germany (2004) and the International Frederic Chopin Piano Competition in Estonia (2000). He has appeared as soloist with orchestras such as the Amadeus Chamber Orchestra, Estonian National Symphony Orchestra, Saint Petersburg State Academic Symphony Orchestra, Wiener Kammersymphonie and the Chester Philharmonic Orchestra. As a chamber musician he is in great demand, collaborating with Jakobstad Sinfonietta (Finland), Mediterranean Chamber Brass (Spain) and Florin Ensemble (UK) among many others.

Maksim studied at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre with Ivari Ilja and on exchange at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater Hamburg, before moving to London to complete his Masters and Artist Diploma degrees with Gordon Fergus-Thompson at the Royal College of Music. He has additionally received masterclasses from Dmitri Bashkirov, Stephan Hough, John Lill and Eliso Virsaladze. Alongside his performing career, Maksim is currently completing a Doctoral course at the RCM, where his research is focused on the piano transcriptions of the contemporary orchestral scores. He is also a Trustee of the Mills Williams Foundation.

This High Definition Surround Recording was Produced, Engineered and Edited by Bert van der Wolf of NorthStar Recording Services, using the 'High Quality Musical Surround Mastering' principle. The basis of this recording principle is a realistic and holographic 3 dimensional representation of the musical instruments, voices and recording venue, according to traditional concert practice. For most older music this means a frontal representation of the musical performance, but such that width and depth of the ensemble and acoustic characteristics of the hall do resemble 'real life' as much as possible. Some older compositions, and many contemporary works do specifically ask for placement of musical instruments and voices over the full 360 degrees sound scape, and in these cases the recording is as realistic as possible, within the limits of the 5.1 Surround Sound standard. This requires a very innovative use of all 6 loudspeakers and the use of completely matched, full frequency range loudspeakers for all 5 discrete channels. A complementary sub-woofer, for the ultra low frequencies under 40Hz, is highly recommended to maximally benefit from the sound quality of this recording.

This recording was produced with the use of Sonodore microphones, Avalon Acoustic & Musikelectronic Geithain monitoring, Siltech Mono-Crystal cabling and dCS - & Merging Technologies converters.

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by **BERT VAN DER WOLF**

www.northstarconsult.nl

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