Dear to Us
Hina & Fiona
ROHAN DE SILVA

DEAR TO US

Johan Halvorsen (1864–1935)

1 **Passacaglia for 2 Violins**
(After G. F. Handel's Passacaglia from Suite No. 7 in G Minor) 6. 39
Fiona, violin 1
Hina, violin 2

Moritz Moszkowski (1854–1925)

Suite for 2 Violins and Piano, Op. 71

2 I. Allegro energico 5. 07
3 II. Allegro moderato 5. 30
4 III. Lento assai 3. 13
5 IV. Molto vivace 4. 52
Hina, violin 1
Fiona, violin 2
Rohan De Silva, piano

Eugène Ysaÿe (1858–1931)

6 **Poème élégiaque, Op. 12** 14. 23
Fiona, violin
Rohan De Silva, piano

Miklós Rózsa (1907–1995)

Sonata for 2 Violins, Op 15a

7 I. Allegro energico 5. 54
8 II. Largo 5. 13
9 III. Vivo e giocoso 5. 39
Fiona, violin 1
Hina, violin 2

Anna Clyne (b. 1980)

The Violin: Complete works

10 October Rose 3. 51
Hina, violin 1
Fiona, violin 2

Maurice Ravel (1875–1937)

11 **Tzigane for Violin and Orchestra** 10. 35
Hina, violin
Rohan De Silva, piano

Pablo de Sarasate (1844–1908)

12 **Navarra, Op. 33** 6. 27
Hina, violin 1
Fiona, violin 2

Manuel Ponce (1882–1948)

13 **Estrellita** *(Arr. by Hina & Fiona)* 3. 29
Hina, violin 1
Fiona, violin 2

Total playing time: 80. 59

Dear to Us is an introduction to us: our journeys both as individuals and together. Through this album, we would like to take you on a voyage through time and nostalgia, across pieces we grew up with, as well as other works we hope to unearth and explore together. In this selection of works we converse, laugh, and, as all siblings do, bicker and clash inevitably... Despite our almost identical upbringings and journeys in music which have equipped us with our foundations of playing, we have always pursued our own artistic visions and prioritized our unique passions. As a result, each of us has developed her own personal taste and authenticity, which is the core of what makes it interesting to play with one another (and perhaps more complicated to rehearse with decorum...) That we are strikingly different as people and artists allows our individually distinct, even opposite, personalities to ultimately join forces when we perform together.

Revisiting works such as the Handel-Halvorsen, Sarasate, and Moszkwoski over the last decade, our interpretations and understandings have evolved parallel to our growth. Our first album represents a culmination of all past iterations of our visions–certainly subject to change over the next decade. Above all, getting to share our passion together, whether it be on stage, during practice, or in a recording booth, has always been about the fun and liberation felt exclusively when making music with whom we trust most in life and in music.

We would like to give our heartfelt thanks to Mr. Perlman, whose unwavering inspiration, wisdom, and guidance have shaped us both musically and personally. To pianist Rohan De Silva thank you for your artistry, warmth, and the joy you bring to every collaboration. And to Charles Letourneau, whose steadfast support and belief in this project—long before it took form—made this album possible. We are also deeply grateful to the incredible team at PENTATONE for their dedication, care, and belief in this music from the very beginning. Last but certainly not least, we are so happy to have shared this project and to have explored these pieces with one another. Thank you for listening!

hina & fiona

To perform Ravel's *Tzigane* feels indescribably empowering. Two renditions are never the same, and like the other works in our album, I continue to engage and be inspired by it on every revisiting. The first two pages of *Tzigane*—the infamous cadenza, half of it a display of showmanship played solely on the G string— is endlessly fascinating to me. I'd describe performing it to walking a tightrope. Each new bar becomes tighter, riskier. Every micromovement of the bow or left hand is increasingly crucial. However, being so uncomfortably high up on the last millimeters of the string gives the sound a more guttural, raw sound so perfect for this opening, that is unachievable if played in a safer position on a different string.

Ravel also compels you to balance rhythmic precision with its opposite: playing with complete abandon. While his detailed markings guide and instruct you, he ultimately places the command of the piece in the performer's hands—and how rewarding that is! I found that every performance of this piece brought a fresh sense of timing, as if I were sculpting the music live on stage. Depending on the hall's acoustics, the instrument's response, or the echoes (or lack thereof), I adjust in the moment. The instrument I have been so lucky to get to work with, Stradivari c. 1722 "Lord Wandsworth", generously on loan from the Ryuji Ueno Foundation and Rare Violins In Consortium, Artists and Benefactors Collective certainly enriches and guides me through the piece, as I carefully listen for how it responds. In a way, Ravel gives the performer the power to control time and space as they hear it, lending an air of improvisation and wildness to a work that is so technically virtuosic and demanding. The remaining sections are pure fun: taking a simple theme that is twisted, expanded, and escalated into a fiery, explosive ending.

hina

I chose Ysaÿe's *Poème Elégiaque* because of its emotional honesty and instinctual structure. Ysaÿe moved beyond traditional forms, reaching for something instinctive and expressive, untethered by expectation, and this piece marked the beginning of his newfound Poème format. That pursuit of authenticity resonates with me, as does the piece's deep emotional arc—from tenderness to tragedy—following the rawness of *Romeo and Juliet*, whose story this piece is based upon. The piece flows along the natural trajectory of emotion—fluid, volatile, and unbound, leaving no room for structure, and strengthens its storytelling aspect in turn. Recording it with a beautiful Giuseppe Guarneri Del Gesù, c. 1741, Cremona, "Jarnowick", generously loaned by Rare Violins, was transformative; the scordatura tuning allowed me to explore the immense depth of the violin, and its darker colors shone through in a way that brought the funeral scene hauntingly to life. Other pieces on this album, like the Handel-Halvorsen *Passacaglia* and Anna Clyne's *October Rose*, also share the theme of reimagining tradition in personal, expressive ways. I hope you will enjoy this glimpse not just into the music my sister and I love, but into the world that shaped us and our dynamic–something honest, a little raw, and deeply ours–woven with music, family, and our shared journey growing side by side.

fiona

Dear to Us, the debut album by New York violinists Hina and Fiona, is the sound of sibling revelry—no pun intended. These talented sisters, born to French-Vietnamese and Japanese parents and based in New York City, are both on a fast track to attaining international renown individually: Hina, 21, won first prize in the 2023 Elmar Oliveira International Violin Competition, and Fiona, 18, made her New York Philharmonic debut at 16. Both lead busy careers as collaborative musicians and orchestral soloists.

As sisters, though, Hina and Fiona share a bond unlike most other collaborators. Having started violin at age 3 after abandoning early plans to pursue ballet, Hina took to the instrument like a natural—and served as a role model to Fiona, who followed in her sister's footsteps also at age 3. They first performed together as fledgling Suzuki method students, and continued to collaborate even as their individual careers began to flourish.

Hearing them play together now, you might be forgiven for assuming that the sisters share some kind of uncanny telepathic bond. (Head straight to Sarasate's *Navarra* if you require immediate proof.) In reality, Hina and Fiona make no supernatural claims; what accounts for their exceptional connection as players, they say, is long hours of experience, discipline, and a sisterly knack for getting straight to the point without undue delay or deference when tackling matters of technique or interpretation.

Stated simply, familiarity supercharges efficiency. "Not only can we be more candid with each other and get to problems more quickly," Fiona explains, "but we can also tackle more problems." And there's also a built-in support system: "We know each other so well," Hina says. "We shared the stage together so many times. So there's a lot of comfort in that, and also just knowing that we have each other's backs."

That's not to suggest that the sisters always think alike—or even play alike, necessarily. "The fact that we're pretty much opposites in the way we interpret music is a really inspiring thing for me," Fiona says. "We always have something we disagree on, for sure. But that allows us to really discuss it, and that discussion helps me understand a piece more deeply."

It would take a very special pianist to integrate with the remarkable chemistry the sisters share—and thankfully, Rohan de Silva fits that description exactly. One of the world's most distinguished collaborative pianists, de Silva has worked with a pantheon of great violinists, including Itzhak Perlman, Midori, Joshua Bell, and Gil Shaham. Hina and Fiona have been working with him for the past five years. "He knows so well how to support you and also when he needs to be the star," Hina says of de Silva," and he can seamlessly shift through those two modes, which is so difficult to do. Whenever I play with him, I'm always inspired and enlightened."

The program Hina and Fiona assembled for *Dear to Us* is mostly what the title implies, familiar pieces they have grown to love during their explorations of works intended for two violins, with and without piano. The sisters set out to put their own stamp on pieces they'd played dozens of times and heard even more. They also selected a handful of lesser-known pieces they'd discovered over the course of their artistic development that they wanted to champion.

The first piece on the program likely was an inevitable inclusion, but that doesn't make it any less welcome. Were he available to comment, the Norwegian composer, conductor, and violinist **Johan Halvorsen** (1864–1935) might view his *Passacaglia* (1894) as something of a mixed blessing. A a lifelong friend of Edvard Grieg and a colleague of Feruccio

Busoni at the Helsinki Music Institute, Halvorsen was an accomplished composer whose oeuvre includes three symphonies, incidental music for plays by Euripides and Shakespeare, many chamber works, and groundbreaking transcriptions of folk tunes for fiddle. Yet his most famous work by far was not wholly his own—thus the credit shared with Baroque master George Frederic Handel.

Taking as his starting point the last movement of Handel's Keyboard Suite in G Minor (HWV 432), a passacaglia – a popular Spanish Baroque form in triple meter, with continuous variations over ostinato bass – Halvorsen fashioned an exhilarating virtuoso showcase demanding a wide range of expressive techniques and articulations. He extended the work's duration and ended on a bright major chord in place of Handel's minor-key repose. The original version paired violin with viola, and violin-cello renditions are also common. But as the sisters artfully

demonstrate in a two-violins arrangement created by Jascha Heifetz, the *Passacaglia* is also well suited for two virtuoso violinists, replacing tonal contrast with spectacular closeness and coordination.

Like Halvorsen, German composer, pianist, and conductor **Moritz Moszkowski** (1854–1925) was first and foremost a working musician. A prodigious talent from an early age, Moszkowski studied piano and composition at a series of distinguished conservatories, culminating in his accepting a job to teach at Theodore Kullak's Neue Akademie der Tonkunst at age 17. After playing a successful Berlin recital debut in 1873, he was hailed as a dazzling virtuoso and profound interpreter.

When a nervous disorder brought his days as a touring performer to a premature end, Moszkowski shifted his focus to composing and teaching; his piano students included Josef Hofmann, Wanda Landowska, and Joaquin Turina, and the distinguished conductor Thomas Beecham sought him out for lessons in orchestration. Moszkowski's fortunes took a calamitous downward turn around 1910, as musical tastes began to change. But his Suite for Two Violins and Piano, a sweeping four-movement work dating from his turn-of-the-century peak, shows his abundant gifts for balance and brilliance.

The first of two works on *Dear to Us* meant to showcase one sister's playing – here, Fiona – the *Poème élégiaque* (1893) by **Eugène Ysaÿe** (1858–1931) marks the point at which this important Belgian composer, violinist, and conductor effectively invented the poem as his ideal musical form. A single movement incorporating multiple sections, less rigid than a sonata or concerto, Ysaÿe declared the poem "is free and needs only its title to guide the composer and make him paint feelings, images, abstractions without a literary canvas; in a word, it is a picture painted without a model."
That said, the *Poème élégiaque* – dedicated on its title page to French composer Gabriel Fauré – was inspired by Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, and its emotional tides are linked to specific episodes in the play. Ysaÿe uses scordatura, tuning the violin's lowest G string to F, to lend this ardently lyrical work a subtly darker, more melancholy character—one ideally suited to Fiona's musical temperament as well as the innate warmth and shadowy hues of the "Jarnowick" Giuseppe Guarneri Del Gesù c. 1741, Cremona she chose specifically for this recording."

Although Hungarian-American composer **Miklós Rózsa** (1907–1995) remains best known for the nearly 100 film scores he created for cinematic classics like *The Jungle Book*, *Spellbound*, and *Ben-Hur*, his confident, appealing concert music has seen a welcome resurgence in attention during recent decades. His Sonata for Two Violins (1933, revised 1973) shows the impact of early exposure to Hungarian folk music—both in its native state and in the pioneering musicological work of fellow composers Béla Bartók (a classmate of Rózsa's mother at the Budapest Academy) and Zoltán Kodály. But the sonata also demonstrates Rózsa's consummate mastery handling instrumental forces, its two zesty outer movements and lyrical centerpiece endowed with the richness and density of a more plushly scored work.

Although *October Rose* (2009) is the sole work on *Dear to Us* by a living composer, **Anna Clyne** (born 1980), the music has a timeless quality that suits it ideally to this supremely lyrical program. Clyne originally wrote the piece as one segment of a larger work, *The Violin*, comprising seven brief pieces for multi-tracked violins with an optional video component by artist Josh Dorman—a Bach-inspired suite closely bonded to Clyne's relationship with her mother.

The elegiac quality in this music reflects one aspect of its inspiration: Clyne's discovery of

a 19th-century violin in an Oxford charity shop not long after her mother's death in 2008. (That particular mode of melancholy lyricism is a noble inheritance from English forebears like Elgar and Vaughan Williams.) But *October Rose* – and *The Violin* as a whole – also allude to a network of warm, close friendships involved in the work's gestation and evolution.

The second showcase on *Dear to Us* for a single violinist – this time Hina, who plays a bright-toned Stradivarius instrument – is *Tzigane* (1924), a flamboyant evocation by French composer **Maurice Ravel** (1875–1937) of so-called "Gypsy" music from Hungary. (The word *tzigane* itself essentially means "Gypsy" in French) The infinitely resourceful Ravel often found inspiration in the music of foreign lands: Spanish and Far Eastern influences turn up in major compositions, and his Violin Sonata famously includes a "Blues" movement. But here he was reacting to a specific performer, Jelly d'Arányi, a Hungarian virtuoso whose fiery display in an impromptu private recital of "Gypsy" playing he found thoroughly energizing.

Ravel studied Paganini's *Caprices* and Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsodies* in preparing to write *Tzigane*, and consulted with d'Arányi on technical matters. Brash and demonstrative from its opening chords, *Tzigane* provides a violinist with abundant opportunity for technical virtuosity and expressive flamboyance alike during an extended unaccompanied introduction. In its original form, Ravel called for the piano to be equipped with a luthéal, an attachment that facilitated a lean, wiry timbre akin to the cimabalom, a kind of Hungarian dulcimer.

Two splendid Latin gems conclude *Dear to Us*. **Pablo de Sarasate** (1844–1908), a prodigiously talented Spanish violinist whose seemingly effortless playing won the approval of Bruch, Saint-Saëns, Joachim, and Dvořák, among the many composers

who wrote works for him. Sarasate titled *Navarra* (1889) in honor of his birthplace, Pamplona, in the Navarre region of Spain. A showcase of extreme complexity despite its frolicsome dance-derived character, the work compels its two violinists to play in extraordinarily tight synchronization all the way to its daredevil finale.

After that demonstration of carefully choreographed fireworks, *Estrellita* (1912) serves as a tender benediction. The Mexican composer **Manuel Ponce** (1882–1948) purportedly wrote this meltingly lovely melody after catching his first glimpse of his future wife—a wonderful story whether factual or apocryphal. "We wanted to add *Estrellita* as a sort of sweet treat to end the album," Hina explains, almost like an encore if it were a concert." Made globally famous when Jascha Heifetz played it in the 1939 feature film *They Shall Have Music*, Ponce's piece is performed here in an arrangement Hina and Fiona created for themselves—a new challenge for them both. The sweet concord that results proves that *Estrellita* serves two violinists as readily as one—especially players as beautifully in tune as Hina and Fiona.

Steve Smith

Steve Smith is a writer and editor based in New York City. He has written about music for The New York Times and The New Yorker, and served as an editor for NPR, the Boston Globe, and Time Out New York.

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