

RAVEL

Violin Sonata No. 2

Sonata for Violin and Cello

Piano Trio

Klara Flieder *violin*

Christophe Pantillon *cello*

Massimo Giuseppe Bianchi *piano*

Maurice RAVEL (1875–1937)		
	Violin Sonata No. 2 in G major, M.77 (1923–27)	[18:02]
1	I. Allegretto	[8:19]
2	II. Blues: Moderato	[5:40]
3	III. Perpetuum mobile: Allegro	[4:03]
Sonata for Violin and Cello in A minor, M.73 (1920–22)		[21:02]
4	I. Allegro	[5:13]
5	II. Très vif	[3:29]
6	III. Lent	[6:23]
7	IV. Vif, avec entrain	[5:56]
Piano Trio in A minor, M.67 (1914)		[27:19]
8	I. Modéré	[9:44]
9	II. Pantoum: Assez vif	[4:29]
10	III. Passacaille: Très large	[7:12]
11	IV. Finale: Animé	[5:56]
Total Timing:		[66:27]

Klara Flieder *violin*
Christophe Pantillon *cello*
Massimo Giuseppe Bianchi *piano*

Maurice RAVEL

Violin Sonata No. 2 • Sonata for Violin and Cello • Piano Trio

Few early 20th-century composers' music has an importance to rival the work of Ravel. The essential ambivalence of a modernist always looking back rings true of his psychological make-up too, that of a grown-up who loves fairy-tales, and is echoed in the sound of rustling pages of schoolbooks and in a love of learning (like the scales and arpeggios swelling the textures of the second movement of the *Piano Concerto in G major*), all maintaining the disposition of someone who knows they will never be fully an adult. Ravel's music is filled with passion precisely because in it passion is exhausted, present as a force but not as an action. And indeed Ravel does not ask the performer to experience their own personal emotions, but the exact opposite: to refrain from doing so, for the very reason that the true passion implicit in the sound arises from the detachment engendered by a rational approach to the text. This approach, which is also one of mistrust of words, might put him in the company of Debussy, with whom he is too often associated (he assigned a place of honour to his fellow-composer, while at the same time declaring himself an 'anti-Debussyist') if we were to concur with Pierre Boulez when he maintained that ideas of poetry and dreams in Debussy come alive only when there is utter clarity and total respect for the notes. But whatever the similarities between the two composers' aesthetics, we should not be overly misled, as in terms of form they are very different.

Debussy, as the poet Eugenio Montale recognised, gives us music that 'neither begins nor ends, but breaks silence to speak, emerging unannounced, before lingering long in the listener's mind'. A Symbolist approach, in other words. Ravel's art, on the other hand, seems less keenly intent on making an effect on the listener, on alluding to something; instead, what we have is a loving gaze towards the past and a desire for perfection as a vital element, one that does not act as a brake on spontaneity but in fact creates sense. For this reason, if and when Debussy is aiming for an effect of impermanence, indeterminacy, Ravel takes refuge in the exact opposite, in the firm, reassuring outlines of the child's bedroom that he has no desire to leave. And if a whole latticework of colour matches does suggest a connection with Debussy, Ravel picks the flower less for its scent than for its geometry, and the beauty of its proportions. Was it not Goethe who, decades before, claimed that Nature is 'the mistress of forms'? Ravel's goal is not an impression, but a representation, and he cannot be described as an Impressionist, a term which he himself rejected. But while Ravelian prose is something other than Debussyan poetry, we have to acknowledge that the former justifies the latter – it is a prose that testifies to the existence of poetry in the real world. Paradoxical though it may seem, Ravel's style, in all its sophistication, is not the primary element in the organisation of his music, in that he is less interested in



displaying stylistic elements than in losing himself in the work before re-emerging in the listener's consciousness. We need no codebook to fully appreciate his music, as the way the material is organised serves the story that is being told at that moment, without any need to disclose a specific ideological standpoint. It is not his intention to interrupt or direct the mechanism of perception. Maurice Ravel founded no school. Claude Debussy unwittingly did, since his music, for all that it represented for him something personal, already contains all the styles of the 20th century.

Even listening to such a cornerstone of the avant-garde as Boulez's *Le Marteau sans maître* of 1955, we cannot fail to discern, mounted on the composer's ideological framework, a three-dimensional world, even a lexicon that derive from Debussy. Ravel's modernity, on the other hand, lies outside time, and if we were to choose anyone to link him to it might be Busoni, for all that his aesthetic is very different, or Stravinsky. What Ravel admired in the latter composer was his capacity for renewal, treating every new work as a new project, and 'forgetting' what had come before, so that his art would not lose its identity each time it regenerated, and become a slave to principles, 'a pointless falsehood, a tiresome one', in the words of poet Umberto Saba. For Ravel, it is only in variety that the intellect finds renewal.

Ravel was very happy with his second *Violin Sonata*, written between 1923 and 1927, whose second movement adopts the Afro-American blues. This particular blues must be one of the

happiest misunderstandings in the history of music, given that all that remains of the source style is, much like the Cheshire Cat in *Alice in Wonderland*, its smile. And yet the soul of that music mysteriously stays indelibly with us, like a glimmer of memory or the trace of a perfume.

Trying to capture a composer's intention in words is almost impossible, the poetics of a work of art being entirely contained in the work itself. The fashion in our technological times seems to be serial algebra rather than art, and in such cases the description of a work's poetics, or fantasy poetics or non-poetics, call it what you will, is fairly straightforward and can actually stand in for the work itself without any particular problem. But how can Ravel's handiwork, in all its precious fragility, be conveyed in words, with all their limitations? What can at least be said of this wonderful sonata is that it is characterised throughout by the contrast between the consistently fairly dry piano part and the smooth, melodic violin.

The *Sonata for Violin and Cello*, written between 1920 and 1922, is dedicated to Debussy, who had died in 1918, and the work could be thought of as an elegy for the composer. There are references to Debussy's final chamber works, particularly in the utterly masterly treatment of melody in inventive contrapuntal textures. There are certainly other elements too, such as the striking references to recent Hungarian music which, despite the avowed Mozartian inspiration, seems derived from Kodály's comparable *Duo* of 1914, a work that

Sonata
für Violon

I

Alligretto

Violon

The musical score is written on seven staves. The first staff contains a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a time signature of 8/8. It begins with a whole rest, followed by a series of rests on subsequent staves. The second staff starts with a piano (p) dynamic marking and contains a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, some beamed together. The third staff continues the melodic line with similar rhythmic values. The fourth staff features a more complex melodic line with slurs and accents. The fifth staff contains a series of chords and arpeggiated figures, with some notes marked with '40' below them. The sixth and seventh staves continue with intricate melodic and harmonic passages, including slurs and dynamic markings like 'p'.

Ravel knew, along with the music of Bartók. Ravel's regard for Mallarmé is well known: 'I consider him not only the greatest French poet, but the only one, as he made the French language, not designed for poetry, poetic'. In the wonderful way that he succeeded in fine-tuning the relationship between musical elegance and poetic enchantment, spinning a magical balance between metaphysics and mystery, Ravel is the Mallarmé of modern music, and what he distilled continues to represent an effective antidote for rushing frantically towards nothingness.

The *Piano Trio* of 1914 is a magnificent work in four movements that clearly demonstrates the difference between *Classical* and *Neo-classicism*. While the latter is a return to a style from the past, chosen without any sense whatsoever of historical continuity and adopted as a model, or rather an object of irony, nostalgia and so on, the former represents instead complete historical continuity, aimed at taking forward everything acquired from history, matching it to one's own idiom and

sending it on towards the new. In this sense, Ravel's *Trio* is an eminently classical work despite, or rather precisely because of the obvious limitations of the musical means of the time. Here we have an example of how in art, a perfectly-aligned union of past, present and future can come about when a powerful creative personality is in play. In the curious second movement, *Pantoum*, the composer follows a fixed poetic form borrowed from Malay poetry. This kind of grafting of poetic form on to music is certainly not new – the towering example of Chopin's *Ballades* springs to mind – but what Ravel achieves is utterly original. It should be kept in mind that Ravel was a firm believer in the connections between the arts, so much so that he claimed he found inspiration not just in Mozart but in Edgar Allan Poe as well, to say nothing of the influence that paintings such as Manet's *Olympia* had on him as a young man.

© 2024 Massimo Giuseppe Bianchi
(translation: © 2024 Kenneth Chalmers)





Klara Flieder studied violin under Margarethe Biedermann at the Conservatory of Music, Vienna, and then with Christian Ferras in Paris and Arthur Grumiaux in Brussels. She had additionally studies with Henryk Szeryng, Nathan Milstein and Augustin Dumay.

Since 2005, Flieder has been professor of violin at the Mozarteum University in Salzburg. She has led lectureships and guest professorships at the University of Music in Vienna and Graz and given master classes in Austria (Allegro Vivo Festival), United States States (Yale University in Norfolk), Sweden, Spain, Italy and China.

Flieder has given concerts as a soloist and chamber musician in Europe, China and the United States. She has performed at festivals such as the Kuhmo Chamber Music Festival, Finland, Carinthischer Sommer, Austria, Midsummer Music Festival, Sweden, Norfolk Chamber Music Festival, United States, Narnia Festival, Italy and at the South Bank Centre, London.

Flieder is a member of numerous chamber music ensembles including the Flieder Trio, Leschetizky Trio Wien and the Hyperion Ensemble Salzburg. She has recorded albums for labels such as EMI, Dabringhaus & Grimm, Extraplatte and Preiser Records.



Christophe Pantillon was born in Neuchâtel into a Swiss-American family of musicians. He started playing the cello with J.P. Guy and Elena Botez before continuing his studies with Heinrich Schiff at the Music Academy in Basel, with Valentin Erben at the Vienna Music University and with Ralph Kirshbaum at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester. He has attended numerous master classes, in particular with Mischa Maisky.

Pantillon has been playing chamber music ever since his childhood. He moved to Vienna in 1992, and in 1998, he founded the Aron Quartet, Quartet-in-Residence of the Arnold Schönberg Center. He also participates in various chamber music ensembles and plays regularly in duo concerts with his wife, the violinist Klara Flieder.

Pantillon gives regular performances, both as soloist and as chamber musician, throughout Europe, North and South America and Asia.

He has given master classes in Switzerland, United States (Yale University in Norfolk), France (Académie de Nice), Ireland, Romania, Spain, Israel and India. He is currently teaching at the Vienna School of Music and is Lecturer at the University of Music and Performing Arts, Vienna.

Pantillon has recorded more than 20 albums, several of which have received international awards. His album *Paroles de violoncelle* (Gramola 99007), featuring works for solo cello by French composers, has been highly acclaimed



Massimo Giuseppe Bianchi trained under the guidance of such great artists as Bruno Canino, the Trio di Trieste and Franco Rossi, and, side by side with his musical career, he has pursued his own wide-ranging interests in philosophy, literature and poetry. His numerous releases include Castelnuovo-Tedesco *Piano Quintets* (CPO 777961-2) with the Aron Quartet in 2016, *Around Bach* (Decca 48145249) also in 2016, *The Art of Variation* (Decca 4818655) in 2019, and Bruno Walter's *Piano Quintet and String Quartet* (CPO 555193-2) in 2023, again with the Aron Quartet.

In the concert hall he has made chamber music appearances with, among others, the Aron Quartet, Rocco Filippini, Antonio Ballista, Bruno Canino, Francesca Deگو and Jack Liebeck. Much in demand for his gifts as an improviser, he has collaborated with such jazz artists as Louis Sclavis, Paolo Damiani, Claudio Fasoli and Enrico Pieranunzi.

He has a vast knowledge of 20th-century music, and has recorded various albums for Naxos of music by Ghedini, Respighi and Pick-Mangiagalli. He has edited critical editions of works by Respighi, Carpi and Castelnuovo-Tedesco for the music publishers Suvini Zerboni and Edizioni Curci, and for more than a decade has lectured at the seminars of the Nuova Accademia – Studio Filosofico Domenicano in Bologna.

Bianchi is a contributor to the magazine *Musica Jazz*, and since 2023 has been lecturer in piano and chamber music at the Tsinghua International School Daoxiang Lake in Beijing. On 12 January 2024 he made his *début* at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing.

Recorded at Musikschule Margareten, Vienna,
27–28 February (tracks 4–7) and 30 August–1 September 2021 (1–3 and 8-9)

Recorded, edited and produced by **Andreas Schwerer**
24bit, 96kHz high resolution recording, editing and mastering

Photos:

Album cover by **David Murphy** (FHR)

Page 4 of Ravel c. 1907 by **Pierre Petit**

Pages 8 taken by **Alice Aymerich di Laconi**

Page 9 of Klara Flieder by **Nancy Horowitz**

Page 10 of Christophe Pantillon by **Hannes Strassl**

Page 6: Ravel *Violin Sonata No.2*, autograph manuscript

Artwork by **David Murphy**

FHR thanks Peter Bromley