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CLASSICS

Vaughan Williams
Grieg

Violin Sonatas

Charlie Siem *violin*
Itamar Golan *piano*



VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
GRIEG
VIOLIN SONATAS

Violin Sonata in A Minor

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

- | | | |
|---|--|--------|
| 1 | I. Fantasia | [0.00] |
| 2 | II. Scherzo. Allegro furioso ma non troppo | [0.00] |
| 3 | III. Tema con variazioni. Andante – Tempo del preludio ma tranquillo – Cadenza | [0.00] |

Violin Sonata No. 2 in G Major, Op. 13

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)

- | | | |
|---|--|--------|
| 4 | I. Lento doloroso — Poco allegro — Allegro vivace — Presto | [0.00] |
| 5 | II. Allegretto tranquillo | [0.00] |
| 6 | III. Allegro animato | [0.00] |
| 7 | Solveig's Song (from <i>Peer Gynt</i>) | [0.00] |
- Edvard Grieg, transcribed Charlie Siem

Total timings: [00.00]

CHARLIE SIEM VIOLIN
ITAMAR GOLAN PIANO

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RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
EDVARD GRIEG

Violin Sonatas

Ralph Vaughan Williams bridged the history of England's sunset from Empire to Commonwealth. Musical revolution, two world wars, the New German School of Liszt and Wagner, Stockhausen, Boulez and the Darmstadt radicals framed his life. In the succession of major Anglo-Saxon composers, he commanded the high ground between Elgar and Britten, facing 'the doubts and portents of a tragic age' where his predecessor had 'proudly' summed up 'the glories of the Victorian century' (Bernard Shore). He has been called 'the apotheosis of Englishness', 'the fountainhead of the ... English national school', a man 'as English as Morley and Purcell'. In 1931, the year Constant Lambert staged *Job* at the ISCM Festival in Oxford, Aaron Copland, fresh from Brooklyn, jazz and Nadia Boulanger, arrogantly wrote him off as 'the kind of local composer who stands for something great in the musical development of his own country but whose actual musical contribution cannot bear exportation ... His is the music of a gentleman farmer, noble in inspiration but dull'. 15 years later, the critic Scott Goddard was to say: 'There is no aspect of life foreign to him, none beyond the

reach of his art; and that art, which is the most individual in the history of [British] music since Purcell, has reached a width of reference and a depth of comment never attained by musicians bred here ... Nothing can be said conclusively about the workings of mind so protean and still magnificently active'. The 'corpus of Vaughan Williams's work will speak to generations of Englishmen of a great Englishman's ranging thoughts, his love of the homely countryside, his piety, his inherited poetry, his adventurous mind and lofty ideals' (Shore, 1949).

Vaughan William believed that music was to be heard, not so much read or spoken about. 'In our imperfect existence what means have we of reaching out to that which is beyond the senses but through those very senses? Would Ulysses have been obliged to be lashed to the mast if the sirens instead of singing to him had shown him a printed score? When the trumpet sounding the charge rouses the soldier to frenzy, does anyone suggest that it would have just the same effect if he took a surreptitious glance at *Military Sounds and Signals?*' (*Music & Letters*, April 1920). In his book *National Music* (published in 1934 from lectures two years previously) he argued that fundamentally all music was a matter of nationality, and therefore nationalistic. Ruling

states had identities and dialects as individual and ‘narrowly’ circumscribed as those of their satellites. ‘National music is not necessarily folk-song; on the other hand folk-song is, by nature, necessarily national’. Music, he asserted, was ‘the only means of artistic expression which is natural to everybody. Music is above all things the art of the common man ... the art of the humble ... Music cannot be treated like cigars or wine, as a mere commodity. It has its spiritual value as well. It shares in preserving the identity of soul of the individual and of the nation’. ‘The great men of music close periods; they do not inaugurate them,’ he wrote famously. ‘The pioneer work, the finding of new paths, is left to smaller men ... I would define genius as the right man in the right place at the right time ... we shall never know of the number of “mute and inglorious Miltons” who failed because the place and time were not ready for them. Was not Purcell a genius born before his time? Was not Sullivan a jewel in the wrong setting? ... As long as composers persist in serving up at second-hand the externals of the music of other nations,’ he concluded, ‘they must not be surprised if audiences prefer the real Brahms, the real Wagner, the real Debussy, or the real Stravinsky to their pale reflections. What a composer has to do is to find out the real message he has to convey to the community and say it

directly and without equivocation ... if the roots of your art are firmly planted in your own soil and that soil has anything individual to give you, you may still gain the whole world and not lose your own souls’.

While the Young Turks of New Manchester – Harrison Birtwistle, Peter Maxwell Davies, Alexander Goehr, Elgar Howarth, John Ogdon – were acidifying the landscape of post-war British music, Vaughan Williams was veiling it in soft Albion twilight. Imagining places ‘where men have never cared to haunt, nor women have walked with me, and ghosts then keep their distance’ ... capturing ‘the wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters of the petrel and the porpoise’ ... wandering ‘lonely as a cloud that floats on high o’er vales and hills’. The last of his chamber works, the Violin Sonata (1952), dedicated to Frederick Grinke – who gave the first performance with Michael Mullinar in a half-hour BBC birthday broadcast, 12 October 1954 (by which time Vaughan Williams was back in London, living in Hanover Terrace, Regent’s Park) – dates from between the *Sinfonia Antartica* and Eighth Symphony. ‘A minor’ avers the score, but in fact the key scheme follows a (late) Romantic progressive trajectory, from A minor (Fantasia) through D minor (Scherzo) to

C major (Tema con variazioni), traversing widely divergent tonal fields in the process. Writing in *Cobbett’s* (1963), Colin Mason maintained the music reflected the composer’s ‘blunter style’. Disagreeing with Michael Kennedy who thought there was ‘too much unison writing for the two instruments, the chords are thick’, he considered the pianistic contribution ‘not ineffective’. Indeed. Challengingly, narratively, each demand and voicing, removed from Brahms, Ireland or Rachmaninov, communicate in orchestrally suggestive, contrapuntally linear ways at once nuanced and persuasive. Introducing the work in *Radio Times* (8 October 1954), Ernest Bradbury of *The Yorkshire Post* – referring to VW as a ‘folksong collector who ... daydreams (if not always luxuriously)’ – noted that Mullinar ‘helped’ with the piano part.

Two subjects permeate the opening Fantasia. The first, *Allegro giusto*, juxtaposes simple (3/4 *cantabile* song) and compound (9/8 dance) rhythms, the piano allocated the latter, the violin the former. The second, *Largamente*, preceded by a *tutti* punctuated violin cadenza, is a 4/4 chorale given to the piano. Both themes begin with the same initial notes of the minor scale (in A and D respectively), the first rising to the third degree (quasi Schubert *Unfinished*), the second to the

fourth and higher. Returning to *Tempo I*, the violin and piano presentations of the first subject are varyingly exchanged and restored metrically, along with re-contoured/contracted elements of the second subject, in what is essentially a toughly directioned development section. A second violin cadenza leads into the tail episode, functioning as both reprise and coda, second (*Lento*) and first (*Tempo I tranquillo*) subjects alternating in that order.

The central Scherzo, *Allegro furioso ma non troppo*, is a horse-fair of displaced accents. Typically, VW resists movable Stravinskyan or Bartókian time-signatures. Re-wiring his 4/4 scaffolding, however, charts rampant turbulence. The opening theme for instance (minor-third geared, carried by piano against *pizzicato/arco* violin) – its pulse-challenging sixty-four quaver/nine-bar-within-eight schema baring tensed sinew and nerve-ends:

2+3+3 / 3+2+3 / 3+3+2 /
3+3 / 3+2+3 / 3+3 /
2+3 / 2+3+2 / 3+2+3.

At this distance in time the Tema con Variazioni, ‘finale’ weighted, conjures a post-Sixth Symphony world somewhere between pebble beach *Grimes*

and permafrost Shostakovich. With hands in unison octaves widely distanced, *ppp una corda molto sostenuto*, the theme (related to both subjects of the first movement, transmuted from minor to the major) comes from the finale of a withdrawn early Piano Quintet in C minor completed in October 1903 (a year distinguished almost exclusively by vocal music). The terminal paragraphs, tranquility uppermost, return cyclically to the opening Fantasia, enshrining within a *tempo rubato cadenza* (so-called) remembering the carolling melismata of *The Lark Ascending* (a work for which Grinke was celebrated). 'Till lost on his aerial rings/In light, and then the fancy sings'. Low violin C#, high piano A major triad, *pianissimo*, silence.

'Grieg belonged to a race living in a remote and peculiar land, with rugged mountains and romantic valleys, and a climate varying from the fierce winter storms of the Atlantic to the bright summer nights when the sun is in the sky the whole night long. He was one with his people. When other nations abandon themselves to the joy of life they play a scherzo, a rondo [...] Grieg played a Norwegian *springar* or a *halling*, as was the custom of the ancient inhabitants [and *hardanger* fiddlers] of Norway' (Marius Moaritz

Ulfrstad, *Cobbett's* [1929]). A man of leonine visage but frail, small physique plagued since his teens by poor health, Grieg was born in Bergen, his Scottish great-grandfather, Alexander Greig, having arrived in Norway the previous century. In 1858, on the advice of the Norwegian violinist and nationalist Ole Bull, a relative through marriage, he went to study at the Leipzig Conservatory, graduating in 1862. Here he studied piano with the director, Moscheles no less, and, during his last year, composition with Reinecke, the latter, however, incurring his dissent. 'I must admit,' he told his biographer, Aimar Grønvd, 'that I left Leipzig Conservatory just as stupid as I entered it. Naturally, I did learn something there, but my individuality was still a closed book to me.' Embarking on a career as pianist and conductor, he married his cousin, the lyric soprano Nina Hagerup, in June 1867.

Neither the pre-Concerto First nor Second Violin Sonatas, admired by Liszt, are as familiar as the C minor Third, given early recorded stature by Kreisler and Rachmaninov. But formal niceties and side-steps are for the finding (the combination of slow movement and scherzo in the First, for example), and both can claim bright 'gallery' finales. Drones and *hardingfeler*, too, are rarely far away, imparting a folklored 'mighty dreamland'

character. Dedicated to the composer-violinist Johann Svendsen, the epithalamic Second (premiered in Christiania, 16 November 1867) – 'more Norwegian even [than the First], for a Norway without tragedy is not a complete Norway' (Gerhard Schjelderup, 1903) – was familiar among early players as Grieg's 'dance sonata' (all three movements are in triple time), Ulfrstad drawing attention to its 'genuine' male-led, *animato/tranquillo* double-theme *springar* finale, 'full of youthful enthusiasm, vigour and joy of life'. Framed by a bard-like introduction, *Lento doloroso*, and accelerating coda, three themes bind the first movement. *Allegro vivace* (offbeat accents); *Tranquillo ed espress* (minor); *A tempo* (clipped rhythms). The middle movement is an *Allegretto* in E minor, the subsequent *dolce maggiore* melody of which Grieg was to return to 20 years later in the *Romanza* of the Third Sonata. A 'magnificent nature tone-poem' Monrad-Johansen called it (1934).

Solveig's Song (1875), *Peer Gynt* Act III, arranged Charlie Siem. Invitation, ballade, mazurka, *adieu*, the betrothal of minor and major. A forest in the remote north, summer, Solveig, fair and handsome, spinning.

*'It may not be till winter's past,
And spring and summer – the whole long year;
But I know that you will come at last,
And I shall wait, for I promised you ...
I shall wait till you come back to me;
If you're waiting above [if in Heaven]
I shall meet you there!'*

(Ibsen, translated R Farquharson Sharp, London 1921).

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CHARLIE SIEM

Charlie Siem is one of today's foremost violinists, with such a wide-ranging diversity of cross-cultural appeal as to have played a large part in defining what it means to be a true artist of the 21st century.

Born in London, to a Norwegian father and British mother, Siem began to play the violin at the age of three after hearing a broadcast of Yehudi Menuhin playing Beethoven's Violin Concerto. He received a broad and thorough education from Eton College, before completing the intellectually demanding undergraduate degree programme in Music at the University of Cambridge. From 1998 to 2004, he studied the violin with Itzhak Rashkovsky in London at the Royal College of Music, and since 2004 has been mentored by Shlomo Mintz.

Siem has appeared with many of the world's finest orchestras and chamber ensembles, including: the Bergen Philharmonic, the Camerata Salzburg, the Czech National Symphony, the Israel Philharmonic, the London Symphony, the Moscow Philharmonic, the Oslo Philharmonic, the Rotterdam Philharmonic and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, MDR Leipzig, Camerata



Salzburg. He has worked with top conductors including: Charles Dutoit, Dennis Russell Davies, Edward Gardner, Zubin Mehta, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Sir Roger Norrington, Libor Pešek and Yuri Simonov. International festival appearances to date include: Spoleto, St. Moritz, Gstaad, Bergen, Tine@Munch, Festival Internacional de Santa

Lucía, and the Windsor Festival. Siem's regular sonata partner is renowned pianist Itamar Golan.

Charlie Siem has a varied discography and has made a number recordings, including with the London Symphony Orchestra (Warner Classics, 2011) and Münchner Rundfunkorchester (Sony Classical, 2014). Recent recordings include *Between the Clouds* (Signum Records, 2020) featuring works by Kreisler, Sarasate, Paganini, Elgar and Wieniawski, showcasing Siem's versatility and virtuosity in an intimate Parisian-style 'salon' programme, and an album of Beethoven's Violin Concerto and Romances (Sigm Records, 2022) with the Philharmonia Orchestra under Oleg Caetani.

A great believer in giving to worthwhile causes, Siem is an ambassador of The Prince's Trust. He is also a Visiting Professor at Leeds College of Music in the UK, and Nanjing University of the Arts in China. He gives masterclasses around the world at top institutions such as the Royal College of Music in London, and the Accademia di Musica in Florence.

Passionate about bringing classical music to new audiences around the world, in addition to his classical performance career Siem has revived the

age-old violinistic tradition of composing virtuosic variations of popular themes, which he has done alongside artists including: Bryan Adams, Jamie Cullum and The Who. In 2014, he wrote his first composition – *Canopy*, for solo violin and string orchestra – which was commissioned by the USA television station *CBS Watch!* and recorded with the English Chamber Orchestra. Siem has also had numerous collaborations with fashion brands including: Armani, Chanel, Dior, Dunhill, Hugo Boss and Loro Piana.

Charlie Siem plays the 1735 Guarneri del Gesù violin, known as the *D'Egville*.

ITAMAR GOLAN

For more than two decades, Itamar Golan has been partnering the most outstanding instrumentalists of our time. His work has brought him great critical acclaim, and he is one of the most sought-after pianists of his generation, playing on the most prestigious stages around the world.

Born in Vilnius, Lithuania, his family emigrated to Israel when he was a year old. There he started his musical studies and at the age of 7, giving his first concerts in Tel-Aviv. He was awarded

multiple scholarships from the American-Israel Cultural Foundation which enabled him to study with Emanuel Krasovsky and his chamber music mentor, Chaim Taub. Later under a full scholarship from the New England Conservatory of Boston, he was chosen to study with Leonard Shure.

Since his earliest years, Itamar Golan's passion has been chamber music but he has also appeared as soloist with some of the major orchestras, including the Israel Philharmonic and the Berlin Philharmonic under the direction of Zubin Mehta, Royal Philharmonic under the direction of Daniele

Gatti, the Orchestra Philharmonica della Scala, the Vienna Philharmonic under the direction of Riccardo Muti and Philharmonia Orchestra under the direction of Lorin Maazel.

Over the years, he has collaborated with Vadim Repin, Maxim Vengerov, Julian Rachlin, Mischa Maisky, Shlomo Mintz, Ivry Gitlis, Ida Haendel, Kyung Wha Chung, Sharon Kam, Janine Jansen, Martin Frost and Torleif Thedéen among many others. He is a frequent participant in many prestigious international music festivals, such as Salzburg, Verbier, Lucerne, Tanglewood,



Ravinia, and has made numerous recordings for labels including Deutsche Grammophon, Warner Classics, Decca, Teldec, EMI and Sony Classical.

In 1991, Itamar Golan was nominated to the faculty of the Manhattan School of Music, making him one of their youngest teachers ever. Since 1994, he has taught chamber music at the Paris Conservatory. Itamar resides in Paris, where he is involved in many different artistic projects.

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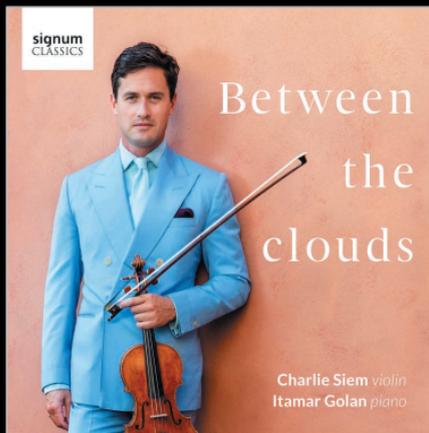
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SignumClassics, Signum Records Ltd., Suite 14, 21 Wadsworth Road, Perivale, Middlesex, UB6 7LQ, UK.

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