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NAXOS

Tibor HARSÁNYI

A Hungarian in Paris

Violin Sonatina

Violin Sonata

Viola Sonata

Trois pièces de danse

Charles Wetherbee, Violin / Viola

David Korevaar, Piano

Tibor
HARSÁNYI
 (1898-1954)
A Hungarian in Paris

Sonatina for Violin and Piano (1919)	19:02
1 Moderato	6:23
2 Scherzo	3:58
3 Allegro giusto	8:41
 Sonata for Violin and Piano (1925)	 21:36
4 Allegro ma non troppo	6:46
5 Lento	9:03
6 Vivace	5:47
 Trois pièces de danse (1928)	 6:47
7 Mouvement de Tango	2:12
8 Mouvement de Boston (Lent)	2:29
9 Mouvement de Foxtrot	2:06
 Sonata for Viola and Piano (1953-54)	 18:56
10 Allegro cantabile	6:49
11 Adagio	6:43
12 Allegro giocoso con vivo	5:24

Tibor Harsányi (1898-1954)

Violin Sonatina · Violin Sonata · Trois pièces de danse · Viola Sonata

Hungarian-born pianist, composer, conductor, and musicologist Tibor Harsányi was part of the lively Paris musical scene from 1923. He was a student of Kodály in Budapest, then travelled around Europe as a performer, settling briefly in Holland, where he worked as a conductor. Once in Paris he joined with other expatriate composers, including the Czech Bohuslav Martinů, the Romanian Marcel Mihailovici, the Swiss Conrad Beck, and the Russians Alexander Tansman and Alexander Tcherepnin. In a 1929 article in the *Revue Musical*, the critic Arthur Hoérée dubbed this group "l'école de Paris", writing that they were not only "remarkable young talents rubbing shoulders with the French, but also foreigners who have chosen Paris as their base and participate in its artistic leanings, while at the same time retaining their individual national characters". Harsányi published a volume entitled *Treize danses* in 1929 featuring works by a number of members of *l'école* (including a *Foxtrot* of his own) that could be understood as a kind of manifesto of the style. Adhering to the anti-Debussy tendencies of *Les six*, but with a distinctly international cast, the music is flavoured with the influences of the American-inflected jazz of the Paris dance halls, the spare and often dissonant textures of the neoclassicists, and a certain amount of folk colour. Harsányi himself was a prolific composer of chamber music, solo piano works, and songs, as well as opera and ballet. Aside from occasional performances of his setting of *The Brave Little Tailor* (1937) for chamber ensemble and narrator – described in a 1952 survey of his work (in the British journal *The Chesterian*) as "an exquisite and witty suite for chamber orchestra" – his music is essentially unknown today, in spite of its intrinsic quality and individual style.

Harsányi's importance in the Parisian musical scene is acknowledged in a 1931 piece in the *The Chesterian* by Andreas Liess, who writes: "Strict adherence to development of clear and concise form and expressive art, together with his exceptional rhythmical gift, places Harsany (sic) in the forefront of his contemporaries."

A 1929 interview by the Parisian critic José Bruyr, in *Le guide du concert*, includes Harsányi's own descriptions of his youth:

In Hungary, just as in France before 1914 and the phonograph, music was understood as the complement of all bourgeois education... That is the reason why my family made me, a little gentleman of four or five years old, sit in front of the keyboard. But, until I was fifteen, even while practising Bach or Chopin, I was only thinking about a football match or a hundred-metre running race.

He goes on to describe service in the Austrian Imperial forces in the first World War, his return to Budapest, and his subsequent travels, mentioning that he had already composed, among other works, the *Sonatina for Violin and Piano*.

Around this time I left Budapest for Vienna, falling from Charybdis to Scylla, from the [Hungarian] revolution into inflation: life was impossible in Vienna. I set forth once again. I travelled through Germany... ending up settling in Holland.

After a short time, he continued to Paris, where he arrived without knowing a word of French or "a living soul". But, he adds, "as I've said, a musician can't live anywhere else". Earlier in the interview, Harsányi described Paris as

... a purgatory for a musician who lives for his art. Never mind that Paris now plays the rôle that Vienna played a century earlier. Beethoven and Schubert were then just semi-understood. But could they have lived and created any other way? ... Paris, great laboratory of contemporary music, today counts more composers than the rest of the universe.

Harsányi's concluding words reflect his concern with logic and order:

A page of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* participates in mathematics and architecture. Bach himself considered music the highest of all sciences. And, according to Schlegel, music was frozen architecture. [Schlegel actually said that architecture was frozen music.]

Bruyr closes with his own thoughts on Harsányi's music as "an individual art reflecting the author's own image as well as a new classicism without nationality – or beyond nationalities – music of tomorrow's young Europe". In 1933, Harsányi told Bruyr:

It's just that I no longer believe in the national soul marked with the folkloric stigmata of a race. Aren't sounds just some colours to create that particular colour we call "local"? Bartók and de Falla, with their genius, sustain a compromised cause, a lost cause.

The music on this recording presents a survey of Harsányi's stylistic development, from one of his earliest works, the *Sonatina*, to his final work, the *Viola Sonata*.

The *Sonatina*, for violin and piano, composed in 1919 while Harsányi was still in Budapest, shares the unusual key of C sharp minor with Dohnányi's *Violin Sonata*, published in 1911. It reflects his essentially Romantic roots, but with interesting harmonic twists and a Hungarian flavour in the musical rhetoric. The slow first movement has the violin speaking its phrases with a mix of drama and simple lyricism. The piano writing is rich, and often serves as a contrapuntal foil to the violin. The mix of textures is particularly striking, ranging from the simplicity of the second theme to the layered lines of the closing idea – a tendency brought to a more extreme level in the final movement. The middle movement is a *scherzo* in D flat major in which the piano and violin chase each other through a series of amusing canonic passages. The *trio* section alternates a wonderfully lyrical melody with

interpolations of dance music. The *finale*, a grandly-scaled sonata-form movement with a repeated exposition, opens with the violin and piano playing their intense individual lines at the same time, with an expressive urgency that strives in Straussian fashion. The second theme is in a far simpler texture, dancing playfully.

The 1925 *Sonata for Violin and Piano* reflects currents of modernism in Paris, as well as the music of Harsányi's compatriot Bartók, whose two violin sonatas had been written in 1921-22. The *Sonata* is once again centered on C sharp, but from the first notes we are in a whole new world of sonic possibilities. The first movement, still in a traditional sonata form, begins with a contrapuntal presentation of motivically derived thematic material. Bartókian gestures abound within a sensuous colour palette, at least at first. The second theme, after an asymmetrically metered march for a transition, takes the form of a three-voice fugal exposition that revels in irregular rhythms and extraordinary dissonance. The development returns to the sensuous world of the first theme. The movement ends with a chord that reflects the prevalence of American jazz in Paris. The middle movement is an improvisation for the violin, with numerous cadenza-like passages, highly expressive and in a Hungarian-influenced rhetorical style. The *finale* is driven by rhythm, and flavoured with touches not only of Hungary, but also of the Stravinsky of both *Petrushka* and *The Soldier's Tale*. This is wildly exciting music reflective of the anarchical tendencies of the avant-garde of the 1920s: never predictable, always engaging.

Trois pièces de danse, a set of three short piano pieces composed in 1928, represents *l'école de Paris* in full bloom, obviously drawing on jazz and dance music. Harsányi has great fun with the dance rhythms, rendering them almost unrecognizable through his sly use of rests on the main beats. With his tributes to three dances that were immensely popular at the time – *Tango, Boston* (a slow waltz), and *Foxrot* – he finds an avenue for melodic wit, harmonic invention, and rhythmic ingenuity.

The *Sonata for Viola and Piano*, written in 1953-54, was Harsányi's final work. The style here is still contrapuntal, but the musical language is more contained,

the contrasts more controlled, than in the earlier works. All three movements are in sonata form. Even with this higher level of refinement, the music retains a mixture of sensuousness and earthiness that connects it to the earlier works. Rhythm remains a critical component. The first movement's lyrical opening theme, for example, is in a flowing 5/8 time, simple at first, and then gaining complexity as the viola and piano diverge metrically from each other in their contrapuntal lines. The second theme introduces new rhythmic elements, and a far more jagged mix of articulations. The second movement, in a very slow tempo, begins with a striking *pizzicato* scale in the viola, which is spun out contrapuntally by the piano in reply. The

music evolves as a series of slowly blossoming expressive gestures – not dissimilar from the earlier *Violin Sonata* in terms of the improvisatory quality of the material itself, but enhanced by a carefully worked out formal plan. The last movement is the most Hungarian in flavour, beginning with a lively figure presented by the viola, setting off an energetic, rhythmically exciting, and generally contrapuntal chase – the fast part (*Friss*) of the Hungarian recruiting dance (*Verbunkos*) heard through the prism of the logic and architecture that are hallmarks of Harsányi's mature style.

David Korevaar

Charles Wetherbee



Charles Wetherbee is a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music, where he studied with Aaron Rosand. A native of Buffalo, New York, he gave his first performances at the age of six. He has performed solos under Mstislav Rostropovitch, as well as performances with the Japan Philharmonic, the Philharmonic Orchestra of Bogotá, Colombia, the Columbus Symphony, the National Repertory Orchestra, the Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional de México, the State Orchestra of Leningrad, and many others. Charles Wetherbee is the first violinist of the Carpe Diem String Quartet, and is a devoted teacher, currently Assistant Professor of Violin at the University of Colorado Boulder. He is also the Artistic Director of The Dercum Center.

David Korevaar



Photo: Casey Cass, University of Colorado

Pianist David Korevaar balances his active career as a soloist and chamber musician with teaching at the University of Colorado Boulder, where he is the Peter and Helen Weil Professor of Piano. Since his New York debut at Town Hall in 1985, Korevaar has performed throughout the United States, including concerts in New York, Boston, Chicago, Washington D.C., Dallas, Houston, Cincinnati and San Diego, as well as on tours in Europe and Asia. He frequently performs in his home state of Colorado. International appearances have included Australia, Japan, Korea, Abu Dhabi and Europe. Korevaar gave his London debut at Wigmore Hall and his German debut at the Heidelberg Spring Festival. He performed and taught in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan as a cultural envoy under the sponsorship of the United States Department of State. Korevaar has made numerous critically acclaimed recordings encompassing solo and ensemble literature from Johann Sebastian Bach, Beethoven and Brahms to Ravel and Hindemith, David Carlson and Lowell Liebermann.

A student of Kodály in Budapest, the pianist, composer and conductor Tibor Harsányi travelled to France in 1923 where he joined an elite group of expatriate composers, including Martinů, Tansman, and Tcherepnin, known as 'l'école de Paris'. The music on this recording presents a survey of Harsányi's stylistic development, from one of his earliest works, the *Sonatina*, with its essentially Romantic roots, to his final work, the *Viola Sonata*, notable for its mixture of sensuousness and earthiness that connects it to the earlier compositions. The *Violin Sonata* reflects currents of modernism in Paris, including American jazz, as well as the music of his compatriot Bartók.

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(1898-1954)

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1-3	Sonatina for Violin and Piano (1919)	19:02
4-6	Sonata for Violin and Piano (1925)	21:36
7-9	Trois pièces de danse (1928)	6:47
10-12	Sonata for Viola and Piano (1953-54)	18:56

WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDINGS

Charles Wetherbee, Violin 1-6 / Viola 10-12
David Korevaar, Piano

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A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet.

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Piano technicians: Ted Mulcahey and Tim Wirth

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