



George Frederick PINTO

COMPLETE SONATAS FOR PIANO AND VIOLIN

SONATA NO. 1 IN G MINOR

SONATA NO. 2 IN A MAJOR

SONATA NO. 3 IN B FLAT MAJOR

Kenji Fujimura, piano
Elizabeth Sellars, violin

FIRST RECORDINGS

THE VIOLIN SONATAS OF GEORGE FREDERICK PINTO

by Paul Conway

The English composer, violinist and pianist George Frederick Pinto (1785–1806) garnered high praise from some of his most eminent contemporaries. Samuel Wesley (1766–1837) stated that ‘a greater musical genius has not been known.’¹ Having published a Minuetto and a Rondo by Pinto, William Ayrton (1777–1858) observed that they ‘would do credit to the name of the greatest composer that ever lived.’² The leading London impresario Johann Peter Salomon (1745–1815) felt that if Pinto had not died at such an early age, ‘England would have had the honour of producing a second Mozart.’³

These expressions of unstinting admiration are echoed by more recent assessments. In his seminal 1965 article for *The Musical Times*, Nicholas Temperley asserted that

Pinto was in truth a genius. In promise he was by far the most remarkable English composer of his generation, and one who might have done almost anything if he had lived longer. In his actual achievement he is a worthy companion to Clementi, Dussek and Field.⁴

Five years later, Alexander Ringer wrote that ‘as a “prophet” of keyboard things to come Pinto is virtually without peers.’⁵

Named after Handel, George Frederick Pinto was born in Lambeth, London, on 25 September 1785. His father, Samuel Saunders, who was an equilibrist (or tightrope-

¹ *Memoirs of Samuel Wesley*, f. 154, quoted in Nicholas Temperley, ‘George Frederick Pinto’, *The Musical Times*, Vol. 106, No. 1466 (April 1965), p. 266.

² Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 266.

³ ‘Mémorial of George Frederick Pinto’ (from a correspondent), *The Harmonicon*, (1826), p. 216.

⁴ Temperley, *loc. cit.*, p. 266.

⁵ ‘Beethoven and the London Pianoforte School’, *Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (October 1970), p. 755.

walker), died young and appears not to have featured prominently in his son's life. George took his surname from his mother, Julia Pinto, who was the daughter of Thomas Pinto (1714–c. 1780), a notable London-born violinist and composer of Italian ancestry. George showed early promise as a violinist and at the age of eight he began studies with Haydn's patron Johann Peter Salomon, who lost no time in presenting his gifted young pupil as a prodigy. His first public appearance as a violinist was in violin concerto by Ivan Mane Giornovichi (alias Jarnović, 1747–1804), at the Order of the Evening for Readings and Music at the New Lyceum, Hanover Square, on 10 June 1795, advertised in that day's *Oracle and Public Advertiser*. Between 1798 and 1803 he performed frequently at concerts in London, Oxford, Cambridge, Bath, Winchester and Edinburgh, and is believed to have made two excursions to Paris. At Salomon's benefit concert on 10 March 1800 he played the violin in a performance of a sonata for piano and violin with John Field. Field was a fellow violin-pupil of Salomon and both were early admirers of J. S. Bach; it was Pinto who first introduced Samuel Wesley to Bach's preludes and fugues.

Pinto also learned the piano, which soon became his 'favourite instrument',⁶ though he played it less frequently than the violin. It is not known with whom Pinto learned piano, but his prowess was such that the composer and writer Alexander Campbell (1764–1824) declared in 1802 of his musical virtuosity:

Young Pinto is not only an admirable violin player, but also a first-rate performer on the grand piano forte: to excel on two instruments so widely different from each other, is a proof of genius and unwearied application very seldom to be met with. If dissipation, and consequent idleness, do not impede him in his career, what may not the musical world expect in his riper manhood ...?⁷

At Domenico Corri's Edinburgh concerts in January 1803 he 'presided at the pianoforte',⁸ although only seventeen years old, when Corri was incapacitated by an accident.⁹ His

⁶ 'Memoir of George Frederick Pinto', *loc. cit.*, p. 216.

⁷ Alexander Campbell, *A Journey from Edinburgh through parts of North Britain*, 2 (1802), pp. 189–90, quoted in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 5th edn., 'Pinto, George Frederick', by Nicholas Temperley.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Caledonian Mercury*, 22 January 1803.

customary role at concerts, however, was to play a violin concerto, generally by an unspecified composer, but occasionally stated to be by Salomon, Giornovich, Giovanni Battista Viotti (1755–1824) or himself. Occasionally he would play a piano concerto or take either the violin or the piano part in a sonata or a piece of chamber music.

Pinto's Op. 1, a set of three divertimenti for piano, was advertised in the *Morning Post* on 5 November 1801, but this publication is now believed to be lost. At about the same time he also published *Cory Owen, a Favourite Irish Air*, arranged as a Rondo for piano. His Op. 2, *Three Favourite Airs with Variations* for piano, probably appeared in 1802. Dating from the following year, perhaps the most remarkable group of keyboard works written by Pinto consists of two Grand Sonatas in E flat minor and A major, Op. 3, and a Grand Sonata in C minor, published without opus number, inscribed 'to my friend John Field'. Three further piano sonatas, in G major, B flat major and C major, Op. 4, were issued in 1804 or 1805. Each of these is designated 'Sonatina' and contains light movements such as marches and a waltz. Other posthumously published works may also date from this period, including a Fantasia and Sonata for piano in C minor, left in an unfinished state by Pinto at the time of his death but completed by Samuel Wesley and Joseph Woelfl (1773–1812), and a fourth sonata for piano with violin accompaniment in A major, edited and completed by Wesley and Woelfl, but not to the same standard as Pinto's original three published sonatas.

After the 1804 season Pinto became increasingly ill and the number of his appearances in public began to decline, although he continued to compose. Three duets (in F major, E flat major and A major) for two violins were published as Op. 5 in 1805, and another three appeared soon afterwards, probably in the same year. Towards the end of his short life Pinto also published a number of songs, to which he or the publisher gave the fashionable title 'canzonets', and others were published soon after his death. These varied treatments show a firm grasp of the expressive techniques of the day and suggest that the composer would have excelled in setting texts; Nicholas Temperley has remarked, 'only Schubert himself wrote more striking songs before the age of 20'.¹⁰

¹⁰ Temperley, 'Pinto, George Frederick', *loc. cit.*

By November 1805, when he was engaged for a series of concerts in Oxford, Pinto's health had deteriorated to such an extent that he was able to participate in only one of them. This occasion proved to be his final appearance in public. He died in Chelsea on 23 March 1806 at the age of 20. The medical cause of his death is open to question, though Salomon spoke of his erstwhile protégé's inability to 'resist the allurements of society',¹¹ Carl Ferdinand Pohl asserted that his health had been 'undermined by excesses'¹² and *Sainsbury's Dictionary* refers to him as 'a martyr to dissipation'.¹³ *Baker's Biographical Dictionary* mentions his 'sexual indulgence and general dissipation',¹⁴ According to Nicholas Temperley, the symptoms described by eyewitnesses suggest that in fact Pinto died of tuberculosis.¹⁵ He was buried in St Margaret's, Westminster, on 30 March 1806.

According to the scant biographical material which does exist, Pinto was 'remarkable for an unusual share of beauty' and 'could converse sensibly on most subjects'.¹⁶ His 'humanity and generosity' extended to kindness to animals and birds who were the victims of cruelty.¹⁷ He also visited prisons and distributed money to the inmates.¹⁸

Pinto was one of the most celebrated English violinists of his generation. For a century-and-a-half after his death it was primarily his exceptional violin-playing that kept his memory alive. An obituary notice from 1806 calls him simply 'G. F. Pinto, the celebrated performer on the violin'.¹⁹ He appears in a listing of the 'most eminent violinists that have exhibited in this country during the present generation' in the *Englishman's Magazine* published 25 years after his death, where his qualities as a musician are enumerated as 'fire, originality, vivid fervour, and profound feeling'.²⁰

¹¹ Quoted in Temperley, 'George Frederick Pinto', *loc. cit.*, p. 266.

¹² Carl Ferdinand Pohl, 'George Frederick Pinto', *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, MacMillan, London, 1879, Vol. II, p. 754.

¹³ John Sainsbury (ed.), *Dictionary of Musicians from the Earliest Ages to the Present Time*, Vol. 2, Sainsbury and Company, London, 1825, p. 294.

¹⁴ Nicholas Slominsky (ed.), *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, 8th edn., MacMillan, New York, 1992, p. 141.

¹⁵ Temperley, 'Pinto, George Frederick', *loc. cit.*

¹⁶ 'Memoir of George Frederick Pinto', *loc. cit.*, p. 216.

¹⁷ *The Musical World* (1840), pp. 271–73, quoted in Percy M. Young, *Music and Letters*, Vol. 69, No. 1 (January 1988), p. 129.

¹⁸ Temperley, 'Pinto, George Frederick', *loc. cit.*

¹⁹ *European Magazine and London Review*, 'Monthly Obituary', 49 (April 1806), p. 322.

²⁰ Edward Moxon (ed.), 'Paganini and his Predecessors', *Englishman's Magazine*, July 1831, Vol. 1 (4), p. 535.

The following year, in a 'History of the Violin' in *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal*, he is hailed as 'a great performer and musical genius'.²¹ In a retrospective of music in England published in 1836, Samuel Wesley declared the 'Young Pinto' as

one of the most wonderful youths who ever existed; he could play the most difficult compositions at first sight, and his precision in the execution of Keütser's or any other of the most elaborate Solos and Concertos, was truly astonishing. He was taken from this world in the twentieth or twenty-first year of his age, leaving the musical public to lament the loss of one of the brightest geniuses that ever adorned the Art.²²

In the same year as Wesley's retrospective was published, an article appeared describing Pinto as a 'prodigy on the violin'.²³

Among the works he wrote for his own instrument may be numbered at least one concerto, the manuscript of which was described by J. W. Davison in 1850.²⁴ His violin duets are exemplary; there was a considerable public appetite for this genre around 1800 and Pinto's contributions have been compared favourably with those of Viotti by Nicholas Temperley.²⁵

Published by Julia Pinto after her son's death in 1806, the *Three Sonatas for the Pianoforte with an Accompaniment for a Violin* were among the composer's last works. In each of them, he allows the violin to introduce some of the thematic material but entrusts the lion's share of the technical display to the piano. Much of the violin-writing is in its dark and sonorous lower register; the more vibrant upper range of the instrument is seldom drawn upon so as not to rival the brilliance of the keyboard. None of the three sonatas deviates from convention in its formal plan. All are cast in a three-movement fast-slow-fast sequence, with an opening sonata-allegro movement in $\frac{4}{4}$ time

²¹ William and Robert Chambers (eds.), *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal*, February 1832–December 1853, 39 (27 October 1832), p. 309.

²² Samuel Wesley, 'A Sketch of the State of Music in England, from the Year 1778 up to the Present', *The Musical World*, Vol. 1 (1), p. 2.

²³ John Parry, 'A Chronological List of Departed Musicians', *The Musical World*, 17 June 1836, Vol. 2 (14), xv.

²⁴ J. W. Davison, *The Musical World*, 25 (1850), p. 2, quoted in Temperley, 'George Frederick Pinto', *loc. cit.*, p. 266.

²⁵ Temperley, 'Pinto, George Frederick', *loc. cit.*

and a concluding $\frac{2}{4}$ rondo, with a central slow movement in either ternary form or, in the case of the A major Sonata, rounded binary form.

Unquestionably the most impressive of the three, the Sonata in G minor departs furthest from the notion of a work for piano with violin accompaniment, being more of a musical dialogue between instrumental partners. The opening *Allegro moderato con espressione* [1] is the only minor-key movement in all the Sonatas. It is also the only instance where the violin is permitted to launch the opening theme. This intensely expressive movement derives some of its restless nature from jagged phrases, use of chromatic sequences in the piano in transitional passages, and a preponderance of sudden accents. The material is closely argued and tightly knit: the second subject contains a descending two-note phrase which is a reversal of an ascending two-note motif which appears in the primary material. The composer and scholar Geoffrey Bush (1920–98) described this movement as ‘passionate in mood, cogent in argument, and full of splendid thematic invention.’²⁶ After the turbulence of the opening movement, the elegant central *Adagio* in E flat major [2] offers a satisfying contrast with its Mozartian poise. A model of Classical restraint and stillness, it allows both instruments moments of unforced eloquence. There are also several opportunities for discreet embellishment of both parts. The closing *Allegretto grazioso* [3] is a rather intricate rondo in G major with an amiable primary subject and more resolute, rhythmic internal sections incorporating fugato episodes. It is the only movement within these three Sonatas for piano and violin to include a change of key-signature (three times, to G minor, E flat major and D major). There is no formal coda but the concluding bars are deftly intimidated by a broadening of the main theme. Of this finale, Bush observed that, ‘unlike the first two movements it aims only to please. This it succeeds in doing agreeably enough, and as the music flows amiably along there is always some unexpected twist (usually harmonic) to hold one’s attention.’²⁷

²⁶ Geoffrey Bush, ‘Chamber Music’, in Nicholas Temperley (ed.), *The Blackwell History of Music in Britain: The Romantic Age 1800–1814*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1988, p. 382.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 383.

The Second Sonata, in A major, is the most lyrical of the three. Its songlike expressiveness anticipates Schubert's mature style. The first movement, marked *Allegro moderato con espressione* [4], is appealing and good-humoured, though it lacks the potency of the opening movement of the G minor Sonata, despite having the same tempo indication. Interest is sustained instead by a plethora of sinuous and ingratiating melodies and a pleasing formal balance and proportion. The central *Andante* [5] is unambitious, melodically and harmonically, but its repetitions allow for some judicious ornamentation. Marked *Allegro con brio*, a substantial Haydnesque rondo [6] rounds off the A major Sonata in ebullient and vigorous style. Though the internal sections are derived from the principal rondo material, they offer sufficient contrast to satisfy the listener. Fleetingly interrupting the flow, the second episode begins hesitantly but gains in fluency as it evolves. This finale is conceived on a sufficiently broad scale to encompass a short but telling coda.

The first movement of the Third Sonata, in B flat, is marked *Allegro moderato con espressione e spirito* [7]. This elaborate and contradictory designation suggests an emotional complexity which is largely absent in a relatively straightforward presentation that generally confines the violin to a subordinate role. The haunting *Adagio* second movement, in G flat major [8], contains sustained expressive writing, with radiant solo passages for the violin and a shadowy, dramatic middle section in E flat minor for the piano alone. Marked *Pastorale e legato*, the engaging final movement [9] is a good-natured and harmonically adventurous rondo *Allegro moderato*. The violin is at last on an equal footing with the piano and, uniquely in these sonatas, it is granted some independent thematic material not shared with the other part.

These three sonatas for violin and piano of George Frederick Pinto suggest a wide variety of contemporary influences. In the case of the very fine G minor Sonata these stimuli have been assimilated and exploited to create a polished score of marked originality. The other two examples are no less indicative of an exceptional creative artist of whom great things might have been expected. Indeed, the burgeoning individual talent and distinctive musical voice on display in all three works presented here makes Pinto's premature death as severe a blow to English music as that of George Butterworth

(1885–1916) 110 years later. A verdict on Butterworth delivered in a 1942 BBC Home Service radio talk is surely also applicable to Pinto: ‘Great in what he achieved, greater still in what he promised.’²⁸

Paul Conway is a freelance writer specialising in twentieth-century and contemporary British music. He has reviewed regularly for The Independent and Tempo, provided programme notes for The Proms and the Edinburgh, Spitalfields and Three Choirs Festivals and contributed chapters to books on John McCabe and Robert Simpson.

Elizabeth Sellars and Kenji Fujimura have enjoyed a musical partnership of more than a decade. A ‘Mozart and More’ series of five concerts in 2006, during which they performed the complete Mozart Sonatas for piano and violin, premiere performances of works by Bowman and Czaplowski and compositions by Finzi, Hurlstone, Respighi, Shostakovich and Takemitsu, garnered much critical praise. Their CD *The Messiaen Nexus*, which included the premiere recording of George Benjamin’s Violin Sonata, as well as works by Messiaen, Kurtág and Dukas, was awarded the 2014 *Limelight* Recording of the Year for chamber music.

Australian-born **Elizabeth Sellars** has enjoyed a distinguished career as both performer and teacher with a reputation as ‘dynamically exciting’ (*The Australian*) and ‘one of the few violinists [...] who can handle works that move in new directions – intellectually difficult material [...] with level headed assurance’ (*The Age*).

Elizabeth is a prize-winning graduate of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, where she studied with David Takeno (violin) and the Takács and Gabrieli Quartets (chamber music). Further significant influences included Sándor Végh and Yehudi Menuhin, with whom Elizabeth worked at the International Musicians’ Seminar at Prussia Cove in Cornwall and at the International Menuhin Music Academy in Switzerland.

During her time in London, Elizabeth was a winner of the inaugural John Tunnell Trust and the Royal Overseas League Ensemble Prize and Miller Trophy. As soloist and chamber



²⁸ Quoted in Michael Barlow, *Whom the Gods Love: The Life and Music of George Butterworth*, Toccata Press, London, 1997, p. 11.

musician, she toured extensively in the UK, broadcast for the BBC, and performed throughout Europe with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields.

Now resident in Melbourne, Elizabeth is a member of the Sutherland Piano Trio with the pianist Caroline Almonte and cellist Molly Kadarauach. Elizabeth has also performed with the Australian Chamber Orchestra, Elision, the Tin Alley String Quartet and Ensemble Liaison. Her performances have been broadcast on radio worldwide and she has recorded for Naxos, Move and ABC Classics. Elizabeth has appeared in festivals throughout Europe, the USA, Mongolia and Australia. As a committed proponent of new music, Elizabeth has also performed world premieres dedicated to her by Calvin Bowman, Philip Czaplowski, Paul Grabowsky, Stuart Greenbaum, Dominik Karski, Thomas Reiner and Julian Yu.

Educating the next generation of students is a passion for Elizabeth. She has presented workshops for the Australian String Teachers Association, the University of Auckland, the International Akaroa Music Festival and the Pettman Junior Academy. As juror she has served on panels for the Australian Youth Classical Music Competition, the Melbourne International Chamber Music Competition, the Singapore Performer's Festival and Chamber Music Competition and the Dorcas McClean Scholarship. Elizabeth is currently Co-ordinator of Strings at Monash University.

Dr **Kenji Fujimura** is the recipient of numerous international prizes and awards as pianist and composer, including the Australian National Piano Award and the William Lincer Foundation International Composition Award (New York). Kenji has been described as 'a grand artist with a magical sound, an accomplished technique and a superb understanding of all musical styles. He adds to this a vision of deep profundity'.

An avid supporter of both contemporary and lesser-known music, recent CD releases include a double-disc set of piano trios by Hurlstone, d'Ollone, Wiren and Hyde – as founding member of Trio Anima Mundi - which was selected as a 2013 MusicWeb International Recording of the Year. His CD of the complete piano music of William Hurlstone (Toccata Classics TOCC 0289) in May 2015 was immediately made a MusicWeb International 'Recording of the Month'. The disc was also selected for the 2015 'Want List' as one of the best five releases of the year by the *Fanfare* critic Colin Clarke, who stated that 'Fujimura is a most powerful advocate for this incredibly strong music'.



Kenji's own compositions have been most recently performed in the USA, Australia, Singapore and Indonesia, including the *Ballade to Anxiety* (Vox Novus prize), *Au Revoir* (Virtual Artists International Composition Competition-winning work), *Echoes of the Silver Screen* and *Matsuri no Asa* (winning work at the Singapore Asian Composers Festival).

Kenji is also a highly respected pedagogue; his teaching career at the tertiary level began while he himself was an undergraduate. He is currently Acting Head of School, Co-ordinator of Classical Performance and Chamber Music at the Sir Zelman Cowen School of Music, Monash University. Kenji is also an examiner for the Australian Music Examinations Board and is frequently invited as an adjudicator for competitions throughout Australia and abroad. In 2015 he was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music, London. His website can be found at www.kenjimusic.com.



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We acknowledge the generosity of Brenton Fyfield, who provided a beautiful Hornsteiner violin for Elizabeth to use in preparation for this project. *Elizabeth Sellars and Kenji Fujimura*

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GEORGE FREDERICK PINTO

Complete Sonatas for Piano and Violin

Sonata for Piano and Violin No. 1 in G minor (c. 1806)	19:49
1 I <i>Allegro moderato con espressione</i>	8:07
2 II <i>Adagio sostenuto e legato</i>	6:11
3 III Rondo: <i>Allegretto grazioso</i>	5:31
Sonata for Piano and Violin No. 2 in A major (c. 1806)	19:26
4 I <i>Allegro moderato con espressione</i>	9:28
5 II <i>Andante</i>	3:55
6 III Rondo: <i>Allegro con brio</i>	6:03
Sonata for Piano and Violin No. 3 in B flat major (c. 1806)	18:06
7 I <i>Allegro moderato con espressione e spirito</i>	9:19
8 II <i>Adagio affettuoso e con sentimento</i>	4:02
9 III Rondo: <i>Allegro moderato</i>	4:45

Kenji Fujimura, piano
Elizabeth Sellars, violin

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