



Paul
JUON
(1872–1940)

Violin Sonatas
Nos. 1–3

Charles Wetherbee, Violin
David Korevaar, Piano

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The three violin sonatas of Paul Juon represent an important artistic statement by this neglected master. Bringing together threads of Russian, German and Scandinavian music, these beautifully written sonatas are immediately attractive, brilliant and dramatic.

Paul Juon was born in Moscow; his father was the son of a Swiss émigré, and Paul was educated in a German school in Moscow before entering the Imperial Conservatory there to study violin and composition. He studied composition with Anton Arensky and Sergey Taneyev, both of whose styles had been strongly influenced by Tchaikovsky. He continued his studies at the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin with Woldemar Bargiel – Clara Schumann's half-brother – providing Juon with a direct link to the German Romantic style of Mendelssohn and Schumann. After returning to Russia for a brief stint teaching violin and music theory in Baku, Juon settled in Berlin in 1897, teaching composition at the Hochschule für Musik beginning in 1906. He was named professor of composition there in 1911. In 1934, ill health led him to retire to Vevey in Switzerland.

While the influences of Tchaikovsky and Taneyev come through in his music, Juon's compositional voice is largely Germanic – he has even been called the 'Russian Brahms'. Much of his later music is full of the sound of Scandinavia, perhaps a consequence of his experience arranging Sibelius's works for his German publisher. Along with other Russian-born composers of his generation, including Taneyev's students Nikolai Medtner and Sergey Rachmaninov, Juon's style remained firmly rooted in tonality and Romantic musical gestures.

The three violin sonatas show Juon's stylistic evolution: the first, the longest of the three, was written when he first settled in Berlin. It is reminiscent of Tchaikovsky in its expansiveness and some of its themes, but also evokes Brahms, with the first movement going so far as to quote gestures from Brahms's *Violin Sonata No. 1*. The three exquisitely structured movements of the second *Sonata* bring together all of Juon's influences, melding

them into a distinctive voice that reflects the diversity of his background, studies and experiences. The third, written ten years after the second and at the end of his time in Berlin, is in one movement, and further integrates the influences that had formed into his mature style. In all three sonatas, Juon's strongly characterised musical ideas and sense of dramatic pacing combine with his imaginative use of common Classical structures to create engaging novelistic tableaux.

Opening this recording, the *Sonata No. 2* in F major beautifully represents Juon's mature style. The distinctive sound of his musical language emerges from his cosmopolitan Russo-German background, but is enriched by pentatonicism, modality and a surprisingly intense chromaticism. While one can identify the diverse influences of Sibelius, Strauss and Reger, the result is completely Juon's own.

The first movement, *Allegro non troppo*, suggests a narrative – a trait common to all three sonatas. The opening gesture, based on pairs of thirds, leads into a series of gestures that feel like the beginning of a story in which individual characters are introduced with their own particular flourishes. The music starts, and then pauses to reflect before starting again. Although the violin and piano toss musical ideas back and forth, each instrument has its own role to play – its own rhythms and sounds – giving each an individual personality within the logical structure of the sonata-form movement. Even when the momentum becomes more constant, the distinctive musical personae of violin and piano are always discernible. The music is mercurial, alternating between playful and sombre, lyrical and martial, brilliant and calm. The textures and sounds are endlessly imaginative, and there is ample food for the attentive listener in every turn of phrase.

The *Largo* second movement begins with a haunting unison passage in the piano; odd jumps and surprising turns of phrase abound. As the violin enters and the textures thicken, the music becomes intensely chromatic, highly expressive, with every note full of emotional

possibility. As in the first movement, the musical development feels driven by storytelling, but always within the discipline of a carefully conceived structure. The phrases follow inevitably, leading at last to a surprising release of tension in a D major folk dance-like passage. The stark searching of the opening returns in fragments split between piano and violin, ending the movement in twilight mystery.

The *Risolto* finale is full of uncontainable energy from the outset, with brilliant piano writing underpinning a leaping, upward-striving melody in the violin. The material is all related to material from the earlier movements, but handled subtly enough that the cyclicalism doesn't hit the listener over the head. Again, the drama of the movement, full of extreme character changes, seems to demand a narrative – perhaps featuring goblins and magic. To conclude, Juon brings back the folk dance of the end of the second movement, but now eerily transformed into a bizarre and otherworldly music in a minor key.

The masterful *Sonata No. 3* in B minor was written at the end of Juon's time in Berlin. It is in a single movement, with three large sections: a fully worked out large-scale sonata structure that occupies more than half the length of the work, an extended slow section, and a conclusion that brings back the thematic material of the first part, but compressed and more brilliantly presented. As in the *Second Sonata*, the interval of the third dominates much of the harmonic and melodic material. The narrative feel of the work is consistently engaging, drawing the listener into a dramatic musical journey. This music evokes an imagined landscape, Nordic perhaps, full of natural and supernatural beings, engaged in a drama both epic and intensely human.

The unabashedly Romantic *Sonata No. 1* in A major was composed shortly after Juon settled in Berlin. The piano takes an outsized role throughout, providing rich textural support for the violin. The sound of the orchestra is never far away, and the work is symphonic in scope.

The first movement, in a broad and Brahmsian 6/4 metre, unfolds generously; its initial motive – a descending triad in a dotted rhythm – appears first in a slow tempo, and is then repeated more quickly as the music evolves and increases in brilliance. The second theme, a beautiful melody combined with gently pulsating piano chords, has a more Tchaikovskian flavour, with an attractive unforced lyricism. The exposition concludes with a burst of virtuosity. The expansive and rhapsodic development section leads to a slightly shortened recapitulation; the movement concludes with a brief coda emphasising the descending triad and dotted rhythms of the opening.

The F major second movement, a wide-ranging set of variations on a folk-like theme, moves through a variety of tempos and characters, much like its likely model, the variations movement of Tchaikovsky's *Piano Trio*. The theme is presented by the piano alone; in the first variation the violin restates the theme while the piano part adds orchestral counterpoint à la Tchaikovsky. The second variation is a lyrical *Moderato*, juxtaposing a transformed melody and quick arpeggios shared by both instruments. The third is a boisterous *Menuetto* with big chords for the violin, while the *Presto* fourth is a virtuoso playground for the pianist. The penultimate variation is a poignant *Romance* in F minor. The final variation is playful and virtuosic, with piano and violin tossing fragments of the theme back and forth. The coda, set over a tolling F pedal in the piano part, brings the movement to a gentle conclusion.

The A minor finale begins with an explosion of brilliance in the piano, soon joined by the violin in a rollicking Cossack-inspired dance. The virtuosity is unrelenting until the second contrasting episode of the rondo, slower and lyrical, full of bell-like chords in the piano part. After a final return of the main theme, the movement fades out brilliantly in a paroxysm of Mendelssohnian playfulness.

David Korevaar

Charles Wetherbee



Violinist Charles Wetherbee has performed throughout the world. He made his debut with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra under Semyon Bychkov, and since then has performed with the National Symphony under Mstislav Rostropovitch, the Japan Philharmonic Orchestra, the Kyoto Symphony Orchestra, the Bogotá Philharmonic Orchestra, the Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional de México and the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra among many others. Wetherbee has recorded extensively, both as a soloist and a chamber musician. Recent releases include works by Tibor Harsányi (with David Korevaar; Naxos 8.573556), volume five of Sergey Taneyev's complete works for string quartet (Naxos 8.573671) and *Calligraphies* by Reza Vali (Albany). A devoted chamber musician, Wetherbee is the first violinist of the Carpe Diem String Quartet, with whom he tours and performs regularly. He is a member of the violin faculty of the College of Music, University of Colorado Boulder, and a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music, where he studied with Aaron Rosand. Wetherbee has been the recipient of numerous honours, including the Ashworth Artist and the George Hardesty awards. He performs on a violin made by Kurt Widenhouse, and bows by Charles Espey and Benoît Rolland. www.cwetherbee.instantencore.com

David Korevaar

David Korevaar performs internationally as a soloist and chamber musician, in addition to teaching at the University of Colorado Boulder, where he holds the Peter and Helen Weil fellowship in piano, and was named Distinguished Research Lecturer in 2016. An active performer and recording artist, in the spring of 2016 Korevaar spent two weeks teaching in Kabul at the Afghanistan National Institute of Music (ANIM). The 2016–17 season also included two tours to Brazil and a recital and masterclasses in Mexico City. In autumn 2017, he conducted and performed two of Mozart's piano concertos in Boulder. Korevaar's extensive discography includes numerous solo and chamber music recordings, most recently a recording of Lowell Liebermann's piano music and a world premiere recording of piano music by Luigi Perrachio. In addition, his collaboration with members of the Takács Quartet has resulted in a number of releases, including albums featuring works by Brahms, Beethoven and Hindemith. Korevaar also writes on various musical topics, with a focus on French music. www.davidkorevaar.com

Paul Juon's musical education provided him with a direct link to the German Romantic style of Mendelssohn and Schumann, and he has even been called the 'Russian Brahms'. These three violin sonatas represent an important artistic statement by this neglected master, also showing his artistic evolution. The *First Sonata* is reminiscent of Tchaikovsky in its melodic beauty, the *Second Sonata* enriched with Scandinavian flavour in its mercurial character and chromatic intensity. The masterful and dramatic *Third Sonata* evokes an epic imagined landscape full of natural and supernatural beings.

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Violin Sonata No. 2 in F major, Op. 69 (pub. 1920) 25:41

- 1 I. Allegro non troppo 10:10**
- 2 II. Largo – Allegretto 6:49**
- 3 III. Risoluto 8:38**

Violin Sonata No. 3 in B minor, Op. 86 (pub. 1930) 17:48

- 4 Moderato assai – Andante – Tempo primo**

Violin Sonata No. 1 in A major, Op. 7 (pub. 1898) 33:35

- 5 I. Andante quasi moderato – Allegro ma non troppo 14:00**
- 6 II. Thema mit Variationen 11:29**
- 7 III. Vivace 8:01**

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Engineer and editor: Kevin Harbison • Piano technicians: Ted Mulcahey, Mark Mikkelsen
Pianos: Shigeru Kawai EX **1–3**, Steinway, Model D **4–7** • Booklet notes: David Korevaar
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