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NAXOS

UKRAINIAN MASTERS

BORTKIEWICZ • KOSENKO • SKORYK

Violin Sonatas

Solomiya Ivakhiv, Violin
Steven Beck, Piano

Ukrainian Masters

Bortkiewicz • Kosenko • Skoryk

Its essential characteristics may only have been thrown into relief with recent events, but the music of Ukraine has periodically come into focus throughout the past 250 years – especially during the mid-20th and early 21st centuries. These periods encompass the three composers featured on this recital, the formal rigour and expressive vitality of whose violin sonatas can seem in marked contrast to the cultural upheavals from which they emerged, and which have affected their creators to varying yet equally marked degrees across their respective careers.

Viktor Kosenko (1896–1938): Violin Sonata in A minor, Op. 18 (1927)

Viktor Kosenko was born on 23 November 1896 in St Petersburg, to where his father, a major general in the army, had been transferred from Ukraine. His family then moved to Warsaw in 1898 where he heard such musicians as Fritz Kreisler, Ferruccio Busoni and Pablo Casals. He performed Beethoven's *Pathétique Sonata* at the age of just nine and, from 1908, received tuition from Aleksander Michałowski. The First World War saw his return to Russia, where he was admitted to the piano class at the St Petersburg Conservatory. Here he studied composition and theory with Mikhail Sokolovsky, and also piano with Iryna Miklashovskaya.

After graduating in 1918 Kosenko joined his family in Zhytomyr, where he undertook piano classes and music theory. In September 1922 he gave his first concert, travelling to Moscow the following year, and had his piano works published by the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians. He returned two years later for a recital at the Association for Contemporary Music, forming a trio with violinist Volodymyr Skorokhod and cellist Vasyly Kolomyitsev. Together they gave more than 100 free concerts across the Ukrainian SSR throughout the later 1920s.

Conflicts with the Stalin regime prompted Kosenko to move to Kyiv, where he was offered a position at the Mykola Lysenko Music and Drama Institute, becoming a professor in 1932. His classes were subsequently transferred to the Kyiv Conservatory, where he taught from 1934 to 1937. In 1938 he was awarded the Order of the Red Banner of Labour by the first secretary of the Communist Party of Ukraine, Nikita Khrushchev. Already ill with kidney cancer, Kosenko died on 3 October 1938 and was interred at Baikove Cemetery in Kyiv.

The 1920s was a notably productive decade for Kosenko, including sonatas for each of the main string instruments. Composed in 1927, his *Violin Sonata* is unusual in having just two movements, but their subtly differentiated nature makes for an eminently satisfying balance. The opening *Allegro* commences with an impulsive theme that draws both instruments into animated dialogue. Its successor is more halting and reflective, if not without its more rapid moments, and this volatility is maintained through a resourceful development that at length subsides into a modified reprise of both themes – prior to the unexpectedly restrained coda. The ensuing *Andantino* is also marked *semplice*, the term aptly indicating the undulating poise of its main theme that finds violin and piano in equable accord. The course of this movement is briefly ruffled by their more dramatic central interplay and a heightened ambivalent tonal colouring, but the initial understatement is soon regained and this work heads towards its conclusion with a sense of emotional fulfilment which belies the unusual formal design.

Myroslav Skoryk (1938–2020): Violin Sonata No. 2 (1991)

Myroslav Skoryk was born on 13 July 1938 in Lviv. He entered Lviv Music School in 1945, but two years later he and his parents were deported to Siberia and not able to return until 1955. He entered the Lviv Conservatoire, where he studied composition with Stanyslav Liudkevych, Roman Simovych and Adam Soltys. From 1960 to 1964 he studied at the Moscow Conservatoire, taking a doctorate with Dmitry Kabalevsky, before joining the music faculties of the conservatoire in Lviv, and then, in 1967, in Kyiv. In 1968 he became secretary of the Ukrainian Union of Composers, then, in 1988, head of the Lviv branch. He was winner of the Shevchenko National Prize and held the title People's Artist of Ukraine. In 2011 he became artistic director of the National Opera in Kyiv and resided in Kyiv until his death on 1 June 2020.

Skoryk's wide-ranging and diverse output embraces biblical and philosophical domains, the classical and avant-garde, indigenous melodies and jazz rhythms, the theatre and academy. The widest range of musical expression can be perceived from his music. In his innovative scores from the 1960s, new ideas and searches brought him to a musical crossroads where academic forms, classical genres and folk traditions became intertwined with contemporary techniques, popular music and jazz idioms. All his compositions since then conveyed his stated and ongoing preoccupation with an elevated spirituality and a universal beauty.

Completed in 1991 (28 years after its predecessor) and first performed five years later, the *Violin Sonata No. 2* is among the most stylistically diverse of Skoryk's chamber works with pointed allusions to Beethoven, Prokofiev and Gershwin during its compact if always eventful course. The opening *Moderato* is marked '*The Word*' and consists of pointedly rhetorical exchanges between the violin and piano, leavened by a more taciturn central passage before the preceding antagonism is regained, then the movement closes with a thoughtful uncertainty. The central *Andante* – '*Aria*' – duly unfolds as a plaintive soliloquy for violin over a tramping accompaniment on the piano. The interplay between this duo becomes more ambiguous, though the initial balance is seldom absent and has been restored well before a calmly speculative conclusion. The final *Vivo* is marked '*Burlesque*', and starts with an appropriately nonchalant theme for the violin over piano syncopations. This impetuosity is presently allayed by suaver exchanges, but the initial dynamism is not to be denied as the work surges toward a decisive final flourish.

Sergei Bortkiewicz (1877–1952): Violin Sonata in G minor, Op. 26 (1922)

Sergei Bortkiewicz (Serhiy Bortkevych) was born in Kharkiv on 28 February 1877, and received his early training with Anatoly Liadov and Karl von Arek in St Petersburg. In 1900 he moved to Leipzig, where he studied with Alfred Reisenauer and Salomon Jadassohn. He finished his studies two years later and was awarded the Schumann Prize on graduating. He also taught at the Klindworth-Scharwenka Conservatory, where he met pianist Hugo van Dalen. The latter premiered his *Piano Concerto No. 1* in November 1913, which brought his first major success.

The outbreak of the First World War saw Bortkiewicz and his wife deported back to Kharkiv, then part of the Russian Empire, where he established himself as a teacher and pianist. Stranded in Yalta in the Russian Civil War, he obtained passage on the steamer *Konstantin* which took them to Constantinople in November 1919. Here he continued his teaching and performing activities, subsequently travelling to Belgrade then to Germany in 1922. Over the next decade he lived in Paris and Berlin, but the advent of the National Socialist regime forced his return to Vienna in 1933.

The Second World War undermined Bortkiewicz's finances. Most of his printed compositions were held with German publishers and destroyed in Allied bombing raids. In autumn 1945 he was appointed director of a master class at Vienna City Conservatory, then after retirement in 1948 received an honorary pension. His 75th birthday was marked on 26 February 1952 by a concert at the Musikverein featuring his *First Piano Concerto* and *First Symphony*. Already seriously ill, he died in Vienna on 25 October and was buried at the city's Zentralfriedhof.

Written in 1922, during what was an especially productive period for its composer, the *Violin Sonata* is among the most impressive of Bortkiewicz's relatively few chamber works and finds the musical language of his maturity at its most vivid and directly communicative. The extensive opening movement features a *Sostenuto* introduction of musing uncertainty, a foil to the main *Allegro* whose *drammatico* marking confirms the forceful manner of its main theme besides the heightened eloquence of its successor. Next follows a tensile development, then both themes are variedly reprised in a return to the initial fatalism. The central *Andante* centres on a plangent melody, offset by a warmly expressive theme which brings a heartfelt climax before subsiding via a cadenza-like passage into a restatement of the earlier melody then a pensive close. As befits its *vivace e con brio* marking, the final *Allegro* starts with a boisterous theme whose edgy successor is also informed by impulsive rhythm and folk music inflections. Both are varied on reprise, then the work strides on to its almost theatrical close.

Solomiya Ivakhiv



Photo: Yevgeny Popov

Ukrainian born violinist Solomiya Ivakhiv is a highly celebrated soloist, chamber musician and educator. She has made solo appearances with the Istanbul State Symphony Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine, Lviv National Philharmonic of Ukraine, Charleston Symphony in the United States and Hunan Symphony Orchestra in China, and has performed at chamber music festivals worldwide, including Tanglewood, Newport, Nevada Chamber Music Festival and KyivFest. Her recordings have been featured on NPR's *Performance Today* and have placed in the top charts on iTunes and Spotify. Since 2010, Dr Ivakhiv has served as artistic director of the Music at the Institute (MATI) Concert Series in New York City, where her primary focus is to introduce audiences to Ukrainian classical music. She is also artistic director of the Caspian Monday Music Festival in Greensboro, Vermont. She holds degrees from the Curtis Institute of Music and Stony Brook University, and is associate professor of violin and viola and head of strings at the University of Connecticut. In 2021, she was named Honoured (Merited) Artist of Ukraine, her native country's highest cultural honour. www.solomiyaivakhiv.com

Steven Beck



Photo: Shervin Lainez

A graduate of The Juilliard School, pianist Steven Beck made his concerto debut with the National Symphony Orchestra. His annual Christmas Eve performance of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* at Bargemusic has become a New York institution. As an orchestral musician he has appeared with the New York Philharmonic and Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. Beck is an experienced performer of new music, having worked with Elliott Carter, Pierre Boulez, Henri Dutilleux, Charles Wuorinen, George Crumb, George Perle and Fred Lerdahl. He is a member of The Knights, the Talea Ensemble, Quattro Mani and the Da Capo Chamber Players. His discography includes George Walker's piano sonatas for Bridge Records, and Elliott Carter's *Double Concerto* on Albany Records. He is a Steinway Artist, and is on the faculty of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. www.stevenbeck.me

The expressive vitality in this collection of violin sonatas transcends the cultural upheavals from which these three Ukrainian composers emerged. Bortkiewicz's *Violin Sonata in G minor* is among the most impressive of his relatively few chamber works, finding his musical language at its most vivid and directly communicative. Kosenko's *Violin Sonata in A minor* is notable for the satisfying balance of its two subtly differentiated movements. Skoryk's *Second Violin Sonata* is a stylistically diverse chamber work, with pointed allusions to Beethoven, Prokofiev and Gershwin during its compact and always eventful course.

UKRAINIAN MASTERS

Viktor Kosenko (1896–1938) Violin Sonata in A minor, Op. 18 (1927)*	17:42
1 I. Allegro	9:24
2 II. Andantino semplice	8:06
Myroslav Skoryk (1938–2020) Violin Sonata No. 2 (1991)	14:58
3 I. The Word: Moderato con moto	5:15
4 II. Aria: Andante con moto	5:56
5 III. Burlesque: Vivo	3:40
Sergei Bortkiewicz (1877–1952) Violin Sonata in G minor, Op. 26 (1922)	25:21
6 I. Sostenuto – Allegro drammatico	10:22
7 II. Andante	7:24
8 III. Allegro vivace e con brio	7:30

***WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING**

Solomiya Ivakhiv, Violin
Steven Beck, Piano

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