

KODÁLY

Sonata for Solo Cello, Op. 8

Duo for Violin and Cello, Op. 7



Andreas Brantelid, Cello
Benjamin Schmid, Violin

Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967)

Duo for Violin and Cello, Op. 7 • Sonata for Solo Cello, Op. 8

Zoltán Kodály was born on 16 December 1882 at Kecskemét (some 50 miles south-east of Budapest), where his father was a railway clerk. The next year his family moved to Szob, then in 1885 to Galánta, a large town close to Bratislava, the capital of modern Slovakia. This was followed by eight years in the largely Slovak town of Nagyszombat (since renamed Trnava), where his father had been transferred. In 1900 Zoltán entered Pázmány University in Budapest, studying German and Hungarian while at the same time taking composition lessons at the Academy of Music with Hans Koessler, a cousin of Max Reger and someone notably unsympathetic to traditional music. His doctoral thesis in 1906 was a study of Hungarian folk song, in the collection and investigation of which he was already occupied, along with his contemporary Béla Bartók.

After an intensive period of study in Berlin, Kodály returned to Hungary to join the Academy and where in 1908 he took over its first-year composition class. Over the following years he continued his activities both as a composer and as a collector of folk song. He latterly became deputy director of the Academy, which had been granted university status in the short-lived Hungarian Republic established in 1919, but he was temporarily barred from teaching after the collapse of the Republic four months later and the accession to power of Admiral Horthy.

Kodály's music received increasing international attention with several publications as well as increasing performances abroad. Having resumed his duties as a teacher, Kodály continued to exercise a strong influence upon younger composers and an even greater effect over music education in Hungary. His main task was to establish a national Hungarian musical tradition, and for this to be absorbed into a recognisably Hungarian form of art music. At the outbreak of the Second World War, Kodály remained in Hungary whereas Bartók – another opponent of the Horthy regime – found refuge in the USA. Kodály had been accorded various honours at home and this continued after the advent of communist rule, coupled with international recognition of his work as composer and educator. He died in Budapest on 6 March 1967.

If Kodály's later years were dominated by choral pieces, complementing his work in music education, his earlier reputation centred upon chamber music – notably two *String Quartets*, a *Cello Sonata* (8.553160) and the two works featured on this album. Completed in 1914 and premiered on 7 May 1918 by violinist Imre Waldbauer and cellist Jenő Kerpely, the *Duo for Violin and Cello* initially enjoyed only a lukewarm reception though was later selected to represent Hungary at the 1924 International Society for Contemporary Music Festival and even today stands, together with Ravel's slightly later *Sonata*, as the principal contribution to the repertoire for these two instruments. Its three movements, almost equal in length, unite Classical forms with the folk music in which Kodály was then immersed.

The opening movement begins with fiery rhetorical exchanges which quickly open out into more understated and ambivalent expression, with recourse to imitative exchanges between the instruments. The ideas heard thus far are drawn into a powerfully sustained development which culminates in a descending cadenza-like passage on cello, presaging the return of the first theme and a modified reprise in which these main ideas are heard in a more restrained and lyrical light. From here the music heads to a ruminative close shot through with regret. The slow movement opens with an eloquent cello line to which the violin responds in like manner. This leads into an arresting passage where tremolando writing for cello is pitted against an anguished response from violin, the music reaching an impassioned climax from where the speculative exchanges continue. Although the mood now becomes more settled, there is no doubting the sombre tone toward the end as both instruments ascend in calm yet restive uncertainty. The final movement picks up where its predecessor left off, but here the mood is audibly more forceful – this recitative-like passage making way for a sequence of energetic dance episodes where the composer's indebtedness to traditional music is made manifest. These are contrasted with passages where the instruments pointedly exchange gestures as in the first movement, though any underlying impetus is never sacrificed; even when the violin belatedly unfolds an angular melody over stealthy cello pizzicatos, before both instruments gather the accumulated energy through to an unmistakably defiant close.

If the *Duo* remains less familiar than it might be, this has less to do with its scoring than for having been overshadowed by Kodály's next work – the *Sonata* for unaccompanied cello. Composed in 1915 then premiered at the same 1918 concert (an all-Kodály affair that also featured his *Seven Songs*), this piece quickly came to be recognised as the most significant for solo cello since the *Cello Suites* of Bach written two centuries earlier. One aspect unique to the work is its deployment of *scordatura* – retuning the instrument's strings to expand its range of harmonies and tone colours. This, along with the composer's imaginative approach to Classical forms and his considerable technical demands, have ensured the *Sonata* a status that has seldom been equalled and never surpassed during the century since its composition.

The tensile opening *Allegro maestoso ma appassionato* commences with powerful declamatory writing that gradually opens-out in expression while also evincing greater harmonic ambiguity. This second main theme unfolds at some length, before an extensive development in which technical virtuosity is pushed to the limit. The reprise duly centres on the second theme, though elements of its predecessor never seem far away. Even when the music withdraws into itself for an inward coda, the closing brusque gesture makes for an unequivocal statement of intent. The central *Adagio* is the work's emotional heart in every respect – the cello's initial soliloquy heading forth with deliberation as the melodic line in the instrument's upper register is shadowed by speculative pizzicatos in the depths. Such rumination is summarily curtailed by an eruptive middle section in which dance elements are once more to the fore, but these are leavened by the return of earlier material that enables the movement to retrace its steps en route to a coda that exudes raptness and anguish in equal measure. The final *Allegro molto vivace* caps the work in suitably imposing fashion: ostensibly another sequence of dance-like episodes, it is informed by a cumulative energy which sees its initial idea reappearing as though a structural refrain; around this, the intervening episodes generate a cumulative intensity that sustains through to the climactic return of the main theme. This has itself been anticipated with a passage of starkly evocative writing that increases in virtuosity and velocity, surging on with a majestic outpouring of emotion, which concludes this singular work in a mood of coursing defiance.

Richard Whitehouse

Andreas Brantelid

Andreas Brantelid was born in Copenhagen and made his debut at the age of 14 with Elgar's *Cello Concerto* together with the Royal Danish Symphony Orchestra in Copenhagen. Today, Brantelid is one of the most sought-after musicians from Scandinavia. His recent orchestral performances have featured a number of world-famous orchestras, including the London Philharmonic, BBC Symphony and BBC Philharmonic orchestras, Tonhalle Orchester Zürich, Yomiuri Nippon Symphony, Netherlands Radio Symphony Orchestra, Seattle Symphony, Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra and Orchestre des Champs-Élysées, as well as all the major Nordic orchestras. Brantelid performs chamber music with the pianist Bengt Forsberg and the violinist Nils-Erik Sparf, and has also formed a trio with the Austrian violinist Benjamin Schmid and the Norwegian pianist Christian Ihle Hadland. Brantelid has previously released albums on such labels as Proprius, EMI and BIS. His first recording on Naxos – *Russian Tales*, released in 2020 with music by Myaskovsky and Glazunov for cello and piano (8.573985) – was highly praised by both the national and international press. His 2022 release *48 Strings* features music for one, two, four and twelve cellos, and pays homage to the four greatest cellists from the beginning of the 20th century. Also in 2022, he made video recordings of Piatti's *12 Caprices* available on YouTube and Apple Music. Brantelid plays on a 1707 'Boni-Hegar' Stradivarius, which has kindly been loaned to him by the Norwegian art collector Christen Sveaas.

Benjamin Schmid

Viennese violinist Benjamin Schmid made his debut at the Salzburg Festival in 1986 as the solo partner of Sir Yehudi Menuhin. Schmid's breakthrough came when he won the Carl Flesch Competition in London in 1992 where he was also awarded the Mozart, the Beethoven and the Audience Prize. Since then he has appeared as a soloist with renowned orchestras such as the Vienna Philharmonic, Philharmonia Orchestra, St Petersburg Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Gewandhausorchester Leipzig and the Tonhalle Orchester Zürich. Schmid's discography includes more than 60 releases, several of which have received accolades such as the German Record Prize, the Echo Classic Prize, *Gramophone* Editor's Choice and *The Strad* Selection. Benjamin Schmid gives masterclasses worldwide and is a professor and mentor to his students at the Mozarteum University where he was awarded, among other prizes, the International Prize for Art and Culture. He was also a professor and guest professor at the Hochschule der Künste Bern/CH and serves as jury chairman of the International Mozart Competition Salzburg. As someone for whom music education for all age groups is becoming increasingly important, Benjamin Schmid has been intensively involved in the artistic design of various institutions for many years: he has led the Classix Kempten festival and the Mattseer Diabelli Sommer, as well as the high-profile Swedish chamber orchestra Musica Vitae. In 2024, Schmid was entrusted with the artistic direction of the Salzburg Cultural Association, which plays around 50 mostly symphonic concerts in his hometown's festival halls throughout the year. He performs on the 1718 'ex Viotti' Stradivarius violin made available to him by the Austrian National Bank, as well as on a modern violin made in 2015 by Wiltrud Fauler.

www.benjaminschmid.com



Andreas Brantelid

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Benjamin Schmid

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Zoltán Kodály was influential not only as a composer and an educator, but in establishing a national Hungarian musical tradition that included a profound respect for its folk music. Kodály's early reputation is centred on chamber music, including the *Duo for Violin and Cello*, with its remarkably sustained structural development and emotional range. The imaginative approach to Classical forms and considerable technical demands found in the *Sonata for Solo Cello* has, during the century since its composition, ensured the sonata's status as the most significant work for solo cello since J.S. Bach's *Cello Suites*.

Zoltán
KODÁLY
(1882–1967)

Sonata for Solo Cello, Op. 8 (1915) 29:58

- 1 I. Allegro maestoso ma appassionato 8:38**
- 2 II. Adagio (con grand' espressione) 10:40**
- 3 III. Allegro molto vivace 10:40**

Duo for Violin and Cello, Op. 7 (1914) 24:54

- 4 I. Allegro serioso, non troppo 8:22**
- 5 II. Adagio 8:37**
- 6 III. Maestoso e largamente, ma non troppo lento – IV. Presto 7:55**

Andreas Brantelid, Cello • Benjamin Schmid, Violin

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