



NORTHSTAR
RECORDING
by BERT VAN DER WOLF



PROKOFIEV | GÓRECKI | YSAË
Sonatas for Two Violins
Maria Milstein | Mathieu van Bellen

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SERGEI PROKOFIEV (1891-1953)

Sonata for Two Violins, Op. 56 (1932)

Maria Milstein violin 1 **Mathieu van Bellen** violin 2

- | | | |
|-----|----------------------------|------|
| [1] | Andante cantabile | 2:49 |
| [2] | Allegro | 2:59 |
| [3] | Commodo (quasi allegretto) | 3:59 |
| [4] | Allegro con brio | 5:28 |

HENRYK GÓRECKI (1933-2010)

Sonata for Two Violins, Op. 10 (1957)

Mathieu van Bellen violin 1 **Maria Milstein** violin 2

- | | | |
|-----|------------------|------|
| [5] | Allegro molto | 8:14 |
| [6] | Adagio sostenuto | 3:53 |
| [7] | Andante con moto | 4:07 |

EUGÈNE YSAÏE (1858-1931)

Sonata for Two Violins (1915)

Mathieu van Bellen violin 1 **Maria Milstein** violin 2

- | | | |
|------|--------------------------------------|-------|
| [8] | Poco lento, maestoso - Allegro fermo | 11:46 |
| [9] | Allegretto poco lento | 8:13 |
| [10] | Finale. Allegro vivo e con fuoco | 12:28 |

total time 64:01



Prokofiev, Górecki, Ysaÿe - Sonatas for Two Violins

The setting of this album - two violins without accompaniment - is no ordinary combination, and the repertoire, though encompassing several style periods from the Baroque to the 21st century, is much smaller than that of a more standard duo such as violin and piano. It is particularly striking that there are very few major works written for this setting, even compared to other string instrument combinations such as violin/viola or violin/cello. This has to do with the fact that the possibilities which two instruments of the same range offer are more limited than those offered by two instruments of higher and lower registers combined - this seeming lack of variety in range and effects has stopped most composers from using this medium for their works.

There were however composers who took this limitation as a challenge, and created true masterpieces with a fascinating sound world, making one forget about the "restricted" means available.

When choosing a program for this CD, we were adamant to present works which, rather than using virtuosic violin display as a means to an end, are masterworks in their own right, where the virtuosity of writing is a simple tool used to create breathtaking landscapes and thrilling stories. Three different countries and three different universes, though all three composed within less than half a century - the *Sonatas for Two Violins* by Sergei Prokofiev, Henryk Górecki and Eugène Ysaÿe show with their incredible variety how exciting a violin duo can be.

Sergei Prokofiev, having made his name as an "enfant terrible" amongst pre-Revolution Russian composers, had been living as an emigrant for about 14 years when he was commissioned to write a piece for the Parisian new music group *Le Triton* in 1932. Prokofiev was at a crossroads in his life - since his first tour to Soviet Russia in 1927, the composer was cultivating closer ties to the Soviet Union, and the thought of returning to his homeland, where he was promised gigantic success and unknown working privileges, increasingly tempted him. Prokofiev's compositional style was also shifting from modernism to a simpler, neo-classical approach with increased use of folk-like tunes and lyricism. While on vacation near Saint-Tropez, Prokofiev composed his *Sonata for Two Violins op.56*; as he later described in his 1941 autobiography: "*Listening to bad music sometimes inspires good ideas... After once hearing an unsuccessful piece for two violins without piano accompaniment, it struck me that in spite of the limitations of such a duet one could make it interesting enough to listen to for ten or fifteen minutes..*"

Prokofiev asked permission for the work to be premiered in Moscow on 27 November 1932, three weeks before the Parisian premiere, which took place on 16 December.

The *Sonata* follows the structure of a Baroque *sonata da chiesa* (four movements in the order slow-fast-slow-fast), and manages to depict an epic narrative with just a few masterful brush strokes. In the opening *Andante cantabile*, a dreamy,

lyrical and seemingly endless melody unfolds, with the first violin starting alone but soon joined by the second violin. The singing, mild and nostalgic character points towards Prokofiev's later works (*Romeo and Juliet*, *Cinderella*) and is unmistakably Russian in flavour. As a stark contrast, the following *Allegro* bursts out with violent chords, rapidly turning into a dancing, *scherzo*-like motive. After an even faster and explosive middle section, the lighter dancing motive briefly returns before winding up into a frenzied coda. The tender, melancholic *Commodo* sounds like a Russian folk song, though the harmonic palette is "pure Prokofiev" - with a major middle section rising to the skies before the sad melody of the beginning returns, this movement is one of the most touching pieces of music written by Prokofiev. The final *Allegro con brio* shows again the composer's witty side with a dancing, folk-like tune which takes unexpected, wild turns until the opening of the first movement suddenly re-emerges in the highest registers of the first violin; after this brief moment of serenity comes a quasi "minimal music" coda, where the two violins seem to melt into one, hastening the listener towards the fiery conclusion.

Henryk Mikołaj Górecki composed his *Sonata for Two Violins op.10* during his studies at the State Higher School of Music in Katowice (now the Karol Szymanowski Academy of Music) in 1957. One of his earlier works, the *Sonata*, extremely energetic and full of violent contrasts, is pervaded by the influence of Béla Bartók, whose *44 Duos for Two Violins* Górecki must have known, as he most probably also did Prokofiev *Sonata for Two Violins*. Despite these influences, the *Sonata* is a fully autonomous work, where Górecki's style is already clearly shaped. The stark contrasts and extremes are not just

achieved by the juxtaposition of three movements of opposite character, but are also featured within each of the movements, leaving the listener breathless. The first movement, *Allegro molto*, opens with an outburst of violence, with each of the violins declaiming a ferocious theme above a sharp ostinato-like accompaniment of the other violin. This section, getting wilder and wilder, abruptly stops, giving space to the austere, meditative middle section with a definite folk-like flavour, where the lonely melody is subtly outlined by distant pizzicati of the accompanying part (Bartók and his *Duos* are not far). This middle section, after a first rise in dynamic and intensity, almost to screaming levels, goes back to its introverted mood, but the excitement quickly grows as the rhythms become shorter and more abrupt, until the first section returns. The *Adagio sostenuto* is an introspective, morose movement, where the icy colours are exacerbated by the use of very high registers and harmonics. A large part of the movement is in unison, creating an eerie, unearthly landscape. Sudden short outbursts do not manage to shake off the lethargic spirit of the movement. After these polar opposites, the third movement, *Andante con moto*, turns to dance - starting with a fierce pizzicato in both lines it quickly switches to an ironic, smirking waltz with striking dissonances; towards the end, the sudden, unexpected reemergence of the first movement, and the ensuing fight with the waltz motive bring the listener to a clashing end.

Eugène Auguste Ysaÿe is perhaps less known to the general audience as a composer, but rather as one of the greatest violin virtuosos of his time. Like his famous predecessors Niccolò Paganini and Henryk Wieniawski, Ysaÿe wrote

profusely for his instrument, not only developing new techniques and pushing the limits of the instrument, but also creating works of great musical value and inspiring his contemporaries. The *Six Sonatas for Solo Violin op.27* are arguably Ysaÿe's most well-known works, and demand a great amount of masterfulness and virtuosity from the performer. In his *Sonate pour Deux Violons Seuls*, Ysaÿe doubles the challenge by giving both violins equally demanding parts, but achieves a far greater effect by creating an immensely rich and colourful sound world - most of the time, both violinists play double stops and chords (two or more notes simultaneously), resulting in a texture comparable to that of a string quartet. This increased scope allows Ysaÿe to expand the form, composing a majestic piece of almost symphonic proportions.

The first movement opens with an epic introduction, where the main motive is presented, setting the tone for the rest of the movement; it is followed by the *Allegro fermo*, where the vivid, agitated first theme undergoes different twists before calming down and flowing into the dreamy, impressionistic second theme, which dazzles with harmonic and colouristic imagination. The development section uses the first theme motive as a fugue, letting the excitement grow to its utmost until resolving into the recapitulation. The monumental movement is concluded by the return of the majestic introduction. The *Allegretto poco lento* provides relief with a gentle, melancholic melody; through the use of modal harmonies a neo-Gothic effect is created (Ysaÿe resorted more often to this idiom), and the listener seems to be drawn back to an ancient medieval castle, walking through an intricate labyrinth of sounds and motives.

The *Finale* is a flamboyant display of the seemingly endless possibilities a violin duo can offer; the singing, enthusiastic opening theme seems to have multiple facets as it reappears throughout the movement, sometimes lyrical, sometimes dreamy, sometimes fiery. The second theme is a mighty counterpart, majestic and heroic, though also becoming introspective at moments. After the ultimate return of the first theme, a coda of utmost brilliance closes this monumental *Sonata* with panache.

Maria Milstein violin

Born in Moscow into a family of musicians, Maria Milstein studied in Amsterdam with Ilya Grubert, in London with David Takeno and at the Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel in Waterloo (Belgium) with Augustin Dumay.

Maria is a prizewinner of major international competitions both as a soloist and as a chamber musician, such as “Città di Brescia” and “Premio Rodolfo Lipizer” in Italy, the ARD Competition in Munich, the Lyon Chamber Music Competition and the Kersjes Prize in the Netherlands. In 2016, Maria is awarded the Fellowship of the Borletti Buitoni Trust, and in 2018, she receives the Dutch Music Prize - the highest recognition for a classical musician in the Netherlands awarded by the Ministry of Culture.

Maria performs extensively across Europe in halls such as the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, BOZAR in Brussels, Musikverein in Vienna, the Philharmonie of Cologne and Cité de la Musique in Paris. She has appeared as a soloist with a.o. The Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, the National Orchestra of Belgium, the Residentie Orkest The Hague, the Essen Philharmonic and Amsterdam Sinfonietta, and worked with conductors such as Vasily Petrenko, Giancarlo Guerrero, Tomás Netopil, Michel Tabachnik, Daniele Rustioni and Reinbert de Leeuw.

A keen chamber musician, Maria formed the successful Van Baerle Trio together with pianist Hannes Minnaar and cellist Gideon den Herder, one of the leading

trios of its generation. After winning the ARD Competition and the Lyon Chamber Music Competition, the Trio made the ECHO Rising Stars Tour in 2014, performing in famous concert halls all over Europe. The Trio already released two CD's, both praised in the international press, and is presently recording the complete works for piano trio by Beethoven for Challenge Records.

Maria's own debut CD *Sounds of War*, recorded with pianist Hanna Shybayeva for Cobra Records and featuring Sonatas by Poulenc, Janáček and Prokofiev, received lavish reviews in the international press and won the Edison Klassiek Prize 2015 in the category “best chamber music album”. In October 2017 her second album *La Sonate de Vinteuil*, recorded with pianist Nathalia Milstein is released on the French label Mirare, and is voted “best CD of 2017” by the Dutch press. The sisters' second album *Ravel Voyageur* released in 2019 was awarded a Diapason d'Or.

The Busch Trio and Maria founded MuziekHaven, a chamber music centre in Zaandam.

Maria plays on a violin by Michel Angelo Bergonzi (Cremona, ca. 1750), on loan from the Dutch Music Instruments Foundation, and holds a teaching position at the Conservatory of Amsterdam.

www.mariamilstein.com



Mathieu van Bellen violin

Mathieu van Bellen was born in The Netherlands and started studying the violin in Belgium with Nico Baltussen. He continued with Jan Repko, first at the Amsterdam Conservatoire and then at Chethams School of Music in Manchester, for which he was awarded a scholarship by The VandenEnde Foundation. He continued at the Royal College of Music in London with Itzhak Rashkovsky and at the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin, with Ulf Wallin.

Laureate of the Yehudi Menuhin Competition, Wieniawski Competition, Prinses Christina Competition and Oskar Back Competition he is a recipient of MBF, RPS Emily Anderson Prize, Philharmonia Martin Musical Scholarship Fund Awards and Making Music Awards. He was also awarded the Bach Prize and the String Player of the Year 2008 at the Royal College of Music. Mathieu has given concerts in Europe, Asia and the USA, playing in major music festivals. He has appeared several times on television and radio, and has performed as a soloist in halls like the Purcell Room and Royal Festival Hall at the Southbank Centre, London, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Tel Aviv Opera House, and Megaron in Athens, performing with orchestras such as the National Orchestra of Belgium, Gelders Orkest, Holland Symfonia, Southbank Sinfonia, and Camerata Athena.

Violinist of the Busch Trio, Mathieu is an active chamber musician, having played chamber music concerts with artists including Miguel da Silva, Michael Collins, Shlomo Mintz and Bruno Giuranna. With the Busch Trio he has performed in Europe and Asia, playing in the Concertgebouw Amsterdam,

Wigmore Hall London, BOZAR Brussels and NCPA Beijing. Recently they recorded Dvorak's entire chamber works with piano for Alpha Classics, and in 2016 they won the Dutch Kersjes Prijs.

In 2013 Mathieu founded the Scaldis Kamermuziek Festival, a yearly chamber music festival in the area of Zeeland in the Netherlands.

His first CD was released in November 2014, with solo works by Bach, Blaha and Bartók for Zefir Records. In the same year he was concert master of the European Union Youth Orchestra, working with Vasily Petrenko and Vladimir Ashkenazy including concerts at the BBC Proms, London and Concertgebouw Amsterdam. In 2018 his live recording of Britten's Violin Concerto with the Zeeuws Orkest and Ivan Meylemans was published on Zefir Records.

In 2015 Mathieu won the Grachtenfestival Prize, resulting in a residency during the 2016 Grachtenfestival. In 2017 he was soloist of the Netherlands Student Orchestra and he was asked to succeed Christiaan Bor as artistic director of the Reizend MuziekGezelschap, also known as the Amsterdam Chamber Music Society.

Mathieu plays on the ex-Adolf Busch G.B. Guadagnini violin (Turin, 1783), using a Dominique Peccatte bow, both on loan to him thanks to private sponsorship, for which he is most grateful.

www.vanbellen.com

This Recording was Produced, Engineered and Edited using the 'High Quality Musical Mastering' principle with the use of Sonodore microphones, Avalon Acoustic & Musikelectronic Geithain monitoring, Siltech Mono-Crystal cabling and dCS - & Merging Technologies converters.



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www.northstarconsult.nl

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