

# DUOLOGUES

2:00PM

SATURDAY 14 OCTOBER 2023

ST JOHN'S CHURCH



Elizabeth Sellars *Violin*

Molly Kadarauach *Cello*

Zoltán KODÁLY (1882 – 1967)

Duo for Violin and Cello, Op. 7

1. *Allegro serioso, non troppo*

2. *Adagio – Andante – Tempo I*

3. *Maestoso e largamente ma non troppo lento – Presto*

Linguist, philosopher, ethnomusicologist, pedagogue, as well as composer, Kodály devoted his life to the folk music of his native Hungary. Beginning in August 1905 and continuing for many decades, Kodály regularly journeyed throughout rural Hungary (often with his friend Bartók), large phonograph and wax cylinders in tow, to record and transcribe the folk music of the Hungarian people, resulting in the collection of thousands of folksongs and the publication of groundbreaking scholarly tomes.

The Duo for Violin and Cello is a paradigm of the composer's synthesis of classical form with many of the elements of Hungarian folk music – pentatonic scales, rapid changes of mood, copious ornamentation and long rhapsodic passages. Written in 1914, Kodály penned the first movement of the Duo into a school exercise book while he was stuck at the Austrian border, having had to abandon a trip in the Alps following the outbreak of World War I.

Though conceived for just two instruments, Kodály treats the violin and cello like ferociously eloquent bards in constant, fervent discourse, giving the Duo a powerful lyrical and rhetorical character. It commences with a “serious” first movement full of brilliant back-and-forth between the players, who alternately accompany and comment on each other's statements with increasing passion, before winding down into an uneasy peace.

The haunting Adagio opens with a plaintive, heartfelt solo for the cello, soon answered consolingly by the violin. Some of the conflicts of the first movement re-emerge in the turbulent middle section, the music concluding in a similarly fragile, almost ghostly calm. The finale is cast in the style of a *verbunkos*, or Hungarian recruiting dance. It begins with a long, majestically rhapsodic introduction where the violin takes the leading role, before suddenly giving way to the Presto, a wild, capricious dance in which the two instruments circle and leap over each other in ever faster torrents of sound. © Douglas Rutherford, 2023

**Maurice RAVEL (1875 – 1937)**  
**Sonata for Violin and Cello, M. 73**

**1. Allegro**

**2. Très vif**

**3. Lent**

**4. Vif, avec entrain**

Dedicated “to the memory of Claude Debussy”, Ravel’s Sonata for Violin and Cello has its origins in the spring of 1920. Henry Prunières, founding editor of the French music periodical *La Revue musicale*, wished to commemorate the recent passing of Debussy by commissioning works from 10 composers – Ravel, Stravinsky and Bartók among them. Whether Ravel had already begun work on the Sonata or whether the impetus actually came from Prunières we may never know for sure. Nonetheless, Ravel submitted the first movement of what would become his Sonata, completing the rest of the work over the following two years.

At the time of starting on the Sonata, Ravel had just completed *La valse* – a remarkable fact considering the two works sit at virtually opposite ends of the aesthetic spectrum. In contrast to the lavish opulence of *La valse*, the stark clarity of the Sonata for Violin and Cello epitomises a move towards musical parsimony and concision. This was a conscious decision by Ravel, partly in response to the accusations of younger composers that his music had become old-fashioned. In his own words, “I think this sonata marks a turning-point in my career. The music is stripped down to the bone. The allure of harmony is rejected and increasingly there is a return of emphasis on melody.”

This predominance of melody and embracing of dissonance is already clear at the outset of the first movement, where the violin spins out an ambiguous major/minor melodic accompaniment to the cello’s bewitching main theme, with the two instruments then swapping roles. The second movement, taking the form of a devilish scherzo, bristles with trills, harmonics, gritty *ponticello* colours and astringently jazzy *pizzicato*.

Existing in another realm, the third movement is the Sonata’s emotional centre of gravity. It begins and ends with an austere, soulful chorale, enclosing a core of searing anguish and fury. A grungy riff in the cello marks the arrival of the Sonata’s whimsically impish rondo-finale. Near the closing heights of the movement, Ravel deftly combines several of the Sonata’s themes in a magnificently contrapuntal climax. © Douglas Rutherford, 2023