



CAL PERFORMANCES
AT HOME

Streaming Premiere – Thursday, October 1, 2020, 7pm

Tessa Lark, *violin*
Andrew Armstrong, *piano*

Filmed exclusively for Cal Performances on location at Merkin Hall,
Kaufman Music Center, New York City, on August 17, 2020.

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PROGRAM

Béla Bartók (arr. Székely)
Romanian Folk Dances, Sz. 56, BB 68

Jocul cu bâță (Dance with Sticks)
Brăul (Sash Dance)
Pe loc (Stamping Dance)
Buciumeana (Hornpipe Dance)
Poarca Românească (Romanian Polka)
Mănuntelul (Fast Dance)

Eugène Ysaÿe
Sonata No. 5 for Solo Violin in G major, Op. 27, *Mathieu Crickboom*

L'Aurore
Danse rustique

Franz Schubert
Fantasy in C major, D. 934

Andante molto
Allegretto
Andantino (Theme and Variations on "Sei mir gegrüßt")
Allegro vivace

INTERMISSION

Edvard Grieg
Violin Sonata No. 3 in C minor, Op. 45

Allegro molto ed appassionato
Allegretto espressivo alla Romanza
Allegro animato

Maurice Ravel
Tzigane – rapsodie de concert

*Tessa Lark plays a ca. 1600 G.P. Maggini violin on loan from
an anonymous donor through the Stradivari Society of Chicago.*

*Tessa Lark is represented worldwide
by Manhattan-based Sciolino Artist Management (www.samnyc.us).*

*Note: following its premiere, the video recording of this concert
will be available on demand through December 30, 2020.*



Musical Passports

“The only true voyage of discovery,” Marcel Proust famously wrote, “would be not to visit foreign lands but... to behold the universe through the eyes of another”—through the perceptions, that is, provided by artists. This insight has acquired unexpected new relevance in the era of the coronavirus. With the curtailment of physical travel—even to a live performance venue—music lovers have become even hungrier for the vicarious experiences afforded by composers and their interpreters.

Tessa Lark almost seems to have anticipated this hunger when she released her solo debut album last year. Titled *Fantasy*, it celebrates the power of the imagination with a focus on variations on the fantasia idea, which Lark describes as pieces “directed by the composer’s whims... essentially written-down imitations of an improvisation.”

The present program, with Lark accompanied by pianist Andrew Armstrong, includes two works that appeared on that recording—Franz Schubert’s extraordinary, single-movement *Fantasy in C major*, the centerpiece of both the album and this performance, as well as Maurice Ravel’s *Tzigane*—but also continues its exploration of improvisatory impulses. Béla Bartók reminds us how closely linked music often is to folk sources, while Eugène Ysaÿe’s unaccompanied *Mathieu Crickboom* sonata, which almost cinematically evokes the sunrise, underscores the true meaning of virtuosity as a tool to liberate the imagination. Even the formal structural rigor of Edvard Grieg’s *C minor Violin Sonata* gives way, at moments, to impulses from Norwegian folk dance.

Each piece on this program transports us to a different spot in Europe deeply connected with its respective composer. At the same time, we can expect to encounter hints of the styles that Lark, a native Kentuckian, grew up with. “My first musical influences came from bluegrass, Appalachian, and other American folk styles,” she says, “and as a result, my primarily classical training, career, and recital programs have always been affected by my fiddler’s soul.”

Béla Bartók (1881–1945)

Romanian Folk Dances, Sz. 56, BB 68

Béla Bartók’s efforts to bring a scientific rigor to the study of folk music helped pave the way for a new way of thinking about the relationship between vernacular sources and so-called “high art.” In the early decades of the 20th century, together with such colleagues as Zoltán Kodály, he applied a more systematic approach that heralded the emergent discipline of ethnomusicology. For his own artistic purposes, Bartók found elements in folk music that he could use as the basis for a fresh musical language. And the process of exploring old Magyar and other ethnic folk musics would go on to enrich Bartók’s own musical palette. It aided him in evolving a compelling alternative to the stalemate between “reactionary” styles oriented toward past and self-proclaimed Modernist revolutionaries.

Bartók’s interest in folk music extended beyond his native Hungary to embrace other peoples and traditions of Eastern Europe (including Slovak, Romanian, Bulgarian, and Croatian music) and even to Turkey and North Africa. He not only transcribed folk music but also used the new invention of the phonograph to record what he was discovering at the source, eventually classifying thousands of folk melodies and dances.

Before the First World War, Bartók had already gathered a number of dances that he had encountered when listening to Romanian fiddlers. He was particularly fascinated by this collection, making numerous arrangements of it over the years: for piano (he recorded his own rendition), for a pair of guitars, and even for a recorder quartet. Bartók published his version of this material as miniatures for piano in 1915 and, in 1917, in an orchestrated form. We hear the arrangement for violin and piano made by his friend Zoltán Székely, for whom the composer later wrote his *Violin Concerto No. 2*.

Bartók’s settings emphasize the individual characters and rhythmic profiles of each of these very brief dances. The collection opens with the proud poise of the “Dance with Sticks” (No. 1), followed by the graceful “Sash Dance” (No. 2), named for the folk costume of its origins. No. 3 (“Stamping Dance”) pits a bagpipe-

like drone against eerie, whistle-like musings at the top of the violin's register. Following the melancholy pastoral sensibility of the "Hornpipe Dance" (No. 4), a festive spirit pervades the last two dances: a zesty Romanian polka (No. 5) and "Fast Dance" (No. 6), which gathers speed to conclude the set in a mood of restless frenzy.

Eugène Ysaÿe (1858–1931)

Sonata No. 5 for Solo Violin in G major,

Op. 27, Mathieu Crickboom

Eugene Ysaÿe ranks as a giant in the history of the violin. He's also a key figure in the transition from the flamboyance of the Romantic era to a more austere, Modernist attitude about music-making. Ysaÿe's sensitive, controlled use of the lush vibrato of an earlier era became a signature of his style. The Belgian violinist enjoyed a brilliant career as a soloist, but he also helped shape generations of influential players through his teaching. Moreover, he promoted new music and was a gifted conductor.

When declining health prevented Ysaÿe from performing, he turned increasingly to composition, and his six sonatas for unaccompanied violin are the composer's best-known works. He wrote them in a single burst of inspiration in the summer of 1923, taking his lead from a performance he had heard by the younger Hungarian violinist Joseph Szigeti—another of Bartók's close friends—of J.S. Bach's works for unaccompanied violin.

Ysaÿe was himself an admired Bach interpreter, and he turned to the German composer's gold-standard set of sonatas and partitas (three of each, gathered into a characteristically Bachian collection of six) as a model for the six solo violin sonatas he published in 1924. At the same time, the Belgian virtuoso incorporated a kind of cultural survey of contemporary styles of violin playing. Each of the six sonatas is dedicated to a particular violinist (including Szigeti himself in No. 1), while Bach is paid tribute through direct quotation in No. 2 and in other kinds of allusions elsewhere in the set. For each sonata, Ysaÿe devises a specific form, instead of repeating the standard format that was developed in the Classical and Romantic eras.

Thus Sonata No. 5 in G major gives a nod to fellow Belgian Mathieu Crickboom (1871–1947), one of Ysaÿe's favorite students, who later became an important pedagogue in his own right. (Crickboom also played second violin in the influential Ysaÿe Quartet.) Cast in two movements, this sonata conveys something of the quality of a tone poem in its evocation of sunrise in the first movement (subtitled "L'Aurore," or "Sunrise"). Ysaÿe makes fascinating use of difficult violin techniques—such as pizzicato with the left hand—to summon his soundscape. The music gradually builds up a sense of motion, suggesting awakening and increasing illumination.

The two-movement pattern of the Fifth Sonata happens to mimic that of the old Baroque *Sonata da chiesa* ("church sonata")—a slow introductory movement followed by a fast one. Subtitled "Danse rustique" ("Rustic Dance"), the second movement turns to vivid rhythms that frame a central lyrical section. Ysaÿe used to enjoy picnics on occasion with students, and some commentators suggest an evocation of these memories lies behind this music.

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)

Fantasy in C major, D. 934

Heading backward in time to 1827, we encounter Schubert. He had lately befriended the Bohemian Josef Slawjk and in October 1826 composed the *Rondo brilliant* in B minor (D. 895) for the virtuoso violinist. Slawjk and pianist Karl Maria von Bocklet premiered it in January 1827, and 11 months later, Schubert composed his Fantasy in C major (D. 934) for Slawjk. Premiered (again with Bocklet) at a lunchtime concert on January 20, 1828, the Fantasy was not published until 22 years following Schubert's death, in 1850 (as Op. posth. 159).

Although it is generally played without a break, the Fantasy falls into discernible sections, following a "circle of fifths" key pattern from the opening C major via A (major and minor), E-flat, then oscillating between C and A-flat to end in C. It follows other such Schubertian Fantasies as the solo piano *Wanderer* Fantasy (D. 760, also in C major) and four Fantasias for

piano four-hands, the last of which, in F minor (D. 940), was composed earlier in 1827. Like the *Wanderer* and such works as the *Trout Quintet* and both the *Death and the Maiden* and *Rosamunde* quartets, here Schubert revisits one of his own songs. He had composed “Sei mir gegrüsst” (“I greet you,” D. 741), setting a text by Friedrich Rückert, in 1822 and reused some of its material here as the basis of four variations, the first three exploiting a violinist’s virtuosic skills.

As early as the second bar, there is a C minor inflection haunting the piano’s pianissimo oscillations, before the violin quietly intones the first theme. The pianist needs stamina and dexterity to negotiate Schubert’s fingerings: some say this is one of the hardest piano parts ever written. With one last fall and rise from the piano, the violin assumes the upbeat to the jaunty Hungarian Allegretto, moving to a lilt-ing Andantino that modifies the refrain from the Rückert song for evermore dazzling variations. This then melts into a truncated reprise of the opening theme. Quickly building to fortissimo, this leads into a joyous Allegro vivace in C, eventually culminating in shivery figurations for violin that—a brief Allegretto respite (a final reprise of the very opening) notwithstanding—is topped by a Presto coda, with thunderous rising triplets added at the end.

Edvard Grieg (1843–1907)

Violin Sonata No. 3 in C minor, Op. 45

It’s interesting to recall that it was a violinist who helped ensure that Edvard Grieg pursued a musical career: the legendary Ole Bull, also of Norway, who happened to be a family friend. Grieg grew up in a musical household, but it was Bull who recognized the depth of his talent and advised his parents to send the teenage Edvard to conservatory in Germany. Grieg himself became a celebrated concert pianist and made his international breakthrough with his Piano Concerto of 1868. During this era of national cultural awakenings across Europe, Grieg—the descendant of a Scottish immigrant to Norway—would soon be cast to play the role of Norway’s “national composer.”

Grieg even faced the critique from one of his teachers, the Danish Niels Gade, that he had made the second of his three sonatas for violin and piano sound “too Norwegian.” But the Piano Concerto showed how Grieg had also internalized German methods of composing and structuring a piece—it follows Robert Schumann’s Piano Concerto as a model—and a similar situation is found in the Violin Sonata No. 3, a work of his mature period that dates from 1886.

Grieg was, in general, more comfortable with miniatures than with the larger forms of the mainstream tradition. Moreover, he never felt at ease during his student years at the Leipzig Conservatory, where the rigid rules of German training were not a good match for his temperament. Still, he found imaginative ways to work with the sonata form in his violin sonatas. Separated by almost two decades from its predecessor in the genre, the Sonata No. 3 achieved instant success upon the premiere of its revised version in 1887—in Leipzig, as it happened, with the composer himself at the keyboard. It was also the composer’s own favorite. The Sonata No. 3, according to Grieg, shows a later stage of his development by casting its gaze beyond a focus on Norwegian idioms toward “a wider horizon.” He dedicated the score to the German painter Franz von Lenbach.

The first movement adheres to the sonata’s core idea of dramatic conflict by opposing two themes of very different character—the first, introduced after a stormy prelude section, rises up from the violin’s very lowest note, while the second radiates a simple serenity. Yet both ideas are subtly connected. Notice how Grieg intensifies the drama by playing the violin’s loftiest register against its full-voiced sound low in its range—or how he denies the implication of a “happy ending” by reprising harmonies that turn the music darker in the final pages of this movement.

A songful oasis that Grieg labels a “Romance” follows, with a brightening of the key from C minor to E major (a particularly “Romantic” shift). But drama enters here as well, with a more troubled central section that is flanked by

one of the composer's greatest melodic inspirations. Grieg also uses dramatic contrasts in the final movement, introducing a lyrical interlude amid the lively, dance-like impulses of the main idea, which evokes more distinctly Norwegian associations.

Maurice Ravel (1875–1937)

Tzigane

In July 1922, Maurice Ravel attended a performance in London by Hungarian violinist Jelly d'Áranyi (Joseph Joachim's niece) in which she and Hans Kindler played Ravel's violin and cello Duo Sonata. Afterwards, at Ravel's request, d'Áranyi played (reportedly until 5am) gypsy music from her homeland. Nearly two years later, this impromptu performance bore fruit when Ravel wrote to d'Áranyi and told her that the Violin Sonata he had promised her for a concert at London's Aeolian Hall scheduled for April 26, 1924 had been put aside in favor of

Tzigane, a gypsy piece "of great virtuosity." When d'Áranyi took the work to Paris, the accompaniment was given with a special piano attachment called a "luthéa," which aspired to make the instrument sound like a cimbalom (the contraption did not catch on).

Having studied both Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies and Paganini's 24 Caprices, Ravel conceived his *Tzigane* in two parts: an extended solo introducing various themes and amounting to almost half the work, before the piano enters (cimbalom-like) with an extended trill. Themes from the opening are revisited and developed gracefully and playfully, followed by a final *perpetuum mobile* section that, as tradition demands, gets ever faster in true bravura fashion.

Introduction and notes on Bartók, Ysaÿe, and Grieg by Thomas May, © 2020; notes on Schubert and Ravel by Nick Breckenfield, © 2019.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Tessa Lark, violin

Violinist Tessa Lark is one of the most captivating artistic voices of our time. A 2020 Grammy nominee in the Best Classical Instrumental Solo category, recipient of a 2018 Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship and a 2016 Avery Fisher Career Grant, Silver Medalist in the International Violin Competition of Indianapolis, and winner of the 2012 Naumburg International Violin Competition, Lark has won widespread praise from critics and audiences for her astounding versatility, technical agility, and musical elegance. A budding superstar in the classical realm, she is also a highly acclaimed fiddler in the musical traditions of her native Kentucky.

Lark has been a featured soloist at numerous US orchestras, recital venues, and festivals since making her concerto debut with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra at age 16. Her 2019–20 season included debuts with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Pasadena, Tucson, and West Virginia symphony orchestras.

Highlights of her 2020–21 season are expected to include a return to the Alabama Symphony Orchestra; debuts with Friends of Chamber Music (Denver) and the Arkansas and West Michigan symphonies; and multiple online appearances in the La Jolla Music Festival's *Summerfest at Home*. Lark is delighted to take part in tonight's inaugural recital for *Cal Performances at Home*.

Three recordings featuring Lark were released in 2019: *Fantasy*, which includes fantasies by Schubert, Telemann, and Fritz Kreisler; Ravel's *Tzigane*, and Lark's own *Appalachian Fantasy*; *SKY*, a Grammy-nominated Albany Symphony Orchestra release whose title selection is a bluegrass-inspired violin concerto written for Lark by Michael Torke; and *Invention*, the debut album of the violin-bass duo Tessa Lark & Michael Thurber comprising arrangements of Two-Part Inventions by J.S. Bach along with non-classical original compositions.

Scheduled for 2021 is Lark's fourth album, *The Stradgrass Sessions*, which will include collaborations with composer-performers Jon

Batiste, Edgar Meyer, Michael Cleveland, and Sierra Hull; works by Bartók and Ysaÿe; and the premiere recording of John Corigliano's solo violin composition *Stomp*.

Tessa Lark is a graduate of the New England Conservatory and completed her Artist Diploma at the Juilliard School.

Andrew Armstrong, piano

Praised by critics for his passionate expression and dazzling technique, pianist Andrew Armstrong has delighted audiences worldwide in performances at venues including Alice Tully Hall, Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, the Grand Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, and Warsaw's National Philharmonic.

Armstrong's international orchestral engagements have featured a sprawling repertoire of more than 50 concertos with orchestra. He has performed with such conductors as Peter Oundjian, Itzhak Perlman, Günther Herbig, Stefan Sanderling, Jean-Marie Zeitouni, and Stanisław Skrowaczewski, and has appeared in solo recitals in chamber music concerts with the Elias, Alexander, American, and Manhattan string quartets, and as a member of the Caramoort Virtuosi, Boston Chamber Music Society,

Seattle Chamber Music Society, and the Jupiter Symphony Chamber Players.

Along with his performance activities, Armstrong serves as the artistic director of the Columbia Museum of Art's *Chamber Music on Main* series in South Carolina, and enters his fourth year directing the Chamber Music Institute at Wisconsin's Green Lake Festival of Music.

Armstrong's debut solo CD was released to great critical acclaim: "I have heard few pianists play [Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Sonata], recorded or in concert, with such dazzling clarity and confidence" (*American Record Guide*). He has also released several award-winning recordings with his longtime recital partner James Ehnes, most recently Beethoven's Sonatas Nos. 4, 5, and 8, to stellar reviews.

Armstrong is devoted to outreach programs and playing for children. In addition to his many concerts, his performances are heard regularly on National Public Radio and WQXR, New York City's premier classical music station.

He lives happily in Massachusetts, with his wife Esty; their three children—Jack (14), Elise (nine), and Gabriel (three); and their two dogs, Comet and Dooker.

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