Master of Music Violin Recital

Zou Mengna, violin | Ge Xiaozhe, piano

Programme Notes

Sergei Prokofiev (1891–1953)

Violin Sonata No. 2 in D major, Op. 94bis (1944)

Prokofiev's Second Violin Sonata began life as the Flute Sonata in D major, Op. 94, composed in 1943 during the Second World War. At the encouragement of violinist David Oistrakh, Prokofiev adapted the work for violin in 1944, retaining its lyrical clarity while reshaping passages to exploit the violin's articulation and expressive range. The resulting sonata balances classical elegance with Prokofiev's characteristic rhythmic bite, sudden contrasts and unexpected harmonic turns.

I. Moderato. A graceful, singing opening theme sets a poised atmosphere. Flowing melodic lines alternate with more animated, sharply articulated passages, establishing a dialogue between violin and piano.

II. Scherzo: Presto. Rapid figurations, offbeat accents and abrupt changes of character give the movement its playful, sometimes mischievous energy. A more lyrical contrasting section briefly softens the momentum.

III. Andante. The slow movement offers an intimate, reflective interlude. Its long-breathed phrases and subtle harmonic colours invite a vocal quality of playing and close attention to the balance between the instruments.

IV. Allegro con brio. The finale returns to a bright, buoyant spirit. Spirited rhythms and brilliant exchanges propel the music toward an exuberant conclusion.

César Franck (1822–1890)

Violin Sonata in A major (1886)

Franck composed his Violin Sonata in A major in 1886 as a wedding gift for the Belgian violinist Eugène Ysaÿe. One of the central works of the violin-and-piano repertoire, it combines Romantic warmth with a tightly integrated structure. Themes and melodic shapes recur across the four movements, a technique often described as cyclic form, giving the sonata a strong sense of unity and emotional progression.

I. Allegretto ben moderato. Rather than beginning with a dramatic declaration, the sonata opens in a tender, questioning mood. The violin's gently unfolding melody and the piano's fluid accompaniment establish an atmosphere of restrained lyricism.

II. Allegro. Turbulent piano writing and impassioned violin lines create an urgent, stormy movement. Moments of expressive release emerge within the driving intensity.

III. Recitativo-Fantasia: Ben moderato. Free, speech-like phrases suggest an inward monologue. The music moves between uncertainty and heightened emotion, recalling earlier ideas while gradually finding a more expansive voice.

IV. Allegretto poco mosso. A radiant melody unfolds as a canon between violin and piano, with each instrument imitating the other. Earlier thematic material returns, and the sonata closes with a sense of reconciliation and affirmation.