

JAMES EHNES



CANADA 2016

PROGRAM

George Frederic Handel: Sonata in D major, HWV 371

Affettuoso

Allegro

Larghetto

Allegro

Ludwig van Beethoven: Sonata for Violin and Piano No.5 in F major ("Spring"), Op. 24

Allegro

Adagio molto espressivo

Scherzo: Allegro molto - Trio

Rondo: Allegro ma non troppo

- *Intermission* -

Bramwell Tovey: Stream of Limelight

Virtuoso selections to be announced from the stage

PROGRAM NOTES BY JAMES EHNES

The idea of a coast-to-coast recital tour of Canada has been percolating in my mind for many years. I have been very lucky to have traveled extensively through this great country of my birth, and am privileged to know the large cities well from repeated visits, but I often miss the days of my early career when I had more chances to visit smaller centres, to interact with people in more remote places, and, perhaps most importantly, to travel by the roads and railways, to get a sense of the massive scale of this nation.

Having moved to the USA and married an American, I have still been able to maintain close ties with Canada through my work, and have had the joy of bringing my wife to many of my favorite places from Victoria to St. John's. But now that I am a father, it is more important to me than ever to be able to show my family as much of Canada as I can. As the milestone of my 40th birthday approached, it struck me that I could give myself and my family no better gift than the opportunity to explore this great nation from West to East, North to South.

I am proud and honoured to have the opportunity to perform on this tour in every Province and Territory, and to share what I consider to be some of the very greatest music from 300

years of history in combination with wonderful music of today, including a work written specially for this tour by my great friend and mentor, Bramwell Tovey. I am also extremely grateful to have the opportunity to express through music my gratitude to Canada and Canadian music lovers for all the support I have received throughout my career.

Handel – Violin Sonata in D Major, HWV 371

Remembered today primarily for such beloved works as *Messiah*, *Water Music*, and *Music for the Royal Fireworks*, the prolific George Frideric Handel also composed a substantial amount of music for small ensembles, of which this sonata is arguably his finest and best known. Its four movements alternate slow and fast, and between somewhat operatic music of great drama and beauty, and virtuoso displays for both the violin and keyboard.

As was typical for music of this type and time, only the bass line (the left hand part) of the keyboard part was written out, including numerical figures that specified the harmonies upon which the keyboard player would improvise. The version that Andrew Armstrong and I perform is one that we have adapted from various performing editions and amended with our own preferences. Once a staple of the violin repertoire, this wonderful work has sadly become somewhat neglected over the last several generations. However, its inclusion in the Suzuki method instruction books has ensured its popularity among developing violinists.

Beethoven – Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 5 in F Major, Op. 24, “Spring”

Written in 1803, this sonata has become one of Beethoven’s most beloved chamber works, and is one of the prime examples (along with the Opus 28 piano sonata and the 6th symphony) of Beethoven’s “pastoral” style of writing. Though the title “Spring” is not Beethoven’s, the charming, optimistic, and predominantly easy-going nature of this music makes it very appropriate. The first movement begins with the violin introducing one of Beethoven’s most inspired and natural melodies, setting the mood for a piece of remarkable lyricism. The second movement combines serene and long-flowing melodies over a gently bubbling accompaniment that brings to mind the idea of gently flowing water. Following a charming and extremely brief scherzo, the finale is a graceful rondo (a piece in which the main theme returns again and again) that, despite moments of turbulence and drama, never loses its sense of good-natured fun.

Tovey – Stream of Limelight (notes by Bramwell Tovey)

I first heard James Ehnes in Winnipeg in 1990. He played Ravel’s *Tzigane* with its dazzling opening cadenza and technical and musical demands completely mastered - at the age of fourteen. There’s an honesty and openness about Jimmy that comes out in the music-making and transports the listener directly to the composer’s vision without resort to artifice. He has a marvellous sense of humour and appreciation for irony which greatly complements his profound and intelligent musicianship. Since that initial meeting we’ve performed together countless times and become great friends. **Stream of Limelight** is affectionately dedicated to my dear friend, James Ehnes.

Limelight was a nineteenth-century method of extremely bright theatrical illumination, pre-dating electricity. Actors honed their skills to deliver all types of scenes from intimate to dramatic, coping under the one source of brilliant light. **Stream of Limelight** is a flow of sound under the glare of this bright light, sometimes no more than a trickle, sometimes a torrent as the violin and piano engage in a robust dialogue based upon the ascending notes heard on the violin at the outset. Like all conversations there are highs and lows, smiles, jokes, silent thoughts, disagreements - until unanimity is reached in the final moments.

Encores

Violinists are blessed to have an enormously rich repertoire, with important works from nearly all of the great composers. But there is also a tremendous assortment of lighter fare, both original and transcribed. These minor masterpieces have delighted audiences for generations and have played an invaluable role in the formation of our violin-playing traditions.

Perhaps no musical instrument combines the opportunities for the lyrical and the virtuosic in such dramatic combination as the violin. The instrument is as equally suited to the long, vocal lines of Ponce's *Estrellita* as it is to the glittering pyrotechnics of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Flight of the Bumblebee*. The tradition of the violin "encore piece" lives on in great works of today like James Newton Howard's dazzling 133....At Least (commissioned by Hilary Hahn as part of In 27 Pieces: The Hilary Hahn Encores).

Much as a great dessert perfectly concludes a fine meal, these musical bon-bons are the perfect ending to a violin and piano recital.