

Agnes ZIMMERMANN

THE VIOLIN SONATAS NO. 1 IN D MINOR, OP. 16 NO. 2 IN A MINOR, OP. 21 NO. 3 IN G MINOR, OP. 23

Mathilde Milwidsky, violin Sam Haywood, piano

THE VIOLIN SONATAS OF AGNES ZIMMERMANN

by Peter Fribbins

To the majority of musicians and music-lovers of the present day the mention of Agnes Zimmermann would chiefly recall her well-known editions of the works of Mozart and Schumann and the Sonatas of Beethoven – classics to which she brought stores of accumulated knowledge and the most painstaking accuracy. In the musical world of the 'seventies, 'eighties, and 'nineties, Agnes Zimmermann occupied a central place among artists. She was a familiar figure [...] both as soloist and in collaboration with those masters among instrumentalists, Joachim, Madame Norman-Neruda (Lady Halle), Ludwig Straus, Piatti, and others. In all the 'musical matinees' and fashionable concerts of those days Agnes Zimmermann took part. She also visited Leipsic, Hamburg, Berlin, Brussels, and Frankfurt, often in conjunction with Dr. Joachim. At the Halle concerts at Manchester, Agnes Zimmermann was a frequent and welcome visitor, and also at the great English provincial towns [...].

The story of this recording begins with my role as Artistic Director of the London Chamber Music Society concerts. These Sunday concerts have been presented at Kings Place, near King's Cross Station, since 2008, but were hosted at the Conway Hall in Red Lion Square from 1929, and before that at South Place in the City of London, where, as the South Place Sunday Concerts, they had begun life in 1887. Their archives reveal a fascinating history over the years. On Sunday, 24 January 1915, for example, following the worst of the Suffragette-movement unrest through 1913 and 1914, there was a concert featuring music entirely by contemporary women composers, performed by notable female performers of the day. The 'Popular Concerts' format in London from this period typically featured a mix of vocal and

¹ Memorial tribute by Lady Arbuthnot, *The Musical Times*, Vol. 67, No. 995, 1 January 1926, pp. 28–29.

instrumental works, and this event was no exception, and alongside various songs, and the *Phantasy* Piano Trio by Edith Swepstone (1862–1942),² was the 'Sonata in D minor for Pianoforte and Violin' by Agnes Zimmermann. Zimmermann's Sonata was by far the most substantial work to be performed that evening; in his concert programme, Alfred Clements, the first Music Director,³ noted its duration as 29 minutes.

Agnes Zimmermann, then in her late sixties, had enjoyed a highly successful career. Born in Cologne in July 1847, she had been brought to England by her parents in the 1850s. She entered the Royal Academy of Music to study piano with Cipriani Potter (1792–1871) and composition with Charles Steggall (1826–1905) and then George Alexander Macfarren (1813–87), being awarded the King's Scholarship in both 1860 and 1862. Prodigiously gifted as a performer, she made her debut as a pianist at the Crystal Palace in 1863, while still a sixteen-year-old student, performing two movements of Beethoven's 'Emperor' Concerto.

In 1864 Zimmermann undertook the first of numerous concert tours to Germany, and in 1865 she gave the first of many recitals and chamber concerts at the Hanover Square Rooms in London. The daily periodical *The Era* of 16 April 1865 commented that: 'No one who has watched the young lady's progress can doubt that greater triumphs are yet in store for her, and that she will promote the dignity of the English school'. In 1865, at about the time that his blindness became complete, George Macfarren composed a piano sonata for Zimmermann. It was not published until fifteen years later, presumably to allow her to perform the work exclusively.⁴ Macfarren was an important influence on Zimmermann: as well as being central to musical life in Victorian Britain, he had also been long connected to the musical scene on the Continent. Henry Banister's posthumous biography of Macfarren discusses his friendship with Felix Mendelssohn, and observes that in 1844 Joseph Joachim, then aged only thirteen, 'received composition

 $^{^2}$ Of the 1,121 works performed at the South Place Concert Series from 1887 to 1987, only thirteen were by female composers; seven of them were by Edith Swepstone.

³ Clements (1858-1938) was Director of the South Place Sunday Concerts for more than 50 years, from 1887.

⁴ Macfarren's biographer Henry Banister comments: 'One of his Sonatas for Pianoforte, that in G minor, being the third that was published, was written, a considerable time before his death, for his pupil, the distinguished pianist, Miss Agnes Zimmerman' (Henry C. Banister, George Alexander Macfarren – His Life, Works, and Influence, George Bell, London, 1891, p. 393).

lessons from Macfarren, to whom, as I have heard him say, he was indebted for his first instructions in the art of writing for an orchestra.'5

In 1866 some of Zimmermann's first compositions were published: two songs issued by Ewer & Co. in London, and a *Canon, Sarabande and Gigue* for piano by Breitkopf und Härtel in Leipzig – the latter demonstrating her keen interest in Baroque music, which extended to transcribing works by Bach and Handel for the keyboard. She also began to include her own compositions in recitals, and in 1868 performed in the first of a number of two-piano recitals with Clara Schumann, probably with Robert Schumann's *Andante und Variationen*, Op. 46, a work they subsequently often performed together: 'It was admirably rendered [...] and the recital awarded the performers justly acknowledged a merit from which there was nothing in the music to distract attention.'6

In August 1868, the violinist Joseph Joachim (1831–1907) commented in a letter to his friend the musician and writer Theodor Avé-Lallemant: 7

In 1872 Zimmermann became a naturalised British citizen and throughout the 1870s and '80s was heard regularly in London concerts. *The Era* was consistently complimentary about her artistry:

⁵ Ibid., p. 103.

⁶ The Pall Mall Gazette, 4 April 1868, as quoted in the article on Zimmermann by Claudia Schweitzer on the website of the Sophie Drinker Institut, Germany: www.sophie-drinker-institut.de/zimmermann-agnes.

⁷ Avé-Lallemant (1806–90) was also the dedicatee of Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5 (1888).

⁸ As quoted in Nora Bickley, Letters from and to Joseph Joachim, Macmillan, London, 1914, p. 377.

Miss Agnes Zimmermann, who has gradually, but successfully, pursued her artistic career until she has come to be regarded as one of the most satisfactory pianistes of the day. We use the word 'satisfactory' in its strictest sense, and with due consideration of what it implies. Miss Zimmermann herself would, we are sure, not wish to be ranked with the merely sensational players. She has no desire to smash the keyboard or to make the wires jingle, which, to speak simple truth, is what some very celebrated pianists do, and more frequently than is at all agreeable to a cultivated ear.9

In addition to performing with Joachim, Zimmermann also became a regular chamber-music partner of the violinists Wilma Norman-Neruda (later Lady Hallé) and Émile Sauret and the cellist Alfredo Piatti. As well as featuring Zimmermann's own music, their programmes often included the chamber works of Brahms, and in March 1891, in a trio with Joachim and Piatti, she gave the British premiere of the revised version of Brahms' B major Piano Trio, Op. 8.

By the 1870s, as well as working as a successful pianist and composer, Zimmermann was becoming a distinguished editor of piano works. Piano arrangements of works by Bach, Handel, Haydn and Gounod were followed by a complete edition of the piano sonatas by Beethoven in London in 1873 (republished in 1880), followed later in the 1870s by a complete edition of Mozart's piano sonatas, and in the 1880s by the complete piano works of Schumann.

Agnes Zimmerman died in London on 14 November 1925, leaving an estate of nearly £40,000, an enormous amount for those days. An obituary appearing two weeks later commented that, 'Though an admirable composer of pianoforte and chamber music, Miss Zimmermann is best remembered as an unusually fine pianist of the classical type. Her last public appearance in London took place in 1913.'10

⁹ The Era, 7 May 1881, quoted in Schweitzer, loc. cit.

¹⁰ The Musical Times, Vol. 66, No. 994, 1 December 1925, p. 1136

Zimmermann's own extant compositions include a suite for piano trio, a cello sonata and the three substantial violin sonatas heard here, as well as songs and piano pieces.¹¹ But her musical legacy has been largely lost: although she did not write much, what survives is impressive, the three violin sonatas in particular. There is, indeed, little to match them in British music of the 1860s and '70s. They compare favourably with the two violin sonatas by her near-contemporary Hubert Parry (1848-1918), which were composed in 1878 and in 1894, although his chamber music is more rhapsodic and fantasy-like in comparison with Zimmermann's more taut and direct manner. They also offer something different from the two violin sonatas by Charles Stanford (1852–1924), which include a rather sunny D major early sonata from 1877 and a second, weightier, offering from 1898. Stanford, too, had a good relationship with Joseph Joachim, whom he first heard perform in Dublin in 1862. Joachim played in many of Stanford's works, both in England and Germany, but never, as far as is known, the violin sonatas. The music of Edward German (1862-1936) and Edward Elgar (1857-1934) essentially belongs to a later age, with German's contribution to violin-and-piano repertoire including works such as Souvenir (1896) and Song without Words (1898); by this time Elgar had largely managed to free himself from the Victorian taste for marches and sentimental trivia, and his sole violin sonata dates from 1918.

Given the quality of Agnes Zimmermann's chamber music, it is a shame there are no orchestral works. A woman, particularly one who was such an accomplished pianist, might have been 'allowed' to compose chamber works in this period, but it was clearly more difficult to write for orchestra, not least because orchestras of the time were almost exclusively a male affair. Composers like Parry and Stanford seemed to have reserved their more serious musical ideas for orchestral genres such as the symphony, and so many of their chamber works, and in particular their violin sonatas, are lighter and often more whimsical in character. Since Zimmermann had fewer options, her musical thoughts were

¹¹ There are also some unpublished manuscripts in the archive at the Royal Academy of Music, London, including two piano sonatas, a string quartet, a piano quartet, a quintet for piano and winds and some part-songs, but they seem mostly to be juvenilia, dating from the early 1860s.

¹² Tellingly, the fourteen orchestral works known to have been composed by Edith Swepstone were almost all performed by the Bournemouth Municipal Orchestra; only two were heard in London.

poured exclusively into chamber music. For this reason, her violin sonatas may ultimately be remembered above some of those by her contemporary male colleagues.

Sonata for Piano and Violin No. 1 in D minor, Op. 16 (1868)

The First Sonata, written for Joachim, was published by Novello, Ewer & Co. in 1870. A review in *The Musical Times* of New Year's Day 1869 commented that:

Here we have a clearly defined and well-written Sonata, by a young artist who has already fairly won her way to public favour as a pianist of the highest class [...]. In the writing of this Sonata [...] a laudable desire to follow the highest models is observable in every movement. This is as it should be; for mere eccentricity, although often mistaken for genius, is in young writers usually the result of a desire to cover their want of it; and it will generally therefore be found that those composers who have in after years endeavoured to escape from form, are precisely those who have begun their career by strictly adhering to it.¹³

The opening theme (Ex. 1) [9] is a striking semiquaver figure alighting on tonic chords, followed each time by climactic diminished-seventh chords. The style in all three sonatas is reminiscent of Schumann's, with something of Mendelssohn's quicksilver textures and, perhaps, the influence of some other famous contemporaries, among them Joachim Raff (1822–82), who composed five sonatas for violin and piano, and whose Romantic-Classical style is not dissimilar to Zimmermann's. Yet, already, aged 21, there is a distinctive musical voice and personality.

Ex. 1



¹³ 'Sonate, für Pianoforte und Violine by Agnes Zimmermann', The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular, Vol. 13, No. 311, 1 January 1869, p. 645.

A gentler theme follows in the subdominant of G minor, balancing the opening stridency with something more reflective, the arabesques in the violin marked *espressivo*. The transparent writing implies German Lieder as well as operatic recitative, with the violin now in the role of singer. Reminiscent also of the sensitivity and colour of Chopin's music, the theme then develops into arpeggiated harp-like accompaniment, oscillating expressively between G minor and B flat major. The second subject (Ex. 2) is beautiful, in the relative major of F, with a hymn-like theme which then moves to the mediant of A minor.

Ex. 2



The writing includes wide-ranging key modulations – for instance, an extended passage in A flat in the development section – although, in comparison to more mainstream violin-and-piano music of the period, some of these passages might appear perfunctory. The textures are also more extensively developed in the two later sonatas, and the violin explores a wider register. Given that this work is by a composer who was only 21, this movement is impressive nonetheless, with some remarkable moments, including an unexpected and dramatic tonal shift to E flat minor in the middle of the D minor recapitulation. Although all three sonatas indicate the habitual exposition repeat in the first movement, their musical material, gestures, nature and scale of expression imply that this marking was more the acknowledgement of Classical tradition than an instruction that the composer wished to be slavishly observed. Indeed, since Alfred

Clements noted that the 1915 performance lasted 29 minutes, omitting the repeat would seem to have been the contemporary performance practice for this repertoire, and so this recording adopts the same approach.

The Scherzo, Allegro grazioso [10], demonstrates Zimmermann's frequent structural preoccupation with subdominants, acknowledging more Classical, Mozartian models of tonal architecture. The musical material is imaginative, with a middle section that features a folk 'musette' style in the major. The slow movement, Andante tranquillo [11], has an impressively sustained expressive focus, opening with a melody that seems essentially either a line for cello or for solo horn (Ex. 3). Beautiful and confident, it is given breadth and seriousness by being sustained over an extended dominant pedal. Instrumental colours are implied, and lower woodwind and horns seem to join lower strings, with a typically Romantic horn-like pedal on E flat in the middle of the texture, as the movement deftly sidesteps, Schubert-like, into a serious and passionate E flat minor.

Ex. 3



By bar 30, the violin has taken on the piano-pedal idea of the opening, sustaining high notes above expressive writing in the piano. Then the piano speaks on its own with an intimate and personal intensity. There is nothing light and relieving about this movement, no trivial English Victoriana: instead, it is the emotional core of the Sonata. All three of Zimmermann's sonatas show the legacy of Beethoven and Schumann with

their conventional designations as 'Sonata for Piano and Violin', articulating the more collaborative and equal status of the instrumentalists, but in this music for celebrity male violinist and young female pianist-composer, there is no doubt who is the protagonist. Eventually, the triplet quavers are transformed into a texture in which the opening melody appears beautifully and luminously in the top voice of triplet piano quavers (Ex. 4).

Ex. 4



The Finale provides relief from the sustained passion of the slow movement, beginning with a lively dance-rhythm idea, *Allegro vivace*, in $_8^6$ time $\boxed{12}$. A contrasting, more lyrical idea follows, preceding an episode in G minor – again underlining the structural importance of the subdominant in Zimmermann's works – eventually leading to a reprise of the opening material in D major.

Sonata for Piano and Violin No. 2 in A minor, Op. 21 (1875)

Zimmermann's Second Sonata, in A minor, was premiered in 1875 and published the following year. Both the Second and Third Violin Sonatas were premiered by Wilma Norman-Neruda (1838–1911), the famous Moravian violinist, whose first husband

was the Swedish composer Ludvig Norman (1831–85) and who went on to marry the German-British conductor Charles Hallé (1819–95) in 1885. A review of the Sonata No. 2 in *The Musical Times* of 1875 commented on

the highly favourable impression it made on its performance in two successive seasons at the composer's concerts. The first movement, in A minor, is a model of refined and intellectual writing [...]. The fresh subject of the 'Scherzo', in D minor, with the melodious Cantabile, in G major, combine to form a movement which will doubtless become the favourite in every concert-room where the Sonata is heard. The 'Andante', in F, commences with a smooth melody of most winning character [...]. ¹⁴

The Sonata opens, Allegro assai [5], with an expansive and confident theme in the piano, implying an orchestral texture of cellos and basses (Ex. 5). Dramatic interplay with the violin follows, leading to a more lyrical second subject on the G string, to gentle piano accompaniment. The writing has strong Mendelssohnian features, with a pithy motivic sense, and intense moments. The development section immediately departs to the darker key of G sharp minor, featuring insistent Beethovenian-like motivic writing before the A tonality reasserts itself.

Ex. 5



 $^{^{14}}$ The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular, Vol. 17, No. 392, 1 October 1875, p. 245.

The Scherzo second movement, an Allegro scherzando in D minor [6], like the scherzo movements in the other two sonatas, is also in the subdominant key. An attractive cantabile middle section intervenes, in G major, a further subdominant relationship. The Andante cantabile slow movement [7] is very beautiful, with rhythmic writing that progresses in intensity from quavers to triplets and then to semiquavers, rather in the way the texture was later to develop in the slow movement of Sonata No. 3. This F major movement seems to be the emotional centre of the sonata, opening with one of Zimmermann's most substantive musical paragraphs for solo piano before the violin enters. Once more, Zimmermann's writing suggests orchestral thinking, with voicings implying cellos and basses, upper string parts and inner horn lines. If she had been permitted the opportunity to compose for orchestra, the evidence is that her writing would have been confident and distinctive.

The finale is a lively *Allegro grazioso* movement in A minor in $\frac{2}{4}$, with the violin casting a melody over Lieder-like piano figuration $\boxed{8}$. Gradually the music becomes more intense, moving to C sharp minor before settling into a more sustained and lyrical middle section in E. Eventually there is a reprise of the opening material, and the sonata moves to the brighter A major to conclude.

Sonata for Piano and Violin No. 3 in G minor, Op. 23 (1879)

Zimmermann's Third Sonata is dedicated to Louisa Sophia, Lady Goldsmid (1819–1908), well-known for her efforts to improve the education provision for British women and for taking a leading role in persuading Cambridge University to permit women graduates. Zimmermann lived with her for many years following the death, in 1878, of Louisa's husband, the famous barrister and politician, Sir Francis Henry Goldsmid.

 provides for more rhythmic drama and fluidity than in the other sonatas. The theme also explores semitone appoggiaturas either side of the dominant, with the E flat and C sharp invoking Bach (Ex. 6).

Ex. 6



This approach is not something seen elsewhere in Zimmerman's chamber works, and I am struck by the similarities in the shape of the theme to that of the first movement of the Piano Sonata that Macfarren dedicated to Zimmermann in 1865, also in G minor (Ex. 7). Both have the same ascending shape from G to D, both wind around E-flat–D–C sharp and both conclude with a pedal idea. It is impossible to say whether this link is merely coincidental.

Ex. 7



A further link between Zimmermann and Macfarren is that their slow movements are both in the submediant of E flat. Zimmermann's 2 draws upon the warmth and tenderness that is central to the traditional Viennese-School 'topic' for this key. The music here seems Schumannesque, with Lieder-like writing for the piano, and wistful melodic touches that begin to take on darker Romantic hues of depth and profundity (Ex. 8).

Ex. 8



Soon the music morphs into a more intense episode, with triplet figures in the more intimate key of A flat minor. The writing looks like textures seen in Schumann or Brahms, but often for solo piano for several phrases, with the violin not daring to intrude on Zimmermann's private soliloquy. The texture later develops further into something more complex with demisemiquavers, and the music closes in the E flat in which it began.

The Scherzo, an *Allegro grazioso* in C minor [3], shows the influence of Chopin, with a recurring theme that sounds similar to the opening of his C sharp minor *Polonaise*, but in lighter, more Classical vein. It is known that Zimmermann performed Chopin's music in her piano recitals and that it was well-received, ¹⁵ and so it seems natural that something of his style might appear in her music, especially in a dance movement. This

¹⁵ From contemporary concert reviews, for example, as in this one from *The Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, published on 30 March 1882: 'Miss Agnes Zimmermann won an unqualified success in Chopin's Ballad in A flat, and the audience were so pleased with her expressive interpretation of Chopin's music that they insisted on a redemand.'

fusion with her own style makes for music that is elegant and highly attractive. A contrasting C major trio section, somewhat Brahmsian, prefaces a return to the C minor dance.

The Finale is in ${6 \atop 8}$, like the finale of Macfarren's piano sonata, and with a not dissimilar rhythmic profile. Zimmermann's finale, by contrast, is more dramatic, with diminished-sevenths harmony and a marking of *Allegro appassionato* 4. After various key modulations, and an impressive range of colours and textures, the music moves to the major mode and ends affirmatively in G major.

Peter Fribbins is a composer, the Artistic Director of the London Chamber Music Society at Kings Place, and Professor of Music at Middlesex University, London.

Mathilde Milwidsky was born in London, where solo performances include appearances in the Royal Festival Hall, Kings Place, Wigmore Hall, St John's, Smith Square, Cadogan Hall and the Royal Albert Hall, Live broadcasts have been heard on BBC Radio 3 and Radio 4. Radio Swiss Classic. Classic FM and the BBC One Show. She has won prizes at the Windsor Festival International String Competition, the Aurora Music Competition in Sweden (First Prize plus Audience Prize) and was a semi-finalist laureate of the International Joseph Joachim Violin Competition in Hanover, as well as a major prize-winner of the Peter Pirazzi Stiftung Competition in Frankfurt in 2020. She won the String Section Final of the 2017 Royal Overseas League Music Competition and was a St John's Smith Square Young Artist, for which she premiered a piece written for her by Sally Beamish, and has worked closely with the



Photograph: Aiga Ozolina

composers Cheryl Frances-Hoad, David Matthews and Huw Watkins.

She is frequently invited to a range of festivals, including IMS Prussia Cove, East Neuk, Fränkische Musiktage, Musikdorf Ernen, Lichfield and Presteigne, where she has collaborated with musicians including Avi Avital, Thomas Hoppe, Lilli Maijala, Anthony Marwood, Rosanne Philippens and Christian Poltéra.

Postgraduate studies at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater München with Mi-kyung Lee were generously funded by the Countess of Munster Musical Trust. Further mentors have included members of the London Haydn Quartet and Pierre Amoyal. She plays a very fine Giovanni Battista Guadagnini violin kindly loaned to her by Irene R. Miller through the Beares International Violin Society.

Sam Haywood has performed in many of the major concert halls of the world. He embraces a wide spectrum of the piano repertoire and is equally at home as a soloist, chamber musician or accompanying Lieder. He has had a duo partnership with Joshua Bell and often performs with Steven Isserlis.

His recordings include two solo albums for Hyperion, with the piano music of Julius Isserlis (grandfather of Steven) and Charles Villiers Stanford's preludes. His passion for period instruments led to a recording on Chopin's own Pleyel piano. In 2013 he co-founded the Solent Music Festival, featuring varied programmes and important projects in the local community.

Following his early success in the BBC Young Musician of the Year competition, the Royal Philharmonic Society awarded him the Julius Isserlis Scholarship. He was mentored by Paul Badura-Skoda, Maria Curcio and David Hartigan, and he studied



both at the Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst in Vienna and at the Royal Academy of Music in London, of which he is an Associate (ARAM).

As a composer, Haywood has written several miniatures for piano: *The Other Side* was premiered in the Konzerthaus in Vienna, and the *Song of the Penguins*, dedicated to Roger Birnstingl, is published by Emerson Editions. His novel invention *memorystars** can significantly reduce the time required to memorise a music score.



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AGNES ZIMMERMANN The Violin Sonatas

Sonata for Piano and Violin No. 3 in G minor, Op. 23 (1879)			28:28
1	1	Allegro moderato	9:11
2	II	Andante affetuoso	6:00
3	Ш	Scherzo: Allegro grazioso	5:08
4	IV	Finale: Allegro appassionato	8:09
Sonata for Piano and Violin No. 2 in A minor, Op. 21 (1875)			28:21
5	1	Allegro assai	7:37
6	П	Scherzo: Allegro scherzando	5:02
7	Ш	Andante cantabile	8:26
8	IV	Finale: Allegro grazioso	7:16
Sonata for Piano and Violin No. 1 in D minor, Op. 16 (1868)			27:45
9	1	Allegro	8:50
10	П	Scherzo: Allegro grazioso	5:21
11	Ш	Andante tranquillo	6:23
12	IV	Finale: Allegro vivace	7:11
Mathilde Milwidsky, violin			TT 84:36
Sam Haywood, piano			EIDST DECODDINGS

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