

Violin Sonata

One of the later works that Cesar Franck wrote is his violin sonata. This piece, that was well received at his time became one of the most performed pieces and is a highlight for any violin-piano duo to play. It got such a great popularity that many other instruments, such as the Flute, saxophone, cello, piano solo, 4 hands and even the Double-Bass adapted this piece for their instrument.

The piece, as said before in the biography of Franck, is a perfect example of the cyclic form in which one theme is dominating, or inspiring the rest of the whole works, including other movements. In this piece, it is the main theme in the first movement that is the inspiration of the sonata. It is something that the French call: 'Theme Generateur'. Though not original for himself, Franck is seen as one of the composers that perfected the cyclic form.

Written for the great violinist Eugene Ysaye, who premiered it as well, it was intended as Ysaye's wedding-present. During the wedding itself, it was performed from the autograph. Ysaye was very honoured and happy with the work and promised to Franck, in a letter, 'to make the piece known and perform it everywhere' (Cesar Franck, Correspondence P.164)

The first movement is written in an Allegretto. Originally it was intended to be an Adagio but Ysaye suggested to the composer to change the tempo. One of the key elements in this movement is the way Franck has written the chromatism and the modulations. Both parts are highly intricate and the piano-part should not be seen as the main line even though the part is written very virtuoso and difficult.

The second movement, which is an Allegro, is of a very big contrast with the first movement, which is rather peaceful in character. This is a turbulent piece which got an infamous reputation among pianists for its difficulty. Though there are quite some differences in tempo-markings, the character of the piece remains relatively the same.

The third movement which is a 'Recitativo-Fantasia' separates the instruments in the beginning. The melody in the right-hand, for the piano, hints back to the second movement with the intervals. The violin starts the real recitativo with a cadenza. After the first cadenza of the violin, the theme of the first movement comes back in the piano-part, which is one of the parts that the cyclic form in this sonata is so famous for. After the Fantasia part finishes, the 'A-tempo. Ben Moderato' brings us to a contrasting part which hints towards a divine character. The accompaniment of the triplets in the piano-part goes back to the beginning of the cadenza of the violin with the triplets. The major change comes in the Accelerando (bar.69) when the music becomes very intense and shows both instruments in their best way, low piano and high violin. The movement concludes with a remembrance of the Molto-Lento in the beginning.

The fourth movement is a gracious movement that was very inspired by the religious music of for example Bach. It is written in a canonical style and the piano-part, which has many different voices, hint toward the organ-style playing. This movement has, in general, a stable metre which gets broken from bar.99 where it starts to become more restless and builds towards the dramatic re-occurrence of the theme from the third movement. When one thinks that the climax is reached, Franck modulates to the major key (C) which gives an even bigger grandeur. From this climax, he makes a diminuendo which results back in the main theme of

this movement. The movement ends with a Coda, with thematic material that was used before in this movement.