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## Elena Urioste & Michael Brown at Wigmore Hall – Janáček, Beach & Strauss Ben Hogwood | Monday, December 02, 2013

### Janáček

Sonata for Violin and Piano

### Beach

Romance for Violin and Piano, Op.23

### Strauss

Sonata in E flat for Violin and Piano, Op.18

Elena Urioste (violin) &amp; Michael Brown (piano)

Wigmore Hall, London



Elena Urioste and Michael Brown began this BBC Radio 3 Lunchtime Concert at Wigmore Hall with a work that had a surprisingly long gestation period, Janáček's Violin Sonata, which occupied him from 1914 to 1921. It's a typically restless utterance, the music flitting around but never breaking free of the stranglehold of A flat minor, one of the composer's most meaningful tonal centres. Where it does exhibit more freedom is in the second movement 'Ballada', an earlier work for violin and piano Janáček incorporated into this compact design. Urioste exhibited an attractive, lyrical tone, her higher register commendably secure in the chorale theme. Elsewhere the mood was turbulent and often distracted,

though the sudden interventions of the muted violin in the finale could have been louder. Brown's ornamentation was very clear in the stormy textures, though, and the performance was a convincing one. Amy Beach's Romance offered a nice complement to such excesses, in a graceful account that was notable for Urioste's singing tone. The piece, based on the song 'Sweetheart, sigh no more', was a reminder that we do not hear Beach's music often enough – it is tuneful and skilfully written.

Richard Strauss's only published Violin Sonata is a relatively common repertoire piece these days, and it demands as much from its piano part as it does from the athletic violin writing. This was one of the more refined performances of the work I have heard, for Brown was very careful not to overplay his role, bringing clarity to even the most congested, quasi-orchestral passages that Strauss writes for the piano. Urioste could have projected a little more, particularly at the beginning of the first and third movements, but her confidence in the soaring trajectory of Strauss's slower themes was impressive, leading to some lovingly delivered phrases. The improvisatory second movement held the emotional heart of this performance, romantic but not too sentimental. The third movement could have thrown more caution to the winds as it changed from Andante to Allegro, but the players nonetheless delivered a focussed and musically intelligent reading. As an encore Urioste and Brown offered Jascha Heifetz's arrangement of the Gershwins' 'It ain't necessarily so', a good choice and a stylish performance. Fun, too!

- Wigmore Hall



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