



Lyrical Revolutionaries

Violinist Sophie Rosa and pianist Ian Buckle's fascinating new recording casts fresh light on a pivotal period in the evolution of the violin sonata

Rubicon Classics album celebrates an age of creative innovation with world premiere recording of Hélène de Montgeroult's Violin Sonata in A minor and sonatas by Viotti, Mendelssohn and Weber

Social change and cultural upheaval are among the shaping forces behind a compelling new recording of violin sonatas from Sophie Rosa and Ian Buckle. Their album, set for international release by Rubicon Classics on 26 February 2021, explores the development of the violin sonata from the time of the French Revolution to the triumph of the bourgeoisie in the early nineteenth century. The programme opens with Giovanni Battista Viotti's Sonata No.10 in E major and continues with the world premiere recording of the Sonata in A minor Op.2, No.3 by Hélène de Montgeroult, whose etudes and compendious fortepiano method influenced the course of piano playing and composition for generations. It also includes the lyrical Sonata in F minor Op.4 by the 14-year-old Felix Mendelssohn and Carl Maria von Weber's Sonata No.2 in G major J.100, one of six delightful pieces composed in 1810 with amateur players in mind.

"Ian phoned me one day to ask if I'd like to play through a sonata by Montgeroult, which was a new name to me," Sophie Rosa recalls. "We've been playing together for around five years now and are always curious to try out rare or little-known music. The discovery process led us to Viotti, who was Montgeroult's duo partner. Mendelssohn's sister Fanny had studied with one of her followers in Paris and with another of her duo partners, the violin virtuoso Pierre Baillot, and we know that Mendelssohn knew Montgeroult's piano method and music. We were also interested in the notion of accompaniment in the sonata, as the violin part was optional in the Montgeroult while the Viotti required Ian to improvise from the sonata's bass line."

Rosa and Buckle's choice of repertoire evokes an instrument and an age in transition. Viotti came to Paris in the early 1780s in part to find a bowmaker with the skills required to improve on the standard violin bows of the time; his collaboration with François Xavier Tourte led to the creation of a new bow capable, among other qualities, of projecting greater warmth of sound and subtlety of expression. Viotti's E major Violin Sonata was probably written with Tourte's bow in mind. While contemporary in its Classical style, it looks back to the Baroque in its accompaniment for either single bass instrument or unfigured keyboard continuo and forward to the expressive freedom of Romanticism. The singing line of Montgeroult's work, in which the subordinate violin part adds colour and contrast, reflects one of her preoccupations as a pianist, while young Mendelssohn's meditative composition exploits the Tourte-style bow's versatility.

"The idea of accompaniment emerged as a principal theme for this disc as we dug into the repertoire," comments Ian Buckle. "Although Montgeroult's sonata can be played with or without the violin, I wouldn't want to perform it as a solo piano piece having heard how much more the violin adds to it. The crucial point about Montgeroult and Viotti is that they understood every ingredient of virtuosity but chose to focus above all on the singing line. I think she felt that the piano was becoming a vehicle for flashy showmanship and rejected that in favour of getting the piano to project a singing melody. And Viotti, for all the possibilities of the Tourte bow, was also eager to promote the cantabile style. They point to Mendelssohn's exquisite, operatic sonata for violin and piano."

Montgeroult's life and times chimed with aspects of Buckle's own musical education, having studied with Marjorie Clementi, the great-great-great granddaughter of Montgeroult's teacher Muzio Clementi. "There's no teaching lineage linking me to Montgeroult," he admits. "But it's a neat coincidence that I studied with Marjorie Clementi. Thinking about her reminded me of what I've learned about Montgeroult's character: there was no faffing about with Marge or, by all accounts, with Montgeroult. They spent their time teaching the nuts and bolts of piano playing, allied to matters of taste and style. It was all about what was in the score and how it should be expressed through the player to the audience. I believe that's absolutely how teaching should be."

Both Viotti and Montgeroult faced mortal danger in the early years of the French Revolution. The violinist came to Paris in the early 1780s and proved an instant hit with the public; he soon tired of giving concerts, however, and was briefly employed by Marie Antoinette at Versailles. Montgeroult, meanwhile, married a marquis and



was consequently seen by many as an enemy of the people. While Viotti found refuge in London, Montgeroult was imprisoned and only spared a date with the guillotine after improvising a set of variations on *La Marseillaise* for members of Robespierre's Committee of Public Safety. In 1795 Montgeroult was appointed *professeur de première classe* at the recently established Paris Conservatoire, the first woman to hold a professorship there; she resigned two years later and subsequently formed one of the finest musical salons in the French capital.

"Montgeroult, in her teaching method and music, and Viotti, with the Tourte bow, promoted the singing style on their instruments," notes Sophie Rosa. "Viotti's legato playing and virtuosity took everyone by storm and made a huge and lasting impact. The lyrical, Italianate style, which was so popular with operagoers in Paris, is very much there in his and Montgeroult's sonatas and surfaces again in the beautiful, bel canto slow movement of Mendelssohn's F minor sonata. Of course Mendelssohn learned and assimilated the new styles and techniques of the time, so you can sense Montgeroult's spirit in this piece. You can hear why one of the leading scholars of her music called Montgeroult the precursor of Romanticism. This project has been very refreshing for us during the lockdown period and totally held our focus on the music."

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Sophie Rosa violin | **Ian Buckle** piano

Viotti Sonata No.10 in E major G.38

Hélène de Montgeroult Sonata in A minor Op.2, No.3 (world premiere recording)

Weber Sonata No.2 in G major J.100

Mendelssohn Sonata in F minor Op.4

NOTES FOR EDITORS

Sophie Rosa

Sophie Rosa enjoys a varied career as soloist, chamber musician and orchestral leader. She came to widespread public attention in 2011 after being awarded the Second Prize and Audience Prize at the second Manchester International Violin Competition. She has performed across the UK as a recitalist in venues including the Royal Festival Hall, the Purcell Room, Wigmore Hall, Kings Place and Bridgewater Hall and has appeared as soloist with orchestras such as the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and Manchester Camerata. Sophie has broadcast for BBC Radio 3 and has released CDs on the Rubicon Classics, Champs Hill and EM Records labels to critical acclaim.

Sophie Rosa is currently leader and artistic director of Sinfonia Viva and has appeared as guest leader with orchestras throughout the UK. As a keen chamber musician, she is a member of Pixels Ensemble and also performs with contemporary music group, Psappha. She is a member of the teaching faculty at the University of Manchester. Sophie plays on Joseph Gagliano violin dated 1795 and a Claude Fonclouse bow, made available through the generous support of the Stradivari Trust.

Ian Buckle

Ian Buckle maintains a varied freelance career working as soloist, accompanist, chamber musician, orchestral pianist and teacher. He enjoys longstanding associations with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic and the John Wilson Orchestra, and has appeared with them as soloist on numerous occasions. He has also played concertos



with the Royal Philharmonic, the Orchestra of Opera North and Sinfonia Viva. Committed to contemporary music, he has been the pianist in Ensemble 10/10 since the group's inception in 1997, and he regularly plays orchestral piano with the BBC Philharmonic. Ian is the artistic director and pianist of Pixels Ensemble (www.pixelsemble.org) which gives concerts throughout the UK. He frequently collaborates with poets and readers, most recently Andrew Motion, Roger McGough and Deryn Rees-Jones; in recitals of piano music and poetry: *Shropshire and Other Lads*, a celebration of A. E. Housman; *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, a commemoration of World War One; and Philip Larkin's *England*.

Ian teaches piano at the Universities of Liverpool and Leeds, maintains a private teaching practice in Manchester and is an examiner with ABRSM. Recordings include Pixels Ensemble's debut release of sonatas and piano pieces by Debussy, a recital of songs by Stephen Wilkinson *The Sunlight on the Garden*, and a CD of new works for clarinet and piano Prism with BBC Young Musician winner Mark Simpson. His performance of Gershwin's *New York Rhapsody* live at the Royal Albert Hall is featured on Warner Classics' 'The Best of the John Wilson Orchestra', and he and regular duo-partner Richard Casey are soloists in Saint-Saëns' *Carnival of the Animals* with the RLPO and Vasily Petrenko.