

A romantic couple is shown in a close embrace in a lush, green park setting. The man, on the left, is wearing a grey suit jacket over a light-colored shirt. The woman, on the right, has long, curly red hair and is wearing a light pink sleeveless top. She is holding a dark green violin and bow. The background is filled with out-of-focus green foliage, creating a soft, natural atmosphere.

Ode to Lost Time

Miriam Davis *violin*

Michael Bulychev-Okser *piano*

CONVIVIUM
RECORDS

TRACKLIST

ODE TO LOST TIME

Miriam Davis *violin* & Michael Bulychev-Okser *piano*

1	<i>Eugène Ysaÿe</i> - Poème Élégiacque in D minor, Op. 12	12.57
	<i>César Franck</i> - Sonata for Violin and Piano in A major	
2	i Allegretto ben moderato	5.20
3	ii Allegro molto	7.56
4	iii Recitativo-Fantasia (Ben moderato - Molto Lento)	7.10
5	iv Allegretto poco mosso	5.46
	<i>Claude Debussy</i> - Violin Sonata in G minor, L148 (140)	
6	i Allegro vivo	4.42
7	ii Intermède: Fantastique et léger	3.54
8	iii Finale: Très animé	4.10
9	<i>Ernest Chausson</i> - Poème, Op. 25	14.34
	TOTAL RUNNING TIME	66.26

PROGRAMME NOTE

In Marcel Proust's 1913 masterpiece, "In Search of Lost Time", he aims to recreate through literature, the period of French history in which he lived. Inspired by Proust's unparalleled ability to express in words the psychological effects of music on the heart and soul, this CD presents works by contemporaneous composers whom Proust heard, knew and loved. As well as creating a window into the musical contents of Proust's mind, we seek to mirror his goal and offer a historical portrait of the era through music. Whilst there has been long-standing interest in the composer 'behind' Proust's fictional composer Vinteuil, Proust himself poured scorn on such musings, stating clearly that Vinteuil is an entirely fictional character. However, he remarks that whilst writing about Vinteuil's famous 'little phrase', he may have been thinking of both Saint-Saëns' 1st Sonata as played by Enescu, and Franck's Violin Sonata.

Debussy's works were a known favourite of Proust, especially Pelléas et Mélisande, which Proust listened to

repeatedly. Proust's fondness for Franck is best remembered by a particular anecdote: one night around midnight, Proust turned up at the house of violinist Gaston Poulet (who also premiered Debussy Sonata), possessed of an urgent desire to hear Franck's string quartet. They rounded up the rest of Poulet's quartet in a taxi, in which Proust sat muffled in an eiderdown, with a bowl of potatoes by his side. Back in his bedroom, the musicians performed amongst Proust's manuscripts, finishing around 2 a.m., at which point Proust asked to hear the entire piece again.

Proust attended many of Ysaÿe's concerts and loved his playing. In Proust's novel, some of the descriptions of the violinist's emotional tone are very likely inspired by Ysaÿe's distinctive sound. Proust was also acquainted with Chausson, and between their styles one might draw the greatest parallels; both writing long, poetic, romantic, gently nostalgic phrases, one in words, the other in music.

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Eugène Ysaÿe: Poème Élégiakue, Opus 12, 1892-3

The Belgian violinist Eugene Ysaÿe is perhaps best known for his notably virtuosic six solo violin sonatas. As well as his extraordinary technique, he was revered as a violinist for his warm, rich, expressive tone. He was indeed one of the first violinists to develop a highly personal sound as a means of emotional and musical expression. When Joachim heard his performance of Beethoven's concerto, he remarked that he had, "never heard anything like it", a somewhat mixed response to Ysaÿe's more, 'modern', emotional sound, which differed from the existing, 'classical' performance aesthetic. This knowledge about Ysaÿe's own playing gives insight into his compositions, meaning even the solo sonatas should be approached more with colour and freedom than technical bravura.

The mournful Poème Élégiakue, 1892-3, is particularly special because of its scordatura: the violin G string is tuned down to an F, making the violin sound a bit like a viola, and creating a unique

tonal world due to the ensuing unusual overtones of the instrument. Ysaÿe originally scored the work for violin and piano, later adapting it to solo violin with orchestra. He loved the freedom of the Poème form and wrote eight, for various instruments with orchestra. They probably suited his expressive style, and it is a great sensuous pleasure for a violinist to revel in the free, luscious harmonies and long, emotional phrases.

Ysaÿe was a great friend of Debussy, who dedicated his string quartet to him, also of Franck, who gave him his sonata as a wedding present, and of course Chausson. Chausson's *Poème* is the result of Ysaÿe's request to him for a concerto. There are clear parallels between the two poems: the ethereal trills near the end, the long, free musical ideas, Wagnerian harmonies, and ecstasies of tonal colour.

César Franck: Sonata for Violin and Piano in A major, 1886

Born in Liège, but studying in Paris from the age of 13 and usually considered a French composer, Franck was initially a

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piano prodigy, pushed towards a concert career by his father. Franck ultimately resisted this path, preferring to teach piano, play the organ in churches, and compose. Franck was known as a deeply spiritual man, and many of his works possess a quiet, sacred beauty. Now one of the most popular romantic sonatas of all time, his A major sonata for violin and piano was given to Eugene Ysaÿe at his wedding in 1886. Together with Franck's quintet, these late chamber works reveal a composer at his pinnacle of mastery. Written according to cyclic principles, the sonata has 4 movements, and actually seems to depict a marriage. There's the delicate *Allegretto ben Moderato*, in whose fragile themes one can hear the sweetness of burgeoning love. Then a dramatic, turbulent *Allegro molto* with incredibly virtuosic piano-writing, betraying Franck's pianistic origins, shows the more passionate sides of a relationship. The tragic *Recitativo-Fantasia* leaves the violinist often playing completely alone, with themes from the first movement reappearing, like memories of a lost beloved. The *Allegretto poco mosso* returns to a

lighter, reminiscent tone. It is in canonic form, so the instruments are constantly repeating each other and there's a happy, child-like mood throughout. This moment appears to represent the joy of family unity. The dramatic theme from the third movement reappears, emotionally transformed by the different musical context.

Ysaÿe performed the sonata for his wedding guests. Some months later, he played it at the Museum of Modern Painting in Brussels. Thanks to a late afternoon start, and no light allowed in the museum, Ysaÿe ended up performing in increasing darkness, eventually forced to play by memory. He took the first movement much faster than Franck prescribed, whether for musical reasons, or to get through it quickly and try to see the pages of the other movements. In any case, Franck stated that Ysaÿe's faster tempo was correct, and, "from now on there will be no other way to play it."

The Sonata is also transcribed for several instruments including cello and piano, the only other version Franck officially supported.



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Claude Debussy: Violin Sonata in G minor L.140, 1917

“An example of what may be produced by a sick man in time of war” was Debussy’s own description of his violin sonata, which he premiered with violinist Gaston Poulet in 1917. The violin sonata is his last work, the third of a planned cycle of six sonatas for various instruments, left unfinished by his death in 1918. Depressed by the war and his long battle with cancer, Debussy himself remarked on the contrast between his somber inner state and the light, exhilarating violin sonata; thirteen minutes of sensuous, bubbling exuberance.

Performer’s interpretation by Miriam Davis: this sonata, especially the second movement, contains unmistakably feline characteristics in its phrase shapes, languid transitions between notes, sudden variations of mood, indolent sensuality, playfulness etc. Knowing that Debussy always kept Angora cats, who must have been one of the few alleviating joys during his final illness, and his fondness for creating sonic images, such as La Mer, La Cathedrale Engloutie, and L’Après Midi d’un Faune, I believe this sonata was,

whether consciously or otherwise, greatly inspired by his beloved pets.

Debussy’s impressionistic language is innovative, breaking all former ‘rules’; using modal scales, floating tonalities, unresolved harmonies and extreme variation of articulation, texture and nuance to create his iridescent world. Strongly identifying as a French musician and rejecting Germanic influences, in this sonata can be heard the influences of Rameau and Couperin, as well as Spanish themes and inspirations from the gypsy violinist Béla Radics whom Debussy heard in Budapest in 1910. Debussy’s writing makes particular demands on the performers, who must conjure up an extremely vivid and varied unusual sound palette, within a quiet dynamic range. As in impressionist painting, very precise techniques are required to achieve floating impressionistic soundscapes.

There are clear similarities between the opening of the *Allegro Vivo* and the first movement of Franck’s Sonata. Dreamy piano chords provide a gossamer bloom upon which the violin’s triadic motif unfurls. Nostalgic mournfulness alternates with

passionate, knife-edge urgency, cushioned by sultry harmonies and liquid textures.

The *Intermède* is notable for its mercurial vibrance, transitioning instantaneously between skittish staccatos, pizzicatos and languid stretches.

The *Finale: très animé*, with its glittering piano lines, was actually written in 1916 before the other movements. It shares motivic material with the first movement before breaking into virtuosic violin cadenzas, glissandi and a “drunken waltz”, ultimately climaxing in an exhilarating coda.

Ernest Chausson: Poème - Opus 25, 1896

Chausson’s Poème is his best-known work, written at the request of his close friend Eugene Ysaÿe. Ysaÿe collaborated compositionally with him, especially on the cadenza and double-stop passages, resulting in the Chausson’s dedication, “ton poème.” Chausson produced three versions of the work: for violin and orchestra, violin and piano, and violin, string quartet and piano. Ysaÿe initially requested a concerto, but Chausson preferred the freedom of the Poème form.

Notable for its long, emotionally passionate

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phrases, chromatic, Wagnerian harmonies and use of leitmotifs, this work, like the Ysaÿe *Poème élégiaque*, allows the violinist to indulge in great sensualities of tone.

On the original score Chausson titled the work, “Le Chant de l’amour triomphant”, although he later crossed it out. This refers to the short story by one of his friends and favourite Russian writers, Ivan Turgenev. The “Song of Love Triumphant”, about a love triangle and a supernatural violin, may have been inspired by Turgenev’s own lengthy love affair with a married woman, the mezzo-soprano, Pauline Viardot.

The rich Chausson was a kindly man, a student of Franck, and also a friend of Debussy, whom he hosted in his house many times, enjoying what must have been spectacular musical soirées.

However, Chausson was known to have suffered from severe depression throughout his life, which may account for the depth of tragic feeling within his Poème and his few other compositions. His early death at the age of 44 whilst riding his bicycle in his garden, has been suggested to be a suicide.



BIOGRAPHIES

Miriam Davis

Violinist Miriam Davis and pianist Michael Bulychev-Okser have been performing together as a duo since 2019, when their performances of Chausson *Poème* first brought them together.

They have performed together throughout Europe and the Baltic States, both in chamber recitals and as double-concerto soloists in Mendelssohn's Double Concerto.

Especially admired for her performances of romantic and early-modern repertoire including Ysaÿe, violinist Miriam Davis has performed worldwide as a soloist and chamber musician. She is a prize-winner in numerous international competitions. Performance venues include Concertgebouw (Amsterdam),

Estonia Concert-Hall, Vanemuise Kontsertdimaja, Częstochowa Philharmonic Hall, Stoller Hall (Manchester), Stavanger Konserthus, Temppliaukio Church (Helsinki), Parco Della Music (Rome), St Martin-in-the-Fields (London), National Portrait Gallery (London) and Sage Gateshead Hall 1. As concerto soloist she has performed with conductors such as Peter Szilvay, Lilyan Kaiv, José Miguel Rodilla, Marc Moncusí and Oliver Weder.

Since 2017 Miriam has studied with renowned French violinist, Philippe Graffin, including receiving her Artist Diploma at Hague Royal Conservatory in 2018. Miriam completed her undergraduate studies at Royal College of Music London, on a full scholarship.





Michael Bulychev-Okser

Michael Bulychev-Okser is an internationally acclaimed American pianist, composer, pedagogue, and producer.

Hailed by New York Times as "enticing and brilliant", Michael Bulychev-Okser has performed on the world's most prestigious stages: Carnegie Hall, Merkin Hall (New York), Kennedy Center (Washington, D.C.), La Salle Pleyel (Paris), Wigmore Hall (London) among others.

Bulychev-Okser is a frequent guest at many music festivals, competition juries and concert series in the United States, England, France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Austria, Greece, Turkey, Netherlands, Finland, Estonia, Poland, Serbia, Ukraine, Mexico, Israel, Georgia, China, South Korea, and Singapore.

Michael Bulychev-Okser organises the Gershwin International Music Competition in New York, Classical Hugs Music Festival in Estonia, and "From Italy with Love" festival in New York.

Michael Bulychev-Okser is a Professor of Piano and Chamber Music at Lucy Moses School at Kaufman Music Center in New York.



ODE TO LOST TIME

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*"With special thanks to the people who have supported this recording,
and to Florian Leonhard Fine Violins for the loan of the
Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume violin Miriam plays on in this recording."*

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