



Martinů

Raphael Wallfisch

John York

3 Cello Sonatas

7 Arabesques



Bohuslav Martinů (1890-1959)

Raphael Wallfisch cello

John York piano

	Seven Arabesques H 201 (1931)	17.11
	(Etudes rythmiques)	
1	Poco allegro	1.55
2	Moderato	2.52
3	Andante moderato	2.38
4	Allegro	2.22
5	Adagio	3.28
6	Allegretto	1.53
7	Allegretto moderato	2.03
	Sonata No. 1 H 277 (1939)	17.45
8	I Poco allegro	6.03
9	II Lento	5.33
10	III Allegro con brio	6.09
	Sonata No. 2 H 286 (1941)	19.53
11	I Allegro	6.58
12	II Largo	7.14
13	III Allegro comodo	5.41

		Sonata No. 3 H 340 (1951-2)	19.49
14	I	Poco andante - Moderato - Allegro vivo	7.47
15	II	Andante	6.10
16	III	Allegro (ma non Presto)	5.52
			Total playing time 74.38

Martinů's works are listed with an identifying H from the catalogue of Belgian musicologist Harry Halbreich (1931 – 2016)

Recorded by Nimbus Records at Wyastone Leys, Monmouth, UK.
6-7 December 2017 & 5 April 2018 (Arabesques)

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Cover photo : Martinů in the USA, 1943

Inlay photo : Martinů at work on the 2nd cello sonata, Jamaica 1941

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John York writes:

The mid-20th century has a tragic and many-faceted story to tell where musicians from Europe, both Jewish and non-Jewish, are concerned. So many were either blacklisted, dismissed from their positions and forced into exile or transported to the camps and simply eliminated. Some, like Martinů, seemed unsettled wherever they were. He was blown hither and yon by events beyond his control but he managed to stay just one step ahead of the invaders, seeking a place where he and his wife could live well despite the war – and where he could work freely. This peripatetic existence was not eased by his difficult, possibly autistic, personality – but that did not prevent him from composing a vast and very successful amount of music in all genres, including an unusually large number of pieces for the cello. Some early sets of short pieces for cello and piano certainly helped him to gain an enormous confidence and facility in that

combination so that, when he came to compose his three sonatas, all written for specific cellists, the music could be filled with technical, idiomatic brilliance.

The son of the village fire warden of Polička, Bohemia, Martinů's early childhood was spent in the rooms at the top of the St Jakub church tower. He was a sickly child who often had to be carried up and down the tower stairs and this early life left him with chronic vertigo. (Much later, in the USA, he fell from a veranda as he walked alone at night - and nearly died.) He had violin lessons, entering the Prague conservatoire in 1906 where Josef Suk began to support and encourage his composing. His personality, however, soon caused problems and he was dismissed in 1910 – for laziness and negligence.

Works from this early period show an attractive late-Romantic character, especially the delightful sets of children's piano pieces called *Loutky* (Puppets) - but by his 30s he felt the need to breathe the free-wheeling avant-garde air of Paris and, in 1923, he obtained a small scholarship and moved to the French capital. There he sought the advice of Albert Roussel and quickly established a fine reputation among the leading musicians of the city. He loved all the new things cooking in the European musical melting pot – jazz, neo-Classicism, expressionism, especially in chamber music – and he changed his style completely. Our **Seven Arabesques** of 1931 display rhythmic quirkiness and repetition, an attractively dissonant colour and an entertaining individuality while generally adopting a straightforward ABA design. Melody, mechanical quasi-minimalist repetition, complicated syncopation, jazz and bravura – they're all here in generous helpings.

In 1932 his burgeoning success was reflected by his winning (with his string sextet) the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Prize, an American award with an illustrious pedigree. For two weeks he refused to believe the letter which told him he'd won and where the prize money of \$1000 could be found!

But this comfort and well-being were to change all too soon. **The first cello sonata** (1939) reflects the turbulence of the war's early months. An unsettling, obsessively rhythmic opening paragraph in the piano launches a motoric, sometimes jagged, triple-time dance, hardly stopping for breath. The ensuing Lento is completely

different – bleak, chilly, despairing and dissonant – and must surely be the composer's personal reaction to the betrayal, loss and destruction in his country. The finale might be an angry, defiant outpouring – or maybe it's simply a virtuoso toccata *à la manière française*, allowing the first performers, the great French cellist Pierre Fournier and Czech exile pianist Rudolf Firkušný, to show off. For me, the fantastic ending represents a train grinding to a halt in a war-ravaged Gare du Nord.

The Nazi invasion of Paris forced him to flee southwards, aided by the conductor Charles Munch, to Limoges and thence to Aix-en-Provence. Eventually, again helped as all escapees had to be, this time by the Swiss benefactor Paul Sacher, he took ship to the USA, never to return to his homeland. He was welcomed by fellow-Czech Frank Rybka, the dedicatee of **the second cello sonata**. While the harmonic language of the second further exploits and further develops much of the astringent dissonance of the first sonata, there are also plenty of real 'new world' colours, melodies full of the open spaces of Martinů's newly adopted country. Now, jazzy harmonies and rhythms are much more complex and varied. The second movement, however, still weeps and yearns darkly and desperately for Europe at its lowest ebb. Central to the slow movement's argument is a heart-rending song of despair from the piano alone which builds to a frenzied double cadenza. The brilliant finale is suddenly interrupted by a real Bohemian folk dance, nostalgic, stamping and thigh-slapping. And there's yet another cadenza, this time for the cello, just before the coda.

Martinů's later style has an attractive mix of pungent dissonance, motoric repetition, jazzy syncopation and some great tunes – and all these are in generous evidence in **the third cello sonata**. It inhabits a more positive world than the first two, well suited to its recently deceased dedicatee, cellist Hans Kindler whose personality was, reportedly, inveterately and delightfully upbeat. It is precisely this positivity which makes this sonata so much more elusive and problematic than its predecessors. The time signature, pulse and pace change constantly in the first movement, but there is still a glorious cello melody at its heart. The second movement is a bit eccentric. Starting in the stygian darkness of E flat minor, exactly where sonata number one's slow movement began, this movement soon enters the world of mechanical puppets, only to build an enormous climax and eventually to subside to a serene, very beautiful coda.

But what meaning lies at the heart of these two movements? Perhaps there is no definitive answer.

The finale is, quite simply, a gigue – a baroque dance in jaunty compound time, witty, syncopated and full of positive energy which suddenly stops while the piano tries out an F-major melody, quickly dissolving into mock Bach! This is surely circus music, responding to, and resolving, the quandaries of the earlier music and, for someone with Martinů's awkward character, almost hilarious. It is certainly huge fun to play – and the piano even seems to imitate bar-room music at the end.

John York, 2020

Raphael Wallfisch is one of the most celebrated cellists performing on the international stage. He was born in London into a family of distinguished musicians, his mother the cellist Anita Lasker-Wallfisch and his father the pianist Peter Wallfisch.

At an early age, Raphael was greatly inspired by hearing Zara Nelsova play, and, guided by a succession of fine teachers including Amaryllis Fleming, Amadeo Baldovino and Derek Simpson, it became apparent that the cello was to be his life's work. While studying with the great Russian cellist Gregor Piatigorsky in California, he was chosen to perform chamber music with Jascha Heifetz in the informal recitals that Piatigorsky held at his home.

At the age of twenty-four he won the Gaspar Cassadó International Cello Competition in Florence. Since then he has enjoyed a world-wide career. Teaching is one of Raphael's passions. He is in demand as a teacher all over the world holding the position of professor of cello in Switzerland at the Zürich Winterthur Konservatorium and at the Royal College of Music in London.

Raphael has recorded nearly every major work for his instrument. His extensive discography on EMI, Chandos, Black Box, ASV, Naxos and Nimbus explores both the mainstream concerto repertoire and countless lesser-known works by Dohnanyi, Respighi, Barber, Hindemith and Martinu, as well as Richard Strauss, Dvorak, Kabalevsky and Khachaturian. He has recorded a wide range of British cello concertos, including works by

MacMillan, Finzi, Delius, Bax, Bliss, Britten, Moeran, Walton and Kenneth Leighton. Britain's leading composers have worked closely with Raphael, many having written works especially for him including Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, Kenneth Leighton, James MacMillan, John Metcalf, Paul Patterson, Robert Simpson, Robert Saxton, Roger Smalley, Giles Swayne, John Tavener and Adrian Williams.

He lives in London with his wife, the violinist Elizabeth, and has three children, Benjamin, Simon, and Joanna. www.raphaelwallfisch.com

John York John York's career was launched over 40 years ago when he was awarded the International Debussy Prize in Paris, and it has taken him around the world as soloist with such orchestras as the London Philharmonic and London Mozart Players, and as chamber music partner, primarily with cellist Raphael Wallfisch and (with his wife Fiona) in the piano duo team of York2 and, more recently, Trio York. John's engagements in recent years have included recitals in Switzerland, the Netherlands and Oman, in Berlin and the Mitte Europa Festival in Saxony, at the Festival of the Sound in Ontario, at the Barossa Festival in Australia, the New World Festival in Venezuela and the Menuhin Festival in Gstaad. The Wallfisch/York team has a repertoire unmatched by any other – and a huge discography on Nimbus, ranging from Beethoven to Zemlinsky, from Bach to MacMillan. Recently they added the great works of Bloch and Rebecca Clarke and these will soon be joined by Martinu's three sonatas and Brahms' sonatas.

John plays the complete solo piano works of James MacMillan on two BBM CDs, 'Raising Sparks' and 'Kiss on wood'. York2 has released (also on Nimbus Records), to huge critical acclaim, their unique, block-busting four-hands one-piano repertoire, including *The Rite of Spring*, *La Mer*, *The Planets* and works of Ravel and York Bowen, etc.

John worked for 27 years with students of the highest level at Astona International of Switzerland. In the UK he was Professor for 33 years at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and he retired just a few years ago from his post as Senior Music Head at the illustrious St. Paul's Girls' School in London. Some of his compositions for various small ensemble groupings can also be heard on Youtube.



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NI 5974 **Brahms**, Sonatas Op. 78 and Op. 120 in arrangements for cello
NI 5943 **Bloch**, Sonata, Suite, Nigun, From Jewish Life, Méditation hébraïque
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