

WIGMORE HALL

Friday 16 May 2025
7.30pm

Sheku Kanneh-Mason cello
Castalian String Quartet
Sini Simonen violin
Daniel Roberts violin
Natalie Loughran viola
Steffan Morris cello

Natalie Klouda (b.1984) Suite for solo cello (2017, rev. 2019)
*I. Prelude (Bach Suite No. 1 in G) • II. Earth Dance (Bach Suite No. 2 in D minor) • III. Lament (Bach Suite No. 3 in C) •
IV. Inventions (Bach Suite No. 4 E flat) • V. Meditation (Bach Suite No. 6 in D) • VI. Finale (Bach Suite No. 5 in C minor)*

Thomas Adès (b.1971) Arcadiana Op. 12 (1994)
*I. Venezia notturno • II. Dasklinget so herrlich, dasklinget so schon •
III. Auf dem Wasser zu singen • IV. Et... (tango mortale) •
V. L'Embarquement • VI. O Albion • VII. Lethe Interval*

Franz Schubert (1797-1828) String Quintet in C D956 (1828)
*I. Allegro ma non troppo • II. Adagio •
III. Scherzo. Presto - Trio. Andante sostenuto • IV. Allegretto*



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Natalie Klouda Solo Cello Suite

Commissioned by cellist Ashok Klouda and dedicated to Anthony & Lekha Klouda

This is a Suite of six short, contrasting movements. Each movement is inspired by and paired with one of the Bach Cello Suites. Individual movements were originally commissioned to be performed alongside each of the JS Bach Cello Suites for a series of concerts given by Ashok Klouda on baroque cello at Conway Hall, London 2017/18. The première of the complete Suite was given by Ashok at the Highgate International Chamber Music Festival in 2019.

Writing a contemporary work for the baroque cello set up was an engaging starting point and I decided to draw on Ashok's Indian heritage and his love of Bach. There is a delicacy of nuance in the Indian Classical vocal tradition which I felt would lend itself well to the baroque bow and style of release in sound production. I was particularly drawn to the songs of Atul Prasad Sen, a renowned Bengali, composer, poet, philanthropist, educationist and lawyer, whose songs are known throughout India, and who was one of Ashok's distant relatives.

The sound world of these movements includes both Indian 'Thats' or seven note scales and to varying degrees also refers to the tonic of the relevant Bach Suite. The *scordatura* from Bach's 5th Suite is mirrored in the corresponding movement and the tuning change for the 6th movement happens during the 5th, as in Traditional Indian concerts, it is part of the performance. At times you will notice the Tanpura-like perfect 5th drone between ideas/phrases and also the element of dance which is so central to the Bach's Suites.

© Natalie Klouda

Et in arcadia ego... the phrase echoes down the history of western culture; an evocation of classical antiquity dating from a later age (most famously in Poussin's painting of 1638) but charged with a sombre, unsettling sense of beauty under the shadow of transience. For **Thomas Adès** — a composer whose whole career might be described as a conversation between past and present, innocence and experience — it's a natural motto. He composed his first string quartet *Arcadiana* in 1994 for The Endellion String Quartet, and he has given his own description of some (but not all) of its seven movements.

Six of the seven titles which comprise *Arcadiana* evoke various vanished or vanishing 'idylls'. The odd-numbered movements are all aquatic, and would splice if played consecutively. I might be the ballad of some lugubrious gondolier; III takes a title and a figuration from a Schubert Lied; in V a ship is seen swirling away to *L'isle joyeuse*; VII is the River of Oblivion.

The second and sixth movements inhabit pastoral Arcadias, respectively: Mozart's 'Kingdom of Night', and more local fields. The joker in this pack is the fourth movement, the literal dead centre: Poussin's tomb bearing the inscription *Even in Arcady am I*.

The sixth — *O Albion* — he leaves to speak for itself, though he has subsequently arranged it for string orchestra. Overtones of Elgar, of Vaughan Williams, and of the very English Arcadia evoked by Housman and Evelyn Waugh, are probably not coincidental.

On 25 September 1828, **Schubert** moved lodgings — on doctor's orders — to the fresh air of his brother's house in the Viennese suburb of Neue Wieden. A week later, on 2 October, he wrote to the publisher Probst that 'I have composed, among other things, three Sonatas for pianoforte solo...and finally turned out a Quintet for 2 violins, 1 viola and 2 violoncellos...If perchance any of these compositions would suit you, let me know'.

Somewhere around this time, it's known that Schubert played the viola in a performance of Beethoven's Quartet in C sharp minor, Op. 131 — and that it sent him 'into such transports of delight and enthusiasm that all feared for him'. He took a walking tour with three friends to Haydn's grave at Eisenstadt; but on 31 October his health took a turn for the worse. Less than three weeks later, he was dead. His manuscripts were sold to the publisher Diabelli, who did nothing with the Quintet until it was premièred, on 17 November 1850 by Georg Hellmesberger's string quartet.

So we're unlikely to find any first-hand explanation of why Schubert chose to write for the unusual combination of string quartet plus a second cello. C major is traditionally the brightest and sunniest of keys — but the brighter the sunlight, the darker and more pronounced the shadows. Within the quintet's very first chord there's chill, as a minor-key cloud obscures that sun. In the *Adagio*, violin, viola and cello sustain their rapt, endless song as if hovering in mid-air; barely tethered to earth by the second cello's pizzicato below and the birdlike fragments of melody far above. It's almost too fragile to withstand the pain that Schubert throws at it in the movement's violent central section.

A pounding hunting-scherzo suddenly halts for a *Trio* section of a near-static solemnity. And a jaunty dance-tune finale slows to near-immobility, as the matched pairs of instruments languish in bittersweet descending phrases. Schubert ends with one final ambiguity. His very last expression mark, written over the final note, was scrawled in such a way that it could be either an accent, or a diminuendo. Defiant shout or dying fall? It's forever open to the interpreters.

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Sheku Kanneh-Mason appears by arrangement with Enticott Music Management.

Sheku records exclusively for Decca Classics, and he plays a Matteo Goffriller cello from 1700 which is on indefinite loan to him.