

WIGMORE HALL

Friday 1 November 2024
7.30pm

Steven Isserlis cello
Joshua Bell violin
Irène Duval violin
Blythe Teh Engstroem viola
Jeremy Denk piano
Connie Shih piano

Joshua Bell is unwell; he has come down with food poisoning today. He is unable to play Fauré's Violin Sonata No. 1, as advertised. We are grateful to Irène Duval and Connie Shih for taking on Fauré's Violin Sonata No. 2 tonight, and to Joshua for agreeing to participate in Fauré Piano Quartet No. 1, despite his illness.

The updated programme is as follows:

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924) Violin Sonata No. 2 in E minor Op. 108 (1916-7)
I. Allegro non troppo • II. Andante • III. Allegro non troppo

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921) Piano Trio No. 1 in F Op. 18 (1864)
I. Allegro vivace • II. Andante • III. Scherzo. Presto • IV. Allegro

Interval

Nadia Boulanger (1887-1979) 3 pièces for cello and piano (1914)
Modéré • Sans vitesse et à l'aise • Vite et nerveusement rythmé

Gabriel Fauré Piano Quartet No. 1 in C minor Op. 15 (1876-9, rev. 1883)
I. Allegro molto moderato • II. Scherzo. Allegro vivo • III. Adagio • IV. Allegro molto

Thank you, our audience, for your understanding

Wigmore Hall is a no smoking venue. No recording or photographic equipment may be taken into the auditorium nor used in any other part of the Hall without the prior written permission of the management. In accordance with the requirements of City of Westminster persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, or to sit in any other gangways. If standing is permitted in the gangways at the sides and rear of the seating, it shall be limited to the number indicated in the notices exhibited in those positions. Disabled Access and Facilities - full details from 020 7935 2141. Wigmore Hall is equipped with a loop to help hearing aid users receive clear sound without background noise. Patrons can use this facility by switching hearing aids to 'T'.



Please ensure that watch alarms, mobile phones and any other electrical devices which can become audible are switched off. Phones on a vibrate setting can still be heard, please switch off.

The Wigmore Hall Trust Registered Charity No. 1024838
36 Wigmore Street, London W1U 2BP • Wigmore-hall.org.uk • John Gilhooly Director

Wigmore Hall Royal Patron HRH The Duke of Kent, KG
Honorary Patrons Aubrey Adams OBE; André and Rosalie Hoffmann; Louise Kaye; Kohn Foundation; Mr and Mrs Paul Morgan

 Department
for Culture
Media & Sport

 ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND

Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

 Registered with
**FUNDRAISING
REGULATOR**

The 60-year friendship between **Camille Saint-Saëns** and **Gabriel Fauré** began as a teacher/pupil relationship and retained something of that flavour for a long time, even though Saint-Saëns was only ten years older than Fauré. When they met, Fauré was a 16-year-old student at the Ecole Niedermeyer where Saint-Saëns, ever one to keep a distance from the establishment, taught in preference to seeking a post at the Paris Conservatoire. Whereas the Conservatoire focused on opera, Ecole Niedermeyer was founded on church music traditions. Saint-Saëns (paradoxically?) introduced his students to music regarded as dangerously modernist, and shared his love of chamber music, considered at the time to be suspiciously un-French. Fauré's compositions suggest that these influences could not have been passed on to a more receptive pupil, or one better equipped to resist mere imitation.

The Piano Trio in F was the first of Saint-Saëns's full-scale chamber works to be published. It was written in 1864, as he approached the age of 30, with much of the composition undertaken while he toured the Pyrenees and the Auvergne. In these mountainous regions of France, the folk music is permeated by the sound of the hurdy-gurdy, a stringed instrument worked by cranking a handle to produce a bagpipe-like drone. At several points in the Trio, most obviously the beginning of the *Andante*, allusions to this effect can be heard. The whole work has a pleasing aspect of fresh air and vigorous energy.

Mentions of **Nadia Boulanger** usually begin with a list of her illustrious pupils, a roster that includes many of the most celebrated composers and performers of the 20th Century. Her own most important early teacher was Gabriel Fauré. She joined his classes at the Conservatoire when she was nine, and continued to study composition with him until 1904, by which time she was 18. Throughout her career she championed his music. The 3 *pièces* for cello and piano were composed in 1914, four years before the early death of her sister and fellow composer Lili, upon which Nadia practically gave up composing in favour of teaching and performing.

Saint-Saëns continued to shepherd Fauré's career well beyond his time as the younger man's tutor. A vital part of this was introducing him to 'salon society', the close-knit group of intellectuals, artists and wealthy patrons who met in each other's homes to exchange ideas and, in modern parlance, to network. It was not only professional and artistic associations that were forged at these events – potential marriage partners were frequently steered together, and not always with happy outcomes.

The soirées of the contralto and socialite Pauline Viardot were particularly prestigious affairs. It was there that Fauré met Viardot's daughter Marianne, who seems to have been even more shy than he was. An awkward romantic relationship continued between them for about five years, eventually being formalised as an engagement in July 1877. Within four months Marianne had withdrawn her consent, much to Fauré's distress and embarrassment.

It was during this time that Fauré wrote the C minor Piano Quartet. Perhaps the stress and uncertainty of the relationship, and the gloom that followed its demise, contributed to the slow process of composition, which lasted from 1876-9. Even then he was unsatisfied with the finale; he rewrote it in 1883, three years after the work had been premièred at the Société Nationale de Musique in Paris.

Even if we subscribe to the theory that the personal circumstances of composers' lives are reflected their music, we shouldn't expect this work to embody a particular mood. It was after all a period of intense but fluctuating and uncertain emotions. Rather it is a masterly consolidation of all the elements that would from now on characterise Fauré's individual style: rhythmic and harmonic ambiguity, shimmering textures, and here and there the faint aroma of liturgical incense.

© Brian David 2024

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.