WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 10 April 2025
7.30pm

Hayoung Choi cello
Alim Beisembayev piano

Anton Webern (1883-1945)	Three Little Pieces Op. 11 (1914) *I. Mässige • II. Sehr bewegt • III. Äusserst ruhig*
Franz Schubert (1797-1828)	Arpeggione Sonata in A minor D821 (1824) *I. Allegro moderato • II. Adagio • III. Allegretto*
Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)	Cello Sonata in C Op. 65 (1960-1) *I. Dialogo. Allegro • II. Scherzo – Pizzicato •* *III. Elegia • IV. Marcia • V. Moto perpetuo*
	Interval
Witold Lutosławski (1913-1994)	Grave: Metamorphoses (1981)
Sergey Rachmaninov (1873-1943)	Cello Sonata in G minor Op. 19 (1901) *I. Lento. Allegro moderato • II. Allegro scherzando •* *III. Andante • IV. Allegro mosso*

UNDER 35S

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Please note the programme has changed slightly since these programme notes were written.

There is a curious symmetry to the fragments of sound that greet our ears in these three interlocking, miniature portraits by **Anton Webern** dating from 1914. A single, desolate note in the cello is answered by an abrupt piano *arpeggio*, and a splash of jazzy piano harmony is answered by a twang of *pizzicato*. The jagged lines of the second movement give way to the glassy trills and harmonics of the third, which levitate in mid-air over a bleak landscape of murky piano harmonies.

Webern's musical language was influenced by the teachings of Arnold Schoenberg and the Second Viennese School. In some ways, this quietly radical two-minute work, with its 12-tone chromaticism and finely-wrought structure, anticipates the Serialist techniques of his teacher.

The Viennese luthier Georg Staufer invented the Arpeggione in 1823. This fretted, six-stringed instrument was tuned like a guitar, but played like a cello. Although the Arpeggione failed to gain widespread popularity, its lasting musical legacy is this Sonata, written in 1824 by Staufer's friend, **Franz Schubert**. Schubert never wrote a cello sonata, but the two instruments are similar enough in range and timbre that it has been adopted by cellists the world over. The opening movement has a sense of poise and elegance, with carefree, radiant phrases contrasting with moments of minor-key introspection. A gentle *Rondo allegretto* rounds out the movement in reflective style. The luminous *Adagio* provides the achingly beautiful emotional heart of the work, and as the tempo halves, sorrow threatens to take over, before an improvisatory cadenza leads us upwards into the *Allegretto,* with its sighing opening theme. The lively second theme is dance-like and characterful, while the third theme (around the four-minute mark) see-saws up and down with embellishments of charm and beauty. The whole Sonata exhibits the bittersweet Schubertian quality of smiling through tears. One should be wary of ascribing particular autobiographical significance to some music, but in 1824, the composer was suffering with ill health, and although he was absorbed in his musical activities, his letters tell of his melancholic mood at the time.

In 1960, **Benjamin Britten** witnessed Mstislav Rostropovich perform Shostakovich's First Cello Concerto at the Royal Festival Hall. That evening, Britten resolved to compose a sonata of his own for the great Russian cellist. He created a piece that puts the soloist through their paces, with harmonics, *glissandi*, four-string chords and intricate *pizzicati* (plucked notes). Shostakovich's influence is clear throughout, from the splintered waltz of the opening movement to the demonic Serenade-gone-wrong of the second (those buzzing pizzicato figures!) and the lopsided *March*. The final movement even contains a homage to the Soviet composer in the form of the 'DSCH' theme – a four-note, stepwise-descending motif invented by Shostakovich as a kind of musical monogram. At the Sonata's first play-through the following year, Rostropovich recalled that they needed 'four or five very large whiskies' before they could begin. ('We played like pigs,' he added, 'but we were so happy.') The piece – by turns taut, ironic and passionate – remains an enduring testament to a great musical friendship.

Every cellist who wishes to play **Rachmaninov**'s Cello Sonata in G minor must first find themselves a willing pianist. For although the cello part has its challenges, the work is arguably a piano concerto in disguise. Perhaps this is not surprising: the work dates from 1901, the year after the Russian composer emerged from an all-consuming creative crisis to the great success of his Second Piano Concerto. The Sonata was dedicated to the great Russian cellist, Anatoly Brandukov, who gave the première with the composer himself at the piano. (Who else?)

The dreamlike haze of the opening *Lento* gives way to the *Allegro moderato*, with its march-like piano accompaniment and urgent, sinuous cello line. Echoes of the Second Piano Concerto can be heard in the calculated ratcheting-up of tension and the unabashed romanticism of the melodies. In the *Allegro scherzando*, motoring, minor-key triplets are anchored by staccato timpani-beats in the piano's left hand, and interspersed with interludes of shimmering beauty. The tender *Andante* cello theme unfolds over a lush piano accompaniment, whose major-minor oscillations create a sense of mysticism. Finally, all traces of shadow are banished by the eruption of joy in the G-major *Allegro*, with its energetic opening theme, and a secondary theme that soars like a love song over a rich, rippling piano part.