

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 10 June 2024
1.00pm

Ryan Corbett accordion

- Johann Sebastian Bach** (1685-1750) Chaconne from Partita No. 2 in D minor for solo violin BWV1004 (1720) *arranged by Ferruccio Busoni arranged by Ryan Corbett*
- Domenico Scarlatti** (1685-1757) Sonata in F sharp Kk318 *arranged by Ryan Corbett*
Sonata in B minor Kk87 *arranged by Ryan Corbett*
Sonata in D Kk214 *arranged by Ryan Corbett*
Sonata in D minor Kk141 *arranged by Ryan Corbett*
- Václav Trojan** (1907-1983) The Ruined Cathedral (1958)
- Felix Mendelssohn** (1809-1847) Rondo Capriccioso in E Op. 14 (1830) *arranged by Ryan Corbett*
- Vladislav Zolotaryov** (1942-1975) Rondo Capriccioso (pub. 1973)



This concert is being broadcast on BBC Radio 3



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New musical instruments appeared with uncommon regularity around the turn of the 18th Century, engendered by the scientific advances and booming market conditions of the age. The accordion, a close relative of the harmonium and harmonica, emerged in Germany in the early 1800s, perhaps first created in Berlin or possibly in Nuremberg. It gradually developed from a simple box supplied with a few keys, bellows and free reeds for the production of sound into a variety of instruments – some diatonic, others fully chromatic and capable of playing left-hand bass notes and chords. Ryan Corbett's Bugari Spectrum classical piano accordion, a miracle of the instrument-maker's art, stands at the apex of two centuries of evolution. Its wide range of tone colours, textures and shadings underpin his transcriptions of works by JS Bach, Domenico Scarlatti and Felix Mendelssohn. They are also sure to enhance two pieces conceived for accordion, Václav Trojan's *The Ruined Cathedral* and the thrilling twists and turns of Vladislav Zolotaryov's *Rondo Capriccioso*.

Although arrangements for piano of works by, among others, Bach, Bizet, Liszt and Wagner amount to only a fraction of **Ferruccio Busoni's** considerable achievements as composer, performer and teacher, they continue to fascinate players and audiences alike. His transcription of the *Chaconne* from **Bach's** Partita in D minor for solo violin, made during the late 1890s and dedicated to the Glasgow-born German pianist and composer Eugen d'Albert, fortifies the substance of Bach's work with mighty octave doublings, enriched chords and quasi-orchestral flourishes. The piece unfolds as a set of progressively elaborate melodic variations based on a short chord sequence repeated 64 times, above which Bach spins a complex polyphonic web.

Ryan Corbett has chosen to arrange four fine works from **Scarlatti's** tally of 555 keyboard sonatas. He opens with the Sonata in F sharp Kk318, an exquisitely tender piece. Its second half begins with a contemplative section in B flat minor which modulates gracefully back to F sharp for a sequence of rapid descending scales and an elaboration of material from the work's first half. A generation was introduced to the Sonata in B minor Kk87 thanks to the sublime recording of it made by Clara Haskil in the early 1950s. Its imitative counterpoint grows from a theme stated in the first three bars. The simple idea is obsessively repeated in the work's first half, as is the long-short-long rhythmic pattern that pervades its second half.

Scarlatti's fascination with imitative counterpoint often led him to ignore textbook rules of harmony: for instance, at one point early in the Sonata in D Kk214, his focus on the pursuit of the work's jig-like main theme is such that the music sounds as if it is simultaneously in two different keys. The Sonata in D minor Kk141 offers a platform for Ryan Corbett to display the accordion's (and his) facility for playing multiple repeated notes and fleeting arpeggios. The work, more toccata than sonata, exploits technical jeopardy, silent bars, sudden contrasts and

abrupt key changes to create and sustain dramatic tension.

Czech composer **Václav Trojan**, best known for his soundtrack scores for Jiří Trnka's animated puppet films, was moved to create *The Ruined Cathedral* by an image of the remains of Dresden's Frauenkirche. The famous Baroque church had been reduced to rubble during the joint British and American bombing raid on the city in February 1945, leaving intact little more than its high altar and chancel. Trojan's atmospheric meditation on the Frauenkirche's remains, an allegory for human folly, dates from 1958, the year in which the anti-war Christian Peace Conference was founded in Prague. *The Ruined Cathedral* begins with a barely audible lament, like the ghostly echo of an organ prelude. Its music grows in intensity, helped by the addition of deep, sonorous bass notes, periodically exchanging its wistful character for more agitated interludes before returning to the austere ground of its opening.

In the winter of 1824 **Felix Mendelssohn** became a pupil of the celebrated Czech pianist and composer Ignaz Moscheles. 'This afternoon, from two to three o'clock,' he recalled, 'I gave [him] his first lesson, without losing sight for a single moment of the fact that I was sitting next to a master, not a pupil'. Other contemporaries spoke of Mendelssohn's effortless technique and ability to extract and suggest orchestral colours from the piano. In short he was an imaginative and perceptive performer, known also for his breathtaking improvisations. His piano compositions have declined in popularity since their Victorian heyday, a reflection more of changing tastes than the consequence of any shortcomings in their invention or melodic charm. *Rondo Capriccioso* in E Op. 14 offers the strongest support for Moscheles's opinion of his young colleague's masterful pianism, its enchanting score completed in 1830. After a lyrical slow introduction in E major, the rondo section appears in the minor mode, its immediately attractive themes evoking images of benign spirits and Oberon's fairy kingdom.

Vladislav Zolotaryov, born in Russia's far east soon after Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union, excelled as a virtuoso bayan or chromatic button accordion player. After studying his instrument in the port city of Magadan, gateway to the gulag prisons of Kolyma, he received private lessons in composition from Rodion Shchedrin in the late 1960s and subsequently studied (and clashed) with Tikhon Khrennikov at the Moscow Conservatory. Beset by depression and suicidal thoughts, he took his own life in 1975. Zolotaryov's compositions for bayan greatly extended the instrument's conventional technical limits, not least through enriching its polyphonic persona and experimenting with new sounds and effects. *Rondo Capriccioso*, first published in 1973, bears witness to Zolotaryov's virtuosity as a player and the striking individuality of his voice as a composer.

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