

# WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 10 October 2023  
7.30pm

## The Legacy of Pablo Casals

Steven Isserlis cello  
Connie Shih piano

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)	Viola da Gamba Sonata No. 1 in G BWV1027 (before 1741) <i>I. Adagio • II. Allegro ma non tanto • III. Andante • IV. Allegro moderato</i>
Emanuel Moór (1863-1931)	Largo Op. 105 for cello and piano (pub. 1910)
Pablo Casals (1876-1973)	Pastoral (1893)
Édouard Lalo (1823-1892)	Cello Sonata (1856) <i>I. Andante non troppo • II. Andante • III. Allegro</i>
Interval	
Enrique Granados (1867-1916)	Intermezzo from <i>Goyescas</i> (1915) <i>arranged by Gaspar Cassadó</i>
Pablo Casals	Morceau de concours (1907)
Gaspar Cassadó (1897-1966)	Requiebros (pub. 1931)
Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)	Cello Sonata No. 2 in F Op. 99 (1886) <i>I. Allegro vivace • II. Adagio affettuoso • III. Allegro passionato • IV. Allegro molto</i>



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## Pablo Casals (1876-1973)

The great Catalan cellist, composer, humanist, activist and conductor Pablo (or Pau) Casals is perhaps best known today for his popularisation of the Bach cello suites, although his impact on cello repertoire and technique extends far beyond the suites. Born in 1876, his musical talents were evident from an early age, and while studying at music school in Barcelona as a young teenager he stumbled across the Bach scores in an old music shop near the harbour. It would be another 12 years before Casals felt ready to perform a complete suite in public, so beginning a lifelong mission to promote them as profound works in their own right (they had previously been dismissed as technical studies). A virtuosic soloist, he was also a consummate orchestral player and chamber musician, touring internationally with his piano trio. By his mid-20s, he had performed for Queen Victoria and founded an orchestra (the Orquestra Pau Casals in Barcelona), as well as helping to found the Ecole Normale de Musique in Paris. With the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, he left the country, and later announced his retirement from performing in 1946 in protest against General Franco's regime. Despite returning to performance in 1950, he continued his crusade for peace from Puerto Rico, where he remained active as a humanitarian and performer until his death in 1973 at the age of 97. Reflecting on his longevity, Casals said: 'Age is relative. If we continue to work and absorb the beauties of the world around us, we shall soon realise that an increasing number of years do not have to mean we are growing old. Now that I am in my nineties I feel some things more intensely than when I was a young man - and I find life more and more fascinating every day.'

Some ambiguity surrounds the date and origin of **Bach's** viola da gamba sonatas, but whether they were written during his tenure as Kapellmeister in Cöthen, or later, during his time in Leipzig (1730s-40s), this expressive and intimate work offers rich scope for interpretation on the cello. The higher tessitura of the viola da gamba - a fretted, bowed instrument with six (or sometimes seven) strings - means that much of the sonata sits in the upper register of the cello. The opening movement is in an elegant triple meter, and its bright G major temperament finds an eerie counterpart in the melancholic, questioning melody of the third movement, while the final *Allegro moderato* brings the sonata to a dancing conclusion.

The Hungarian composer **Emanuel Moór** was a prolific composer whose talents also extended to inventing musical instruments. Best-known was the Moór piano which, by means of a double keyboard and a tracking device, enabled each hand to span two octaves. More eccentric still was the giant violin, a hefty 1.5 metres in length, complete with a foot pedal to move the bow. Thankfully neither of these devices is

required for the *Largo*, written for Casals, who became a close friend and champion of the Hungarian's music.

It is easy to overlook the impact **Pablo Casals** had on cello technique. He objected to the rigid technique his teachers attempted to instil in him ('We were taught to play with a stiff arm,' he reminisced, lamenting that he was 'obliged to keep a book under the armpit'). He developed a freer technique, and there is a joyful sense of liberation in the *Pastorals* expansive, lilting tune, which revels in a legato and expressive bowing style.

It is 200 years since the year of **Édouard Lalo's** birth, and the French composer's best-known composition, the Cello Concerto, owes much of its popularity, like so much cello repertoire, to Casals's performances and recordings of the work. The Cello Sonata is less well known, but its three movements provide a dramatic showcase for both pianist and cellist, with the passionate opening movement situating us firmly in the stormy world of mid-19th-century Romanticism.

Casals's legacy lives on through the many cellists he taught and mentored, who included Amaryllis Fleming, Pierre Fournier, Mstislav Rostropovich and Paul Tortelier. **Gaspar Cassadó** (1897-1966) was Casals's countryman and pupil, and like his teacher, he also arranged repertoire for the cello - this fiery *Intermezzo*, arranged by Cassadó in 1923, is originally from *Goyescas*, **Enrique Granados's** 1915 opera inspired by a series of paintings by the Spanish painter, Goya.

Infused with characteristic Spanish style, Casals's *Morceau de concours* is a short show-piece beginning with a march-like melody that, once echoed in the piano part, soars into the upper limits of the cello's register, ending with an enigmatic, diminished-seventh flourish.

The Spanish term *Requiebro* translates as an 'expression of admiration', and it was no doubt in this spirit that Cassadó dedicated this lively, charming piece to his teacher Casals. Gaspar described Casals as his 'spiritual father', and spoke of the revelatory effect of hearing his playing for the first time.

Written 20 years after his first cello sonata, **Brahms** endowed this work, dating from 1886, with a symphonic sweep, and a grand, four-movement design. The opening *Allegro vivace* surges into life with unstoppable momentum and bubbling energy, while the heroics give way to music of great poignancy and tenderness in the slow movement. The stormy scherzo contrasts with the songlike final movement, where the piano and cello interweave musical ideas in a vibrant and dynamic exchange, bringing the sonata to a triumphant conclusion.

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