

WIGMORE HALL



Sunday 11 June 2023
11.30am

Borletti-Buitoni Trust 20th Anniversary Weekend

Sivan Magen harp
Simone Rubino marimba
Filippo Gorini piano
Geneva Lewis violin

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue in D minor BWV903
transcribed for harp by Sivan Magen (before 1723)

Cello Suite No. 3 in C BWV1009 transcribed for marimba
by Eduardo Egüez (c.1720)

Allemande • Sarabande • Bourrée I and II

From *Art of Fugue* BWV1080 (by 1742, rev. 1745-9)

Contrapunctus 1 • Contrapunctus 11

Chaconne from Partita No. 2 in D minor for solo violin
BWV1004 (1720)



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The influence of **Johann Sebastian Bach** has been of paramount importance in the ensuing history of Western classical music. That influence can be traced through Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, Schumann, Debussy *et al.*, and has perhaps grown even more with the 'rediscovery' of period instrument practice. Just take the view of one of our artists today, Simone Rubino: 'For me, Johann Sebastian Bach is immortal... a wellspring of inspiration!'

In this morning's concert we hear unadulterated Bach only at the very end: the *Chaconne* from his solo violin Partita No. 2, played on an instrument that is almost contemporary with Bach, having been made roughly 16 years after his death.

Bach would not have been surprised by hearing two of *Art of Fugues*' contrapuncti on a piano, even if a modern Steinway is worlds away from the early keyboards he would be used to; but I wonder what he would make of his music on the harp and marimba, the latter presumably impossible to imagine for a Baroque composer.

It is the harp we hear first, in **Sivan Magen's** own transcription of the extraordinarily forward-looking *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue* in D minor BWV903, which dates from Bach's years at Cöthen, around 1720, although revised later. One of his own favourites, it outdoes even his *The Well-tempered Clavier Book I* (from the same period) in exploring the new-fangled equal temperament for, originally, the keyboard. The chromaticism Bach employs heavily disguises the stated key, outdoing many examples by other composers of the period. Magen's transcription was inspired by Zoltán Kodály's for solo viola.

The *Fantasia* (somewhat longer than the ensuing *Fugue*) is like an extended improvisation: a short toccata to start, followed by a long recitative-like section, before toccata elements creep back in, visiting such remote keys as B flat minor and C sharp minor with inspired use of chromaticism and enharmonic equivalents. The coda is only five bars long, with a colossal, slowly descending crotchet chromatic scale. The three-part stately *Fugue* is less improvisatory, although its middle section still roams harmonically far and wide. Bach bends the rules of fugue a little before a typical Bachian flourish to end.

From the same period – indeed all Bach's Cello Suites are dated to 1720 – we hear Bach on the marimba, as transcribed by Argentine lutenist **Eduardo Egüez** especially for Simone Rubino, working from the lute and basso continuo accompanied version of the *Suite*. Unlike the Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin, we don't have Bach's own manuscript of the solo cello suites, but we do have his second wife Anna Magdalena's copy from later that decade. The cello suites are all based on typical Baroque suite form of dances following a prelude. We

hear three of the dances, including two of the Suites' standard four, starting with the *Allemande*, originally – as the name suggests – from Germany. With its typical up-beat start and constant semiquaver motion, the marimba's tone bars enhance the infectious music with their mesmeric 'ping.' The *Sarabande*, a slow, stately triple-time aristocratic dance, had its origins as a wild 16th-century dance in Spain, with perhaps Moorish influence. Here it is the *Suite's* only movement which uses extensive multiple stopping on the cello to create harmonies, more easily achievable on the marimba. We end with the 'guest' dances, a pair of *Bourées*: the first jaunty and carefree with the expected change of key, to C minor; the second contrastingly more thoughtful and considered.

Composed in the last five years of his life, Bach's last, great work *Die Kunst der Fuge* ('Art of Fugue'), was left unfinished – the final 14th fugue incomplete. Filippo Gorini has been exploring this multi-faceted work in a series of forthcoming video interviews which interrogate each of the contrapuncti with a range of artistic practitioners from the fields of music, dance, choreography, art, architecture and mathematics, while his Alpha Classics recording includes his own written sonnets and haikus inspired by the work. He plays today the very opening, *Contrapunctus 1*, where a solo alto voice is gradually joined by other voices, intertwining with exquisitely controlled layering (Gorini sees this as 'The unknown, remembered gate'). Over twice the length, *Contrapunctus 11* – Gorini's 'Past and future gathered' – is a triple fugue, similarly contemplative and growing in intensity to the close.

Unique to all of Bach's solo instrumental works, his Second Partita for solo violin ends with a 15-minute *Chaconne*, almost overpowering and overshadowing the Partita's earlier movements. It may have been a response to the news Bach had, while away from his family, that his wife had died. His second surviving son, Carl Philipp Emanuel, wrote: 'Having spent 13 years in happy marriage with this, his first wife, he suffered the severe distress of discovering, on his return to Cöthen from a journey, that she had passed away and been buried, although he had left her in the full bloom of health at his departure. The first report that she had fallen ill and died only reached him as he entered his house.' Some have seen Bach's wife's name, Maria Barbara, enshrined as a musical motif in the work, in which Bach utilises double, triple and sometimes quadruple stopping to create polyphonic lines. The effect, in Brahms's words, is to produce 'one of the most wonderful, incomprehensible pieces of music... [and]... a whole world of the deepest thoughts and most powerful feelings.'

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