

WIGMORE HALL 125

Monday 12 January 2026
1.00pm

Cuarteto Casals

Abel Tomàs violin

Vera Martínez-Mehner violin

Cristina Cordero Beltrán viola

Arnau Tomàs cello

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) From Art of Fugue BWV1080 (1742, rev. 1748-9)

Contrapunctus 1 • Contrapunctus 4 •

Contrapunctus 6 • Contrapunctus 9

Joaquín Turina (1882-1949) La oración del torero Op. 34 (1925)

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975) String Quartet No. 3 in F Op. 73 (1946)

I. Allegretto • II. Moderato con moto •

III. Allegro non troppo • IV. Adagio • V. Moderato



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Bach began work on *Art of Fugue* (or *The Art of the Fugue*, as *Die Kunst der Fuge* can also be translated) around 1742, leaving it unfinished on his death in 1750. One of a series of late works that also include the Mass in B Minor, the second book of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* and the *Goldberg Variations*, it distils an entire life of artistic creativity and spiritual reflection. It consists of 14 fugues and four canons, arranged in increasing complexity. There have been various attempts – musical, mathematical and metaphysical – at explaining Bach's intentions in collating the *Art of Fugue* as he did, but perhaps the simplest one is that it was a pedagogical exercise intended to illustrate to students and scholars the various permutations of complex counterpoint. There is certainly a learned quality to the work, as suggested by Bach's use of the Latin word *contrapunctus* to describe each fugue.

The manuscript is arranged over four staves, with a single part allocated to each line of music. This suggests that Bach did not necessarily have a keyboard instrument in mind (as he did when composing the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, for instance). And did he intend for the work to be performed as a single whole, or can performers pick and choose from among its movements? The lack of any explicit directions in the score means that performers enjoy complete freedom to interpret the *Art of Fugue* according to their tastes and inclinations. The selection performed this evening includes the *Contrapunctus 6*, described as being 'in the French style' in reference to its use of dance-like dotted rhythms – a human touch amidst so much cerebral learning.

The inspiration for *La oración del torero* (The Bullfighter's Prayer), Op. 34, came to **Turina** one sultry afternoon in Madrid. As he recalled: 'I was by the stables, and there, behind a small door, there was a chapel filled with incense, where the bullfighters came to pray for a moment before facing death. Then, in all its plenitude, I was presented with that subjectively musical and expressive contrast between the distant hubbub of the bullring, the audience waiting for the fiesta, and the devotion of those who come to that altar, poor and full of touching poetry, where they pray to God for their lives, perhaps for their souls, for pain, for excitement, and for the hope that that maybe they will depart forever in a few minutes, in this arena full of laughter, music and sunshine.'

La oración del torero was originally composed between 31 March and 6 May 1925 for an ensemble of *laúdes*, a variety of Spanish lute widely employed in folk ensembles. Almost immediately, however, Turina produced a version for string quartet, as well as for string orchestra. It consists of five sections, played without a break: *Introduction brève* – *Pasodoble* – *Andante* – *Lento* – *Pasodoble (repetición)*. It is certainly full of the sounds of Spain, with the players imitating not just lutes, but guitars and even castanets

too. Turina was born in Seville, and there is more than a dash of Andalucía to *La oración del torero*. But he was also clearly harking back to his composition lessons with d'Indy in Paris between 1905 and 1914, and where, like his compatriot de Falla, he encountered the evocative, sun-drenched scores of Debussy and Ravel.

In February 1936, **Shostakovich**'s opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* was viciously attacked in the pages of *Pravda* and swiftly removed from the repertoire. He rehabilitated himself with the Symphony No. 5 in D minor, Op. 47 – the first of a series of major symphonic and chamber works that included the Piano Quintet, Op. 57, which won him a Stalin Prize in 1940. At around the same time, Shostakovich also turned to the string quartet, composing a sequence of 15 such works between 1938 and 1974. Intensely private counterparts to his more public symphonies, the quartets document his experience of living in a highly repressive, authoritarian regime and developing a musical language that might avoid ideological criticism whilst still speaking to his attentive listeners.

The Quartet No. 3 in F, Op. 73, was composed between 26 January and 2 August 1946, and some have heard it as an attempt to convey the experience of the Second World War in musical form. Its five movements may originally have had explicit subtitles, although these were ultimately suppressed in the final version of the score:

- I. 'Calm unawareness of the future cataclysm'
- II. 'Rumblings of unrest and anticipation'
- III. 'The forces of war unleashed'
- IV. 'Homage to the dead'
- V. 'The eternal question: Why? And for what?'

Whether these were meant in earnest, or designed to distract the censor, the quartet certainly mimics the structure and even the tempo markings of the wartime Symphony No. 8. Whatever the authenticity of the narrative that some have read into it, the quartet was particularly dear to its composer. For Shostakovich, as for many so Soviet citizens, contemplating the suffering of the war years became a way of alluding to the unspeakable trauma of the Stalin era. The violist Fyodor Druzhinin recalled him weeping at a rehearsal: 'the only time that I saw Shostakovich so open and defenceless'. Other listeners were haunted by it too, singling out the solemn passacaglia that forms its fourth movement, and above all its ethereal final chords. There were attempts to nominate it for a Stalin Prize, although Shostakovich's critics deemed its musical language too experimental to be accessible to the masses. In 1946, though, there was a prize for the Beethoven Quartet, to whom the third quartet was dedicated and who gave its première on 16 December 1946.