

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 13 June 2022 7.30pm

Natalie Clein cello

Cédric Pescia piano

CLASSIC *f*M Wigmore Hall £5 tickets for Under 35s supported by Media Partner Classic FM



This concert is part of the CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust ticket scheme, offering free tickets to those aged 8-25

Ernest Bloch (1880-1959)

Méditation hébraïque (1924)

Elisabeth Lutyens (1906-1983)

9 Bagatelles (1942)

*Molto moderato • Adagio • Allegretto grazioso • Poco allegro •
Piacevole • Allegro ma non troppo • Solenne • Commodo • Andante*

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Arpeggione Sonata in A minor D821 (1824)

I. Allegro moderato • II. Adagio • III. Allegretto

Interval

Brian Elias (b.1948)

L'innominata (2018)

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Cello Sonata No. 2 in F Op. 99 (1886)

*I. Allegro vivace • II. Adagio affettuoso •
III. Allegro passionato • IV. Allegro molto*

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The *Méditation hébraïque* appeared in the same year as **Ernest Bloch's** scenes *From Jewish Life* (also for cello and piano), and eight years after *Schelomo* for cello and orchestra. Its melodic contour features doleful quarter-tone alterations and the characteristic augmented second interval found in Jewish music. It was dedicated to the great Pablo Casals, who gave its première in New York in 1926. In these 'Jewish' works, Bloch was not interested in reviving or preserving authentic melodies. Instead, he said, 'It is the Jewish soul that interests me ... It is all that I endeavour to hear in myself and to transcribe in my music: the venerable emotion of the race that slumbers way down in our souls.'

Elisabeth Lutyens's career as a composer was sadly impeded on several fronts. Aside from the difficulties of entering a male-dominated profession, she had to balance composition with motherhood and battle with alcoholism and mental health problems, taking on commercial work writing scores for horror and sci-fi films in order to support her husband and four children. But she was equally uncompromising, whatever she was writing. 'Do you want it good, or do you want it Wednesday?' was one of her retorts. As an early adopter in England of Schoenberg's 12-tone serial technique, she earned the nickname 'Twelve-Tone Lizzie'. Lutyens's *9 Bagatelles* for cello and piano were followed by five for piano (1962), six for chamber orchestra (1976) and three further books for piano (1979), the first book of which was première at Wigmore Hall at a Lutyens 75th-anniversary concert in 1981. In the manner of Webern, the *9 Bagatelles* are brief, fleeting, poetic, yet the textures are clear (No. 7 is almost pointillistic). For all that they are largely atonal, there are melodies that are lyrical in their own way, and a kind of consonance that emerges from harmonies that on paper are dissonant.

Invented in 1823, the arpeggione was described as a 'bowed guitar' and is effectively a bass viol with six strings (tuned to the same pitches as a guitar), the two extra strings allowing the player the ability to take on fast passagework and leaps without changing position on the fingerboard as often. **Franz Schubert's** sonata is usually played today on either viola or cello with piano. He composed the sonata in 1824, soon after completing *Die schöne Müllerin* and the 'Death and the Maiden' quartet and just before beginning his 'Great' C major Symphony (No. 9). The sonata exudes warmth and intimacy. The plaintive, minor-key opening theme of the first movement – passed from piano to cello – contrasts with the major-key second theme, which incorporates a playful circular semiquaver figure and light-hearted yodel-like leaps. The development section opens with a sunnier (major-key) version of the first theme with gentle pizzicato accompaniment on the cello. The climax is given to the second theme, now more frantic. The return of the two main themes is then followed by a sombre coda. The tender *Adagio* second movement is a testament to Schubert the

song composer, a grateful tune for the cellist. But a slower, more dreamlike section emerges, venturing into wider harmonic depths, before a brief but blissful cadenza leads directly into the final-movement *Allegretto*. Cast in a rondo, its main theme – an easeful, lyrical idea – alternates with episodes featuring folk-like elements. This is far from a rousing, flashy finale, yet there is a satisfying, comforting sense of closure.

Born in Mumbai, **Brian Elias** came to Britain at the age of 13 and has become one of Britain's leading composers – the subject of a Focus Day here at Wigmore Hall last April and of a forthcoming retrospective at Kent's Music@Malling Festival in September. Early in his career he studied for a while with Lutyens, who became a mentor and remained influential on his work. Written for Natalie Clein, *L'innominata* (meaning 'The Unnamed' or 'The Nameless') is a searching, sometimes disquieting piece whose slower outer *adagio* sections tend towards an air of despair – the expression of human emotion not surprising for a composer who has written profusely and profoundly for the human voice. The central *allegro* brings more vigour but no less intensity.

Elisabeth Lutyens might not have approved of the final piece in tonight's programme – towards the end of her life, she declared **Johannes Brahms** 'a composer I now passionately dislike'. He wrote his second Cello Sonata, as well as the Violin Sonata No. 2 and the C minor Piano Trio, in the summer of 1886 near Lake Thun in Switzerland. Of the three works, the Cello Sonata is on the largest scale and the most extrovert. The first movement bursts into being with a passionate, almost brash cello theme supported by a *tremolando* accompaniment in the piano. The second theme is equally bold, beginning with a chordal treatment in the piano. After the two themes are repeated, the development sees a cooling of temperature, but with the *tremolos* featuring in a fairly sustained way in the cello before the return of the main themes. The second movement opens with a relaxed theme on piano, accompanied by a plucked, 'walking' bass line in the cello (70 years later, this might have been called jazz!); then the instruments swap roles. The expressive central section opens with a ruminative new cello theme beginning with an upward leap.

The third movement scherzo returns to a passionate, driven expression, but, introduced by three gentle piano chords, the central section is more relaxed. Like that of Schubert's Arpeggione Sonata, Brahms's last movement is not a firecracker but cast in a rondo form. As Brahms biographer Malcolm MacDonald has pointed out, the imploring second contrasting theme (on cello) cannot, as some have suggested, have been lifted from the clown Canio's tragic aria 'Vesti la giubba' from Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*, simply because the opera had not yet been written!

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