

WIGMORE HALL

Friday 14 February 2025
7.30pm

Sean Shibe guitar
Sasha Savaloni guitar

Fernando Sor (1778-1839)

L'Encouragement Op. 34 (1828)
I. Cantabile • II. Theme and Variations • III. Waltz

Isaac Albéniz (1860-1909)

Córdoba from *Cantos de España* Op. 232
Capricho Catalan from *España* Op. 165

Manuel de Falla (1876-1946)

Danza Española from *La vida breve* (c.1904-13)

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Theme and Variations in D minor Op. 18b (1860)
arranged by John Williams

Interval

Gabriella Smith (b.1991)

Loop the Fractal Hold of Rain (2017)

Per Nørgård (b.1932)

Wasser und Rosen for 2 guitars *UK première*

David Fennessy (b.1976)

JACK *I live performance première*

Sara Glojnaric (b.1991)

Latitudes #5/DISCO IS A SYMPTOM *UK première*



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Duet playing, embedded in western classical music for centuries, received a boost in the early 1800s with the spread of lithographic printing and the cheap editions it produced. **Fernando Sor** was among the early beneficiaries of the new technology, especially so after he moved from Paris to London following Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo. The guitarist and composer, born in Barcelona and a graduate of its military academy, attracted patronage from James Duff, fourth Earl Fife, who had fought with the Spanish resistance against Napoleon during the Peninsula War. Sor's society connections, the Prince Regent and Duke of Sussex among them, drew the attention of London's leading music publishers and led to the publication of over 50 of his works. *L'Encouragement*, first published in Paris in 1828, was conceived as a teaching piece, a fantasy for two guitars 'dedicated to one of [Sor's] lady pupils', as its subtitle notes. The piece comprises an opening Cantabile, a theme and variations, and a waltz, with the first guitar assigned to *L'élève*, the pupil, and the mostly chordal second guitar taken by *Le maître*, the teacher.

Isaac Albéniz gave his first piano recital around the age of five, made his name soon after as a gifted performer and progressed to compose works that heightened the international reputation of Spanish music. 'Cantos de España' began life in 1892 as a suite of three piano pieces to which the composer added two more for its second edition. 'Córdoba', one of the additions, reflects the composer's evocation of the Andalusian city, with its sublime Islamic architecture, cosmopolitan history and distant echoes of the Moorish *gusla*, a bowed single-stringed instrument: 'In the silence of the night, interrupted by the whispering aromatic breeze of jasmines, the *guslas* accompany the serenatas and their fervent melodies, which diffuse in the air notes as sweet as the sound of the palms swaying in the sky above.' 'Capricho Catalan', the fifth of six 'album leaves' composed in London in 1890 for Albéniz's own piano recitals, evokes the warmth of the Catalan countryside. Both 'Córdoba' and 'Capricho catalan' are ideally suited to two guitars.

Manuel de Falla achieved prominence as composer and pianist after moving to Paris in 1907. He had completed much of his opera *La vida breve* ('Life is short') before leaving his native Spain but was unable to secure a performance there. It was first staged in Nice, presented in a French translation; encouraged by Debussy, Falla revised and enhanced the work for its production in December 1913 at the Opéra-Comique in Paris. The vivacious 'Danza española', from the opening scene of the opera's second act, gained an independent life thanks to its many transcriptions. **Brahms**, an attentive student of J.S. Bach's counterpoint, looked to the Baroque *chaconne* to supply the formal structure of the sombre slow movement of his String Sextet in B flat major Op. 18. The composer's dazzling invention so impressed Clara Schumann that she asked him to transcribe the piece for solo piano in time for her birthday in September 1860. John Williams's

arrangement for two guitars underlines the dramatic contrasts and cumulative power of Brahms's variations.

Gabriella Smith, raised in the San Francisco Bay Area, declares that her work 'invites listeners to find joy in climate action'; it also reflects her deep love for the natural world and desire to distil awe-inspiring vistas into 'sonic landscapes'. Her 'Loop the Fractal Hold of Rain', written for Duo Noire in 2017, begins with a vertigo-inducing rhythmic riff for second guitar backed by its companion's peeling bass note. Smith's use of extended techniques, including exquisite harmonics, microtonal pitch bends and subtly varied *vibrato*, and effects such as retuning the lowest string during performance embrace her sense of playfulness. The haunting melody that emerges early in the piece taps the folk roots of Americana, while the improvisatory central section channels the energy of a desert rainstorm.

Per Nørgård's fascination with tonal colour and timbral shades, the physical properties of sound and the mathematical foundations of rhythm has given a rare beauty to many of his mature works. 'Wasser und Rosen', written in 1997, takes its title from a line in the opening stanza of Rainer Maria Rilke's sonnet *Singe die Gärten, mein Herz*, which the Danish composer had set over two decades earlier for vocal ensemble. Movement and stasis overlap in *Wasser* to create a mood of reverence that deepens into one of trance-like ecstasy in 'Rosen'. The latter pivots between passages of rhythmic complexity and flowing lyricism, apt to express Rilke's homage to 'Water and roses from Isfahan or Shiraz: sing blessings, praise them, nothing can compare'.

David Fennessy's early musical experience included playing guitar in rock bands. The Irish-born, Glasgow-based composer wrote 'JACK' to mark the 25th anniversary of Crash Ensemble in 2022. The piece, for two unplugged electric guitars, begins with a starburst of percussive sounds, governed by both players' use of brass slides. Its freewheeling energy soon settles on a riff that supports an intensely expressive melodic line picked out in ringing harmonics. 'JACK's' ritualistic progress slows to a halt midway through the work, preparing the way for entry into a transcendent world of pulsating rhythmic patterns.

Pop culture's collective memory and nostalgia are among the elements encompassed by **Sara Glojnaric**'s vibrant art. The Croatian composer, based in Leipzig, began her Latitudes series in 2020 with a work for prepared piano and video. *Latitudes '#5/DISCO IS A SYMPTOM'* for two electric guitars and tape, written for Duo Santorsa – Pereya in 2023-24, requires what Glojnaric describes as a '“crispy”, sharp and clear funk guitar sound, with a little bit of reverb'. The tape's percussion backing plays almost without interruption throughout the whole piece, regulating the guitar duo's 'étude in synchronisation'. Pitch bends, funk rhythms and throbbing chords conjure up the subjective experience, the very symptom, of disco. © Andrew Stewart 2025
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