

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 14 June 2025

11.30am

Sophia Rahman harpsichord
Thomas Kemp conductor
Chamber Domaine

Tom Pigott-Smith violin I
Matthew Ward violin II
Greta Mutlu violin III
Nicholas Barr viola
William Schofield cello
Lucy Shaw double bass
Jonathan Williams horn I

Caroline O'Connell horn II
Paul Edmund-Davies flute
Gordon Hunt oboe I
Alison Alty oboe II
Rachel Harwood-White oboe III
Sarah Burnett bassoon

Luke Styles (b.1982)

A Brandenburg BWV 565 (2024)

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Brandenburg Concerto No. 1 in F BWV1046 (1721)
*I. [Allegro] • II. Adagio • III. Allegro •
IV. Menuet – Trio I – Polacca – Trio II*

Brian Elias (b.1948)

Sequel (2020)

3.00pm

Sophia Rahman harpsichord
Thomas Kemp conductor
Chamber Domaine

Tom Pigott-Smith violin I
Matthew Ward violin II
Greta Mutlu violin III
Nicholas Barr viola I
Ian Rathbone viola II
Andrew Parker viola III
William Schofield cello I

Jonathan Tunnell cello II
Nicholas Cooper cello III
Lucy Shaw double bass
Aaron Akugbo trumpet
Paul Edmund-Davies flute
Gordon Hunt oboe

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Brandenburg Concerto No. 2 in F BWV1047 (1721)
I. Allegro • II. Andante • III. Allegro assai

Aaron Holloway-Nahum (b.1983)

as the soul recedes in what the years bring (2024)

Michael Price (b.1969)

The Malling Diamond (2022)

Deborah Pritchard (b.1977)

Illumination (2022)

Zoë Martlew (b.1968)

Bacharolle (2025)

Johann Sebastian Bach

Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 in G BWV1048 (1721)
I. [Allegro] • II. Adagio • III. Allegro

7.30pm

Sophia Rahman harpsichord

Thomas Kemp conductor

Chamber Domaine

Tom Pigott-Smith violin I

Matthew Ward violin II

Greta Mutlu violin III

Nicholas Barr viola I

Ian Rathbone viola II

William Schofield cello I

Jonathan Tunnell cello II

Nicholas Cooper cello III

Lucy Shaw double bass

Paul Edmund-Davies flute

Louise Bradbury recorder I

Annabel Knight recorder II

Daniel Kidane (b.1986)

Concerto Grosso (2021)

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Brandenburg Concerto No. 4 in G BWV1049 (1721)

I. Allegro • II. Andante • III. Presto

Florence Anna Maunders (b.1979)

Big Koncher'ah (2024)

Johann Sebastian Bach

Brandenburg Concerto No. 5 in D BWV1050 (?1719, rev. 1721)

I. Allegro • II. Affettuoso • III. Allegro

Interval

Joseph Phibbs (b.1974)

Bach Shadows (2022)

Stevie Wishart (b.1969)

Gold and Precious Silver (2022)

Johann Sebastian Bach

Brandenburg Concerto No. 6 in B flat BWV1051 (1721)

I. [Allegro] • II. Adagio ma non tanto • III. Allegro



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There is no evidence to back up the old story that the Margrave Christian Ludwig of Brandenburg, a minor member of the Prussian royal house, never bothered to have his musicians play the concertos with which **Bach** had honoured him. He was certainly keen on music, like his great-nephew Frederick the Great, with whom Bach had dealings at a later point.

But equally, there is no evidence that the Margrave definitely did hear them, or that they were much performed at all, even after they had been published, in 1850. As living music they belong only to the last 90 years, popularised by the hundreds of recordings that have followed Adolf Busch's pioneer set of 1936. From being nowhere they are everywhere, and the question becomes that of presenting them afresh, as if the ink on the manuscript dispatched to the Margrave in 1721 still needed blotting.

Hence the attempts we make to restore the styles and conditions of performance the concertos could have received when they were new. And hence, beyond those attempts, the pleasant possibility today that youth will brush off on them, from music composed only very recently – that this music, made in their light, will have them glow.

Six of these neighbour works, those by Brian Elias, Michael Price, Deborah Pritchard, Daniel Kidane, Joseph Phibbs and Stevie Wishart (in Brandenburg order), were commissioned by Music@Malling for Chamber Domaine to perform at Malling Abbey, near Maidstone, in April 2022. Another three followed at the 2024 Deal Music Festival and came from Luke Styles, Aaron Holloway-Nahum and Florence Anna Maunders. Zoë Martlew joins the team today.

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11.30am

Luke Styles A Brandenburg BWV 565
Bach Brandenburg Concerto No. 1 in F BWV1046
Brian Elias Sequel

As we would expect, these ten composers approach the task from various angles, various distances. **Luke Styles**, first off, comes up close, to give Brandenburg 1 a preface by applying its instrumentation to an organ piece Bach may have written in his youth, when he was organist at what is now called the 'Bach Church' in Arnstadt, a small town about 30 miles southwest of Weimar. A toccata, quite short but ranging around the instrument's possibilities of texture and register, is followed by a fugue on a subject that starts out from the same mordent figure (A–G–A). Coming to the concerto this way, Styles 'aims to set its driving rhythms ablaze and heighten the dissonance within Bach's harmony while enjoying the melodic familiarity of this popular work.'

Though exceptional in so many ways, the Brandenburg Concertos are typical of the Baroque

concerto grosso in setting off a group of solo instruments (the *concertino*) against a string ensemble (the *ripieno*, or 'stuffing') and also in having a keyboard instrument there most of the time, perhaps joined by a low string instrument, to provide the *basso continuo*, or harmonic underpinning.

At the time when he was carefully copying these works out for their dedicatee, Bach was employed as kapellmeister to Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen, ruler of a small domain centred on the town of Köthen (in present-day spelling), about 40 miles north-east of Leipzig. Since Leopold's chapel was Calvinist, and therefore required no music, Bach had plenty of time for instrumental compositions, including the Brandenburgs, though at least one movement, the very first of the set, probably dates back several years to his time at the ducal court in Weimar.

Bach very naturally put his most richly scored concerto in first place, a work with a concertino of seven diverse instruments: three oboes, a pair of horns, a bassoon and a 'violino piccolo' (small-scale violin). The first movement contrasts the families of oboes, horns and strings, and does so using two themes, one starting with a twiddle of adjacent notes, the other with a rising arpeggio.

The slow movement, in D minor (all but the last of the Brandenburg slow movements are in the relative minor), presents two of the soloists in dialogue: the first oboe and the violino piccolo, which was doubling the first violins right through the first movement. The horns take a break.

In the third movement (and this often happens in the Brandenburgs) it is as if the kaleidoscope of the first has been twisted, so that similar elements appear in new combinations – and in a new rhythm: bouncing 6/8 instead of the common time frequent in a first movement.

Unlike its companion Brandenburgs, and unlike most concertos of the period, the work appends a dance movement, a minuet interleaved not only with trios for two oboes and bassoon but also with a polacca softly voiced by strings.

A bright reflection on all this comes from **Brian Elias**, who writes:

'When I was asked to write a companion piece to Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 1, I knew at once that I did not want to write pastiche or to try and pursue an analytic response to the work, but rather to try and produce something personal. I decided to use elements of the concerto that I would find particularly stimulating, and to do so in my own voice without any direct quotation, to try and convey something of my own impressions of the piece. (The only quotation is of two bars from the *Polacca*, which appear in the last section of the piece.)'

Keeping his distance, Elias comes up with a piece thoroughly Brandenburgish in its bounce, its counterpoint and its ravishing solos, all in a language that is the composer's own, maintaining energy, invention and joy through the work's ten minutes.

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3.00pm

Bach Brandenburg Concerto No. 2 in F BWV1047

Aaron Holloway-Nahum as the soul recedes in what the years bring

Michael Price The Malling Diamond

Deborah Pritchard Illumination

Zoë Martlew Bacharolle

Bach Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 in G BWV1048

Like No. 1, Brandenburg Concerto No. 2 is in F and fields a colourful group of soloists. But that is pretty much where resemblances end. For one thing, the solo line-up is even more spectacular in including a high trumpet, alongside flute, oboe and violin. Almost certainly written for the Köthen court trumpeter Johann Ludwig Schreiber to play on a natural trumpet, this brilliant solo remains a virtuoso feat when transferred to the valve trumpet. In the opening movement, Bach demonstrates how the simplest way to show up the diverse colours is also the best: have the four instruments play almost the same figure in turn.

The trumpeter rests through the slow movement while the other soloists enjoy a moment of suave concurrence... until the spell turns, as **Aaron Holloway-Nahum** explains:

'My as the soul recedes in what the years bring interrupts a movement of Bach, which I suppose is a rather presumptuous thing for a composer to do! What I can tell you is that I love Bach's music. For years, he was the one composer I truly listened to every single day. For me, this means – more than familiarity or knowledge – that his music is really in my DNA as a composer. So it was rather a joy to imagine reversing the idea: what if my music was a part of Bach's DNA? What if I interrupted Bach, returning and re-returning to his material repeatedly until it refracted open and suddenly took off in quite unexpected directions? I had a lot of fun playing with this idea, and I certainly hope you will have a lot of fun listening to the results.'

Then, to quote Holloway-Nahum again, 'the cellist and harpsichord player may improvise/fill out the concluding D-major chord as desired, after which point the ensemble carry on to the third movement as if nothing had happened.'

The trumpet leads off this finale with a literally breathtaking solo. Again, the movement answers the opening *Allegro* by taking similar figures through different paces.

Michael Price adds a response to this same concerto:

'When I close my eyes and think of the second Brandenburg, there's always a sparkle, like light refracting through a prism or a jewel. *The Malling Diamond* takes a ten-note phrase, which you hear right at the beginning, and transforms it, like turning cut glass in your hand. First we count down from the full ten notes to just one, each time with a different colour from the orchestra, then, once the momentum has picked up, we hear the theme counting up from that single note back to its full length. The trumpet, which has been an equal member of the group until now, then has a moment of freedom, like an image seen buried deep within the glass, before the jewel turns again, from one note to ten, and we're left dazzled and exhilarated.'

Deborah Pritchard in her *Illumination* shifts our attention to Brandenburg No. 3, in G major, and so to the dazzle that can come also from a group of string soloists. 'Interval control,' she notes, 'light, darkness, use of colour, timbre and register pervade the score. And while the starting point was with the Bach (specifically using a rhythmic cell from the concerto), my own style and syntax govern the sound world. The title conveys the bright luminous resonance of the music and the idea of illuminating the Bach, like a colourful manuscript.'

The relevant Brandenburg duly follows. Uniquely, this one lacks a central movement, Bach's score providing just a cadence, presumably to indicate that a slow movement was to be improvised, on the violin or harpsichord. On this occasion something else happens.

Bach's unusual conception for this concerto was to have trios of violins, violas and cellos all as both soloists and ensemble players, and yet to keep the distinction between *concertino* and *ripieno* passages. Not at all so unusual is how the music grows from just two or three basic motifs, none of more than a few notes, and how there are certain ways in which they seem to want to hang together and develop. A frame is set up and repeated, with variations that upset the frame, until this can reassert itself. We might think of the work, even more than its companion Brandenburgs, as a fractal composition, made with repeating elements that produce surprise and delight as much by how they do not fit together as by how they do. Long before the minimalists, Bach was showing how new patterns could emerge from how earlier ones are shaping themselves, as with what comes out of the mordents, arpeggios and scales of the first movement.

After that, in the middle, comes **Zoë Martlew's** brand new *Bacharolle*, which, she writes, 'is, as the title implies, a lilting slow 6/8, in the style of, and also not, of JS. The tantalising two chords between Brandenburg 3's two outer movements have traditionally hopped over the

missing middle to form a cadential anacrusis, rich with improvisational possibilities, to the rollicking G major opening of the finale. Here they precede a ghostly pianissimo exploration (beginning in the relative minor, E) of Bach-ish slow movement lyricism and harmonic sequences, refracted through a prismatic hocketing technique across all 11 players.

'Traditional Baroque string colour is overlaid with modern string techniques, a palimpsest dusting of ethereal scrapes, harmonic pings, whispers and crunches, eventually vanishing in a descending rainbow of fifths, the eternal essence of a vibrating string...'

The finale brings us back to Bach's original, where an up-down scale figure, coming out of what was happening in the first movement, is rushing to take over as much of the musical space as it can.

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7.30pm

Daniel Kidane Concerto Grosso

Bach Brandenburg Concerto No. 4 in G BWV1049

Florence Anna Maunders Big Koncher'ah

Bach Brandenburg Concerto No. 5 in D BWV1050

Interval

Joseph Phibbs Bach Shadows

Stevie Wishart Gold and Precious Silver

Bach Brandenburg Concerto No. 6 in B flat BWV1051

To open this final sequence **Daniel Kidane** offers a new *concerto grosso* using the ensemble of the fourth Brandenburg. His piece starts, he writes, 'as if in a haze with quarter-tones in the solo violin heightening the feeling of uncertainty and the pulsating tremolo accompaniment alluding to mist. This gives way to a section that promotes chorale-like texture featuring the solo instruments: two recorders, violin and harpsichord. The final section is lively and rhythmically driven, incorporating elements of the music heard earlier in the piece.'

The arrival of a quarter-tone slip, within the octaves of the beginning, might be felt as a wound, accounting both for the lamed rhythm of much that follows in the first movement and for the syncopation of the second.

And now it is as if the clock goes in reverse from evening back to daylight for the Bach concerto, in G, scored for the same outfit. Among the soloists, the recorders (called 'flauti d'echo' in the autograph score) make an immediate appearance, while the solo violin is doubling the first violin of the *ripieno* group. It is as if this were daylight in high summer, with cumulus clouds lit bright white by the sun – the violin, indeed – which will then come out at times from behind them. At one point the sun is set spinning, nor is that the last of its tricks.

This sun of a violin is discernible only fleetingly in the *Andante*, being most of the time tucked in with the

ripieno again. Focus is thus on the recorders, which at last reveal why Bach called them echo flutes. In the final fugue, though, the sun is out all right.

Florence Anna Maunders takes us on to the instrumentation of the fifth Brandenburg, with solo flute, violin and harpsichord. Her *Big Koncher'ah* is, she writes, 'cast in three short, related movements, paralleling the typical fast-slow-fast of the Baroque *concerto grosso* and playing games with its conventions. The work starts with a lively, pounding movement in ritornello form – a musical structure in which a section alternates with contrasting episodes. In this piece the repeated material becomes increasingly squashed and frantic with each repetition. Secondly, a calm and relaxing movement allows the soloists some lyrical expression, as they soar and interweave melodic lines over and through shimmering electronic-sounding static harmonies. The concerto concludes with a 21st-century take on a dance movement: instead of a Baroque gigue or gavotte, this is a catastrophically shattered and remixed kaleidoscope of fragmented dubstep, drum 'n' bass and electro-disco.'

We move on to Brandenburg 5 itself, with its important harpsichord part Bach may have written to display the powers of an instrument the Cöthen court acquired in 1719 from the outstanding Berlin maker Michael Mietke. An alternative theory, prompted by the presence in the slow movement of a theme by the French organist-composer Louis Marchand, is that Bach wrote it in 1717, when he was due to take part in a contest of skills with Marchand in Dresden. (Marchand left town ahead of time.)

Another intriguing speculation has come from Philip Pickett, who suggests that the Brandenburg Concertos make a set of allegorical tableaux, the subject of No. 5 being the choice of Hercules between Virtue and Vice. Hercules, on this theory, is represented by the harpsichord, rapidly rotating ideas throughout the first movement and going into a long aria of consideration before dismissing Vice (the flute) in favour of Virtue (the violin). The hero's decision is perhaps made difficult for him by the fact that Vice and Virtue so often say the same things, but such is life.

For the slow movement Bach once more lets the rest of the ensemble listen while the soloists play chamber music together. Then Virtue, as it might be, leads everyone in a gigue, a kind of lively dance that commonly provided the last number of a suite.

We stay in the penumbra of Brandenburg 5 for **Joseph Phibbs's** *Bach Shadows*, which once again is in three short movements, mirroring on a smaller scale the concerto's three-part form. 'Each movement', Phibbs notes, 'includes a passing melodic reference to the Bach, though in reverse order: the end of the third movement, for example, echoes the rising string gestures that open the concerto's first movement. In this sense, the piece aims to lead the listener gradually

towards the Baroque sound-world of the Bach, the harpsichord only fully emerging as the piece nears its end. The flute, by contrast, is often singled out as a soloist, most clearly in the second movement: a lamenting vocalise, which forms the heart of the work.'

Stevie Wishart then takes us towards the final Brandenburg with her *Gold and Precious Silver*, of which she writes:

'The starting point and title for this intermezzo is a chant of West Malling Abbey dedicated to St Eanswythe, daughter of King Eadbald of Kent (ruled 616-40). This chant, written by the abbey's choirmistress in 2007, can be adapted to thread between the tonalities of the second and third movement of Brandenburg 6, chosen because its special combination of bowed string timbres and harpsichord, but without violin, is very unusual if not unique, and opens up new sound worlds for exploration.'

The Eanswythe chant, 'Aurum tuum et argentum pretiosum', begins in harmonics on the first cello,

alone for a while before the ensemble comes in to give it an environment of slow-breathing harmony. Halfway through, the chant starts to move around the ensemble and seems to precipitate other activity.

Thus prefaced, the sixth Bach concerto completes this Brandenburg day. The *concertino* group here comprises pairs of violas and violas da gamba (cello-sized viols, generally replaced these days by cellos), joined by a cello and a violone (double bass) in the *ripieno* passages and with harpsichord continuo. Replete with canonic imitation and pulsing, the first movement contrives to be at once grave and busy. The slow movement for once is not in the relative minor but in the subdominant. More typically, it is for a reduced formation, omitting the gambas to give us an interweaving of violas. A gigue finale sends us home with something like a folksong bouncing in our minds.

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