WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 14 November 2026

Wigmore Hall Viola Day

These concerts are supported by The Tertis Foundation in memory of Lillian Tertis

11.30am

Timothy Ridout viola
Hélène Clément viola
Ting-Ru Lai viola
Matthew Lipman viola
Eivind Ringstad viola
Georgy Kovalev viola
James Baillieu piano

Alessandro Rolla (1757-1841)	Viola Duo No. 2 in F *I. Allegro espressivo • II. Cantabile Scherzoso • III. Rondo. Presto*
Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)	Trio in C Op. 87 (1795) *arranged by Lionel Tertis* *I. Allegro • II. Adagio • III. Menuetto. Allegro molto – Scherzo • IV. Finale. Presto*
Alan Shulman (1915-2002)	Theme and Variations (1940)
Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)	Czech Suite Op. 39 (1879) *arranged by Sancho Engaño* *I. Praeludium. Pastorale • II. Polka • III. Minuetto Sousedská • IV. Romanze • V. Finale. Furiant*

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Wigmore Hall's Viola Day is largely focused on the instrument's renaissance in the past 125 years. But we will also be reminded that the viola had its advocates in earlier times.

Alessandro Rolla spent 30 years at the Scala Opera House in Milan, where he was the orchestra director. In an environment where opera was pre-eminent, he devoted a remarkable amount of time to instrumental music though composition and performance. He was an excellent player of the violin and viola, with a preference for the latter instrument – in 1772 he was the soloist in 'the first viola concerto ever heard', in the opinion of one writer. His playing was noted for both its lyrical qualities and its conspicuous virtuosity: he passed on several of his technical innovations to his celebrated pupil Nicolò Paganini.

His compositions number about 500, including several concertante works for viola and orchestra. The viola is an equally ubiquitous presence in his chamber works, and the three-movement work we hear today is found among several sets of duos for two violas that he published.

50 years after the death of Rolla, it was still necessary to promote the image of the viola as a credible solo instrumental voice and to bring it out from the shadowy hinterland between melody and bass line. No one did more for this cause than the Hartlepool-born Lionel Tertis (1876-1975), an internationally celebrated player who commissioned or inspired concertos from most of the distinguished British composers of his generation. He was also a composer in his own right and made effective arrangements of the work of earlier composers to give the viola a better share of the limelight.

In the case of his arrangement of Ludwig van Beethoven's Trio in C, he was also shedding new light on a rather forgotten composition. The opus number is misleading. Though not published until 1806, the work dates from more than a decade earlier, when Beethoven was honing his craft by experimenting with different instrumental combinations. This trio was originally written for two oboes and a cor anglais; it may seem an unusual line-up, but wind music was all the rage in Vienna when Beethoven arrived there in 1792. Perhaps the craze had died down a little by 1806 – at any rate, alternative versions for two violins and viola, and for piano and violin, were published with the composer's blessing. Though it has a *divertimento*-like character, this is quite a substantial work.

Alan Shulman's *Theme and Variations* comprised something of a breakthrough work for the composer and, in the USA, for the viola as a solo instrument. Shulman was born in Baltimore in 1915. His Russian-born father, an amateur flautist and a pharmacist by profession, died before Shulman was two years old, and he was brought up by his Jewish mother. Along with his brother, Sylvan, and sister, Violet, he began playing concerts locally, and all three studied at the Peabody Institute, where Alan began composing.

From the start, the Shulmans embraced popular culture as well as aspiring to the top flight of classical music making. By the end of the 1930s both Alan (cello) and Sylvan (violin) were members of the NBC Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Toscanini, while simultaneously recording in the jazz ensemble New Friends of Rhythm. Alan Shulman's orchestral compositions were performed by the NBC SO and the New York Philharmonic and jazz players of the calibre of Artie Shaw were enthusiasts for his work. He wrote everything from film scores to piano pieces with such quirky titles as *Dripping Faucet* or *Mexican Mountain Climb*.

The first performance of his *Theme and Variations* was given in New York in February 1941 by Emanuel Vardi and the pianist Vivian Rivkin. Vardi was then the soloist in the version for viola and orchestra broadcast by the NBC Orchestra to considerable acclaim – it became the first American-composed concertante work for viola to gain a firm place in the repertoire.

Shulman's musical language here is unequivocally tonal. The theme has a neoclassical formality and its contours remain easily recognisable throughout the variations, which are clearly differentiated until a chorale for orchestra/piano alone sets the stage for an impassioned viola cadenza to introduce the ghostly last variation. The closing bars are more of a question than an answer.

Antonín Dvořák is one of many great composers whose favourite instrument on which to perform was the viola. As a young man he began playing it in a local dance band and in 1862 he joined the viola section of the Bohemian Provisional Theatre Orchestra in Prague. Performing the operatic repertoire there (including Wagner under the composer's baton) gave him practical, inside knowledge of orchestration.

In 1871 he left the orchestra to concentrate on composing. His breakthrough came three years later when, at the age of 33, his works made sufficient impression on Johannes Brahms for the senior composer to introduce and recommend Dvořák to his own publisher, Simrock. The *Czech Suite* of 1879 was published by Simrock shortly after the success of the orchestral version of Dvořák's *Slavonic Dances*, which had followed the piano-duet original. The *Suite*'s five movements comprise three traditional Czech dances with two evocations of the Bohemian countryside.

The arrangement we hear today is credited to 'Sancho Engaño', a musician best known (indeed, solely known) as the in-house composer for the Absolute Zero Viola Quartet. According to this ensemble's publicity, he turned to music after a career cleaning up the animal stalls adjacent to the bull rings and remains remarkably prolific despite dying in 1995. His biography can be read on the Quartet's website – but bear in mind that it references a large amount of bull manure, and 'engaño' is Spanish for 'hoax'.

3.00pm

Timothy Ridout viola
Hélène Clément viola
Ting-Ru Lai viola
Matthew Lipman viola
Eivind Ringstad viola
Georgy Kovalev viola
James Baillieu piano

York Bowen (1884-1961)	2 Duos in G for 2 violas (1920) *I. Andante • II. Presto*
Paul Hindemith (1895-1963)	IV. In Form und Zeitmass einer Passacaglia: das Thema sehr gehalten from Viola Sonata Op. 11 No. 5 (1919)
Frank Bridge (1879-1941)	Pensiero (c.1906)
	Allegro appassionato (1908)
York Bowen	Romance in A (1908)
Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) & **Frank Bridge**	There is a Willow Grows Aslant a Brook (1932)
Cecil Forsyth (1870-1941)	Chanson Celtique (1905)
Franz Waxman (1906-1967)	Carmen Fantasie (1947)

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The name of Lionel Tertis emerges as a strong thread running through Wigmore Hall's Viola Day. It is largely through him that the viola became generally accepted as a solo instrument as the 20th Century progressed. There had been earlier advocates (Rolla, Paganini, Bruch) and there would be later ones (Primrose, Imai, Kashkashian, Bashmet). But it was Tertis, born in Hartlepool in 1876, who finally freed the viola from the middle murk of ensemble harmony and let it shine in the foreground.

He achieved this in three ways: first, through his abilities as a performer; second, through seeking out or having made for him louder violas than were the norm; third, through commissioning a repertoire for solo viola that had hitherto never existed. While still a student at the Royal Academy of Music in London, Tertis began giving duo recitals with **York Bowen** as pianist. Bowen, as well as being a child prodigy piano soloist and composer, was a good viola player. Consequently he wrote a concerto and two sonatas for the instrument, and several more chamber works with prominent viola parts, with Tertis invariably the performer of choice. The 2 Duos date from 1920.

Paul Hindemith was a professional viola player (and violinist) both before and after he became a celebrated 20th-century composer. Born in the German city of Hanau, in 1917 he was conscripted into a regimental band; somehow, during the First World War, he found the time and mental space to begin composing a series of sonatas for solo stringed instruments, which were completed in 1919. They include one for viola and piano and one for unaccompanied viola, the latter (Op. 11 No. 5) being the most difficult to play and the most musically advanced of the set.

It is in four movements, of which the fourth is by far the longest and most intense. Headed (in German) 'In the Form and Tempo of a Passacaglia', it is clearly derived from the mighty Chaconne from Bach's D minor Violin Partita BWV1004. Though its language is tonal, it looks towards the tightly contrapuntal, highly chromatic path that Hindemith was about to embark upon. It is often performed separately from the rest of the Sonata.

Like Hindemith, **Frank Bridge** had a considerable reputation as a viola player before his compositions gained recognition. It was the instrument he played in the English String Quartet, of which he was a founder member. Oddly, he composed very little music for the viola as a solo instrument. In 1912 he and Tertis played two viola duos of his, *Caprice* and *Lament*, in London's Aeolian Hall, but they were never published and the manuscripts were lost (*Lament* has since been reconstructed from sketches). Apart from that, we have just *Pensiero* and *Allegro appassionato*, which were published, perhaps inevitably by Tertis, in 1908 as part of a 'Viola Library'. They make a contrasting pair, the first delicate and tender but with a sorrowful central climax, the second energetically lyrical, but both show Bridge's increasing fondness for subtly shifting harmonies.

Tertis and his circle had a particular fondness for the title *Romance*, perhaps feeling it particularly well suited to the viola's warm and dusky tone. Among the associated composers who adopted it (including Tertis himself), **Bowen** appears to have been the first to attach it to a specific composition for viola and piano: the Romance in D flat (1900) followed by one in A (1908). In fact neither was originally written for viola. The D flat was for violin, the one in A for cello, but it was doubtless the persuasive presence of Tertis that ensured they were soon reassigned. The A major work rises and falls through the instrument's registers with corresponding changes in emotional temperature.

Bridge's most prominent pupil, **Benjamin Britten**, was still studying with his revered teacher when he made two arrangements of Bridge's orchestral idyll *There is a Willow Grows Aslant a Brook*, the first for reduced orchestra. The second, more audaciously, is for viola and piano: as such it changes the sound-world considerably. However, the viola's voice is well suited to the work's inspiration in the text of Hamlet: Gertrude's speech reporting the drowning of Ophelia in softly poetic words. The viola was the stringed instrument Britten was most proficient on, so the arrangement enshrines that bond with Bridge.

Cecil Forsyth played viola in the Queen's Hall Orchestra in London, where his section leader was the ubiquitous Tertis. The latter would therefore have been present when Forsyth's Viola Concerto was given its première at a Queen's Hall Prom in 1903, though he was not sufficiently impressed to take it into his repertoire. The soloist on that occasion was the Belgian player Émile Férir, who would prove to be a better champion of Forsyth's music. Férir moved to the US to join the Boston Symphony Orchestra, with which he gave the première of the orchestral version of *Chanson Celtique* in 1912.

In 1914, Forsyth too emigrated to the States, where he pursued a parallel literary career. Another musician who relocated there from Europe was **Franz Waxman**, who was born into a Jewish family in Silesia and was a prominent composer in the progressive German film studios until the rise of the Nazis necessitated his departure. He soon became sought after in Hollywood (scores for *Rebecca*, *Sunset Boulevard*, *Taras Bulba*), and in 1947 composed the *Carmen Fantasie* (on themes from Bizet's opera) for the film *Humoresque*. For the soundtrack, the fiddler was Isaac Stern, but the piece caught the attention of Jascha Heifetz, who asked Waxman to expand it. As you shall hear, it will not disappoint any string player (or audience) looking for a fizzing firework display to crown a concert.

7.30pm

Timothy Ridout viola
Hélène Clément viola
Ting-Ru Lai viola
Matthew Lipman viola
Eivind Ringstad viola
Georgy Kovalev viola
James Baillieu piano
George Herbert harpsichord

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)	Brandenburg Concerto No. 6 in B flat BWV1051 version for 5 violas (1721) *arranged by Sancho Engaño* *I. [Allegro] • II. Adagio ma non tanto • III. Allegro*
George Benjamin (b.1960)	Viola, Viola (1997)
Frank Bridge (1879-1941)	I. Lament from *Viola Duos* (1912)
York Bowen (1884-1961)	Fantasia for four violas Op. 41 No. 1 (1907)
	Interval
Lionel Tertis (1876-1975)	Variations on a Passacaglia of Handel (1935)
Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)	Pavane pour une infante défunte (1899) *arranged by Vadim Vasilyevich Borisovsky for viola*
Moritz Moszkowski (1854-1925)	Suite No. 1 Op. 39 (1885) *arranged by Mamiko Kobayakawa* *I. Allegro molto e brioso • II. Allegretto giojoso • III. Tema con variazioni • IV. Intermezzo • V. Perpetuum mobile*
Henning Kraggerud (b.1973)	Musical Calendar (1992) *I. Januar • II. Februar • III. Mars • IV. April • V. Mai • VI. Juni • VII. Juli • VIII. August • IX. September • X. Oktober • XI. November • XII. Desember*
Benjamin Dale (1885-1943)	Introduction and Andante Op. 5 (1911, rev. 1913)

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According to **Johann Sebastian Bach**'s son Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, the viola was JSB's preferred string instrument when he performed in ensemble music. When it came to the Sixth Brandenburg Concerto, Father Bach took his advocacy of the viola to a higher level – literally, since he dispensed with violins altogether and gave the top line to the violas instead.

The six concertos were written while Bach was employed by Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Köthen, but in 1721 the composer presented them, with a dedication, to Christian Ludwig, Margrave of Brandenburg-Schwedt (hence the 'Brandenburg' name) – though, if Bach was hoping for a position in the Margrave's court, he was disappointed. Each of the concertos features a different instrumental configuration; the Sixth adds a cello, two violas da gamba, violone and continuo to its pair of violas. But you can never have too many violas, hence this arrangement for five of them by 'Sancho Engaño' (see the end of this morning's note for more on Sancho).

In 1997, the British composer **George Benjamin** wrote *Viola, Viola* in response to a commission from his friend the revered Japanese composer Tōru Takemitsu. It was first played by two legendary players of our time, Yuri Bashmet and Nobuko Imai, at the opening of the Tokyo Opera City Concert Hall. In his programme note for the piece, Benjamin wrote that he started out with thoughts of the viola as 'a melancholy voice hidden in the shadows'. However, as he worked on the piece a more volatile, 'fiery and energetic' character took over. The textures are almost orchestral, with the harmonies 'as sonorous as possible'.

Frank Bridge's *Lament* is one of two viola duets that the composer played alongside Lionel Tertis at the Aeolian Hall, London, on 18 March 1912. Neither it nor its companion piece, *Caprice*, was published, and the manuscripts were lost. However, enough sketches for *Lament* survived for the score to be reconstructed by musician, producer and Bridge authority Paul Hindmarsh and performed in 1980.

The 1912 recital was one of many organised by Tertis to promote the image of the viola, for which he commissioned new music from many British composers of his generation. Thus on 3 March the Tertis event included the première of **York Bowen**'s *Fantasia for four violas*.

British music in this era saw a glut of new compositions labelled 'Phantasy', 'Fantasie' or 'Fantasia'. The reason is that, between 1905 and 1919, a wealthy industrialist and passionate amateur musician named Walter Cobbett offered a series of generous prizes for chamber works in the form of a 'phantasy', which he defined as a single movement containing several contrasting sections. Whether prompted by Cobbett's initiative or simply by his own temperament, Bowen adopted this form in many of his works. Accordingly the *Fantasia for four violas* traverses an arc that begins and ends peacefully but becomes highly animated along the way.

In 1929 **Lionel Tertis** joined the violinist Albert Sammons in a recording of Johan Halvorsen's flamboyant version of the *Passacaglia* from Handel's Harpsichord Suite HWV432. Six years later, Tertis composed his own *Variations on a Passacaglia of Handel* for two violas, based on the same keyboard source. Whereas the Norwegian composer's free transcription adheres to the sustained ecstasy of Handel's original, Tertis's work soon starts to explore darker, even grotesque regions. The effect is especially disconcerting because the changes of mood are sudden and unpredictable.

The mission of Tertis and others to expand the solo viola repertoire in the 20th Century could not rely entirely on new compositions. Several viola players made arrangements of existing music; among the most prolific was the Soviet Vadim Borisovsky (1900-72). He was best known in the West as member of the Beethoven Quartet, but he transcribed or arranged more than 200 works for the viola or his other instrument, the viola d'amore. **Maurice Ravel**'s *Pavane pour une infante défunte* was written in 1899 for solo piano, then orchestrated in 1910. The composer sometimes said that it evoked a dance that a little princess might have danced at the Spanish court in the time of Velázquez, but at others he admitted that he just liked the euphony of the words when choosing the title.

Mamiko Kobayakawa is another player who has contributed a large number of arrangements to showcase her instrument. The Polish composer **Moritz Moszkowski** is now best remembered for his piano compositions, but his orchestral works often have much of the same sparkle and charm, including this First Orchestral Suite, from 1885.

The *Musical Calendar* by the Norwegian violinist and composer **Henning Kraggerud** brings us right into the present time, since it owes much of its fame to the internet. Comprising a duet for each month of the year, it was composed as a Christmas present for family members in 1992. But it attracted renewed attention when Kraggerud and his nine-year-old daughter Alma played the work on YouTube over the course of 2016, thus documenting Alma's progress as a viola student as well as the passage of the year.

The final work takes us back to Tertis and his circle, and the early years of the 20th Century. **Benjamin Dale** was one of the most promising of the British composers to emerge at that time, but he had the misfortune to be on holiday in Bavaria when the First World War broke out. After being held in internment camps until the hostilities ended, he emerged a somewhat changed man and most of his subsequent career was dedicated to academia and administration. The *Introduction and Andante* – a sextet written in 1911 for Tertis to play with his students – indicates why his contemporaries regarded him as a leading voice, and why he should not be forgotten.

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