

# WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 14 September 2021 7.30pm

**Gautier Capuçon** cello

**Trad/Catalan**

The Song of the Birds *arranged by Pablo Casals*

**Johann Sebastian Bach** (1685-1750)

Cello Suite No. 1 in G BWV1007 (c.1720)

*I. Prélude • II. Allemande • III. Courante • IV. Sarabande • V. Menuett I and II • VI. Gigue*

**Henri Dutilleux** (1916-2013)

3 Strophes sur le nom de Sacher (1976-82)

*I. Un poco indeciso • II. Andante sostenuto • III. Vivace*

Interval

**Zoltán Kodály** (1882-1967)

Sonata for solo cello Op. 8 (1915)

*I. Allegro maestoso ma appassionato • II. Adagio (con grand' espressione) • III. Allegro molto vivace*

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Gautier Capuçon's recital traverses notable peaks from the solo cello repertoire. **Pablo Casals**'s calling card encore is played as a prelude to another work he was intimately associated with. Casals arranged *The Song of the Birds* in 1941, as protest against General Franco's regime. Based on a Catalan carol, wrens, nightingales, sparrows and eagles serenade the infant Jesus. In their song, Jesus is a flower whose scent will delight the Earth. On the surface, the graceful melody is simplistic, but inner harmonies reveal emotional depths. Casals stated, 'These sounds gently echo the nostalgia we all feel for Catalonia, but with hope for a peaceful tomorrow.'

As **Bach**'s autograph manuscript is lost, it is speculated that Bach's six cello suites date from the early 1720s, when he was the *Kapellmeister* at Cöthen. Stylistically, they appear akin to other instrumental works from this time. Their composition was possibly inspired by the Cöthen-based cellist Christian Bernhard Linike. Anyone performing the suites must rely on copied scores made by Bach's wife Anna Magdalena, Johann Peter Kellner, a former pupil of Bach, and two eighteenth-century editions. The first two copies possibly date from between 1727 and 1731, although they contain variations of notation and phrasing. Once dismissed as mere exercises, today few people would disagree with Robert Schumann's opinion that they are 'the most beautiful and important cello compositions ever written'.

The first suite, BWV1007, is the simplest and best known of them all. Each suite is structured as a prelude and a sequence of dances. The *Prélude* establishes the mood and key through repeated sounding of an open G string. With rhythmic regularity, it rises with inevitability to a climax atop a chromatic scale. The *Allemande* was originally (as the name suggests) a German dance, but the French adopted and adapted it. Consisting of two halves, each repeated, the *Allemande* is thought by some to represent a mystical conversation between Man and God. In structural terms, it forms a link to the ensuing *Courante*. A favourite dance of Louis XIV, the *Courante* is rapid and displays running rhythms. The *Sarabande* provides contrast with its slower tempo and solemn character. The pair of *Menuetts*, akin to two sides of the same coin, present stylised versions of the formal dance form. The first *Menuett* is in the major key; the second, in its relative, the tonic minor. The closing *Gigue* has its roots in an uproarious English jig. Bach's predilection for exploring chromatic inflections as the dance progresses is explored before reaching appropriate concluding passages.

**Dutilleux's 3 Strophes sur le nom de Sacher** has its origins in an earlier work, the single movement *Hommage à Paul Sacher*. It was one of twelve solo cello pieces commissioned by Mstislav Rostropovich in 1976 to mark the 70th birthday of the Swiss conductor Paul Sacher. After two movements were added, Rostropovich premièred the full work in 1982.

Dutilleux sets Sacher's name to a note sequence: E flat (eS in the German notation) – A – C – B (H) – E – D (Re). Heard first in order

then in reverse at the work's opening, the note sequence is developed and varied throughout the movements. A non-standard tuning of the strings is used throughout: B flat, F sharp, D and A. This scordatura technique was employed by Bach in his fifth cello suite. Bartók's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celeste*, which Sacher commissioned and premièred, is quoted within the first movement's conclusion. *3 Strophes* presents the major characteristics of Dutilleux's mature style in a microcosm of under ten minutes' duration. Precisely notated, the music constantly shifts with tempo fluctuations and frequent time signature changes. Some sections are free of a time signature altogether. Dutilleux makes significant demands of the soloist to explore the instrument's full potential. A plethora of bowing techniques, a palette of tremolo and vibrato speeds, double-stopping and complex harmonics are unavoidable performance requirements.

**Kodály** was a talented amateur cellist. In 1915, Béla Bartók remarked of his compatriot's recently completed Sonata for solo cello Op. 8, 'This is not a mere imitation of Bach's polyphonic style. Kodály is a great master of form and possesses a striking individuality. He says things that have never been uttered before.' A sonata for cello and piano and a duo for violin and cello pre-date this solo sonata. Kodály employs a partial scordatura, retuning the C string to B and G to F sharp. The score, however, is notated according to their standard pitches. The opening movement contains two themes; the first is declamatory with large-scaled chords, the second is more lyrical. Kodály's knowledge of Hungarian folk music was only rivalled by Bartók's. Thus, influences of ethnic string, cimbalom, flute playing and the singing voice soak the sonata's fibrous textures. The development section, notable for its furious trills at the top of the instrument's register, precedes an inward coda related to the second theme.

A specifically Hungarian lament pervades the sonata's every aspect and nowhere is this truer than in the slow second movement. Its initial melody sits in the lower register before growing to a highly ornamented form. The middle section is a rough, uninhibited dance, then a highly reworked version of the opening returns. The despair-filled coda ends with a downward sweeping glissando. Kodály's final movement is jovial and presented as an intricately structured sequence of dances. Demanding a full technical armoury of pizzicatos, arpeggio passages, double stops and rapidly repeating notes, it builds with searing originality to squealing tremolandos, played on the bridge. The movement's main material is repeated and the final bars span the cello's five octaves. With such demands made of the soloist, it is understandable why Kodály predicted, 'in 25 years no cellist will be accepted who has not played it'.

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