

WIGMORE HALL 125

Wednesday 15 July 2026
1.00pm

Morgan Szymanski guitar

Manuel Ponce (1882-1948)

Suite in A minor (1930)

*I. Prelude • II. Allemande • III. Gavotte •
IV. Sarabande • V. Gigue*

Agustín Barrios Mangoré (1885-1944) Una limosna por el amor de Dios (c.1944)

Julio César Oliva (b.1947)

Tres Danzones Mexicanos (2015)

I. Valle de Bravo • II. Irene • III. Bugambilias

Leo Brouwer (b.1939)

Paisaje Cubano con Campanas (1986)

Paulo Bellinati (b.1950)

Jongo (1988)



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In its long evolution as a concert instrument since the early 19th Century the six-string guitar has gradually become embedded in the artistic culture of almost every country in the world, but its folkloric roots are deepest where Spanish or Portuguese is spoken. Today's programme illustrates this by featuring Central and South American composers who have built upon their familiarity with these traditions to develop their own individual voices.

Manuel Maria Ponce (1882-1948) is a seminal figure in Mexican music. Like his famous Brazilian peer, Heitor Villa-Lobos, he researched the folk songs and dances of his homeland, arranged them and brought them to wider attention through publications, concert performances and the many important educational posts he held. Having studied in Berlin, Bologna and Paris, he was also conversant with European trends and, as the eminent Spanish guitar virtuoso Andrés Segovia quickly noticed after their first meeting in 1923, Ponce had the knowledge and aptitude to turn out skilful imitations of past composers, whom he wished had written for his instrument. Early among these neo-classical creations was Ponce's delightful Suite in A minor, using the typical Baroque design of four contrasting dance movements, preceded by a *Prelude* and concluded by an effervescent jig.

Although he wrote extensively for Segovia throughout his life, producing longer sonatas, variations and a concerto with orchestra, Ponce did not play the guitar. In contrast, the other works in this recital are all by expert practitioners.

Born in Paraguay three years after Ponce and eight before Segovia, **Agustín Barrios Mangoré** made 36 pioneering 78 rpm recordings between 1912 and 1928 of his own music, as well as transcriptions of earlier composers. His frequent tours of South America led to concerts in Latin America and across the Atlantic to Europe. His works are almost exclusively for solo guitar and range from the popular style of his day to folkloric and classical/romantic pieces. Among the best known is his prayerful tremolo study *Una limosna por el amor de Dios*.

The Mexican composer **Julio César Oliva** (b.1947) has more than 300 works to his name, both for solo guitar and a variety of instrumental combinations. While sometimes exploring metaphysical and literary themes, such as in his *Portrait of Dorian Gray* (based on Oscar Wilde's celebrated story), he is also a prolific arranger of traditional Mexican music and popular songs, often using jazz harmonies, as here in his *Tres Danzones Maxicanos*.

The result of a fusion of African rhythm and European structure, the *Danzón* originated in 19th-century Cuba, where it has acquired national status as an elegant dance for older couples. In more recent times Arturo Márquez's exciting *Danzón No. 2*, as performed by the Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra under its conductor Gustavo Dudamel, has popularised it worldwide.

The island of Cuba has a rich, cultural heritage and no living composer from there exemplifies this diversity of influence better than **Leo Brouwer**. Born in the capital city of Havana in 1939, he learnt the classical guitar with Isaac Nicola, a pupil of Emilio Pujol, and soon made his mark on the international scene with appearances at major festivals on both sides of the Atlantic and highly acclaimed recordings on Erato, Deutsche Grammophon and other labels. In 1960-1 he studied composition at Hartt College and Juilliard School in America. A further formative experience for him during this period was his attendance at the Warsaw Autumn Festival to hear the music of Stockhausen and Penderecki among others. Back in Cuba during the early 1960s, he held appointments as Music Adviser for Radio Havana, Director of the Music Department of the Cinema Institute of Cuba, Professor of Composition in the National Music Conservatory and from 1969, Head of the experimental Department of the Institute of Cinematic Arts and Industry. He has conducted more than 120 symphony orchestras and chamber ensembles and, as a composer, has a catalogue of more than 500 works, covering almost all genres and musical forms; many of these have been dedicated to and recorded by world-famous musicians, such as Yuri Bashmet, Julian Bream, Sheku Kanneh-Mason, Yo-Yo Ma and John Williams.

Now aged 87, Brouwer continues to publish his compositions, each year adding substantially to the guitar's concert repertoire. His early works drew freely on indigenous elements, but he was soon to adopt avant-garde techniques brought to Cuba by Luigi Nono in 1967 and Hans Werner Henze in 1969-70. Subsequently, he explored minimalism and has developed this, in the context of the guitar, by creating mosaics of rhythmic and lyrical motifs within a broadly tonal, neo-romantic palette, which has proved a highly successful formula with performers and audiences alike. Typical of this approach is his *Paisaje Cubano con Campanas*, which is from a series of impressionistic evocations of his native landscape, this one depicting bells.

To end his programme, Mexican-born Morgan Szymanski plays **Paulo Bellinati's** *Jongo*, a prize-winning piece which rapidly became a favourite among guitarists when recorded in its duo version by John Williams in 1996. Bellinati (b.1950) grew up in São Paulo, Brazil, from where his performing career, as soloist and in ensembles, has taken him to Europe, Asia and the Americas. Based on his research into Brazilian musicology, he has made recordings of the 'Guitar Works of Garoto' and arrangements of Afro-Sambas by Baden Powell and Vinicius de Moraes. His own music is usually in traditional Brazilian styles but spiced with contemporary harmonies and techniques. *Jongo* is a lively dance associated with workers from the mines and plantations of Southeast Brazil; in it you will be able to hear the call-and-response of the dancers, accompanied by tribal drums!

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