

# WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 15 March 2023  
7.30pm

Sheku Kanneh-Mason cello

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) Cello Suite No. 2 in D minor BWV1008 (c.1720)  
*I. Prélude • II. Allemande • III. Courante •  
IV. Sarabande • V. Menuet I and II • VI. Gigue*

Gwilym Simcock (b.1981) Prayer for the Senses (2022)

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) Cello Suite No. 1 Op. 72 (1964)  
*I. Canto primo. Sostenuto e largamente • II. Fuga.  
Andante moderato • III. Lamento. Lento rubato •  
IV. Canto segundo. Sostenuto • V. Serenata. Allegretto,  
pizzicato • VI. Marcia. Alla marcia moderato • VII. Canto  
terzo. Sostenuto • VIII. Bordone. Moderato quasi  
recitativo • IX. Moto perpetuo e Canto quarto. Presto*

Interval

Leo Brouwer (b.1939) Sonata No. 2 for solo cello (2020) *London première*  
*I. • II. • III.*

*This work is dedicated to Sheku Kanneh-Mason and was commissioned by  
the Royal Philharmonic Society through the generous support of an  
anonymous donor.*

Edmund Finnis (b.1984) Preludes I-V (2021)  
*Prelude I • Prelude II • Prelude III • Prelude IV • Prelude V*

Gaspar Cassadó (1897-1966) Suite for solo cello (pub. 1926)  
*I. Preludio-Fantasia • II. Sardana •  
III. Intermezzo e danza finale*

Friends of Wigmore Hall – celebrating 30 years of friendship

Over the past 30 years, Friends have been providing transformational support for the Hall, ensuring this historic building remains a home for great music making. Enjoy the benefits of friendship by joining as a Friend today, and be a part of the Wigmore story. Visit: [wigmore-hall.org.uk/friends](http://wigmore-hall.org.uk/friends) | Call: 020 7258 8230

FRIENDS OF  
WIGMORE HALL

30

*Wigmore Hall is a no smoking venue. No recording or photographic equipment may be taken into the auditorium nor used in any other part of the Hall without the prior written permission of the management.*

*In accordance with the requirements of City of Westminster persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, or to sit in any other gangways. If standing is permitted in the gangways at the sides and rear of the seating, it shall be limited to the number indicated in the notices exhibited in those positions.*

*Disabled Access and Facilities - full details from 020 7935 2141.*

*Wigmore Hall is equipped with a 'Loop' to help hearing aid users receive clear sound without background noise. Patrons can use this facility by switching hearing aids to 'T'.*



*Please ensure that watch alarms, mobile phones and any other electrical devices which can become audible are switched off. Phones on a vibrate setting can still be heard, please switch off.*

The Wigmore Hall Trust Registered Charity No. 1024838  
36 Wigmore Street, London W1U 2BP • [Wigmore-hall.org.uk](http://Wigmore-hall.org.uk) • John Gilhooly Director

Wigmore Hall Royal Patron HRH The Duke of Kent, KG  
Honorary Patrons Aubrey Adams OBE; André and Rosalie Hoffmann; Louise Kaye; Kohn  
Foundation; Mr and Mrs Paul Morgan

Department  
for Culture  
Media & Sport

LOTTERY FUNDED

Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

Registered with  
**FUNDRAISING  
REGULATOR**

Though in tonight's programme Sheku Kanneh-Mason explores multiple branches of the solo cello repertoire, he begins at its unwavering root. Composed around 300 years ago, **Bach's** six solo cello suites were mostly neglected until only the past century. It was the Catalan cellist Pablo Casals who put them back on the map, having studied them for over a decade before playing them in public, recording them in the latter half of the 1930s. (In 1909, in his first appearance here, Casals played Bach's Suite No. 3 at Wigmore Hall.)

Each of the suites is based on a standard sequence of Baroque dances, starting with a prelude, followed by an allemande, courante, sarabande and gigue. Between the sarabande and gigue come either a pair of minuets (in the second suite), or bourrées or gavottes (in the other suites). The introspective *Prélude* of the Suite No. 2 reflects the dark tone of its D minor key (the same key as for the solo violin Partita No. 2, with its epic *Chaconne*). There's a symmetry – and a tension and release – in the rise and fall of its phrases; and a wistfulness in its open, improvisatory nature. After the more florid *Allemande*, the *Courante* reflects the nature of its title (meaning 'running' in French). The *Sarabande* is the emotional centre and gravitational core of the suite; it is followed by a pair of contrasting minuets, the first presenting plenty of double-stopping (playing two notes simultaneously), the latter a more interior journey. The suite rounds off with a spirited, swinging *Gigue*.

From the oldest of tonight's works, we jump to the newest, with one of the *200 Pieces* commissioned by the Royal Academy of Music to mark its bicentenary last year (search online for 'RAM 200 Pieces' to hear them all). **Gwilym Simcock's** *Prayer for the Senses* opens with a sighing first section that strives tensely upwards, while the second section – of constant, jumping movement – gives the illusion of counterpoint (multiple voices), meaning Bach's influence is close. The two types of music alternate again, now merging into each other. The cello finally begins to unfurl its wings, but soon it is back in its cage, still sighing.

It may well be true, as the composer David Matthews has suggested, that **Britten's** three cello suites are the most important solo cello music since Bach. Like the earlier Cello Sonata (1961), they were written for the great Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich. 'Slava', as he was affectionately known, gave the première of the first Suite at Britten's Aldeburgh Festival in 1965. The suite is framed by a pair of *Cantos* ('songs'), with two further *Cantos* nestled within. Britten traverses not only a range of playing techniques, but also the gamut of expression. The *Fuga* is playful, if gnarly to play, with its overlapping voices. The plaintive *Lamento* leads to the brief second *Canto*, which in turn yields to the *Serenata*, pizzicato throughout in imitation of a plucked guitar. There's a macabre mood in the *Marcia*, among its allusions to bugle calls and drums. After the third *Canto* comes the *Bordone*, featuring a drone

contrasting with nervous flurries. That nervousness continues into the *Moto perpetuo* and fourth *Canto*, which demand a split-second left-/right-hand co-ordination as the *Canto* intrudes.

Cuban composer and guitarist **Leo Brouwer** has written in many genres, but he is especially beloved of guitarists. Self-taught as a composer, his music draws on ritual, religion and Cuban folk culture. His first Cello Sonata was written in 1960. The Sonata No. 2 came 60 years later, in 2020. The composer writes: 'The Sonata No. 2 was composed expressly for the excellent cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason. His special sound and professionalism, even at his young age, motivated me greatly to make my second sonata for this instrument. It is really very difficult for me to talk or write about my music: I prefer to compose it and not to explain it. Thanks to Mr James Murphy, Chief Executive of the Royal Philharmonic Society for encouraging these projects in favour of the cello repertoire in the 21st Century and promoting young talents.'

Another instalment from the Royal Academy of Music's *200 Pieces* project, and another premièred by Sheku Kanneh-Mason, are the five *Preludes* by **Edmund Finnis**, who has recently been developing a fruitful relationship with the innovative Manchester Collective. Kanneh-Mason has said how struck he was by the 'directness of [Finnis's] intentions and ability to portray emotion in a captivating and concise way'. Captivating and concise are perfect descriptors of these *Preludes*, the first of which carries a gently swinging line with a hint of traditional folk and a satisfying repetition and balance. The opening tremolos of No. 2 start from nowhere and present a vision, perhaps, of psychedelic minimalism. The freely lyrical No. 3 emerges out of chant-like fragments, whose circular shapes grow wider. Only 24 bars long, No. 4 grows out of the calm, with deep-breathing bass notes beneath ethereal harmonics. Marked 'Wavelike', No. 5 encapsulates the ebb and flow, the energy and motion of surging water.

Like Pablo Casals, with whom he studied, **Gaspar Cassadó** was also one of the 20th Century's great cellists and a champion of Bach's six cello suites. And, like Bach's suites, Cassadó's Suite was neglected for many years, until it was taken up by János Starker (1924-2013) in the 1980s. The opening *Preludio* includes a sarabande-like section that quotes the flute solo from *Daphnis et Chloé*, by another of Cassadó's teachers, Maurice Ravel. The *Sardana* is a round dance with a slower middle section whose repeated *long short-short long long* rhythm must surely be a reference to the second movement of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. The final movement begins meditatively before giving way to a *jota*, a colourful dance originally for couples, with accompanying castanets.

© Edward Bhesania 2023

*Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.*