

WIGMORE HALL

Friday 15 November 2024
1.00pm

Alban Gerhardt cello
Steven Osborne piano

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Arpeggione Sonata in A minor D821 (1824)
I. Allegro moderato • II. Adagio • III. Allegretto

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Adagio and Allegro in A flat Op. 70 (1849)
I. Adagio • II. Allegro

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Cello Sonata No. 2 in F Op. 99 (1886)
*I. Allegro vivace • II. Adagio affettuoso •
III. Allegro passionato • IV. Allegro molto*



This concert is part of the CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust ticket scheme, offering free tickets to those aged 8-25



SUPPORT OUR AUDIENCE FUND: EVERY NOTE COUNTS

Ensure Wigmore Hall remains a vibrant hub of musical excellence by making a donation today.
wigmore-hall.org.uk/donate | 020 7258 8220



Join & Support
Donations

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 • John Gilhooly Director

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



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



In spring 1823, two instrument-makers – JG Stauffer of Vienna and Peter Teufelsdorfer of Pest – launched remarkably similar ‘bowed guitars’ onto the market. The instruments had six strings, tuned like a modern guitar, with 24 metal frets on the fingerboard; like a cello or bass viol, they were held between the knees and played with a bow. Only in the 1870s, by which time their popularity had long since waned, did they become known as ‘arpeggiones’, taking their name from the sonata that **Schubert** composed exactly 200 years ago, in November 1824, but which was not published until 1871.

Schubert was introduced to the new instrument by his friend Vincenz Schuster, a guitarist who quickly embraced its potential and published compositions and an instruction manual aimed at encouraging others to do the same. D821 is unique among Schubert’s sonatas in featuring a melodic instrument in addition to piano, and it is intriguing to speculate what factors, besides friendship for Schuster, might have motivated its composition. The new instrument’s shortcomings quickly became obvious – its sound was too thin to balance with a piano, and its flat bridge made accurate string-crossing difficult – but its melodic capabilities and distinctively plangent tone may nonetheless have appealed to the composer who had just completed *Die schöne Müllerin*. The varied and song-like melodies that Schubert poured into each of the sonata’s movements have made it justly popular among performers of several instruments, including flute, viola and even double bass. It is most frequently heard, however, on the cello – thanks partly to the advocacy of some prominent cellists, not least Mstislav Rostropovich, who learnt it at Benjamin Britten’s behest for their 1961 recital in Aldeburgh.

Like the ‘Arpeggione’ Sonata, *Adagio and Allegro* was originally conceived for an instrument other than cello. **Schumann** wrote it in 1849 in the middle of a rich vein of chamber music composition: the solo part was intended to show off the capabilities of the valved French horn, invented in 1814 but still in the process of development and regarded as a relative novelty. If the *Allegro*’s exuberant flourishes make the original instrumentation obvious, then the languidly beautiful melody of the *Adagio* is at least as well suited to performance on the cello, and Schumann specifically sanctioned the work’s appropriation by other instruments by publishing it with alternative parts for violin and cello.

Four years after composing this piece, Schumann met the 20-year-old **Brahms** for the first time and was famously dazzled both by his early compositions and by his virtuosity at the piano. Brahms’s activities as a cellist were less well-publicised, but he studied the instrument seriously as a teenager, and evidently remembered the experience fondly: late in life he boasted to the cello virtuoso Julius Klengel of having been accomplished enough to tackle the demanding concertos of Bernhard Romberg. Brahms’s affinity for the cello is clear not only from countless glorious melodies in his symphonies and chamber music, but also from the fact that the first sonata

involving any instrument other than piano that he submitted for public scrutiny was his E minor cello sonata: before its publication in 1866, he had already written and destroyed several violin sonatas.

Despite the success of his first cello sonata, 20 years passed before he composed its sequel. As so often with the mature Brahms – Richard Mühlfeld’s clarinet and Hermine Spies’s voice are other obvious examples – it was the sound made by a particular performer that sparked his creativity. His favoured cellist was Robert Hausmann, a member since 1879 of the quartet led by Brahms’s long-standing friend Joseph Joachim. Moved by Hausmann’s impassioned advocacy of his E minor Sonata, Brahms composed the F major Sonata for him in Switzerland during summer 1886. The following year Hausmann asked Brahms to write him a concerto, but instead he produced the Double Concerto for the cellist to play with Joachim; in 1891, Hausmann would participate with Mühlfeld in the first performances of Brahms’s final two chamber masterpieces, the Clarinet Quintet and Clarinet Trio.

Hausmann was renowned for his rich tone and bold performing style, qualities that Brahms fully exploits in his new sonata. Its opening bars alone defy the frequent characterisation of Brahms’s late chamber music as introspective and melancholy: the cellist’s arresting fanfares rapidly scale the top string’s upper reaches, the pianist’s shuddering tremolos generate immediate momentum. The tremolo figure is soon taken up by the cellist, with the performer required to effect rapid and repeated string crossings while the left hand draws out an interior melody.

This technically demanding passage is one of a number of instances where Brahms takes the instrument beyond its comfort zone, a tendency also evident in the frequent use of pizzicato, not just as an occasional effect but also to convey important musical material. Plucking in the instrument’s lowest register introduces the serene melody with which the slow movement begins; so remote in terms of traditional harmonic relationships is this movement’s key (F sharp major) from that of the sonata that some scholars have speculated that it was originally intended for the E minor sonata, though no documentary evidence supports this claim.

The sonata’s most novel use of pizzicato occurs towards the end of the finale, where the cellist is asked to change note during a single ‘slurred’ pluck of the string, an effect anticipating 20th-century composers such as Bartók. In duration the *Allegro molto* is much the shortest movement of the four, but such are the freshness of its ideas and the vigour with which they are developed that it makes for an entirely fitting climax, crowning what is surely the most important cello sonata of the more than 70 years since Beethoven’s last such works were composed.

© Michael Downes 2024

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.