

WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 15 September 2026
1.00pm

Hall of Mirrors

Mishka Rushdie Momen piano

Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764)

From Suite in E minor (pub. 1724, rev. 1731)

I. Allemande • II. Courante • V. Le rappel des oiseaux • VI. Rigaudons I, II & Double • VII. Musette en rondeau • VIII. Tambourin • IX. La villageoise (rondeau)

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

From *Le tombeau de Couperin* (1914-7)

I. Prélude • II. Fugue

Pavane pour une infante défunte (1899)

Élisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre (1665-1729)

From Suite No. 2 in G minor (pub. 1687)

I. Prélude • II. Allemande • III. Courante

John Bull (c.1562-1628)

Walsingham (pub. c.1609-19)

François Couperin (1668-1733)

VII. Forlane from *Concert Royal IV* (pub. 1722)

Premier prélude from *L'art de toucher le clavecin* (pub. 1716)

No. 5 Les ombres errantes from *Quatrième livre de pièces de clavecin (Vingt-cinquième Ordre)* (pub. 1730)

No. 6 Le tic-toc-choc, ou Les maillotins from *Troisième livre de pièces de clavecin (Dix-huitième Ordre)* (pub. 1722)



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Designed and built during the reign of Louis XIV, the Hall of Mirrors is the Palace of Versailles's crowning glory, an extraordinary blend of precision and illusion. Its decorative marble and breathtaking painted ceiling are crowned by the 357 mirrors that reflect and refract the sun that streams through the hall's vast array of windows. The effect is dazzling, almost disorientating.

Similarly, tonight's recital by Mishka Rushdie Momen defies expectations and offers us a chance to glimpse great works of art in contrasting lights. At the centre of the programme lie harpsichord works by Jacquet de La Guerre, Rameau and Couperin, three composers who served at the Versailles court, albeit for different French kings. Music by the 20th-century composer Ravel weaves through the programme, his affection for Baroque clarity and innovative and atmospheric harmonies resulting in music of intoxicating beauty. The old reflected in the new. Lastly, there's John Bull whose Walsingham variations are one of the glories of late Tudor England. Placed in the context of this recital, Bull's music allows us to compare the evolution of music on either side of the English Channel.

But it's perhaps the use of the modern piano that is Momen's most effective mirror, adding lucidity and definition to pieces originally composed for the harpsichord, presenting their musical lines and articulation in fresher definition, while also bringing to them a subtle dynamic expressiveness.

We start with **Jean-Philippe Rameau**, whose harpsichord music is widely considered the finest by any French composer. There is not a huge amount of it, but what there is is driven by rhythmic and harmonic invention and abundant poetic beauty. Technical challenges for the player include wide leaps, percussive effects and hand-crossing. The characterful Suite No. 2 in E minor appeared in 1724 as part of the *Pièces de clavecin*. It starts conventionally with a noble *Allemande* and *Courante*, but then the fun begins. Its fifth movement, *Le rappel des oiseaux*, is one of Rameau's masterstrokes, its rapid, trilling figures imitating birdsong with charm and wit. The *Rigaudons* and *Double* are showcases for fizzing ornamentation and melodic flair, while the *Musette* evokes the drone and modal simplicity of a small bagpipe. The *Tambourin* conjures the percussive energy of a Provençal drum while the Suite ends with a portrait of a country girl, *La villageoise*, and a moment of peaceful rustic charm.

Composed between 1914 and 1917, **Ravel** intended *Le tombeau de Couperin* to be a homage not only to the French Baroque, but to friends of his who died in the First World War. You'll hear much of Rameau's filigree ornamentation reflected in the shimmering *Prélude*, while the austere, restrained *Fugue* that follows is an even more deliberate nod to Baroque formality. A little later in the programme, in the lilting *Pavane pour une infante défunte*, Ravel takes a Baroque dance form and transforms it into one of his most touching works, although the precision and dignity of the piece prevent it from ever becoming sentimental or maudlin.

Like Rameau after him, **François Couperin**, who ends our programme, was a master of the harpsichord. The

Concerts Royaux, published in 1722, were composed for performance at Versailles for Louis XIV's private evening entertainments. Unlike the solo harpsichord *Pièces de clavecin*, the *Concerts Royaux* were conceived as chamber works for the King's musicians, playable by various combinations of instruments (and adaptable, as here, for solo keyboard). A forlane, or forlana, is a lively Italian-derived dance in 6/8 time, associated with Venetian gondoliers.

Today's programme includes a *Prélude* from the composer's treatise on keyboard technique, *L'art de toucher le clavecin*. Translated as *The Art of Playing the Harpsichord*, it was intended not just as a guide to ornamentation and fingering but, according to Couperin himself, was 'absolutely indispensable for playing my *Pièces* in the style most suitable to them'. The eight preludes featured in *Art*, he suggests, are useful for 'loosening the fingers; and often, in trying over instruments upon which one has not yet practised'. If this first *Prélude* sounds free and improvised, then that's entirely intentional. Interpretation, in terms of rhythm and tempo, is left largely to the performer.

Les ombres errantes (The Wandering Shadows), from the *Quatrième livre de pièces de clavecin* (pub. 1730), is late Couperin at his most enigmatic and poetic, its harmonic language chromatic and ambiguous. By this point, Couperin had moved decisively away from generic dance titles toward evocative imagery. *Le tic-toc-choc, ou Les maillottins*, from the *Troisième livre* (1722), offers something entirely different, however. The music is mechanical and percussive in its imitation of a ticking clock or some form of mechanical hammers.

An almost exact contemporary of Couperin, **Élisabeth Jacquet de La Guerre** (1665-1729) was one of the few women of her era to achieve renown as a composer and performer at the French court. Her Suite No. 2 comes from a 1687 collection of harpsichord pieces, her first publication as a composer in a career that would see her go on to compose opera, cantatas and chamber sonatas. The *Prélude* is improvisatory, almost exploratory in character; the *Allemande* is gracefully introspective; while the *Courante*'s metrical ambiguity and almost conversational style derives directly from the *courante française* with its characteristic rhythmic hesitations.

Finally, **John Bull**'s Walsingham predates the Versailles Hall of Mirrors by at least 65 years, but serves to show what was being achieved quite some time before the golden era of France's harpsichord school. Bull's piece features in the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book, an extraordinary compilation of English keyboard music from around 1562 to 1612 – a snapshot of the entire Elizabethan and Jacobean keyboard tradition. These inventive and beguiling variations on the then well-known English tune *As I went to Walsingham* present considerable challenges for the player, including rapid runs, quick-fire ornamentation and complex rhythms.

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