

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 18 September 2023
1.00pm

Chouchane Siranossian violin
Leonardo Garcia Alarcón harpsichord
Balázs Máté cello

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Violin Sonata in G BWV1021 (1732-5)
I. Adagio • II. Vivace • III. Largo • IV. Presto

Carlo Farina (c.1604-1639)

Sonata quinta detta 'La Farina' (pub. 1626)

Johann Sebastian Bach

Adagio from *Violin Sonata in C minor* BWV1024
Fugue in G minor BWV1026 (before 1712)

Johann Jakob Walther (c.1650-1717)

Passacaglia from *Sonata No. 7* (pub. 1688)

Krikor Naregatsi (c.950-1003)

Improvisation on *Havun Havun*

Pietro Antonio Locatelli (1695-1764)

Sonata in D minor Op. 6 No. 12 (pub. 1737)
*I. Adagio • II. Allegro • III. Andante •
IV. Allegro • V. Capriccio 'prova dell'intonazione'*

Andreas Anton Schmelzer (1653-1701)

Violin Sonata 'Victori der Christen' (c.1683-4)



This concert is being broadcast on BBC Radio 3



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As with so many subjects, music acquired a new discipline dedicated to the dissection and understanding of its component parts during the 19th Century. The painstaking, generally useful work of pioneer musicologists restored ancient works to life (or at least to the library shelf); it also unravelled knotty problems of composer biographies, raised questions of attribution and deciphered ancient forms of musical notation. Yet musicology's rational methods sometimes delivered categorical definitions that were strained to breaking point by the evidence of countless compositions, especially so in the case of the instrumental sonata. Chouchane Siranossian's lunchtime recital recalls a time when the genre, not yet bound by textbook rules, was broad enough to contain narrative programmes, serve as a vehicle for audacious virtuosity or create the conditions for contemplative reflection.

Scholarly consensus and the evidence of their manuscript sources suggest that **Bach's** two surviving sonatas for violin and continuo were written in Leipzig, perhaps after he took charge in 1729 of the collegium musicum that gave weekly concerts during winter at Gottfried Zimmermann's coffee-house. The Violin Sonata in G BWV1021, like his three sonatas for unaccompanied violin, harks back to the 17th-century *sonata da chiesa* or 'church sonata' in its four-movement form and alternating pattern of slow-fast-slow-fast movements. Bach treats the two slow movements almost like arias without words, in which the violin part embroiders its melodic line with delicate ornaments and expressive gestures.

Questions of attribution certainly hang over the Violin Sonata in C minor BWV1024, which may have been composed by Johann Georg Pisendel, concert master of the Dresden court orchestra, or was possibly written for him by Bach. The great rhetorical flourishes and dramatic nature of the work's *Adagio*, regardless of its composer's identity, were clearly written for a violinist blessed with a consummate technique and strong personality. It is paired here with the *Fugue in G minor* BWV1026, the earliest surviving example of Bach's chamber music. This virtuoso piece, preserved in a copy made in Weimar in 1714 by Johann Gottfried Walther, reflects Bach's own formidable skills as a violinist in its double-stopped passages and thrilling melodic flourishes.

Carlo Farina helped import new styles of violin playing and composition from Italy to Germany and Austria in the early 1600s. Having worked alongside Claudio Monteverdi as a member of the Duke of Mantua's orchestra, he moved to Dresden in 1625, where he worked with Heinrich Schütz, and later entered the service of the Empress Eleonora I in Vienna. Farina's formidable technical and inventive skills surface in the sonatas he wrote during his Dresden years, strikingly so in his Sonata quinta called 'La Farina', with its violin runs and roulades and lively dialogue between the solo and continuo instruments.

Before Bach raised the violin sonata to previously unimagined levels of expression, German and Austrian composers of an earlier generation, Johann Heinrich

Schmelzer and his son Andreas among them, absorbed the traditional Italian fondness for display pieces for solo violin into their works for the instrument. **Andreas Anton Schmelzer**, a violinist with the Vienna court orchestra, reflected the triumphant mood that coursed through his home city following the defeat of the Ottoman Turks at the Battle of Vienna in 1683 and the lifting of the devastating two-month siege that preceded it. His Violin Sonata 'Victori der Christen', based on the tenth of Biber's so-called Rosary Sonatas, opens with a depiction of the approaching Turkish forces and continues with a lament for the victims of the siege. Vigorous arpeggios portray the Turkish attack, which gives way to a stately 'March of the Christians' and their rousing pre-battle meeting. The Turks are defeated and seen off, clearing the way for the final 'Victory of the Christians', a lachrymose hymn marked by the violin's haunting double-stopped melody.

Johann Jakob Walther, a member of the Elector of Saxony's court orchestra in Dresden, was said to have learned to play violin from a Polish gentleman whose service he entered during his adolescence. He progressed to push the accepted technical limits of his instrument, not least by exploring virgin high-note territory, employing multiple stopping to imitate birdsong and animal cries and creating elaborate polyphonic passages for solo violin. The *Passacaglia* in D minor that forms the Seventh Sonata from his *Hortulus chelicus* collection, first published in Mainz in 1688, illustrates Walther's remarkable virtuosity and ability to embroider a simple melodic idea with spectacular 'divisions' or variations.

Solitude informed the mystical poetry of **Krikor Naregatsi** or Gregory of Narek (c. 950-1003/11), who spent most of his life at a remote monastery in the western Armenian province of Reshdunik. He became one of the most significant theologians of the Armenian Apostolic Church, by which he was declared a saint, and an enduring figure of Armenian literature. 'Havun Havun' ('The bird, the bird was awake'), his hymn to the Resurrection, originally chanted as part of the Divine Liturgy, evokes the free spirit of birdsong to suggest the fragile miracle of life.

It seems likely that **Pietro Antonio Locatelli**, considered to be the 18th Century's Paganini, made his name in the 1710s as a virtuoso in Rome before gaining fame across Europe, thanks not least to his astonishing talent for playing in the violin's highest register. According to one near-plausible story, he played so high on one occasion that his little finger became trapped in the holes in the violin's bridge. Locatelli's Sonata in D minor, the last of his dozen Op. 6 collection, strikes a fine balance between virtuosity and reflective expression, with the latter promoted in the work's opening *Adagio* and central *Andante*. The sonata closes with the astonishing virtuoso fireworks of the *Capriccio 'prova dell'intonazione'*, a fearsome test of high-flying violin intonation.

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