

WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 19 February 2023
7.30pm

Chineke! Wind Quintet

Meera Maharaj flute
Myfanwy Price oboe
Benjamin Pinto clarinet

Daria Phillips bassoon
Francisco Gomez horn

György Ligeti (1923-2006)

6 Bagatelles (1953)

*Allegro con spirito • Rubato. Lamentoso •
Allegro grazioso • Presto ruvido •
Adagio. Mesto (in memoriam Béla Bartók) •
Molto vivace. Capriccioso*

William Grant Still (1895-1978) Summerland from *Three Visions* (1935) *arranged by Adam Lesnick*

John Mayer (1930-2004)

From *Raga Music* (1957)

Megha (Rainy Season) • Vibhasa (Sunrise) •
Gunakali (Morning) • Shri (Afternoon) • Pilu (Evening)

Paul Hindemith (1895-1963)

Kleine Kammermusik Op. 24 No. 2 (1922)

*I. Lustig. Mässig schnelle Viertel •
II. Walzer. Durchweg sehr leise • III. Ruhig und einfach •
IV. Schnelle Viertel • V. Sehr lebhaft*

Interval

Arturo Márquez (b.1950)

Danza de Mediodía (1996)

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Le tombeau de Couperin (1914-7) *arranged by Mason Jones*


I. Prélude • II. Fugue • III. Menuet • IV. Rigaudon

Gilles Silvestrini (b.1961)

Le ballet espagnol (Edouard Manet, 1862) from *6 Etudes for oboe*
(1984-5 rev. 1997)

Valerie Coleman (b.1970)

Red Clay & Mississippi Delta (2009)

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Chineke! Wind Quintet's tour of American and European music, with a little Latin-American twist, opens with a 20th-century classic for wind quintet: the *6 Bagatelles* by **György Ligeti** – arrangements (made in 1953) of six pieces from his earlier piano cycle *Musica ricercata*. Each of the *Bagatelles* is concentrated in form and precision-cut. The first is virtuosic, playful, spirited, dominated by a single, almost childishly sneering alternating interval of a third. This is followed by a doleful, chant-like lament, punctuated by sharp, bell-like chords. No. 3 contrasts staccato background chatter (grouped in sevens) with a sinuous folk-like tune. After No. 4, which is entirely hijacked by a repeating nine-note rhythmic pattern, comes No. 5, marked 'in memoriam Béla Bartók'. The constant ticking 'cuckoos' perhaps underline the march of time. The final *Bagatelle* is the pithiest.

William Grant Still was known as the 'Dean of African American composers'. Like his near contemporary Florence Price, he grew up in Little Rock, Arkansas, around half a century before the group of African American students who became known as the Little Rock Nine tested a US Supreme Court ruling allowing them to enrol at the previously all-white Central High School. *Summerland* is the central movement of Still's *Three Visions* for solo piano, which imagines the onward journey of a human soul after death. This impression of heaven has a dreamy transparency to match, its Debussyan whole-tone and parallel harmonies gently infused with the influence of jazz.

A musician of remarkable variety, **John Mayer** was born in Calcutta (now Kolkata), but came to London to study at the Royal Academy of Music. He was an orchestral violinist for 15 years before earning a living as a composer. His ability to mix East and West, classical and jazz, led him to co-found the successful band Indo-Jazz Fusions in 1966, which combined Indian ragas with jazz. Each of the nine short solo-clarinete pieces of his *Raga Music* (of which we hear Nos. 2-6) is based on a different scale; the titles reflect that certain ragas are associated with particular seasons or times of the day.

In Germany, almost three decades before Ligeti wrote his *Bagatelles*, **Paul Hindemith** was engaging with the idea of 'New Objectivity' (*Neue Sachlichkeit*), a post-war reaction to what was seen as the excesses of both Romanticism and Expressionism. Between 1922 and 1927 he wrote seven works labelled *Kammermusik* ('Chamber music'), most of them effectively solo concertos. *Kleine Kammermusik* is the second in the series, a wind quintet that reflects the cleaner lines of Classicism but shot through with the wit and pungency of the 1920s.

The first of the five movements is based on a long-short-short motif suggestive of a military drum, but there is something of a circus parody too. After the second-movement waltz – charming yet out of sorts – the third movement concentrates on a more homogeneous, 'orchestral' texture, and its central section brings a further march, this time crossed with a

bolero. Though barely a minute in length, the fourth movement allows each instrument a solo moment to shine, while the fifth is a bracing finale, playing with both irregular rhythms and repeated patterns.

Our Latin American twist comes by way of **Arturo Márquez**. Though he studied in Paris and California, picking up the latest avant-garde techniques, he celebrated the popular dances of his native Mexico in a series of *Danzones* during the 1990s. His *Danza de Mediodía* ('Midday Dance') is a celebration of the Afro-Cuban *danzón* genre, whose apparent lightness Márquez sees as 'just a cover letter for music full of sensuality and qualitative rigour.'

Written during the First World War, **Maurice Ravel's** solo piano suite *Le tombeau de Couperin* was a tribute not only to his illustrious French predecessor, François Couperin (as its title shows) but also, he said, 'the whole of French music of the 18th century'. Each movement is of a type that might have been found in a Baroque keyboard suite, and each was dedicated to a friend Ravel lost during the war. In 1919 Ravel orchestrated four of the suite's six movements. Three of these feature in Mason Jones's arrangement for wind quintet. The *perpetuum mobile* nature of the *Prelude* recalls the keyboard music of Couperin. The *Fugue* (not included in Ravel's four orchestrations) opens with a doleful, sighing figure which seeps into the music's fabric through imitation and repetition. The graceful *Menuet* continued Ravel's fascination for this graceful three-time form (the waltz was another obsession). The vibrant *Rigaudon* sports a contrasting reflective, pastoral central section led (as in Ravel's orchestration) by the oboe.

French composer **Gilles Silvestrini** studied oboe before turning to composition and is surely an admirer of Ravel's alluring writing for the instrument. Each of his *6 Etudes for oboe* is based on a French Impressionist painting, the last *Etude* being inspired by *Le ballet espagnol* by Edouard Manet, which depicts a café concert featuring four colourfully costumed Spanish dancers accompanied by two guitarists. Silvestrini has maintained that the purpose of an etude is not merely to help improve technique but also to improve 'artistic work, the work of imagination'. The player's imagination might be piqued by the *seguidilla* incorporated into the *Etude*, but there's much to stretch the physical technique too.

Red Clay & Mississippi Delta from flautist and composer **Valerie Coleman** is the most stylistically wide-ranging and the most outrightly showy of tonight's pieces. The idea, Coleman says, was to combine a musical scherzo (a playful humorous piece) with a reflection of the American South. The references for Coleman span 'from the juke joints and casino boats that line the Mississippi river, to the skin tone of kinfolk in the area: a dark skin that looks like it came directly from the red clay'.

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