

# WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 19 March 2025  
1.00pm

## Richard Harwood & Friends: London Soundtrack Festival Chamber Music by Film Composers

Richard Harwood cello  
David Arch piano  
Ben Hancox violin  
Esther Kim violin  
Garfield Jackson viola

Miklós Rózsa (1907-1995)

Toccata capricciosa Op. 36 (1977)

Dario Marianelli (b.1963)

I Think I Do Remember Him (1994)

Christopher Gunning (1944-2023)

Lament (2015)

Natalie Holt (b.1982)

Partita No. 1 (2025)

Rachel Portman (b.1960)

juniper (2019)

Bernard Herrmann (1911-1975)

Echoes for String Quartet (1965)

*Prelude - Valse lente - Elegy - Scherzo - Nocturne -  
Habañera - Scherzo macabre - Pastorale - Allegro -  
Epilogue*



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'My 'public' career as composer for films ran alongside my 'private' development as composer for myself', recalled **Miklós Rózsa** in 1982. 'My concern has always been to prevent their meeting'. As recently as the 1980s, writing film music could carry a career-limiting stigma for concert-hall composers. In the immediate postwar era, there existed a critical double-standard that ignored the remarkable concentration of musical talent in the Los Angeles area – where exiled European performers, as well as composers, had found security and the chance to build a new life. Groups such as Felix Slatkin's Hollywood String Quartet saw no artistic contradiction in recording Schoenberg's chamber music under the composer's supervision, and accompanying Frank Sinatra on his 1956 album *Close to You*.

Rózsa was acutely aware that he straddled two worlds. Born in Budapest, he was already a presence in European concert halls by the time the Second World War took him to Hollywood, where scores such as *Ben-Hur* and *Spellbound* made an enduring impact. Chamber music was a constant in Rózsa's creative life, and the *Toccata capricciosa* (1977) for unaccompanied cello is a personal homage to his fellow Californian-by-adoption: the great Russian-born cellist Gregor Piatigorsky, who had died the previous year. Rózsa's muscular, virtuosic writing echoes the solo cello music of his compatriot Zoltán Kodály, a towering figure in the Hungary of his youth.

Happily, we live in more enlightened times; today's composers move between the concert platform and the sound stage without prejudice or compromise. *I Think I Do Remember Him*, **Dario Marianelli's** meditation for unaccompanied cello, dates from 1994. 'I am attracted by the vocal quality of that instrument; I find its sound very close to a (male) human voice', he says. 'My love for the cello might go back even further, as I remember as if it was yesterday being blown away by hearing Rostropovich, playing live the six Bach suites, almost 30 years ago'. That affinity for the solo cello has carried over into Marianelli's subsequent scores for *Atonement*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *The Soloist*.

The late **Christopher Gunning**, meanwhile, found genuine acclaim as a symphonist after a long and successful career in film and television, and he composed *Lament* in 2015, between his piano sonata and his Eighth Symphony. *Lament* was Gunning's response to a TV news report from Syria, and the horror of seeing piles of dead bodies on the screen. 'This came from ... somewhere', Gunning wrote to our soloist Richard Harwood a few days after he had completed the piece, which was performed by Harwood and David Arch at Gunning's memorial concert in February 2024.

For the Ivor Novello award-winner (and Emmy nominee) **Natalie Holt**, visual stimuli are as natural an impetus to creation in scores like *Loki*, *Wallander* and *Rivals* as they are in concert works such as her new Partita for solo cello. The composer writes:

'I felt the breath of the beast and heard the volcano stir inside the mountain' wrote journalist Henry Porter, describing how he had stood next to Eyjafjallajökull in Iceland weeks before it erupted in 2010. Translated literally as 'Island Mountain Glacier', the volcano was described as a mere 'inflamed pimple' as far as eruptions go, yet the shooting of its ash four and a half miles into the sky caused chaos for plane travel. The quiet in the skies reminded us once again of nature's power to suddenly and unexpectedly assert itself onto our lives. 'This was my inspiration for these three contrasting movements in Partita No. 1' states Holt.

**Rachel Portman's** work needs little introduction. In 1996, her score for *Emma* (one of well over 100 scores, ranging from Mike Leigh's *Life is Sweet* to *A Dog's Purpose* in 2017) brought her the first Academy Award ever won by a female composer. Her concert music includes an opera, *The Little Prince*, choral music and – in 2019 – *ask the river*, a collection of short works for piano trio. 'They are the fruit of many years spent being immersed in nature' says Portman. 'What can be more inspiring than the green shoots of new beech leaves appearing in the woods with the dappling light reflected in the spring breeze? These pieces are a personal reflection on the beauty of the earth around us – the trees, flora, rivers, birds, animals and all her gifts to us'. 'juniper' is the eighth of 13 discrete – but kindred – movements.

Decades earlier, in Hollywood, the young John Williams approached the veteran **Bernard Herrmann** for advice about writing music for the concert hall. 'Who's stopping you?' snarled Herrmann. Herrmann's peppery temper concealed profound musical knowledge and an unacknowledged hurt. His scores for classic Hitchcock thrillers like *Vertigo* and *North by Northwest*, as well as Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976 – Herrmann's last completed work) remain unparalleled in their psychological acuity, though his concert scores (which include a symphony and the opera *Wuthering Heights*) await their due.

Herrmann's string quartet *Echoes* (1965) dates from the final decade of his life. This is Herrmann speaking openly after the collapse of his marriage, and its name heartbreakingly reflects Herrmann's own belief that 'I am not possessed of any real great talent. It is perhaps an echo of a talent'. The intensely sensitive Herrmann had internalised the often-repeated taunt that film music is derivative (in his own case, a startlingly cloth-eared assertion). Structured in 10 clearly defined but linked sections, and dedicated to his friend Nancy Sanderson (who had recently suffered a similar heartbreak), this haunted, powerfully expressive single-movement quartet proves exactly the opposite. It was premièred in St James's Square, London in December 1966. Herrmann, a passionate Anglophile, would have been delighted to have heard it played at Wigmore Hall.

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