

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 19 September 2024
7.30pm

Sean Shibe guitar

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Prelude in C minor BWV999 (by c.1727)

Agustín Barrios Mangoré (1885-1944)

La Catedral (1921, rev. 1939)

*I. Preludio saudade • II. Andante religioso • III.
Allegro solemne*

Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959)

Prelude No. 3 in A minor from *5 Preludes* (1940)

From *12 Etudes* (1929)

*Etude No. 1 in E minor • Etude No. 5 in C • Etude
No. 8 in C sharp minor • Etude No. 10 in B minor*

Agustín Barrios Mangoré

Julia Florida (1938)

Interval

Federico Mompou (1893-1987)

From *Suite compostelana* (1962)

Preludio • Coral • Canción • Muñeira

Frank Martin (1890-1974)

4 pièces brèves (1933)

Prélude • Air • Plainte • Comme une gigue

Thomas Adès (b.1971)

Forgotten Dances (2023)

*I. Overture - Queen of the Spiders • II. Berceuse -
The Paradise of Thebes • III. Courante - Here
was a Swift (for Max Ernst) • IV. Barcarolle - The
Maiden Voyage • V. Carillon de Ville (for Hector
Berlioz) • VI. Vesper (for Henry Purcell)*

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Improvised preludes and written-out etudes, once prescribed by teachers to their pupils as study aids, became invaluable measures of a musician's progress. Like most good ideas from the classroom, they gradually acquired a life of their own; indeed, notated preludes and studies flourished as independent genres of composition, still concerned with the development of technical prowess yet now reinforced by a measure of artistic invention that transcended the comparatively narrow business of virtuosity for virtuosity's sake. Sean Shibe's recital celebrates this happy marriage between the business of highwire solo display and the cultivation of profound expression; it also pays homage to the part played by Andrés Segovia in changing perceptions of the guitar and inspiring composers to enrich its classical repertoire.

Segovia's *Guitar Archive* series, launched in 1926, set benchmark standards for the transcription of instrumental compositions for guitar. Each of its many volumes contained original pieces for guitar and 'Classical Transcriptions', the latter often devoted to music by **JS Bach**. Segovia's transcription and recording of the *Prelude in C minor* BWV999 introduced one of Bach's few surviving lute pieces to a wide audience. The original composition, probably written between 1717 and 1723 during Bach's time as Kapellmeister to Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen, survives in a copy made for keyboard by Johann Peter Kellner, the title page of which describes it as 'pour le Lute'. The short work, apparently lacking a conclusion in the home key of C minor, is hallmarked by its improvisatory freedom.

Agustín Barrios Mangoré, a native of Paraguay, forged an international reputation in the early 1920s with a series of recordings and, above all, virtuoso compositions for guitar. *La Catedral*, overtly influenced by Bach, dates from 1921. The piece began as a composition in two movements, marked *Andante religioso* and *Allegro solemne*. Barrios wrote an additional *Preludio saudade* while visiting Cuba in 1938, a decade after he recorded the work in its original form. *Preludio saudade* establishes an atmosphere of nostalgic melancholy from which emerges the *Andante religioso*, with its evocation of a sacred procession, bell-like opening chords and echoes of Bach at the organ. The pace of street life pulses through the *Allegro solemne*, a world in perpetual motion, driven by a repeated rondo theme, punctuated by the sounds of cathedral bells and intensified by increasing dissonances as the music moves towards its chordal coda. Barrios's 'barcarola' *Julia Florida*, a love song dedicated to his pupil Julia 'Florida' Martinez de Rodriguez, remains his most popular composition, such is the beauty of its melodic line and the wave-like imagery conveyed by its lilting accompaniment.

Heitor Villa-Lobos developed his lifelong love for Bach during childhood, encouraged by an aunt who played pieces from the German composer's *Well-tempered Clavier*. In the early 1900s, he journeyed deep into Amazonia, where he discovered strands of indigenous Brazilian music which he later blended with Bachian counterpoint. The third of his *Preludes* for guitar, completed in 1940, stands as one of five homages, in this

case to Bach. Villa-Lobos's 'Homenagem a Bach' exploits the ringing sound of the guitar's open strings to create the impression of music made in a reverberant space, like one of Bach's great organ preludes. His dozen *Etudes*, written for and dedicated to Segovia, began life in Paris in the 1920s. The work leads from the soundworld of Bach, present in the first study's arching arpeggios and the third's intricate polyphony, to the Chopinesque contrasts of the eighth study and the complex polyrhythms of Etude No. 10.

While Catalan composer **Federico Mompou** wrote chiefly for piano, he created several gems for other instruments, the exquisite *Suite compostelana* among them. Its six impressionistic movements, written in 1960 for Segovia, capture the spirit of the great cathedral city of Santiago de Compostela. Sean Shibe offers its opening and closing pairs of pieces: *Preludio* seems to emerge from the mists of northwestern Spain like travellers on the Camino, the pilgrimage route to the shrine of St James. The meditative stillness of Gregorian chant pervades the mood of *Coral*, while *Canción* embraces the habitual melancholy of Galician folksong. *Suite compostelana* closes with an irresistible Galician dance, the *Muñeira*, seductive and intimate.

4 pièces brèves, conceived for solo guitar in 1933, embody **Frank Martin's** assimilation of Bachian counterpoint and the melodic sophistication of Chopin. The Swiss composer's little suite opens with a beguiling *Prélude*, in which he bookends a tense, hyperactive central section with two meditative improvisatory melodies. *Air*, the shortest of the four pieces, rises like the revenant of a Baroque sarabande and sets the mood for *Plainte*, the anguished melody of which unfolds above a bed of dissonant chords until making a final solo dash for liberty. *Comme une gigue* subverts the triple-time rhythms of the Baroque gigue with multiple syncopations, deceptive melodic patterns and a declamatory, recitative-like conclusion.

Sean Shibe gave the world première of **Thomas Adès's** first work for solo instrument other than piano in Vienna in 2023. *Forgotten Dances*, a collection of six vibrant miniatures, bursts to life with *Overture - Queen of the Spiders*, with its hypnotic yet unsettling patterns of elaborate melodies and shifting speeds. *Berceuse - The Paradise of Thebes* takes its title and inspiration from a scene from Luis Buñuel's surrealist black comedy *The Exterminating Angel*, while the sonorous *Courante - Here was a Swift*, a demonstration of concentrated virtuosity, grows from the haunting imagery of one of Max Ernst's bird paintings. *Barcarolle - The Maiden Voyage* provides a moment for reflection which continues (but not for long) in *Carillon de Ville*, Adès's increasingly clangorous homage to the music of Hector Berlioz. Finally, the fuzzy nature of memory and recollection pervades *Vesper*, a piece dedicated to Henry Purcell and based on his sublime 'Evening Hymn'.

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