WIGMORE HALL

Friday 20 November 2026
7.30pm

Francesca Dego violin
Francesca Leonardi piano

Giuseppe Tartini (1692-1770)	Violin Sonata in G minor 'Didone abbandonata' Bg10 (pub. 1734) *I. Affettuoso • II. Presto • III. Allegro*
Luciano Berio (1925-2003)	Due Pezzi (1951) *I. Calmo • II. Quasi allegro, alla marcia*
Claude Debussy (1862-1918)	Violin Sonata in G minor (1916-7) *I. Allegro vivo • II. Intermède. Fantasque et léger •* *III. Finale. Très animé*
	Interval
Ottorino Respighi (1879-1936)	Violin Sonata in B minor (1917) *I. Moderato • II. Andante espressivo •* *III. Passacaglia. Allegro moderato ma energico*
Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)	Tzigane (1924)

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Giuseppe Tartini excelled at the art of fencing and applied its blend of discipline and athleticism to the way he made music. His Violin Sonata in G minor, one of a dozen published in Amsterdam in 1734, gained its nickname in the 19th Century, although it followed the composer's precedent of applying to his sonatas evocative titles taken from the opera librettos of Pietro Metastasio, in this case *Didone abbandonata*. Tartini's Sonata certainly captures the emotional turmoil of Dido, Queen of Carthage, after her abandonment by Aeneas, her lover. Despair and indignation vie for attention in the first movement, with the latter gaining supremacy before yielding to anguish. Rage flies in the fiery central movement, underpinned by near-manic repetitions. Tartini closes with one of his great singing melodies, an instrumental aria charged with emotions of loss and longing.

Luciano Berio entered a period of profound personal and creative development during the early 1950s. He completed his studies at the Milan Conservatory, married the American Armenian singer Cathy Berberian and won a bursary to study with Luigi Dallapiccola at the Berkshire Music Center in Tanglewood, Massachusetts. 'In those years Dallapiccola was a point of reference that was not just musical, but also spiritual, moral and cultural in the broadest sense of the word,' he later recalled. Berio absorbed aspects of what he described as Dallapiccola's '"melodic" world', without embracing fully the older composer's attachment to the 12-note method. The *Due pezzi* for violin and piano, first performed by its dedicatee Lorin Maazel and Samuel Lipkin at Tanglewood in 1952, stands as one of four compositions in which Berio worked out his response to Dallapiccola's influence.

The first piece emerges like a melancholy thought, expressed fleetingly by muted violin before its yearning melody twines around a unison *cantus firmus* voiced by the piano. Gentle dissonances grow harsh as both instruments become more agitated; their edgy dialogue races with rhythmic precision to a climax. Silence forms the prelude to a reflective coda built from simple counterpoint between the duo partners, confessional in its sombre intimacy. Berio changes gear in the second piece, the march tempo of which is set by a staccato theme which the violin complements with a singing line spiced with double and triple stops. The march theme returns to lead a dark, daredevil race to the finish, like a Keystone Cops chase directed by Ingmar Bergman.

Debussy's final years were blighted by severe illness. In November 1915 he was diagnosed with rectal cancer and underwent a debilitating operation. His health improved the following year and, under doctors' orders, he and his second wife, Emma, travelled to Le Moulleau in the Gironde in October 1916. He began his Sonata for violin and piano at the seaside resort but without the creative energy that he had experienced near Dieppe the previous year. 'I am a sick old man…,' he wrote to his old friend Robert Godet. 'Now, what I am writing always seems to stem from yesterday, never from tomorrow.' Although Debussy dismissed his Violin Sonata as 'an example of what may be produced by a sick man in time of war', the work, his last, offers an often contradictory combination of tender melancholy and youthful energy, regarded by one critic as symbolic of his 'struggle against death'.

While apolitical by nature, **Ottorino Respighi** was exploited for propaganda purposes by Mussolini's fascist regime. His famous trilogy of orchestral tone poems, *The Fountains of Rome*, *The Pines of Rome* and *Roman Festivals*, evokes the mighty Roman empire, which the Duce and his henchmen planned to revive. The composer received bad press following Mussolini's downfall in 1943, guilty by association with Italy's brutal dictator. Respighi was no fascist; rather he was, like Elgar, Sibelius and Grieg, a romantic nationalist. The Violin Sonata was composed in 1917, as was *The Fountains of Rome*, while Italy was fighting against Austro-German forces to preserve its sovereignty.

The Sonata's opening movement, by turns mysterious and impetuous, carries symphonic weight. Its first theme slithers in the violin, while its Brahmsian second theme offers a more reflective counterpart. Respighi develops both at length before reaching a coda in which the second theme soars high, marked to be played 'with great expression and sweetness'. One big melodic idea runs through the *Andante espressivo*, propelled with contrasting emotions towards a viscerally intense climax. The closing movement, a monumental *Passacaglia*, owes a debt to the finale of Brahms's Fourth Symphony while highlighting Respighi's gift for thematic variation. The dotted passacaglia theme provides rich material, developed here with compelling inventive brilliance.

During a visit to London in 1922, **Ravel** joined a select audience to hear the Hungarian violinist Jelly d'Arányi and cellist Hans Kindler perform his Sonata for violin and cello. He called on d'Arányi to play a 'gypsy' tune, much to her delight. Ravel requested another and then another, becoming intoxicated by the passion of d'Arányi's playing. Neither composer nor performer appeared to notice passing time until 5am, when it became clear that everyone else had heard enough. Two years later Ravel wrote to d'Arányi outlining his intention to compose a Romani-inspired work especially for her. 'This Tzigane must be a piece of great virtuosity,' he explained. 'Certain passages can produce brilliant effects, provided that it is possible to perform them – which I'm not always sure of.' Ravel finished the work shortly before its scheduled première in London in 1924, leaving little time to remove any impossibilities. *Tzigane* far exceeds the technical demands made in almost every violin work of the preceding century and must have stretched even d'Arányi's formidable talents. Beyond the violin part's demands, Ravel's multi-coloured harmonic palette and sophisticated rhythms add greatly to the composition's heavyweight musical substance.

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