

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 22 May 2023
1.00pm

Sitkovetsky Trio

Alexander Sitkovetsky violin

Isang Enders cello

Wu Qian piano

Sam Perkin (b.1985)

Freakshow (2016)

*I. The Rat Circus • II. The Two-Headed Nightingale •
III. The Living Skeleton • IV. The Gentle Giant •
V. The Angel of Death • VI. Pandora's Basket •
VII. The Armless Fiddler*

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Allegretto in B flat WoO. 39 (1812)

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Piano Trio No. 2 in C minor Op. 66 (1845)

*I. Allegro energico e con fuoco • II. Andante espressivo •
III. Scherzo. Molto allegro quasi presto •
IV. Finale. Allegro appassionato*



This concert is being broadcast on BBC Radio 3



This concert is part of the CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust ticket scheme, offering free tickets to those aged 8-25

Friends of Wigmore Hall – celebrating 30 years of friendship

Over the past 30 years, Friends have been providing transformational support for the Hall, ensuring this historic building remains a home for great music making. Enjoy the benefits of friendship by joining as a Friend today, and be a part of the Wigmore story. Visit: wigmore-hall.org.uk/friends | Call: 020 7258 8230

FRIENDS OF
WIGMORE HALL

30

Wigmore Hall is a no smoking venue. No recording or photographic equipment may be taken into the auditorium nor used in any other part of the Hall without the prior written permission of the management.

In accordance with the requirements of City of Westminster persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, or to sit in any other gangways. If standing is permitted in the gangways at the sides and rear of the seating, it shall be limited to the number indicated in the notices exhibited in those positions.

Disabled Access and Facilities - full details from 020 7935 2141.

Wigmore Hall is equipped with a 'Loop' to help hearing aid users receive clear sound without background noise. Patrons can use this facility by switching hearing aids to 'T'.



Please ensure that watch alarms, mobile phones and any other electrical devices which can become audible are switched off. Phones on a vibrate setting can still be heard, please switch off.

The Wigmore Hall Trust Registered Charity No. 1024838
36 Wigmore Street, London W1U 2BP • Wigmore-hall.org.uk • John Gilhooly Director

Wigmore Hall Royal Patron HRH The Duke of Kent, KG
Honorary Patrons Aubrey Adams OBE; André and Rosalie Hoffmann; Louise Kaye; Kohn Foundation; Mr and Mrs Paul Morgan



Sam Perkin has dual bases in Ireland and France, having studied in both Cork and Lyon. *Freakshow* was premièred by the Fidelio Trio in 2016, to mark the centenary of the Easter Rising in Dublin. The commission came from the Welsh music festival Gŵyl Gregynog; nearly 2,000 of the activists arrested in the Irish capital were incarcerated for six months in Wales, in the prison camp Fron-Goch, earning the place the nickname 'The University of Revolution'.

The composer drew inspiration from a book on Fron-Goch by the author Lyn Ebenezer. Among the stories uncovered by Ebenezer is that of one prisoner who caught rats and trained them to perform tricks to entertain the inmates. *The Rat Circus* provides what Perkin calls the 'portal' into his work. This is followed by a series of further episodes representing society's interaction with so-called 'freaks' of the past, beginning with African-American conjoined twins Millie and Christine McKoy, who performed vocal duets in the 19th Century as *The Two-Headed Nightingale*. *The Living Skeleton* references the American Isaac W Sprague (1841-1887), who was compelled by financial pressures to exhibit his emaciated form as a sideshow act.

The 8ft 11 in Robert Wadlow, believed to be the tallest man in history, is *The Gentle Giant*. The fifth movement concerns the Hungarian-Jewish Ovitiz family, some of them with restricted growth, who were subjected to the appalling 'experiments' of Auschwitz doctor Josef Mengele, *The Angel of Death*. *Pandora's Basket* takes inspiration from the extraordinary mind-and-body-bending feats of turn-of-the-century contortionists, while the final section, *The Armless Fiddler*, depicts Carl Herman Unthan (1848-1929), a Prussian born without arms who played violin with his toes.

Beethoven spent the summer of 1812 in Teplitz (Teplice), a spa town north of Prague. It was there that he would meet Goethe, the poet and dramatist he so much admired. As it turned out, the two men would not get on. Goethe considered Beethoven uncouth; Beethoven thought Goethe affected and sycophantic to the aristocracy.

On his way to Teplitz the composer stopped off at Karlsbad, where the Brentano family, close friends from Vienna, were staying. Franz and Antonie Brentano had six children, the first of whom died in infancy. Their third child, born in 1802, was Maximiliane. On this visit Beethoven presented the ten-year-old girl with the Allegretto for piano trio as a personal gift.

It is a straightforward piece in sonata form, not published until three years after the composer's death. There has sometimes been speculation that the movement is part of an abandoned larger work, but there is really no need to complicate the matter. The manuscript is written out with much greater clarity than usual so as to be easy to read, and inscribed: 'For my

little friend Max. Brentano, to encourage her piano playing.'

The year 1845 came at a time of career triumph for **Mendelssohn**, but also of failing health and exhaustion. His mood might be gauged from the letter he wrote to the dedicatee of his C minor Piano Trio, his fellow composer Louis Spohr. Mendelssohn had long wanted to inscribe an important work to Spohr, he said, but 'nothing seemed good enough to me, and in fact neither does this trio'.

Yet there is no sign of failing powers in this composition. C minor is traditionally a key of determination in the face of hardship, at least to followers of Beethoven, whose Fifth Symphony and Third Piano Concerto are in this key. So is his *Coriolan* overture, a work that Mendelssohn is said to have played on the piano with full orchestral effect, and whose character is echoed in parts of the Trio.

The very opening is a case in point: subfusc, agitated rumbling that achieves thematic substance only with difficulty. It is with difficulty, too, that the first alternative subject maintains its shape as a half-pleading, half assertive melody – especially when its harmonic foundation slips away from under it. A third episode gathers the material in a chorale-like peroration. The development drifts between dream-like ambivalence and disturbing lack of assurance. The coda is again Beethovenian, falling into a mood of profound contemplation before the final rally and an abortive gesture towards apotheosis.

The lilting rhythm of the *Andante* is consoling after the uncertainties of the first movement; however, after the strings join the piano, less comfortable areas are explored. After rather bleak duetting between the piano and the strings in turn, the lullaby-lilt of this 'gondola song' becomes a headache-throb. There are nevertheless moments of repose, and all is peace at the end.

There is a mischievous quality to the play of the sprites in the *Scherzo*, and perhaps we emerge from it not entirely confident that the demons of the first movement have been vanquished. The *Finale* launches with a Bohemian, purposeful tune. The marking of *appassionato* is not really evident in the music until the storming scale passage that rounds off the first subject and sets up the transitional theme, its optimism slightly undermined by flattened notes. Then the second subject, a broad chorale, is announced by the piano, with the strings first commenting from the perspective of what has gone before, then joining in. The climactic return of this tune is truly overwhelming, giving a further reminder of Mendelssohn's 'orchestral' pianism, and the resolution at the close is joyful and wholly convincing.

© Brian David 2023

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.