

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 23 December 2023
7.30pm

This concert is supported by the Sir Jack Lyons Charitable Trust



Avi Avital mandolin

Il Giardino Armonico

Giovanni Antonini recorder,
chalumeau, conductor

Stefano Barneschi violin I*

Fabrizio Haim Cipriani violin I

Ayako Matsunaga violin I

Liana Mosca violin I

Marco Bianchi violin II*

Angelo Calvo violin II

Francesco Colletti violin II

Gabriele Pro violin II

Ernest Braucher viola*

Maria Cristina Vasi viola

Marcello Scandelli cello*

Elena Russo cello

Giancarlo De Frenza double bass

Michele Pasotti theorbo

Cristiano Gaudio harpsichord

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Concerto grosso in G Op. 6 No. 1 HWV319 (1739)

I. A tempo giusto • II. Allegro •

III. Adagio • IV. Allegro • V. Allegro

Emanuele Barbella (1718-1777)

Concerto in D for 2 violins, mandolin and continuo (pub. 1772)

I. Allegro ma non presto • II. Andantino • III. Giga. Allegro

Francesco Durante (1684-1755)

Concerto No. 2 in G minor for strings and continuo (?1730-50)

I. Affetuoso - Presto • II. Largo affetuoso • III. Allegro

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Double Concerto in D minor for recorder, mandolin, strings and continuo BWV1060R (c.1736)

I. Allegro • II. Adagio • III. Allegro

Interval

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

Sonata a4 al Santo Sepolcro RV130

I. Largo molto • II. Allegro ma poco

Cum dederit from *Nisi Dominus* RV608 transcribed for chalumeau and strings (c.1713-7)

Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714-1788) Symphony in G H657 (1773)

I. Allegro di molto • II. Poco adagio • III. Presto

Giovanni Sollima (b.1962)

Mandolin Concerto (2019)

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Handel composed his 'Grand Concertos' Op. 6 in the autumn of 1739 as interval fillers. Taking his lead from the multi-movement concertos of Corelli and made a virtue of the textural and expressive contrasts arising from solo or concertino and orchestral or ripieno groups. The set's first concerto, cast in five movements, exploits those contrasts in its opening movement by juxtaposing a stately introduction for *tutti* strings with answering phrases voiced by two solo violins and continuo. Concertino and ripieno forces engage in a lively dialogue in the second movement before the mood tilts towards melancholy in the *Adagio*, sustained throughout until optimism creeps in with the final chords and replaced by the radiant *Allegro's* unforgettable fugal theme and delightful conclusion. Dialogue of the call-and-response kind propels the concerto's finale, a bustling, joyful affair governed by impeccable compositional logic.

Emanuele Barbella worked in Naples at a time when the Italian city was enjoying its heyday as a centre for producing new operas and distinctly Neapolitan styles of instrumental music. While he mostly composed works for violin, it is no surprise that he was drawn to write for the mandolin, such was its popularity in Naples by the second half of the 18th Century. Barbella's Concerto in D makes a virtue of the mandolin's ability to project strong musical ideas and effectively presents it as a character in three short dramatic scenes. The first movement's heroic principal theme, echoed by Avi Avital in his enchanting cadenza, gives way to the *Andantino's* seductive charms, a tender-hearted demonstration of the mandolin's singing voice. Barbella closes with a helter-skelter jig complete with episodes for mandolin and solo fiddle and a thrilling sprint to the finish.

Another Neapolitan, **Francesco Durante**, studied at the Conservatorio di Sant'Onofrio a Porta Capuana with his uncle, the institution's rector and an accomplished composer. He left few marks on the historical record before his appointment in 1728 as *primo maestro* of the Neapolitan Conservatorio dei Poveri di Gesù Cristo; it seems likely, however, that he had studied in Rome in the early 1700s, where he surely discovered the concertos of Corelli. Durante's Concerto No. 2 in G minor for strings blends elements of the concerto grosso with Neapolitan tunefulness and the fashionable solo concerto. The work is hallmarked by the affecting contrasts of its outer movements, the ingenious interplay of ideas at work in its *Presto* and the touching simplicity of its slow movement.

It seems that all but one of **JS Bach's** harpsichord concertos began life as works for other instruments. Among speculative reconstructions of their original models, the Concerto BWV1060R in its version in C minor for violin and oboe is perhaps the best known. Avi Avital and Il Giardino Armonico offer a plausible alternative, transposed here to D minor to suit recorder and mandolin. It is probable that the original concerto for two instruments was written for the court orchestra of Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen in the early 1720s. JS Bach takes the existing form of the Venetian solo concerto and graces it with his peerless mastery of

counterpoint, strikingly so in the work's sublime slow movement and again in the recurrent theme and contrasting episodes of its finale.

Vivaldi was able to convey powerful emotions and explore their many facets with simple thematic ideas, a point underlined by the two works that open the second half of this evening's programme. The *Sonata a4 al Santo Sepolcro* RV130 is one of two surviving *sepolcro* works for strings, so called for their association with the semi-staged sepulchre oratorios performed during Holy Week at the Viennese imperial court. It is possible that Vivaldi wrote both hoping to land a job in Vienna. The Sonata establishes a solemn mood appropriate for a procession to the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, the most sacred of all Christian sites, and follows its slow introduction with a fugue built from two subjects. Vivaldi's skills as mood-setter are on display in 'Cum dederit' ('For so he gives his beloved sleep'), from his setting of Psalm 127/Vulgate 126, *Nisi Dominus* ('Except the Lord build the house'). The alto aria's mantra-like bass line and lilting siciliana rhythm support a solo melody of extraordinary tenderness, played this evening on the chalumeau, a warm-toned precursor of the modern clarinet.

Neapolitan overtures and the fluid lyricism of Italian vocal music were among the influences absorbed by **CPE Bach** into his early symphonies. The Symphony in G, one of six conceived for strings in 1773, displays the sophistication of CPE Bach's mature musical style, present in the intricate melodic invention of its opening movement and again in the surprising turns of its finale. The work's short central *Poco adagio* contains the elements of boldness, individuality, originality and wit that its composer's contemporaries so often found in his music.

The concertos of 18th-century Italy have long fascinated **Giovanni Sollima** and provided the springboard for many of his own compositions. His Mandolin Concerto, originally written for Avi Avital in 2019 and presented this evening in its more recent short version, raises ghosts of Vivaldi's Concerto for mandolin and strings RV425 and blends them with other materials, including strong traces of folk music from the Mediterranean basin. Sollima's score opens with a slow introduction in which the mandolin emerges from the mist of barely audible string chords before escaping at a canter with a flurry of unaccompanied triplet and duplet quavers. Dramatic contrasts between solo and tutti writing, the latter flavoured by the addition of a soprano recorder, give way to a lyrical central section in which the mandolin echoes Henry Purcell's *A New Scotch Tune* of 1687 and the accompanying strings emulate a 17th-century viol consort. Past yields to present with the arrival of complex string rhythms and eerie recorder sounds before returning in the form of a lilting siciliana. The music's pastoral mood is interrupted by a return of the mandolin's triplet figures followed by an extended exploration of Purcell's melody and a final pulse-quickenning jig.

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