

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 24 April 2023
1.00pm

Imitations

Lawrence Power viola, violin
Sergio Bucheli lute

Dieterich Buxtehude (c.1637-1707)
Nicola Matteis

Fazil Say (b.1970)

Johann Paul von Westhoff (1656-1705)

Errollyn Wallen (b.1958)

Johann Paul von Westhoff

Cassandra Miller (b.1976)

Nicolò Paganini (1782-1840)

Luciano Berio (1925-2003)

Marin Marais (1656-1728)

Prelude and Chaconne

From Suite in G from *Ayres for the Violin Book 2*
(pub. c.1679)

Grave • Sarabande

Ground after the Scotch Humour (pub. 1685)

Viola Sonata Op. 92 (2021) *world première*
I. Largo espressivo • II. Allegro assai molto energico

Imitazione delle Campane from Violin Sonata No. 3 in
D minor (pub. 1694)

Peace on Earth (2006)

Imitazione del liuto from Violin Sonata No. 2 in A minor
(pub. 1694)

Daylonging, Slacktide (2020)

From Quartet No. 15 in A minor (1818-20)

Recitativo • Adagio cantabile

From *Naturale* for viola, percussion and tape (1985-6)
Abbagnata • Ninna nanna • Ladata

Les Voix Humaines (pub. 1701)

Le Tourbillon (pub. 1717)



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

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Imitation carries multiple meanings in music. Several among them surface in one of the earliest surviving polyphonic compositions, *Sumer is icumen in*. The piece echoes the cuckoo's call and requires four of its voices to imitate one another by singing the same melody in canon. And so musical imitation can be mimetic, structural or a combination of the two. Composers have always copied sounds from the natural world: the barking dog in Vivaldi's 'Four Seasons', the cuckoo again in Beethoven's 'Pastoral' Symphony, Vaughan Williams's ascending lark and Messiaen's blackbird spring to mind. Lawrence Power's programme explores ways in which composers, past and present, have used imitation to evoke certain styles of music or apply the characteristic sounds or playing techniques of one instrument to another.

The second part of **Buxtehude's** *Prelude and Chaconne*, drawn from one of his sonata concertatas, illustrates imitation in its simplest form. Following the *Prelude's* flourishes, the *Chaconne* restores order with a movement based on multiple repetitions of a descending four-note bass line; the upper part is also built from repeated melodic sequences and imitative rhythmic patterns. **Nicola Matteis**, born in the mid-1600s, could have encountered Buxtehude's music on the long walk from his native Naples through Germany. He progressed to find fame as a virtuoso violinist in London, where his four volumes of *Ayres for the Violin* were published and republished before his death. The Suite that opens Matteis's second book of *Ayres* contains two movements marked *Grave*, both of which emulate the expressive nuance of the human voice; the first is followed by a stately *Sarabande*, in which the composer imitates the style and copies the binary form of a simple song. There was much talk of Scotland in England in 1685, the year of James II's accession as king of both nations and of the Earl of Argyll's botched attempt to topple him. Matteis's lively *Ground after the Scotch Humour*, another product of 1685, presents a series of lively 'divisions' or variations above a repeated four-bar ground bass. The piece, a popular hit of its day, plays with reiterated rhythms and so-called Scotch snap syncopations.

Fazıl Say's Viola Sonata Op. 92 is characterized in its opening section by the same short-long syncopation, used here to articulate a slow lament. The Turkish composer's score is dedicated to the memory of his countryman Ruşen Güneş, the revered former principal viola of the BBC Symphony Orchestra who died in 2020. Say's two-movement sonata begins with an incantation in which repetition and gradual change share a symbiotic relationship. Haunting high harmonics follow, and a passage in which glissandi, subtle bow shifts and tremolos mark a change of mood, more intense, less certain than what has gone before. The first movement spirals into the viola's upper register and signals its dramatic climax with a yearning melody that prefaces a modified return of its reflective

opening section. A clear rhythmic pattern emerges in the second movement, an energetic *Allegro* built around a rondo theme of alternating 9/8 and 7/8 bars. While the metre changes as the movement reaches its midway point, the rhythmic regularity continues and is reinforced by animated Scotch snap chords. The work ends by projecting the viola as dramatic hero, fully in command of the coda's shifting metrical patterns.

Italy's fondness for virtuoso violin pieces flowed north of the Alps during the late 17th Century and was adopted in German-speaking lands by, among others, Heinrich Biber, JJ Walther and **Johann Paul von Westhoff**. The third of the latter's Six Sonatas for solo violin with basso continuo, published in 1694, includes a movement constructed from rapid-fire figures that imitate a bell's clangour. The second of Westhoff's sonatas includes a sublime imitation of the lute, conveyed by a tripping melody in compound duple time above a repeating bass line.

Belize-born British composer **Errollyn Wallen's** *Peace on Earth* began life as a setting of her own words for unison voices and piano or organ. The carol's hypnotic use of melodic and rhythmic repetition, intended to evoke winter's stillness, imparts a mood of near-mystical contemplation. *Daylonging*, *Slacktide*, the fourth of Lawrence Power's acclaimed Lockdown Commissions, echoes fragments of the Georgian song 'Saqartvelo Lamazo', based on a profoundly moving recording made by two brothers reunited after two years apart. 'This is a piece about longing to reconnect with others, and about the experience of time holding still, endless hours without signposts,' observes **Cassandra Miller**.

Imitation surfaces in the *Recitativo* and *Adagio cantabile* from the last of **Paganini's** 15 quartets for violin, viola, guitar and cello. Perhaps inspired by his friendship with Rossini and certainly by his feeling for the expressive ebb and flow of the human voice, his beguiling composition replicates an operatic scena *sans paroles*. Folksong supplies both the essence of *Naturale*, **Berio's** 'action for dance' (1985-6), and its potent thematic material. *Abbagnata*, *Ninna nanna* and *Ladata* are based on traditional songs from Sicily, recorded by the composer in Palermo.

Les voix humaines, first published in 1701, reflects the spirit of human voices engaged in compassionate dialogue. **Marin Marais's** score, conceived for viola da gamba, radiates warmth from its baritone melodic registration and sonorous harmonies. *Le Tourbillon* ('The whirlwind') belongs to the French composer's 'Suite in a Foreign Style', *Suite d'un Goût Etranger*, a collection of character pieces from 1717 in which Marais portrays certain national stereotypes and natural phenomena.

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