

WIGMORE HALL

Friday 27 October 2023
7.30pm

This concert is supported by The Tertis Foundation in memory of Lillian Tertis.

We are grateful to The Tertis Foundation for underpinning viola recitals at Wigmore Hall with a major gift to the Director's Fund.

Timothy Ridout viola

- Caroline Shaw (b.1982) in manus tuas (2009)
- Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767) Fantasia for solo violin No. 1 in B flat TWV40:14 (pub. 1735)
I. Largo • II. Allegro • III. Grave • IV. Allegro da capo
- Sally Beamish (b.1956) Ariel (2012)
- Georg Philipp Telemann Fantasia for solo violin No. 7 in E flat TWV40:20 (pub. 1735)
I. Dolce • II. Allegro • III. Largo • IV. Presto
- György Kurtág (b.1926) Jelek Op. 5 (1961, rev. 1994)
I. Agitato • II. Giusto • III. Lento • IV. Vivo, feroce • V. Adagio • VI. Con slancio, risoluto
- Georg Philipp Telemann Fantasia for solo violin No. 10 in D TWV40:23 (pub. 1735)
I. Presto • II. Largo • III. Allegro
- Interval
- Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) Elegy for solo viola (1930)
- Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) Partita No. 2 in D minor for solo violin BWV1004 (1720)
I. Allemande • II. Courante • III. Sarabande • IV. Gigue • V. Chaconne

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Unconditional faith and the emergence of light from darkness are among the concerns of *Compline*. The nocturnal service, held three times during Holy Week, formed one of the most powerful rituals of the late medieval Church in England. **Caroline Shaw's** *in manus tuas*, written in 2009, grows from fragments of an eponymous responsory motet by Thomas Tallis, first published long after the abolition of the old Catholic liturgy in the *Cantiones sacrae* of 1575. Tallis's composition harks back to the worship of pre-Reformation times and its feeling for the intense drama of the instant, recalled in St Luke's gospel, when the dying Jesus cries out from the cross, 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit'. The experience of hearing Tallis's piece in what Shaw describes as 'the particular and remarkable space' of Christ Church at New Haven, Connecticut inspired her to create *in manus tuas*. It was her intention 'to capture the sensation of a single moment' recalled from that performance, evoked by the work's initially inchoate rise out of silence, the static nature of its arpeggiated harmonies, its ruminative wordless vocalisations and haunting echoes of music from Tallis's motet filtered through the distorting lens of Shaw's memory.

Telemann's dozen fantasias for solo violin, first published in Hamburg in 1735, represent what the musicologist Steven Zohn has fairly described as 'some of the most original and successful music of unaccompanied melody instrument from the eighteenth century'. Although the collection inevitably invites comparisons with JS Bach's Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin, it stands proud in its ingenious combination of six fantasias that include fugues and other contrapuntal writing and six cast in the fashionable *galant* style, marked not least by their *cantabile* or 'singing' melodies and elegant phrasing. The publication's opening Fantasia in B flat begins with a slow introduction, serious in tone and coloured by stopped chords. It includes two iterations of a lively 'concerto' movement, rich in Italian influences, the second of them preceded by a melancholy sarabande.

Sally Beamish began her career as a professional viola player in London before moving to Scotland in the late 1980s to forge a new life as a full-time composer. The relocation made all the difference. Having founded the Chamber Group of Scotland in company with her husband, the cellist Robert Irvine, and James MacMillan, she created ideal conditions in which to compose and ensure that her works were heard. *Ariel*, written in 2012 for Nils Mönkemeyer, belongs to Beamish's ever expanding list of international commissions. The short piece, notes its composer, 'portrays the magical and elusive qualities of Ariel, the spirit who is enslaved to Prospero' in Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*. It does so by ingenious repetitions and elaborations of a distinctive melodic cell, which is stated at the work's beginning and grows more obsessive in nature as its shape shifts. 'The final section,' Beamish observes, 'is a wordless setting of part of Ariel's song "Full Fathom Five", and ends with the

tolling of a distant bell, which has been sounding intermittently throughout the piece.'

The seventh of Telemann's fantasias follows the slow-fast-slow-fast movement pattern of the so-called *sonata da chiesa* or church sonata, more a formal plan than an ecclesiastical adornment by Telemann's time. Its opening movement, marked in character as *Dolce* or 'sweet', recalls the mood of the first Fantasia's initial movement while making a virtue of *galanterie*, expressed through a flowing lyrical line and carried into the following *Allegro*. Telemann's tenth Fantasia begins with a fugue, with successive entries of its subject lightly highlighted by double and triple stops. It continues with what sounds like an introspective lament, subdued in nature and apparently resigned to whatever fate has decreed, before Telemann lifts spirits with a folksy jig.

Jelek, the Hungarian word for signs, offers a clue to the possible interpretation of the six aphoristic movements of **György Kurtág's** eponymous composition. Each of these miniatures, originally written for solo viola in 1961 and created under the clear influence of Anton Webern's music, presents short yet complex rhetorical flourishes, like signs or symbols of fleeting emotional states or feelings. Kurtág withdrew the piece from circulation until the violist Kim Kashkashian persuaded him to revise it in the early 1990s. Bartók's shade hovers at times over *Jelek*, present in the otherworldly trills and tremolandos of the third and the fifth's meandering melodic line.

On the morning after his final day at Gresham's School in July 1930, **Benjamin Britten** sat down in his family home at Lowestoft to compose his *Elegy* for solo viola. Its austere language was perhaps informed by the modernist works he had heard broadcast on the wireless from Europe. The piece bears clear witness to the remarkable maturity of the teenager's melodic invention, his feeling for the power of expressive silences and understanding of an instrument that had only recently gained a foothold in the solo spotlight. It was rediscovered after Britten's death and first performed at the 1984 Aldeburgh Festival by Timothy Ridout's former teacher, Nobuko Imai.

Viola players have enriched their repertoire in recent years with transcriptions of the *Chaconne* from **Bach's** Partita No. 2 in D minor, a piece conceived for solo violin most likely in the late 1710s. Timothy Ridout embraces the complete work, which comprises a suite of four dance movements together with the final *Chaconne*. By making extensive use of multiple stops, especially so in the yearning *Sarabande* and above all in the *Chaconne*, Bach creates the impression of polyphony from the solo instrument's single voice. The monumental *Chaconne*, a sequence of 64 variations on a descending four-bar phrase and crowned by a cathartic restatement of the main theme, stands among the supreme tests of the string player's art.

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