

WIGMORE HALL 125

Saturday 27 September 2025
1.00pm

Anastasia Kobekina cello

Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179)

O frondens virga

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Cello Suite No. 2 in D minor BWV1008 (1717-23)

I. Prélude • II. Allemande • III. Courante •

IV. Sarabande • V. Menuet I – II • VI. Gigue

Oliver Leith (b.1990)

The Folly at Dirge Hill (2025)

Joseph-Marie-Clément Dall'Abaco
(1710-1805)

Capriccio No. 1 in C minor (c.1770)

Johann Sebastian Bach

Cello Suite No. 3 in C BWV1009 (c.1720)

I. Prélude • II. Allemande • III. Courante •

IV. Sarabande • V. Bourrée I – II • VI. Gigue



Help us raise £125,000
for 125 years of music

To find out more visit wigmore-hall.org.uk/donate



Join & Support
Donations

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](https://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

*O blooming branch, you stand upright in your nobility, as breaks the dawn on high:
Rejoice now and be glad, and deign to free us,
frail and weakened, from the wicked habits of our age; stretch forth your hand to lift us up aright.*

Hildegard von Bingen was a 12th-century poet, visionary, theologian and composer who spent her early adulthood to midlife as a nun in the Disibodenberg Monastery in the Rhineland region of Germany. In her 40s, she began experiencing religious visions, and rose to prominence as a scholar and religious person of note, endorsed by the Pope and subsequently founding a new abbey in Bingen in 1150. The devotional musical chant we hear transcribed for cello, is a radiant prayer to the Virgin Mary, who is the 'frondens virga' (or 'blooming branch') referenced in the Latin text of the title. In her works, Von Bingen frequently associated spirituality, and in particular, the divine feminine, with nature, and so it is in this chant, with its weaving, winding melody evocative both of flourishing greenery and the radiance of the dawn.

Bach's Six Cello Suites might have fallen into total obscurity, had it not been for the curiosity of a teenage cellist in late 19th-century Barcelona. The player in question was none other than the great Catalan cellist Pablo Casals (1876-1973) who, while a 13-year-old music student, stumbled across a copy of a manuscript in an old music shop by the harbour. Despite being immediately enraptured by his discovery, it would be another 12 years before he felt equipped to perform a complete suite in public, and a lifetime's labour of love to popularise these hauntingly beautiful works. It's safe to say he succeeded: today, the suites are a cornerstone of the repertoire, beloved by both cellists and audiences worldwide.

The D minor Suite dates from Bach's tenure as Kapellmeister in Cöthen (1717-23), and it is presumed (but not known) that the composer wrote the suites for musicians of the court orchestra there. The suite has a melancholy mood, as heard in the searching, bittersweet opening *Prelude*, although it is not without its dramatic moments, as heard in the resonant chord flourishes of the *Allemande*. If we continue with the spiritual theme of the Bingen, the cellist Steven Isserlis has suggested that the varying moods of the six suites might in fact represent a Christian musical narrative, calling them 'Mystery Suites'. In this scheme, Isserlis suggests that the D minor Suite represents 'the agony in the garden'.

Oliver Leith's music has been described by BBC Radio 3's Kate Molleson as: 'deadpan, subversive, quietly anarchic, disarmingly heart-sore and sweet-sour'. In this world première, he describes this work for solo cello in his own, poetic words, as follows: 'A collection of short pieces named *Sham Ruin*, *Jealous*

Wall, *Under hollow something*, *Cherub Grotto* and *The Folly at Dirge Hill*.

'They are named after follies or folly features. Faux castles with no innards – and scars etched onto them. Ornamental in function but love songs to aged and ancient places. Grottos filled with stalactites, made with dripping concrete rather than time. Ruins built with fresh bricks. Familiar grand buildings made from something uncanny.

'One, *Jealous wall*, is named after a real wall in Ireland built to hide a brother's more impressive home and to appear as if it was there first. These structures and these miniatures might appear as if they have always existed but are built from something new – skewed and artificially aged.'

Italian cellist and composer **Joseph-Marie-Clément Dall'Abaco** was a cello prodigy, and his impressive technical facility is evident in this captivating *Capriccio* (the first of 11 that survive). The opening theme – a wide-ranging melody that pivots between a stepwise bass line and a songlike upper melody – forms the basis for a cascading series of variations, its busy flourishes and see-sawing quavers an example of the musical *perpetuum mobile*, or perpetual motion; the illusion of infinite movement. As the melody transforms and evolves through major- and minor-key iterations, some listeners may be reminded of Niccolò Paganini's later, more famous violin *Caprices*. It is thought that Dall'Abaco composed the cello *Caprices* in around 1770, by which time he had relocated to Verona, having spent much of his early career as a court musician in Bonn and Bavaria. Despite this, he retained his allegiance to his Teutonic past, and dedicated all 11 *Capricci* to the Elector of Bavaria.

Where better to begin – or indeed, to end the programme – than a descending C-major scale? **Bach's** Third Cello Suite is likened, in Stephen Isserlis's biblical interpretation of the complete set of six, to the 'descending of the Holy Spirit', and why not? The profundity of these musical works has, since their aforementioned rediscovery by Casals, granted them an elevated, quasi-mythical status among solo instrumental compositions.

The scale of the opening *Prelude* develops into a focused, arpeggiated study, with the concluding surprise of the quadruple-stopped final chords the only respite following a torrent of semiquavers. The genial *Allemande* and *Courante* give way to the serene chord suspensions of the *Sarabande* – three lines of sheer harmonic perfection – while the irrepressible *Bourrées* and the exuberant, whirling *Gigue* round off the sunniest of the Suites.

© Sophie Rashbrook 2025

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.