

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 28 July 2025
7.30pm

Colour is a Rhythm

Illumina

Tai Murray violin	Guilherme Caldas viola
Felipe Bueno violin	Bartholomew LaFollette cello
Hanan Santos violin	Bruno Lima cello
Uiler Moreira violin	Edmundo Carneiro percussion
Jennifer Stumm viola	

Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959)

Preludio from *Bachianas Brasileiras* No. 4 (1930-41)

Béla Bartók (1881-1945)

Improvisation on Brazilian Rhythm: Capoeira

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Allegretto pizzicato from String Quartet No. 4 BB95 (1928)

Rhiannon Giddens (b.1977)

Assez vif, très rythmé from String Quartet in F (1902-3)

Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson
(1932-2004)

At the Purchaser's Option (2016-7)

György Kurtág (b.1926)

Louisiana Blues Strut: A Cakewalk (2002)

Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

Schatten from *Signs, Games and Messages* (1989-97)

Prelude from *Tristan und Isolde* (1857-9) arranged by
Sebastian Gärtler

Anon

J'avais cru qu'en vous aimant (c.1700)

Improvisation on Brazilian Rhythm: Chorinho

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Poco allegro from String Sextet No. 2 in G Op. 36 (1864-5)

Interval

George Enescu (1881-1955)

String Octet in C Op. 7 (1900)

*I. Très modéré • II. Très fougueux • III. Lentement •
IV. Mouvement de valse bien rythmée*



UNDER 35S

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A chance encounter with a São Paulo taxi driver delivered a priceless reward to Jennifer Stumm and the outstanding young musicians of Ilumina. The American violist's project to develop talented players from diverse backgrounds, which she founded in 2015, had held its first two festivals at separate rural venues in Brazil. Jennifer was on the hunt for a new home for her 'musical laboratory' when she hailed the ride. 'I was chitchatting about the festival in my then not-great Portuguese,' she recalls. 'I mentioned that we were looking for somewhere where we could provide world-class opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable to young artists from South America. "I know just the farm for you," he said, and gave me a phone number.' She called the owners of Fazenda Ambiental Fortaleza, a coffee plantation founded in 1850, now devoted to sustainable organic agriculture, and discovered they were ready to host her Ilumina Festival. 'There was some magic that made it happen.'

Ilumina (pronounced 'ee-loo-mee-nah', 'to illuminate' or 'light up' in Portuguese) grew from Jennifer's visits to Brazil and the masterclass sessions that she was often invited to lead as part of the nation's network of social programmes. Many of the exceptionally talented, highly motivated young string players she met lacked the economic and social capital that were readily available to their peers in the so-called developed world. 'As a guest chair at London's Royal College of Music, I knew they were good enough to be studying there,' she notes. 'Yet there was no bridge that would lead them to a conservatoire place. This talent was not flowing where it deserved to flow. I felt that was a real indictment of our system.'

Jennifer recognised the benefits that Brazil's social programmes generated through music. They supplied instruments and opportunities to learn how to play them, which ignited a seemingly insatiable desire among many young people to practise and progress. Ilumina emerged from her vision of how to nurture such talent and remove the obstacles that would ordinarily stifle its development. 'I've seen from the energy and enthusiasm of our small grassroots project just how things can grow. If more of us who have had opportunities from the start could get excited about that process, so many things would change.'

While Ilumina's scope has greatly expanded since it began, its artist-led ethos has remained constant. Each festival brings remarkable young South American musicians to live and work side-by-side with leading professional performers and share the results with a large rural audience. 'It's exciting to think how things came together and have gone in so many different directions,' notes Jennifer. 'It's an international family, and it's great to see that family grow every year. Everybody needs access to the emotional care that music brings and every audience matters. Of course, it's a joy to play in places with wonderful acoustics and great history. But I'm also proud of performing in our farm's sawmill. It's now a famous place for musicians in Brazil, where people want to play for those farmworkers and know that they'll listen

to really complex music with open minds. Wigmore Hall and the sawmill are equally important, equally beautiful to me.'

This evening's concert reflects Ilumina's omnivorous appetite and enlightened ideals. Its contents are rooted in Jennifer Stumm's determination to shape programmes that speak to people from all walks of life. The succession of pieces recalls a freedom that was commonplace during the lifetimes of Mozart and Beethoven. 'We often work like a theatre or dance company, with lighting design and movement,' explains Jennifer. 'The idea is to create a narrative flow of pieces that will carry the audience with you. I want people to feel an emotional, physical connection to the music.'

Colour is a Rhythm shows how different rhythmic patterns can convey everything from the cool introspection of **Kurtág's** *Signs, Games and Messages* to the irresistible warmth of **Brahms's** Second String Sextet. The programme's first half complements the unbridled power and explosive energy of the 18-year-old **George Enescu's** magnificent String Octet. It opens with the intense slow introduction to the fourth *Bachianas Brasileiras*, an affectionate homage paid by Brazil's foremost 20th-century composer to the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. **Béla Bartók** and **Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson** likewise mined existing musical models, the former's Fourth String Quartet embodying elements of Hungarian, Romanian and Bulgarian folk music, the latter's *Louisiana Blues Strut* evoking the cakewalk dance brought to life in the mid-1800s by slaves on the plantations of the Southern United States.

Aspects of love surface in the impassioned Prelude to *Tristan und Isolde* and *J'avais cru qu'en vous aimant* ('I believed that by loving you'), an anonymous song first published in Paris in 1703, while Ravel's fleet-footed String Quartet conjures impressions of Spain. **Rhiannon Giddens's** song was inspired by an advertisement for the sale of a slave and of her nine-month-old child, available 'at the purchaser's option'. Its refrain delivers the mother's defiant reply: 'You can take my body/ You can take my bones/ You can take my blood/ But not my soul.' Kurtág's delicate *Schatten* ('Shadows'), an exquisite miniature less than a minute long, caps the energy of Perkinson's cakewalk and prepares the ground for **Wagner's** *Tristan* Prelude.

The set's improvisations on Brazilian rhythms are guided by cellist and composer Bruno Lima, who started playing alto saxophone at his hometown's church before taking up cello at the age of 16. 'From the early days of Ilumina, improvisation has been an important part of what we do,' notes Jennifer Stumm. 'It really helps glue different pieces together and refreshes the audience, almost like a palate cleanser'. Ilumina, she adds, aims to create a new musical ecosystem. 'It's not about either doing good stuff for society or making amazing music – it's about doing both!'

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