

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 28 October 2021 7.30pm

Avi Avital mandolin

Arcangelo

Jonathan Cohen director, harpsichord

Zefira Valova violin 1, leader **Rebecca Jones** viola

Iona Davies violin 1 **John Crockatt** viola

Sophia Prodanova violin 1 **Jonathan Manson** cello

Max Baillie violin 2 **Timothy Amherst** double bass

Davina Clarke violin 2



Supported by the Sir Jack Lyons Charitable Trust

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

Mandolin Concerto in C RV425

I. Allegro • II. Largo • III.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

The Art of Fugue BWV1080 (by 1742, rev. 1745-9)

*Contrapunctus 1 • Contrapunctus 4 • Contrapunctus 7 •
Contrapunctus 9 • Contrapunctus 14*

Concerto in A minor BWV1041 (c.1730)

I. • II. Andante • III. Allegro assai

Interval

Antonio Vivaldi

Concerto in G RV310 'L'estro armonico' (pub. 1711)

I. Allegro • II. Largo • III. Allegro

Concerto in G minor RV578 'L'estro armonico' (pub. 1711)

I. Adagio e spiccato - Allegro • II. Larghetto • III. Allegro

Johann Sebastian Bach

Violin Concerto in D minor BWV1052R

I. Allegro • II. Adagio • III. Allegro

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 • 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



Fresh from performing Bach's *St Matthew Passion* at this year's BBC Proms, Arcangelo and Jonathan Cohen begin their term as a Wigmore Hall Artist in Residence with a programme rich in connections and contrasts. They are joined by Avi Avital, peerless virtuoso and pioneering champion of his instrument, in a programme built around Vivaldi's Mandolin Concerto in C major and transcriptions of works conceived for other solo instruments. Their concert recalls the fluid nature of instrumentation and pragmatic approach to scoring taken by composer and performers at a time when new instruments were emerging while older ones were fighting a rear-guard battle for survival.

The northern Italian mandolin, a direct descendent of the lute, had already gained a foothold in opera, oratorio and chamber music by the early 1700s. Its repertoire was soon enhanced by a fine, albeit small repertoire of solo concertos. It is possible, indeed probable that **Vivaldi** created the Concerto in C major for mandolin and strings to display the talents of a star pupil at the Ospedale della Pietà in Venice, one of the city's four institutions for orphans and abandoned children. The work dates from the mid-1720s and calls for considerable dexterity from the soloist, notably so in its lively finale. The lyrical central *Largo* draws out the melancholy strands of the mandolin's nature, juxtaposed here with the carefree charm of the concerto's first movement and joyful finale.

Fugue in all its forms, the supreme test of a composer's skills for generations, was increasingly seen during **Bach's** lifetime as old-fashioned, legacy of a past dominated by polyphonic music for church and chapel. One of Bach's critics accused the Leipzig composer of obscuring the beauty of his music with 'an excess of art'. Counterpoint was surely the 'excess' he had most clearly in mind. Bach responded in the last decade of his life by constructing a series of monumental works in which he surveyed every conceivable contrapuntal technique, from old-fashioned *cantus firmus* settings in the Mass in B minor to arcane canonic pieces and elaborate multi-part fugues. *Art of Fugue*, published posthumously in May 1751 by Bach's second oldest son Carl Philipp Emanuel, amounts to a comprehensive collection of fugal works, most of which are in four parts and all of which are based on one principal theme. Each of the fourteen fugues is styled as *Contrapunctus* or 'counterpoint'. Their individual fugal parts are presented on separate staves in the work's earliest editions.

While *Art of Fugue* can be played on a keyboard instrument, the independent lines of its fugues and canons invite performance by instrumental ensemble. Arcangelo's choice of five fugues charts the collection's progress from the simple to ultra-complex; it also underlines Bach's ability to elicit bold rhetorical and expressive contrasts from a work based on a single, short melodic theme. *Contrapunctus 1* presents Bach's fugue subject in its essential form, stripped of the customary countersubject and shared by four voices. Bach turns his principal theme on its head in *Contrapunctus*

4, adding countersubjects to its inverted form, before augmenting and diminishing its note lengths in *Contrapunctus 7*. *Contrapunctus 9* constructs a double fugue in which the principal theme runs in partnership with a second theme and both are inverted at the interval of a twelfth; *Contrapunctus 14*, meanwhile, left unfinished by Bach, unfolds as a triple fugue, the third subject of which opens with Bach's musical cryptogram, the notes B, A, C and H, the German terminology for B-flat, A, C and B natural.

Vivaldi's first concerto publication, *L'estro armonico*, issued in Amsterdam in 1711, became a hit with musicians across Europe. Its title alludes to a period of heightened harmonic arousal, from which grew the collection's happy union of Venetian, Bolognese and Roman musical styles. The dozen concertos of *L'estro armonico* were soon transcribed for everything from unaccompanied violin to carillon and glass harmonica. Originally written for solo violin and strings, the Concerto in G major RV310 seizes the listener's attention with a simple thematic idea, presented by full ensemble, which is then repeated and developed in dialogue with the soloist. The slow movement generates drama with its call-and-response pattern of reiterated chords and meandering solo lines, preparing the ground for the finale's lively interplay of the orchestra's ritornello theme and concise solo episodes. Vivaldi sounds a pre-echo of 'Winter' from 'The Four Seasons' with the chordal opening of his Concerto in G minor RV578 for two violins and strings, the tension of which spills into the following *Allegro* and is ratcheted up in the *Larghetto*. Although the finale's impish solo episodes provide a sense of respite, the ritornello sections sustain the work's seriousness.

Shortly before his promotion as the Duke of Weimar's Konzertmeister in 1714, Bach immersed himself in the study of Vivaldi's concertos. Five of the transcriptions he made at the time for solo harpsichord were of works from the Venetian composer's *L'estro armonico* collection. Even though Bach's aristocratic employer probably directed him to arrange Vivaldi's concertos, their formal order and balance later served as ideal models for his own compositions, the Violin Concerto in A minor BWV1041 among them. The reconstructed Violin Concerto in D minor BWV1052R survives in manuscript only as a work for harpsichord and strings. Although recent scholarship has disputed if not disproved its origins as a composition for violin, the concerto's flamboyant solo writing often suggests violin passagework, string-crossing and other technical effects. Bach's arrangement for harpsichord, if it is such, preserves the original work's virtuosity and sets a solid precedent for its reincarnation as a piece for mandolin and strings.

© Andrew Stewart 2021

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.