

WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 29 September 2024
3.00pm

Cello: A Journey Through Silence to Sound

Kate Kennedy author
Cheryl Frances-Hoad composer
Natalie Clein cello
Sam Lucas cello
Simon Over piano
Tom Morris co-director
Jess McClough-McCrae co-director
Theodore Pin visuals

Cheryl Frances-Hoad (b.1980)

Through Silence to Sound (2023)*

I. The 'Mara' Cello • II. The 'Bee' Cello • III. The Gagliano Cello • IV. The 'Open String' Cello

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Cello Suite No. 2 in D minor BWV1008 (c.1720)

I. Prélude • II. Allemande • III. Courante • IV. Sarabande • V. Menuet I and II • VI. Gigue



**Through Silence to Sound was commissioned by the Royal Philharmonic Society with support from an anonymous donor.*

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The catalyst for this project was a photoshoot. I was shifted about, asked to turn, fold my arms, smile, look serious. It was rather fun, a bit exposing, a bit awkward. After a while the photographer suggested I get my cello and see what images of playing might look like through the camera. I remonstrated – after a career-limiting arm injury, I didn't see myself primarily as a cellist any more. But, in the face of his enthusiasm, I fetched it and sat in front of the blank screen, improvising and playing snatches of Bach. The photographer became much more animated, snapping away. 'This is it!' he said. 'Perfect.' In that moment, observed, the lens pointing at both my instrument and me, I began to understand something I had only half sensed until then. Away from my cello, my shadow was missing. Without it I felt exposed, my silhouette incomplete. But with my instrument I was protected, and entirely happy within my own skin. During that photoshoot I realised that I needed to find out what the cello, and its absence, had meant to other cellists, in order to start to understand what it meant to me.

And so began a journey across Europe, a journey in and out of silence and music to uncover the stories of cellists and their instruments. Western classical music is a history of harmonies and sounds that speak to each other across the centuries. It is also a history of absences, of gaps. I found myself drawn to those gaps, to the silences where a player or an instrument should have been. As I pieced together my own fractured relationship with my instrument, I found ways of filling those silences with music; through the telling of a story, or bearing witness to others' suffering, often far greater than my own. I found stories of fragmentation and erasure, but also of resurrection and resilience. And I learnt to fall back in love with the instrument that has always been my soul, and has shaped me, however complicated our partnership.

With my own cello as my travelling companion, we drew around us a community of players, both historic and contemporary. Often through the common language of Bach's solo cello suites, I found new ways of looking at and listening to the instrument, and exploring it in every way. Particular cellists and cellos became important to me, four of which have provided the inspiration for Cheryl Frances-Hoad, herself a cellist, to write her suite for solo cello *Through Silence to Sound*.

Cheryl writes: 'I was delighted when Kate asked me to compose a new work inspired by her new book: a lapsed cellist myself, the contents held many resonances for me. My suite has four movements, each very intuitively inspired by the four stories below.'

I. The 'Mara' Cello

I followed the adventures of the Stradivari cello of 1711 known as the 'Mara'. Amedeo Baldovino (1916-98), the cellist in the Trieste Piano Trio, was the owner of the 'Mara' during the 1960s. On tour between Buenos Aires and Uruguay, the trio and their instruments were involved in a shipwreck. Forced to jump into the water, the trio survived, but their instruments were washed away.

II. The 'Bee' Cello

In Nottingham, I encountered a cello that had been turned into a beehive, its hollow cavity filled with bees and honeycomb. It is the inspiration of physicist and bee-keeper Martin Bencsik.

III. The Gagliano Cello

Pál Hermann (1902-44) was a Jewish cellist and composer who was celebrated in his lifetime as the next Pablo Casals, but, after being hounded across Europe, was taken to Drancy internment camp in Paris, then murdered by the Nazis, probably at Fort IV, the 'Fort of Death', on the outskirts of Kaunas, Lithuania. When he was arrested, his cello (made by Nicolò Gagliano (c.1730-87)) was rescued, but has subsequently been lost. It is all that is left of this once brilliant young man, apart from his manuscripts, which have only very recently been edited and performed. After looking all over Europe for his cello, I learnt that the cello bore an inscription, which I hope some day will enable me to trace it. 'Ego Anima Musicae Sum': I am the soul of music.

IV. The 'Open String' Cello

The 'Open String' Cello is a project to take the fragments of broken old instruments and create new cellos for young players who need them. Working with the luthiers W. E. Hill & Sons we created a new design of instrument that can be made from flat pack by teenagers in a youth orchestra in a deprived area of Uruguay, not far from the 'Mara's shipwreck 60 years before. These instruments will have new stories, new partnerships, and offer players from deprived backgrounds a better future.

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