

# WIGMORE HALL 125

Tuesday 30 June 2026  
7.30pm

## Bach Violin Concertos

Leonidas Kavakos violin

The Apollon Ensemble

Noé Inui violin

Alexandros Sakarellos violin

Ilias Livieratos viola

Timotheos Petrin cello

Dimitris Tigkas double bass

Iason Marmaras harpsichord

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) Violin Concerto in A minor BWV1041 (c.1730)

*I. • II. Andante • III. Allegro assai*

Violin Concerto in E for BWV1042 (by 1730)

*I. Allegro • II. Adagio • III. Allegro assai*

Violin Concerto in G minor BWV1056R (before 1738)

*I • II. Largo • III. Presto*

*Interval*

Violin Concerto in D minor BWV1052R (?1730-4)

*I. Allegro • II. Adagio • III. Allegro*



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In his pioneering biography of Johann Sebastian Bach (1802), Johann Nikolaus Forkel provides an informative (albeit biased) account of Bach's development as a composer. He writes: 'Bach's first attempts at composition were, like all first attempts, defective...[but] he soon began to feel...[that] some kind of guide was necessary. Vivaldi's concertos for the violin, which were then just published, served him for such a guide.' Bach first encountered the modern Italian concerto style, as exemplified by the works of Antonio Vivaldi and others, around the years 1713-4, when he was working at the ducal court in Weimar. The subsequent impact of Italian music on the development of Bach's own style – and his compositional process of 'musical thinking' – was profound.

Although Bach wrote many concertos for the violin, the exact number is not certain: indeed, his official obituary (1754) merely vaguely mentions 'a mass of other instrumental pieces of all sorts and for all kinds of instruments'. Of those whose existence is known, most have not survived in their original form, and are largely transmitted as arrangements for other instruments, especially the harpsichord. One of the few exceptions is the **Violin Concerto in A minor BWV1041**, which is preserved in a set of parts, partly copied by Bach himself, that dates from around 1730. Exactly when the piece was composed, however, is a matter of conjecture: it may date from as early as Bach's Weimar years, or from his time at the court of Anhalt-Cöthen, where he wrote a large amount of instrumental music (including the Brandenburg Concertos). Some scholars, however, have suggested it was specifically written for Leipzig's Collegium musicum, a secular ensemble that consisted mostly of university students, and which gave weekly performances at the local coffee house. Bach took over direction of the Collegium musicum in 1729, and this concerto may have been written not long after; later, he arranged it as a concerto for harpsichord in G minor (BWV1058).

The A minor Concerto opens with a movement in typical Vivaldian style, where a main theme (or *ritornello*), heard at the outset, returns throughout the movement, progressively fragmented and recombined in different ways. In between, the solo violin plays virtuosic 'episodes' that move into new key areas. The meditative *Andante*, in the relative key of C major, features a repeating *basso ostinato*, a feature that Bach seems to have particularly associated with violin concertos, and often employed. In the third movement, cast as a *gigue*, technical brilliance comes in the form of *bariolage* figuration, a rapid string-crossing technique that produces exciting effects.

The original sources for the **Concerto in E BWV1042** are lost, and although the music is found in Bach's hand in a later version for harpsichord (BWV1054), it only survives as a violin concerto thanks to a copy made after his death. Like BWV1041, this piece is based on the three-movement concerto model cultivated by Vivaldi, although it displays a number of un-Italian

characteristics. The first movement, for example, has a *da capo* structure, where the first section is repeated with embellishments after a contrasting middle section. Despite a written cadenza, Bach resists the temptation to let the violin show off too much; instead, both violin and orchestra are engaged in a partnership for much of the movement, with the former sometimes even accompanying the latter. The slow movement is again based around a long *basso ostinato* line, above which the violin weaves an intimate, poignant melody, while the finale features a swinging, *passepied*-like refrain, interspersed with couplets in which the figuration for the solo violin becomes ever more virtuosic.

Given that several of Bach's other concertos are thought to have existed in earlier versions for different solo instruments, various attempts have been made to reconstruct the lost originals. The **Concerto in G minor BWV1056R** (the 'R' denotes 'reconstruction') is one of these, but here the identity of the original solo instrument is not certain. Many scholars suggest it was indeed a violin, although the beautiful middle movement was later reused as the opening *Sinfonia* to the cantata *Ich steh mit einem Fuss in Grab* BWV156, where it is scored for oboe. The outer movements are lively but brief: this is, in fact, the shortest of Bach's concertos.

By contrast, the **Concerto in D minor BWV1052R** is one of the longest and most monumental of the concertos, although its origins are disputed. Today, it is most well-known in its later version for harpsichord (c.1738); Bach also arranged its constituent movements for organ obbligato between 1726 and 1728, incorporating the first two movements into the cantata *Wir müssen durch viel Trübsal* (BWV146), and the third into the cantata *Ich habe meine Zuversicht* (BWV188). It was long thought that the now-lost original version of the concerto was for violin, as much of the writing is very characteristic of the instrument, especially the first movement's use of *bariolage*. The latest research, however, does not support this view, and instead strongly suggests it originated in Bach's Weimar period as a harpsichord or organ concerto. Nonetheless, it remains a dramatic work in its modern arrangement for violin, opening with an arresting unison theme that reappears throughout the first movement, contrasting with the highly virtuosic solo violin figuration. The following *Adagio*, too, begins with a unison theme, this time a repeating ground bass, over which the violin spins a long and florid aria-like melody. Brilliant virtuosity returns in the last movement, however, which features a rhythmic, driving theme (a dance, nevertheless), and demands great stamina from the soloist, eventually building to a thrilling climax. Despite no longer having an authentic basis, none of the impressive power of this greatest of Bach's solo concertos is lost in the version for violin. Its success is testament to the supreme versatility and adaptability of Bach's music – and, of course, the genius of his art.

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