

WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 30 March 2022 7.30pm

Alina Ibragimova violin

Cédric Tiberghien piano

Doric String Quartet

Alex Redington violin

Ying Xue violin

Hélène Clément viola

John Myerscough cello



Supported by CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust

Guillaume Lekeu (1870-1894)

Violin Sonata in G (1892)

I. Très modéré - Vif et passioné • II. Très lent • III. Très animé

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

String Quartet in G minor Op. 10 (1893)

*I. Animé et très décidé • II. Assez vif et bien rythmé •
III. Andantino, doucement expressif • IV. Très modéré*

Interval

Ernest Chausson (1855-1899)

Concert in D for violin, piano and string quartet Op. 21 (1889-91)

I. Décidé • II. Sicilienne • III. Grave • IV. Très animé

Welcome back to Wigmore Hall

We are grateful to our Friends and donors for their generosity as we rebuild a full series of concerts in 2021/22 and reinforce our efforts to reach audiences everywhere through our broadcasts. To help us present inspirational concerts and support our community of artists, please make a donation by visiting our website:

[Wigmore-hall.org.uk/donate](https://www.wigmore-hall.org.uk/donate). Every gift is making a difference. Thank you.

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://www.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



Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND



Born in Vervier near Liège, **Guillaume Lekeu** came late to music; and a chance encounter with Beethoven's String Quartet Op. 132 at the age of 18 shaped the course of his brief adult life. 'I quiver still with fever produced in me by this work', he wrote. 'It was as if a blind man had been operated upon for a cataract'. His musical development was swift and spectacular. In October 1888 he began studies in Paris with his fellow-Belgian César Franck - and the music started to flood out: a cello sonata (1888); a piano trio (1891); and a violin sonata (1892) for the great Belgian virtuoso Eugène Ysaÿe: impassioned, harmonically bold, and driven by a lyrical urge that can feel like a force of nature. 'Is it not the artist's mission' he asked, 'to toil all his life to bring to perfection one single ideal, which each individual work is but an attempt to realise?'

Lekeu had no time for music that was 'pretty, but not felt', and even in repose there's an energy - a tension - behind every note of the Violin Sonata. The first movement moves in spacious paragraphs towards an exultant climax; the finale throws itself headlong into an urgent and expansive drama before surging on to the grandest of conclusions. Yet it's in the centre of the sonata, perhaps - the wandering, pensive *Très lent*, where Lekeu shapes and guides a flowing, deceptively artless melody in 7/8 time - that we catch a glimpse of the composer he might have become; the artist who marked the central section of this movement 'Very simply, and in the mood of a folksong'. But we can never know. At the age of 23, Guillaume Lekeu contracted typhoid fever after eating sherbet made with contaminated water in a Paris restaurant. He died one day after his 24th birthday.

On 7 April 1893, **Debussy's** cantata *La damoiselle élue* was premièred at the *Société Nationale* in Paris. Having rejected the honours and academic principles of the Conservatoire, and already 'attracted by everything subtle, delicate, complicated and strange', Debussy's credentials as a bohemian were well established - so when his next major première took place, artistic Paris was ready to listen. The concert was on 29 December 1893, and the piece, played by Eugène Ysaÿe's quartet, was Debussy's String Quartet in G minor. 'He is rotten with talent' announced one critic.

Debussy wore his influences with pride. Grieg's passionate G minor Quartet (1878) was an inspiration; César Franck's 'cyclic' technique gave Debussy's ideas a formal logic. Harmonies came from Wagner, filtered through Franck, and, famously, there was the Javanese gamelan that Debussy heard at the 1889 Paris Exhibition. That same exhibition also featured Russian concerts under Rimsky-Korsakov, and Debussy's experience of Russian music taught him a keen sense of instrumental colour, as well as myriad ways to transform a single 'motto theme'.

But the quartet is something more than the sum of these parts. Debussy ties the whole work together with the trenchant ('*très décidé*') opening motif. The transformations that follow, though, are

pure inspired Debussy. The theme dances over *pizzicato* accompaniment in the second movement, and sings ecstatically over shimmering trills at the movement's centre. It's changed almost beyond recognition in the *Andantino* (a muted, profoundly tranquil nocturne) and is proudly assertive, once more, in the finale - the last in a series of transformations that, as Paul Dukas put it, are 'captivating in their unexpected grace'. It's a description that might equally suit the whole quartet, for despite Debussy's optimistic title of *Premier quatuor*, it would remain his only string chamber work. The *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* was already on his work-desk. But that's another story.

Ernest Chausson had a comfortable upbringing and an excellent education, right up until the point in 1879 when, at the age of 24, he abandoned a promising legal career to study music with Jules Massenet, and then César Franck, at the Paris Conservatoire. A wealthy and well-connected young man could afford to indulge his creative impulse, but Chausson's privilege left him with a problem. Intensely self-critical, he was horrified at the thought of being perceived as a dilettante. 'To attain self-belief is a life's work', he told his diary in 1892. Debussy recognised his talent, and spoke frankly: 'You do not let yourself go enough...I would simply like to give you courage to believe in yourself'.

The *Concert* is the sound of Chausson finding that self-belief. The direct inspiration, once again, was the playing of Eugène Ysaÿe; this is in one sense a chamber violin concerto, with the accompaniment of a piano quintet. And Ysaÿe gave the first performance, in Brussels on 4 March 1892. 'Never have I had such a success!' wrote Chausson in his diary after the première. 'I feel light and joyful, something I haven't done for a long time. It's done me good and has given me courage'.

But this work is also a *Concert* in the tradition of the French court composers of the 18th Century, such as Couperin and Rameau, who habitually described chamber works in these terms. Not that you'd guess it from the music, except, perhaps in the lilting *Sicilienne* - where Chausson reinvents a Baroque dance form as a lyrical interlude. The voice of Chausson's great teacher Franck echoes throughout the *Décidé* first movement; the surging, chromatic writing is Gallic late-Romanticism at its most heady, balanced by that iridescent *Sicilienne* and a sombre, *Grave* slow movement, gradually unfolding and growing in passion over a sinking, passacaglia-like bass. The restless finale, with its final glowing, grandiloquent sweep home into the major key, is the sound of a composer who senses (one way or another) that he has come into his inheritance.

© Richard Bratby 2022

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.