

WIGMORE HALL 125

Monday 30 March 2026
7.30pm

Bach Beyond Borders

Ensemble Diderot

Johannes Pramsohler artistic director, violin
Roldán Bernabé violin
Gulrim Choï cello
Philippe Grisvard harpsichord

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Trio Sonata in C BWV529 (c.1730)

I. Allegro • II. Largo • III. Allegro

Jean-Marie Leclair (1697-1764)

Trio Sonata in D minor Op. 4 No. 3 (pub. c.1731-3)

*I. Adagio • II. Allegro • III. Aria. Allegro ma poco •
IV. Sarabanda. Largo • V. Allegro*

Johann Gottlieb Goldberg (1727-1756)

Trio Sonata in C BWV1037 attributed to Johann
Sebastian Bach

*I. Adagio • II. Alla breve •
III. Largo • IV. Gigue. Presto*

Interval

François Couperin (1668-1733)

Trio Sonata in D minor 'La Convalescente'

*I. Gravement • II. Vivement et ferme •
III. Lentement • IV. Air gracieusement •
V. Lentement • VI. Vivement*

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

Trio Sonata in G RV820

*I. Allegro • II. Adagio • III. Presto – Adagio •
IV. Allegro • V. Adagio • VI. Allegro • VII. Allegro*

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Trio Sonata in F HWV392 (c.1707-9)

I. Andante • II. Allegro • III. Adagio • IV. Allegro

Antonio Vivaldi

Trio Sonata in D minor Op. 1 No. 12 RV63
'La Follia' (pub. 1705)



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The Baroque 'Trio Sonata' is among the more deceptively titled musical categories. Such works are scored for two solo voices (often violins) above a bass, but the bottom 'basso continuo' part is typically filled out both by a low string player, like a cellist, and by a musician capable of extemporising appropriate chords, such as a harpsichordist. Composers began to write for this combination in the early 1600s, and by the end of that century it had become the most common form of instrumental chamber music.

Many trio sonatas follow a slow-fast-slow-fast movement structure that became standardised in dozens of works published by the Italian violinist Arcangelo Corelli between 1681 and 1694. Two selections on this program stick to this archetypal form. **Handel** likely wrote his early Trio Sonata in F HWV392 in the early 1700s, when he was living in Italy, though the work was not published until the 19th Century and the attribution is considered spurious by some scholars. If it is indeed by Handel, it is among his most Corelli-esque creations. In a touching *Andante*, the two violin soloists alternate on increasingly elaborate disquisitions. The bubbling *Allegro* is a fugue based on a subject that begins with several chirping repetitions of the same note, in which the continuo player contributes actively to the counterpoint. The movement ends with a daringly dissonant recollection of the *Andante*, which sets up the severe mood of the mournful *Adagio*. In the final *Allegro*, the violins return to the turn-taking of the first movement, but rather than engaging in a respectful dialogue, they cut one another off with curt, energetic statements.

The other four-movement piece heard in this concert is the Sonata in C by **Johann Gottlieb Goldberg**, the harpsichordist for whom Johann Sebastian Bach wrote his 'Goldberg' variations. This piece made such exquisite use of the instruments and of four-movement trio sonata structure that it was credited to Bach himself when it was first published in 1761, and it was only formally attributed to Goldberg in the second half of the 20th Century. The fugal *Alla breve* is based on a tense, chromatic subject that appears to allude to Bach's only purpose-built trio sonata, which he included in his 1747 *Musical Offering* BWV1079, a collection of works based on a gnarly theme purportedly given to him by King Frederick the Great. The pair of slow movements in Goldberg's sonata offer a contrast between sweet and severe moods, while the witty *Gigue* that closes the work is indebted to the fleet finales found in the seminal works by Corelli.

Around 1730, **JS Bach** compiled a set of three-movement organ sonatas – some arranged from earlier pieces, some original compositions – in which the upper manuals flit and flirt above a resounding, pedal bass. These works have the texture, if not the typical instruments, of trio sonatas, and they are often

transcribed for ensembles of high voices with continuo. The Sonata in C, BWV529, opens with a virtuosic *Allegro*. The two solo voices initially trade gestures in the manner of works by Corelli or Handel, but soon Bach abandons this strategy for a more developmental approach, having one musician state material before the other plays it in a new key or varies it substantially. In the *Largo*, the elaborately ornamented solo lines dovetail with one another, creating a sequence of increasingly desperate cries. The bass stays in the background for much of the piece, but it enters the fray in the final, fugal *Allegro*, when the three voices build to a euphoric conclusion.

Other works on this program illustrate looser approaches to the form of a trio sonata. In his Sonata in D minor Op. 4 No. 3 (c.1730s), the French violin soloist and pedagogue **Jean-Marie Leclair** hints at the symmetry of a slow-fast-slow-fast structure; the piece starts with a grave *Adagio* full of dotted notes, which is followed by a tight fugue with a whining, chromatic countersubject. But he inserts a playful minuet-like *Aria* into the proceedings, which exhibits all the charm of later works he would write in the elegant, mannered, mid 18th-century *galant* style. In **Vivaldi's** early G major Trio Sonata, RV820, which was only authenticated just over a decade ago, the two soloists begin by exchanging quick, fluttering filigree. In addition to an austere *Adagio* and a chattering, up-tempo closing movement, Vivaldi gives the upper voices substantial, individual solo sections in which the players embark on separate, varied, accelerating trajectories.

Though many of these Baroque sonatas foreshadow the abstract symphonic and chamber works of the late 18th Century and beyond, often composers would write trio sonatas with particular images or narrative programs in mind. **François Couperin's** Sonata in D minor, evocatively subtitled 'La Convalescente' or 'The Convalescent', begins with a subdued *Gravement* that features slightly phlegmy, choked violin figures. The piece wanders through a graceful air – a pastoral reverie that Bach liked enough that he transcribed it for organ – and comes to a close on a lively, defiant and resilient fugue. And **Vivaldi** based his Sonata in D minor, Op. 1 No. 12, on 'La follia' (Madness), the apt name for a popular chord progression that had its origins in a fast and furious 15th-century dance form. This pattern of harmonies featured prominently in works by many other Baroque-era musicians like Corelli, the Italian-French composer Jean-Baptiste Lully, and the French viol player Marin Marais. In his sonata, Vivaldi strictly and continuously repeats the progression while varying orchestration, figuration, affect and tempo, carefully simulating the contrasts of a multi-movement trio sonata and unleashing hysterical extremes of instrumental virtuosity.

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