

WIGMORE HALL 125

Wednesday 3 December 2025
7.30pm

A Baroque Christmas

Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin

Mayumi Hirasaki violin, concertmaster
Georg Kallweit violin, concertmaster
Elfa Rún Kristinsdóttir violin
Kerstin Erben violin
Thomas Graewe violin
Gudrun Engelhardt violin

Monika Grimm viola
Clemens-Maria Nuszbaumer viola
Katharina Litschig cello
Annette Rheinfurth double bass
Christian Beuse bassoon
Michael Freimuth theorbo
Flóra Fábri harpsichord, organ

Heinrich Biber (1644-1704)

Ciacona from *Mystery Sonata IV in D minor 'The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple'* (c.1770)

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

Violin Concerto in E RV270 'Il Riposo per il Santo Natale' (c.1722)
I. Allegro • II. Adagio • III. Allegro

Pietro Antonio Locatelli (1695-1764)

Concerto grosso in F minor Op. 1 No. 8 (pub. 1721)
*I. Largo – Grave • II. Largo Andante • III. Andante •
IV. Pastorale: Largo Andante*

Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713)

Concerto grosso in G minor Op. 6 No. 8 'Fatto per la Notte di Natale' (pub. 1714)
*I. Vivace – Grave • II. Allegro • III. Adagio – Allegro – Adagio •
IV. Vivace • V. Allegro – Largo. Pastorale ad libitum*

Interval

Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767)

Overture in F 'à la Pastorelle' TWV55:F7 (1700)
*I. Ouverture • II. Viste • III. Menuet • IV. Air •
V. Gigue • VI. Caprice • VII. Carillon*

Evaristo Felice Dall'Abaco (1675-1742)

Concerto a più strumenti in B minor Op. 6 No. 4 (c.1734)
I. Allegro • II. Adagio • III. Allegro

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Double Concerto for 2 violins in D minor BWV1043 (1730-1)
I. Vivace • II. Largo, ma non tanto • III. Allegro



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Christendom in the 17th and 18th centuries celebrated the birth of its founder in different ways according to whether its adherents recognised the Pope as head. The papists maintained the language of ancient Rome, Latin, as that of religion and worshipped Christ in the mass as a mystical deity. The others used the vernacular, promoted alternative types of service such as Organ Vespers or Evensong and tended to treat the mystical aspects more as metaphor. Music by composers of both traditions make up this programme.

Latin Rome fought back against the vernacular Reformists in the Counter-Reformation of which the best-known proponents were the Jesuits founded in 1534 by Ignatius Loyola and Francis Xavier. The composer and virtuoso violinist **Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber** from Bohemia (now the Czech Republic) was so committed a Jesuit that he added the founders' forenames to his own. He composed the *Ciacona*, which opens the concert, around 1700 as the fourth of 15 *Mystery Sonatas*, meditations on the mystical events of Christ's life and death, the first five of which, the Joyous Mysteries, concern Christmas. Biber's *Ciacona* recalls the baby and two sacrificial turtledoves being brought to Jerusalem where an old man recognises the Messiah. It repeats, by turns slow, passionate, excited, resigned, etc., the same 16-bar sequence 12 times – long enough to repeat ten *Ave Marias* (Hail Marys) and one *Paternoster* (Our Father), counting them off on rosary beads. The work's alternative title is the *Rosary Sonatas*. The musical repetitions are, in a sense, a mantra. The music is written on two staves, the upper part played by solo violin, the lower part, the repeating bass, by a harpsichord improvising chords in the right hand, with or without lute and bass viol – a grouping known as the continuo. The soloist retunes their instrument for each sonata, the *Ciacona* requiring open fifths an octave apart – DADA instead of EADG – which facilitate arpeggios and change the fiddle's sonority.

The player resumes conventional tuning for the rest of the concert. The Italian composer-priest **Antonio Vivaldi** taught music in a Venetian girls' orphanage whose orchestra was one of the musical wonders of Europe, praised for its skill and beauty by princes, ambassadors and tourists. It is likely that Vivaldi wrote his Violin Concerto in E in 1722 for it, specifying its use at Christmas with the charming Italian title *Il Riposo per il Santissimi Natale* – a Nap for the Most Holy Birth. This would no doubt have delighted the girls who surely loved the joyous occasion – an excuse to drop old-fashioned Latin. He had a sense of humour their 'red priest', *il prete rosso*, for his Holy Orders and red hair. He directs the women to play the concerto hushed with mutes – *tutti stromenti con sordini* – so as not to wake the baby, and without the clattering harpsichord – *senza cembali* – for the same reason.

The next two works are linked. In Amsterdam in 1721 **Pietro Locatelli** published his Concerto grosso No. 8

in F minor as one of a dozen such pieces for his Opus 1. In the same city seven years earlier, **Arcangelo Corelli** had done likewise posthumously, although his Concerto grosso No. 8 was in G minor and the Opus number, his last, was 6. Locatelli began where Corelli left off. Corelli gave his No. 8 the Italian title *Fatto per la Notte di Natale* – made for Christmas Night – and ends with a pastorale, a movement evoking shepherds and simple rusticity traditionally associated with Christmas. He writes a simple hurdy-gurdy drone in the strings and a folksy melody. Locatelli also concludes with a pastorale although he doesn't call it that, but the six-eight lilt is the same and he copies Corelli's final cadence of two quiet, detached chords.

It was probably for Christmas that German composer **Georg Philipp Telemann**, descendant of Lutheran pastors, wrote the Overture in F with the French title *à la Pastourelle*. The work is a suite of seven short dances with rustic elements in passages of crude octaves, drones in the middle six-eight section of the opener, and bell-like down-beats of the closing *Carillon*. At joyful Christmas, even the most austere Lutherans became a little French.

The Veronese composer **Evaristo Felice Dall'Abaco** was also much influenced by French music. He worked for the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian and followed him into exile first in the Low Countries where, like Corelli he published 66 works in six opuses, and in France. He published, again in Amsterdam, his Opus 6 collection of a dozen multi-instrument concertos including the present work in B minor. It has three movements – quick, slow, quick – quiet echoes, *spiccato* i.e. detached bowing, and opportunities for soloists.

The German composer **Johann Sebastian Bach** had two wives and 20 children, not to mention choristers to look after at two churches in Leipzig from the 1720s. Christmas was massive. The house being crowded, the composer resorted with family and students to the wintry fug of Zimmermann's Café where his Collegium Musicum, which Telemann had founded, performed and where current scholarship suggests the Double Violin Concerto first entertained audiences. It follows the Vivaldi model of three movements with the first an irrepressible *ritornello* in which a bubbly main theme played by the full orchestra recurs between passages of duet interplay with the *ripieno* (the ensemble players) reduced to a discreet backing of staccato chords. He marks the middle movement *Largo ma non tanto* – slow but not too much – and has the soloists in intertwining imitative duet throughout. There are two dynamics: *piano* and *pianissimo*. The duettists remain separate through the *Allegro* finale, chasing each other in close canon like spiralling butterflies until the last four bars when soloists and *ripieno* combine in joyful unanimous climax. Differences? Pah!

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