

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 6 February 2025
7.30pm

Mischa Maisky cello
Martha Argerich piano
Yossif Ivanov violin

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Cello Suite No. 1 in G BWV1007 (c.1720)

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

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Piano Trio in G HXV/25 (1795)

*I. Andante • II. Poco adagio • III. Finale 'Rondo
all'Ongarese'. Presto*

Interval

Johann Sebastian Bach

Partita No. 2 in C minor BWV826 (by 1727)

*I. Sinfonia • II. Allemande • III. Courante •
IV. Sarabande • V. Rondeau • VI. Capriccio*

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Piano Trio No. 1 in D minor Op. 49 (1839)

*I. Molto allegro agitato • II. Andante con moto
tranquillo • III. Scherzo. Leggiero e vivace •
IV. Finale. Allegro assai appassionato*



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Tonight, **Felix Mendelssohn**'s tumultuous first piano trio is performed alongside music by two composers who greatly influenced him: **Johann Sebastian Bach** and **Joseph Haydn**.

It is thought that **Bach** wrote his six suites for solo cello during his time (1717–23) as *Kapellmeister* to the music-loving Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Köthen. As Leopold was a Calvinist who did not require intricate music for liturgical worship, Bach was able to spend six years chiefly writing secular pieces, including many of his greatest instrumental compositions. While the cello had existed since the mid-16th Century, he was the first major composer to acknowledge its potential as a solo instrument.

In each of the Cello Suites, an elaborate Prelude is followed by five movements based on Baroque dance forms. The Prelude of Suite No. 1 in G major is characterised by constantly flowing figuration and noble intensification. It is followed by an elegant Allemande and a lively Courante featuring distinctive downward leaps. Next comes an introspective Sarabande that includes multiple-stopping – where the cellist plays two or more notes simultaneously to form chords – and a tuneful pair of Minuets. A rustic Gigue brings the suite to a spirited conclusion.

Joseph Haydn wrote some 45 piano trios. They span much of his career, from the 1760s to 1797. No. 39 in G major Hob. XV/25 was composed in 1795 – along with No. 38 and 40 – during his second happy stay in London. All three were published there in October, and were originally entitled 'sonatas for the pianoforte, with an accompaniment for a violin and violoncello'. While the piano is indeed the dominant instrument throughout – as was customary in the 18th Century – this G major Trio also includes some lovely violin solos. Haydn dedicated all three pieces to Rebecca Schroeter, a widow who took piano lessons with him in London and with whom he was almost certainly in love.

Unusually, the first two movements of Trio No. 39 both have slow tempos. The opening Andante is a series of variations on a simple and graceful theme, with episodes alternating between sunny major-mode and more pensive minor-mode. Later variations feature ornate figuration for both violin and piano. In the exquisitely tender Poco adagio, marked *cantabile* ('in a singing style'), piano and violin take turns as soloist (The great cellist Pablo Casals was so enchanted by the violin solo that he insisted on sharing it.) This movement is notable for its warm-hued harmonies and melodic beauty.

The fleet-footed recurring theme of the closing Rondo alternates with colourful episodes based on Hungarian gypsy music. (This piece is often nicknamed the 'Gypsy Rondo' Trio). Haydn was especially inspired by the *verbunkos* – a military recruiting dance with alternate slow and fast sections. He knew Hungarian traditional music first-hand from years working for the aristocratic Esterházy family in rural Hungary, and used it here to create an especially brilliant finale, full of fire and wit.

Bach's Partita No. 2 in C minor comes from *Clavier-Übung I*: a volume of six partitas (suites) for solo keyboard. Released in 1731, this was Bach's first substantial publication. (Very few of his works were published in his lifetime.) His first biographer Johann Nikolaus Forkel later recalled how it made 'a great noise in the musical world' as 'such excellent compositions for the clavier had never been seen or heard before'. The partitas were initially written for harpsichord but have become equally popular with pianists. As with the Cello Suites, most of their movements are modelled on Baroque dance forms.

Partita No. 2 opens with a substantial Sinfonia in three sections: a majestic introduction characterised by stately dotted rhythms in the manner of a French overture; a melodious Andante; and an animated two-part fugue (in which a recurring subject is accompanied by increasingly intricate countermelodies). A reflective and rich-hued Allemande, an assertive Courante containing many melodic flourishes and an expansive and lyrical Sarabande follow. The closing two movements, in the French style, are a playful and rhythmically vital Rondeau, and a witty, virtuosic and texturally intricate Capriccio.

Felix Mendelssohn composed his Piano Trio No. 1 in D minor in 1839. He drafted most of it during June and July, but then revised it extensively on the advice of his friend Ferdinand Hiller, who had suggested that the piano writing was unadventurous compared to that of his contemporaries Franz Liszt and Fryderyk Chopin. The première took place at the Leipzig Gewandhaus on 1 February 1840 and was a triumph. Robert Schumann, who reviewed it, hailed Mendelssohn as 'the Mozart of the 19th century' and termed the piece 'an exceedingly fine composition which will gladden our grandchildren and great-grandchildren'. It remains one of Mendelssohn's most popular works.

The volatile first movement has two principal themes, both introduced by the cello: the first is impassioned and increasingly agitated; the second placid and song-like. The ensuing music continues to alternate between storminess and serenity. Turbulent emotions come to the fore in the vertiginous coda, where the piano writing is especially virtuosic. Calm is restored in the Andante con moto tranquillo: a gentle song-without-words in which the melody is passed between piano and strings. A central episode featuring an ardent string-piano dialogue briefly explores more troubled emotions. The Scherzo's delicate textures and rapid pace anticipate the mischievous fairies in Mendelssohn's incidental music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1843), though again the mood momentarily darkens in the central episode. The finale is a Rondo whose edgy, emphatic main theme, introduced by the piano, alternates with sunnier episodes, the second of which features a sweeping string melody. A return of this melody and a triumphant move to D major ends the work in a mood of expansive optimism.

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