

WIGMORE HALL

Friday 6 January 2023
7.30pm

Liza Ferschtman violin

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) Partita No. 3 in E for solo violin BWV1006 (1720)
*I. Preludio • II. Loure • III. Gavotte en Rondeau •
IV. Menuett I • V. Menuett II • VI. Bourrée • VII. Gigue*

Sonata No. 2 in A minor for solo violin BWV1003 (1720)
I. Grave • II. Fuga • III. Andante • IV. Allegro

Interval

Partita No. 2 in D minor for solo violin BWV1004 (1720)
*I. Allemande • II. Courante • III. Sarabande •
IV. Gigue • V. Chaconne*

CLASSIC *fm* Wigmore Hall £5 tickets for Under 35s supported by Media Partner Classic FM

Friends of Wigmore Hall – celebrating 30 years of friendship

Over the past 30 years, Friends have been providing transformational support for the Hall, ensuring this historic building remains a home for great music making. Enjoy the benefits of friendship by joining as a Friend today, and be a part of the Wigmore story. Visit: wigmore-hall.org.uk/friends | Call: 020 7258 8230

FRIENDS OF
WIGMORE HALL

30

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 • 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

Department
for Culture
Media & Sport

ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND
LOTTERY FUNDED

Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

Registered with
**FUNDRAISING
REGULATOR**

The techniques of playing polyphony on stringed instruments had been fully worked out by the end of the 17th Century, in Germany by composers like Biber and Walther, in England by gamba players like Christopher Simpson. The world awaited **Bach** to show exactly how far this genre could be taken. Bach's unaccompanied string works were composed round about 1720 in Cöthen, where he was enjoying an unaccustomed artistic freedom. As Court Kapellmeister to the Duke of Saxe-Weimar, Bach had been rather stuck in the organ-loft, but when in 1717 he stepped up from his Duke (who briefly imprisoned him, and never uttered his name again) to a Prince, he had an orchestra, and his violin-playing came into its own.

It has been suggested that Bach may have written his Sonatas and Partitas for the famous violinist Johann Georg Pisendel, whom he knew. Telemann, Albinoni and Vivaldi, with whom Pisendel studied in Venice in 1717, also composed for him. Pisendel himself was one of many virtuosos who composed unaccompanied pieces: Locatelli, Stamitz, Ferdinand David, Vieuxtemps, and of course Paganini among them. Most of these unaccompanied pieces were called Caprices. Bach's pupil, Agricola, provides a scornful definition of the pedagogical purpose of a mere Caprice: pieces designed for learning to master the full resources of an instrument, presenting all possible difficulties, to enable the student to acquire a firm control of them. He goes on to compare Caprices to their disadvantage with Bach's Sonatas and Partitas, which combine technical usefulness with something much more musical. Bach very frequently managed this handy trick, often further blending in an idea of completeness, or at least order: complete liturgies of cantatas, all the possible intervals for a canon, preludes and fugues in every key. The manuscript of his solo violin pieces neatly presents Sonatas and Partitas in alternation, all in different keys, minor keys first and then the major ones. Performance opportunities for six long, difficult works did not exist, of course – the order of the manuscript was purely a matter for Bach's mind. The Sonatas were perhaps intended for performance in church, while the Partitas must have appeared in private salons.

A comparison with the 12 unaccompanied Fantasies by Telemann, the godfather of Bach's son Carl Philipp Emanuel, provides an interesting comparison with Bach's obsession with order. Telemann was a fine and famous composer, even more highly regarded than Bach by many at the time. His Fantasies, as their name implies, are extremely

varied, some with three movements, some with more, some beginning with a fast movement, some with a slow. The one hint of order is that every third fantasy is in a minor key, but to set against that, Bach might have tutted that there are two fantasies in D major.

While Bach's three sonatas show a single pattern, his three partitas are more varied – much more varied than the six Suites for unaccompanied cello, which all have a Prelude, Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, a pair of *Galantieren* (as the lesser dances were called – Menuet, Bourrée or Gavotte), and a Gigue. The third violin Partita follows its *Prelude* with a fine selection of dances, of which only the *Gigue* is a regular member of a suite. Bach arranged the whole partita for harp or lute, and arranged the *Prelude* for organ and orchestra so he could use it as an introduction to two of his cantatas. The *Gavotte en Rondeau*, which presents its catchy tune, with its bold consecutive sevenths, no fewer than five times, is one of Bach's most desirable numbers, stolen away for the piano by Rachmaninov, amongst many others.

Bach arranged the whole of the second Sonata for the harpsichord. The subject of its fugue was singled out by the scholar Johann Mattheson in 1737: 'One often finds the most excellent workings-out upon the fewest notes, or shortest fugue subjects; almost as the best sermons can be made on three or four words of text. Who would have believed that these eight short notes would be so fruitful as to bring forth a Counterpoint of more than a whole sheet of music, without unusual extension, and quite naturally? And yet the skilled Bach who is particularly gifted in this form, has set just this before the world; indeed he has also introduced the subject here and there in inversion.'

The second Partita at first seems the most modest of all the pieces – the *Gigue* comes to its conclusion after about a quarter of an hour. Bach's first audiences, doubtless deprived of printed programmes, had no way of knowing they were only half-way through, and their wonder must have grown and grown as the magnificent *Chaconne* unwound itself majestically. The medical missionary and Bach scholar Albert Schweitzer thought that 'out of a single theme Bach conjures a whole world'. Brahms, whose piano arrangement of the *Chaconne* thoughtfully limits itself to the left hand alone in order to match the 'limitations' of an unaccompanied violin, told Clara Schumann that it was 'one of the most wonderful and incomprehensible pieces of music'.

© David Owen Norris 2021

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.