

# WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 7 December 2021 7.30pm  
Leon Bosch 60th Birthday Year Concert

## I Musicanti

**Tamás András** violin      **Richard Harwood** cello  
**Benedict Holland** violin      **Leon Bosch** double bass  
**Robert Smissen** viola      **Rebeca Omordia** piano



Supported by CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust

<b>Giovanni Bottesini</b> (1821-1889)	Grand Quintet in C minor Op. 99 (1858) <i>I. Allegro moderato • II. Scherzo. Allegro ma non troppo • III. Adagio • IV. Finale. Allegro con brio</i>
<b>Ludwig van Beethoven</b> (1770-1827)	Horn Sonata in F Op. 17 (1800) <i>transcribed by Leon Bosch</i> <i>I. Allegro moderato • II. Poco adagio, quasi andante • III. Rondo. Allegro moderato</i>
<b>Giovanni Bottesini</b>	Elegy No. 1 (1857) Tarantella (1857)  Interval
<b>Grant McLachlan</b> (b.1956)	Yihle Moya (2020)
<b>Antonín Dvořák</b> (1841-1904)	String Quintet in G Op. 77 (1875) <i>I. Allegro con fuoco • II. Scherzo. Allegro vivace • III. Poco andante • IV. Finale. Allegro assai</i>

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It did not take long for **Giovanni Bottesini** to begin making a name for himself as a virtuoso of the double bass. By the time he was 20, having left the Milan Conservatory at 16, the native of the small town of Crema was touring Italy; at 25, he was playing to thousands in New York.

His success was made possible in part by the music - ranging in scale from concertos to operatic fantasies and small character pieces - he wrote for himself to play. His aspirations as a composer, however, went much further. Although dubbed 'the Paganini of the double bass' as early as 1843 (Paganini died in 1840), he did not restrict himself to composing for his instrument, as his compatriot largely did. For one, he wrote several operas that were produced in various European and American countries, and worked as an opera conductor too. But, much less commonly for an Italian of the time, he also wrote chamber music, having developed a love for the genre playing in ensembles at numerous gatherings while touring.

Bottesini completed his first string quartet in 1845, going on to write at least five more as well as four string quintets for various instrumental combinations. The first of these, published in 1858 under the name *Gran Quintetto*, shows just how well acquainted he was with the central European tradition of chamber music - Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Schubert were clearly strong influences. Scoring the piece for string quartet and double bass, Bottesini gave himself a distinct but undemonstrative part to play, an indication that when it came to his chamber music he was interested in more than self-promotion.

Giovanni Punto (1746-1803) was another virtuoso on an instrument not renowned for its virtuosity - the French horn. In his case, however, the 'Giovanni' was an assumed name. Born Jan Václav Stich in Bohemia, he changed his name when he fled Court service to Italy, aged 20. So began a trans-European musical career, courtesy of his skill with the hand-stopping technique that significantly enlarged the range of notes playable on the valveless instruments of the day.

When he and **Beethoven** met in Vienna and Beethoven wrote him this Sonata, Punto may well have been the more widely celebrated musician. Although Beethoven had by then performed his first two piano concertos, and his first symphony received its première around the same time as the first performance of the Sonata, he was only just publishing his first six string quartets. But he *had* published a substantial proportion of his output of sonatas, with piano, for violin and for cello. Indeed, the writings of Beethoven's student Carl Czerny and early editions of the Sonata suggest that it was considered a suitable work for cellists. Though relatively short, it is both lyrical and athletic and not noticeably slight, save perhaps the slow second movement, a tender little dialogue between the two performers.

The *Elegy No. 1* and *Tarantella* date from 1857, the year Bottesini, on one of his many visits to the UK, met Queen Victoria and Prince Albert at Carisbrooke Castle. Both pieces, although they could otherwise hardly be more different in character, have an almost inexorable rhythmic propulsion. In the *Elegy*, this comes through the gently repeated quaver chords in the piano that support the wistful double bass melody throughout. The *Tarantella*, meanwhile, is very much true to the form: a relentless dance intended, supposedly, to ward off the effects of a tarantula bite. Bottesini adds just a hint of a lull in the middle, however, as if the victim is momentarily tempted to succumb to the poison.

**Grant McLachlan** is a South African composer based in Cape Town. He is noted as a composer of music for the screen, specialising in natural history, and a considerable body of choral music. His chamber music includes the quintet *Oesterwal Landscape* for violin, viola, cello, double bass and piano.

*Yihle Moya* is an adaptation of the hymn 'Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika' ('God bless Africa'), making much use of the open strings and harmonics of the double bass. The original hymn is extended over three and a half octaves; its emotional impact is enhanced by the deep resonance and singing quality of the bass. *Yihle Moya* was written under lockdown at the request of Leon Bosch, who sought a work for solo double bass that would reflect his South African roots. The title of the work translates as 'Descend O spirit' and is taken from the chorus of the original hymn.

**Dvořák's** second String Quintet was published in 1888, although he had actually written it some time earlier, in 1875. The piece is dedicated 'To my nation' and, as in so much of his work, there are echoes of the music of his native region throughout, not so much in the form of recognisable folksongs but the dance-like rhythms, often repetitive or asymmetric, that he employs. The second movement, with its stop-start feel, is a particular example.

The earlier incarnation of the Quintet included another slow movement. Similarly serene in mood to the one he retained, this would have been the second movement, but Dvořák removed it when the time came to publish the Quintet (he later turned it into a Nocturne for strings). The other modifications he made were relatively slight, so he was somewhat irritated that the publishers designated it as Opus 77: he worried that audiences would expect a work of greater maturity from a piece with such a high number than he felt the piece displayed. As a musician of international standing by that point, he would naturally have been concerned about his reputation; happily that has today been irrevocably established.

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