

# WIGMORE HALL 125

Friday 7 November 2025  
7.30pm

Kian Soltani cello  
Benjamin Grosvenor piano

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Arpeggione Sonata in A minor D821 (1824)  
*I. Allegro moderato • II. Adagio • III. Allegretto*

Franghiz Ali-Zadeh (b.1947)

Habil Sajahy (1979)

*Interval*

Errollyn Wallen (b.1958)

Dervish for cello and piano (2001)

César Franck (1822-1890)

Sonata in A (1886)  
*I. Allegretto ben moderato • II. Allegro •  
III. Recitativo-Fantasia. Ben moderato •  
IV. Allegretto poco mosso*



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In 1823, the Viennese luthier Georg Stauer invented the arpeggione; a fretted, six-stringed instrument tuned like a guitar, but played like a cello. Sadly for Stauer, the arpeggione failed to gain widespread popularity, and its lasting musical legacy is this Sonata, composed in 1824 by Stauer's friend, **Franz Schubert**. Schubert never wrote a cello sonata, but the two instruments are similar enough in range and timbre that it has been adopted by cellists the world over. The opening movement has a sense of poise and elegance, with moments of minor-key introspection contrasting with carefree, radiant phrases. A gentle *Rondo allegretto* rounds out the movement in reflective style. The luminous *Adagio* provides the achingly beautiful emotional heart of the work, and as the tempo halves, sorrow threatens to take over, before an improvisatory cadenza leads us into the *Allegretto*, with its sighing opening theme. The lively second theme is dance-like and characterful, while the third (around the four-minute mark) see-saws up and down with embellishments of great charm and beauty.

Azeri musician Habil Aliyev (1927-2015) rose to fame as a virtuoso player of the kamancheh, or kemanshah, an Iranian stringed instrument with a long neck and bowl-shaped resonating chamber covered by a membrane, where the bridge is set. It is played seated, like the cello, although it is closer in size to the viola. The title of the work, which was written in 1979, translates as 'In the style of Habil', and composer **Franghiz Ali-Zadeh** (b.1947) was inspired by Aliyev's vibrant performance style, as well as 'Mugam' – a modal system rooted in the oral music tradition of the composer's native Azerbaijan.

The work is written for cello and prepared piano, yet both instruments deploy an adventurous variety of extended techniques to evoke a veritable orchestra of Eastern instruments. We hear the cellist playing *col legno* (slapping the wood of the bow on the string) and double-stopping, while the pianist sets the piano's strings jangling with a plectrum and a rubber stick, as well as tapping a catchy drumbeat on the lid, in musical homage to the 'ud' (a short-necked lute), the 'dāf' (a shell drum) and the 'gosh-nagara' (a clay drum), amongst others. The piece journeys through a kaleidoscopic array of moods and emotions, building to a jubilant, lively conclusion richly evocative of a thriving musical culture and perhaps, also, offering a sense of the composer's own, self-professed inspirations: 'childhood memories: the family, the environment, the musical life of the homeland.'

'In dervish dances,' writes Belize-born British composer **Errollyn Wallen**, 'contrary to popular myth, there is absolutely no hedonistic wildness; the swirling skirts move from rapt and still devotion. The Sufi dance is solely for worship. I wanted to capture this atmosphere (Dervish proceeds from an intense, trance-like state) and also to set it beside the passion that is speed.'

Composed in 2001, this single-movement work for cello and piano starts with a high, lone, glassy note in the cello part, which is answered almost immediately by a sonorous rumble from the depths of the piano. There is an improvised, searching quality to the cello's melody, which unfolds and swirls upwards like smoke, or an anguished prayer. Listen out for subtle percussive effects from the piano, in which the wood of the instrument is played like a drum (the cello follows suit later on). The piano sets up a hypnotic, dirge-like refrain, over which the cello intones an impassioned counterpoint of shrill glissandi, upward-leaping harmonics and octave double-stopping, before both instruments descend into a frenzy of angular semiquavers. Finally, the swaying refrain returns for one final incantation before sudden silence descends.

Born in Liège in 1822, **César Franck** was best known during his lifetime as the organist at the Parisian church of Sainte-Clotilde (a role he held for some 30 years), and as a Professor at Paris Conservatoire. The 65-year-old composer offered this Sonata as a wedding gift to the violinist Eugène Ysaÿe (a fellow Liège native) and his bride, Louise Bordeau de Courtrai. Franck didn't attend the wedding, but according to legend, after the briefest of rehearsals on the day of the ceremony in 1886, Ysaÿe and his pianist, Marie-Léontine Bordes-Pène performed the work in full at the reception. Writing to Franck about the piece, Ysaÿe enthused: 'It was with heartfelt emotion that I dared to tell myself it is a masterpiece! ...Yes, master, a masterpiece, but what can that word mean to you when it comes from me?' The following year, Franck authorised a cello arrangement of the work by cellist Jules Delsart, and this version was published in 1888.

The Sonata begins with warm, almost jazzy piano chords which introduce a lilting cello theme that winds up and down in reflective contemplation. This opening theme is answered by a secondary piano theme, a songlike outpouring with a distinctive triplet rhythm. The second movement, a turbulent, restless *Allegro*, begins with a rippling piano introduction before the cello joins in, adding its impetuous energy to a theme that returns with renewed vigour following two quieter, moodier sections. The third movement takes the unusual form of a *Recitativo-Fantasia*: a two-part adventure in which cadenza-like cello solos and soaring, heartbroken musical declamations alternate with dreamlike duets that resound with fragments of earlier movements. The final movement flows like a joyful conversation between the piano and, in canon a bar later, the cello. Although the central section recalls the stormy mood of the second movement, the sun finally breaks through in jubilant A-major style with an exultant final flourish.

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