

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 7 October 2023
7.30pm

Bach Sonatas for violin and harpsichord

Antje Weithaas violin
Mahan Esfahani harpsichord

- Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) Violin Sonata in G BWV1021 (before 1732)
I. Adagio • II. Vivace • III. Largo • IV. Presto
- Eugène Ysaÿe (1858-1931) Violin Sonata in G 'Pastorale' (dedicated to Mathieu Crickboom)
Op. 27 No. 5 (1923)
I. L'Aurore • II. Danse rustique
- Johann Sebastian Bach Violin Sonata No. 5 in F minor BWV1018 (c.1717-23)
I. Largo • II. Allegro • III. Adagio • IV. Vivace
- Interval
- Darius Milhaud (1892-1974) Sonata for violin and harpsichord Op. 257 (1945)
I. Nerveux • II. Calme • III. Clair et vif
- Johann Sebastian Bach Violin Sonata No. 6 in G BWV1019 (c.1717-23, rev. by 1741)
I. Allegro • II. Largo • III. Allegro • IV. Adagio • V. Allegro

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



This concert is part of the CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust ticket scheme, offering free tickets to those aged 8-25



Our Audience Fund provides essential unrestricted support for our artistic and learning programmes, connecting thousands of people with music locally, nationally, and internationally. We rely on the generosity of our audience to raise £150,000 each year to support this work. Your gifts are, and continue to be, indispensable.

To donate, please visit <https://wigmore-hall.org.uk/support-us/wigmore-hall-audience-fund>

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



Of the four solo violin sonatas of **JS Bach** that survive, the Violin Sonata in G was initially, when it was uncovered in 1928, thought to date from Bach's late career in Leipzig. The date of the discovered copy was accurately dated to 1732, but its conception is likely to have dated right back to his Weimar period, like the others in the group. Bach was never particularly enthusiastic about the solo violin sonata form with figured bass accompaniment, but it is nevertheless the case that his examples provided the starting point for his odyssey into repertoire for violin. It was this which allowed him to examine various styles and musical techniques that eventually came to fruition in his two sets of violin sonatas: the six solo sonatas and partitas, and the six accompanied violin sonatas around which this series of recitals is based.

Although the original melody line of the sonata may simply have been lost over the course of one of his many moves, Bach reused the bassline of this sonata (which was also reworked by his son, Carl Philipp Emanuel) specifically for teaching purposes. A note on the copy suggests that he was using it for his lessons with Count Heinrich Abraham von Boineburg, a violinist who was studying at Leipzig University at the time. By all accounts, Bach was a creative and dynamic teacher, adapting his approach to meet the needs of his violin pupils and – possibly more likely – his own changing perspectives and investigations. In this way, Eugène Ysaÿe was like Bach – a musical innovator and teacher, in many ways also set apart from his environment and his contemporaries. It is therefore not surprising that he professed a profound interest in the violin music of Bach, looking directly back to him to pull the original source material out of his works.

Ysaÿe dedicated each of his violin sonatas to a different performer-friend, and each is wildly different in character as a result. He may also have dedicated them to those he thought would play them best, but obvious in all of them is his acquisitive nature in relation to influence and reference. Everything is there: jazz, folk, Debussy and, above all, Bach. The Sonata No. 5 in G was dedicated to his friend Mathieu Crickboom, second violin in the Ysaÿe Quartet and his favourite pupil. The sonata's subtitle of 'pastoral' emphasised the shared Belgian background of the two, and just as Bach's relationship with his son resulted in a teacher-pupil relationship, Crickboom himself became a well-known teacher and writer on violin technique. In this sonata in particular it is possible to hear the kaleidoscoping of sounds; it is the same extraordinary variety of themes, styles and – perhaps most importantly – moods that gave Bach's accompanied violin sonatas an emotional

appeal that has lasted down the centuries. Especially as they came from the most carefree period of Bach's life, though the first movement of the Violin Sonata No. 5 in F minor, for instance, has an almost Dido-like sense of lament and sad tranquillity about it. But it is the repeated notes of the second movement that make it hard to imagine that he was still to experience some great loss. The real melody here is not the most obvious one in the piano part, or even the beautiful line in the bottom part of the double-stopping in the violin. It is the notion that all three of those lines might be merely an accompaniment, supporting a fourth melody singing over the top, left for the listener to imagine.

Darius Milhaud spent a lot of his middle career trying to recreate the absolute essences of the Baroque and Classical periods. He investigated all sorts of forms during this time, taking, like Bach, single ideas and distilling them as close as possible to their essence. His Sonata for violin and harpsichord is probably the purest example of this, sending his clearest statement of intent all the way back to Bach. Ralph Kirkpatrick, one of its dedicatees (along with the violinist Alexander Schneider), made the original registration suggestions that Milhaud retained, reflecting all the ornamentation and decoration to be expected in a Baroque sonata, including Bach's own beloved Italian prototypes. But most of all, Milhaud places the harpsichord and violin on an equal footing, just as Bach did in the accompanied sonatas. The opening movement not only uses minutely wrought Bachian counterpoint, but also pulls out all the purities of the Baroque sonata, treating each idea separately: sharp and snappy rhythms in the first movement, for instance; chromatic lines in a simple texture (so beloved of Bach's son and his Potsdam colleagues) in the second; and sequences and imitations in the third.

The seeds of all the pearls that Milhaud created from his image of the Baroque can be found in the last of Bach's accompanied sonatas. In the Violin Sonata No. 6 in G both instruments play equal roles in the construction of all its parts and, although there are three surviving versions, the movements are ordered to surround two slow movements with three fast movements, bringing his revelatory collection full circle back to the Italian *sonata da camera*. Even if the accompanied sonatas don't reflect a period of turbulence in Bach's life, they do still represent a turbulent time in music: the extinction-burst of a great tradition, and the beginning of a new form.

© Caroline Gill 2023

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.