

WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 8 November 2023
7.30pm

Bach Keyboard Concertos

Britten Sinfonia

Mahan Esfahani harpsichord
Jacqueline Shave violin I, director
Michala Petri recorder
Thomas Hancox flute
Steven Hudson oboe
Sarah Burnett bassoon

Marcus Barcham Stevens violin I
Miranda Dale violin II
Yukiko Ogura viola
Caroline Dearnley cello
Stephen Williams double bass
Ian Wilson recorder
Lynda Sayce theorbo

Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767) Concerto in F for recorder, bassoon, strings and basso continuo TWV52:F1 (c.1716-25)
I. Largo • II. [Vivace] • III. [Grave] • IV. Allegro

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) Harpsichord Concerto No. 5 in F minor BWV1056 (1738)
I. [Allegro] • II. Largo • III. Presto

Harpsichord Concerto No. 6 in F BWV1057 (1738)
I. [Allegro] • II. Andante • III. Allegro assai

Interval

Johann Sebastian Bach

Harpsichord Concerto No. 3 in D BWV1054 (1738)
I. [Allegro] • II. Adagio e piano sempre • III. Allegro

Antonio Vivaldi

 (1678-1741)

Chamber Concerto in G minor for recorder, oboe, violin, bassoon and continuo RV105
I. Allegro • II. Largo • III. [Allegro]

Johann Sebastian Bach

Concerto in A minor for flute, violin and harpsichord BWV1044 (1729-41)
I. Allegro • II. Adagio ma non tanto e dolce • III. Alla breve



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



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



A Few Remarks

It has been often said - by no less than Glenn Gould - that **Bach** was indifferent to the instruments or 'media' at hand, caring much more about the purity of the musical idea itself. Other than the fact that this sort of reasoning is created out of thin air mostly to justify ugly-sounding performances of Bach's music, nothing counters this notion more obviously than the composer's keyboard concerti for which the same ideas were expressed in other forms, e.g. BWV1054 (which uses material from the violin concerto in E BWV1042) and BWV1057 (which has a similar relationship with the fourth 'Brandenburg' Concerto in G, BWV1049). The keyboard concerti in these instances are *not* transcriptions of earlier concertos, but rather instances of Bach amplifying material in other ways with other instruments whilst sensitively re-fashioning that material to fit the idiom at hand. Philipp Spitta, the first modern musicologist to seriously examine Bach's output, subtly dissects the complex relationship between these works:

For that Bach undertook their re-arrangement merely because he did not care to write new clavier concertos is an assumption utterly contrary to his character, and is disproved even by the large number of these re-arrangements. No doubt he felt that the style of his violin concertos was so much moulded by his clavier style that their true nature could only be fully brought out in the shape of clavier concertos. It cannot be denied that in many details, and notably *cantabile* passages, lose in effect in the clavier arrangement, but as a whole we must regard them as new and higher developments, rather than arrangements.

Likewise, the argument that there must have been 'lost' originals for concertos existing only in keyboard form - namely BWV1052, 1053, 1055 - is based on the shaky logic that since the keyboard-writing in these concertos has violinistic figuration they must have been originally for violin. Since most concerti of the era were written for violin, it only seems natural that in inventing a new type of concerto Bach would imitate the violin in some way. Should we assume then that the preludes of the English Suites, solo keyboard pieces designed according to concerto form, also have lost originals simply by virtue of having violinistic figuration? Of course not.

The works on this evening's programme not by JS Bach - the *Concerto da camera* RV105 by **Antonio Vivaldi** and the Double Concerto for recorder and bassoon by **Georg Philipp Telemann** - attest to the elements of concerto form in the hands of his contemporaries that appealed most to Bach. All too often seen as a note-spinner, Vivaldi shows himself in this work to be quite an original thinker, slyly both reversing the *solo* and *ripieno* segments of the

musical narrative and dispensing with the spurious need for a larger string ensemble against which to contrast the soloists. Telemann, on the other hand, carefully puts the soloists into relief against the string ensemble whilst providing largely rhythmic and thematic interest to both complement and work 'against' the solos; thus, he inserts material in the *ripieno* that in the first two movements resembles rather than fully imitates the soloistic motifs themselves. In the fourth movement, both groups of the ensemble use the same basic musical ideas, but the soloists elaborate on it and ultimately reveal its full emotional and harmonic potential.

The Triple Concerto in A minor BWV1044 survives in a score written by Bach's son-in-law Johann Christoph Altnickol and in a set of parts by the somewhat shadowy Johann Gottfried M thel; both sources date from the middle of the 18th Century and likely post-date JS Bach's death. The musical material for the first and third movements is taken from the Prelude and Fugue in A minor BWV894, while the content of the second movement is originally found in the second movement of the D minor Trio Sonata for organ BWV527.

For a number of significant reasons which shall be elaborated upon in an upcoming academic article, I am of the view that this concerto, though it bears scribal indications as being 'by Johann Sebastian Bach' - a perfectly accurate attribution as far as the essential ideas of the piece are concerned - is not in its current form from the pen of JS Bach. Briefly, the part-writing in the ensemble and physical aspects of the keyboard writing are highly atypical of Bach's style, to say nothing of a number of slightly inept moments in the general structure of the piece's composition. Furthermore, the range of the keyboard part goes one note (f3) higher than any other work by or indeed even attributed to JS Bach; on the other hand, this is found in instruments built after 1750. Nonetheless, BWV1044 is a fascinating and beautiful work that provides a valuable glimpse into the way older music was re-fashioned by a younger generation of composers. Seeing as what we know of the performance practice of the keyboard concerto principally starts with the generation of Bach's sons and last pupils (particularly with a work like BWV1056, for which we have parts marked by Emanuel Bach with obvious provisions for performance on early piano), we would do well to see this piece as an important artefact in the overall reception history of Bach's music. The keyboard concerti show not a composer mistakenly viewed as merely a great summation of all that came before him, but rather a tremendously sensitive *innovator* who single-handedly invented a new genre of music perfectly suited to his own considerable skills as a player.

© Mahan Esfahani 2023

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.