WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 9 March 2023
7.30pm

Supported by the Rubinstein Circle

Alina Ibragimova violin
Kristian Bezuidenhout fortepiano, director
Basel Chamber Orchestra

Baptiste Lopez violin, director
Eva Miribung violin
Nina Florence Candik violin
Valentina Giusti violin
Antonio Viñuales violin
Regula Keller violin
Tamás Vásárhelyi violin
Pablo de Pedro Cano viola
Bodo Friedrich viola
Christoph Dangel cello
Hristo Kouzmanov cello
Stefan Preyer double bass
Susanne Helen Regel oboe
Francesco Capraro oboe
Carles Cristobal bassoon
Konstantin Timokhine horn
Mark Edson Gebhart horn

Johann Christian Bach (1735-1782)
Symphony in G Op. 3 No. 6 (pub. 1765)
I. Allegro assai • II. Andante • III. Allegro assai

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)
Violin Concerto No. 4 in D K218 (1775)
I. Allegro • II. Andante cantabile • III. Rondeau. Andante grazioso - Allegro ma non troppo

Interval

Iris Szeghy (b.1956)
Hommage à Mednyánszky (2022)
I. Frosty Forest • II. Watering Place with Ravens • III. The Iron Gates on the Danube • IV. Christmas of the Prisoners of War • V. Dying Man (the artist's father) • VI. Golden Lights in the Winter Forest

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Symphony No. 29 in A K201 (1774)
I. Allegro moderato • II. Andante • III. Menuetto: Allegretto • IV. Allegro con spirito

Johann Christian Bach was the youngest of Johann Sebastian's sons, and grew up in the bustling musical environment of his father's home in Leipzig. In 1754 he moved to Italy to begin a career unheard-of for a member of the Lutheran Bach family, as a composer of operas and music for the Catholic church (to which he himself converted), and eight years later he came to London to compose for its principal Italian opera venue, the King's Theatre, Haymarket. From that time onward he made England his home as a highly regarded composer, keyboard performer and concert-promoter.

Johann Christian was a very different type of composer from his father; in place of the complexities of the Baroque he favoured the simpler, more self-consciously polite manner of the emerging Classical style, mastering it with a refinement and elegance that is attested by the imprint it made on Mozart, who met Bach in London when he was eight years old and thereafter loved him dearly both as a man and a composer. The polish of Bach's Classical language is much in evidence in the Op. 3 symphonies, his first published set, issued in 1765 and performed at the concert series he ran with fellow composer Carl Friedrich Abel at Carlisle House, half a mile from here in Soho Square.

Although the prevailing image of **Mozart** the performer is that of a pianist, the part played by the violin in his early life was hardly less important. Accounts of his teenage triumphs around Europe suggest that, at that stage at least, he was equally proficient on violin and keyboard, and right into the mid-1770s his letters home to his family in Salzburg contained reports of public appearances as a violinist. 'I played Vanhal's Violin Concerto in B flat', he wrote from Augsburg in 1777. 'Everyone praised my beautiful, pure tone.'

Mozart composed his first violin concerto in 1773, and the remaining four in 1775. The Fourth is a confident work, bold and clean of line yet maintaining an elegant clarity and grace in its first movement as the violin indulges in a more or less continuous flow of melody while the orchestra provides a supportive role. The radiant *Andante cantabile* extends this dominance, for after the orchestra's opening statement, it is the soloist who carries the song-like melody almost without interruption in violin-writing of the most serenely classical kind. The finale is a *Rondeau* in which Mozart delights in keeping the listener guessing by hopping back and forth between two different musics – a poised *Andante grazioso* and a tripping *Allegro*. And if there is a hint of pastoral dance about the latter, there is no mistaking the folk-music inspiration for the episode that occurs about halfway through the movement, when an exaggeratedly powdered French-style gavotte appears, followed by a rustic tune with bagpipe-like drones.

Hommage à Mednyánszky by the Slovak-Swiss composer **Iris Szeghy** was premièred in Bruges last Sunday, and is an adaptation for string orchestra of her Third String Quartet (2022). It was inspired directly by six paintings by László Mednyánszky (1852-1919), whose Impressionistic works often depicted nature and working people, and which Szeghy says she admires for their 'great originality and the urge for freedom, coupled with deep humanism'. She continues: 'the moods of the images range from the very sombre and eerie ('Watering Place with Ravens') to the mystically bright, elevating the dark to an unexpected dimension ('Dying Man'). The contrast and merging of the opposite poles of dark and light are present in all the images set to music, whether in 'Christmas of the Prisoners of War', the bright golden colours in the depiction of a force of nature ('The Iron Gates on the Danube') or in a winter landscape ('Frosty Forest' and 'Golden Lights in the Winter Forest'). I was inspired by the "musicality"' and strong expression of these images, and ultimately transformed them into abstract impressions with the help of my musical language and the rich sound-palette of the string orchestra.'

Mozart's teenage years as a composer-performer of violin concertos at the court of the Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg was also a time when he was at his busiest as a writer of symphonies. Yet sunny and easily inventive as they were, it was a visit to Vienna in the summer of 1773, and a probable encounter with state-of-the-art examples by composers such as Haydn, Vanhal and Gassmann, that seems to have provided the impetus for the next step in his symphonic development, in which seriousness of expression and musical inspiration are taken to a new level.

The Symphony in A K201 – completed in April 1774 – was among these new works, and right from the start declares its originality. Instead of the usual bold fanfares or orchestral chords, it opens softly with a broadly swelling theme, soon repeated more loudly with the melody echoed in canon by the cellos and basses. This device turns out to be a feature of the movement, since two of its later themes also make gestures towards accompanying themselves in this fashion, offering fine early evidence of the subtly assumed contrapuntal enhancements that would enrich so much of Mozart's later music.

The slow movement is one of exquisite grace and refinement, its summer-night glow abetted by a scoring for muted strings with discreet support from oboes and horns. Mozart drops in a surprise ending, however, perhaps to prepare us for the mood of the third movement, a boisterous minuet and trio. The finale turns up the ebullience levels further, bringing the symphony prancing to its conclusion in a movement whose 'hunting' associations are made thrillingly explicit at the end in a short burst of horn fanfares.