WIGMORE HALL

The Score

2024 SUMMER ISSUE

VIOLINIST VILDE FRANG, TENOR NICKY SPENCE AND COMPOSER DANIEL KIDANE ON THEIR NEW RESIDENCIES

Welcome

Helen Hawkins © Andrew Ward

Helen Hawkins
Editor of *The Score* magazine

Dear Friends of Wigmore Hall

It's time once again for the performers and composers that the Hall will host in the coming months to talk about what drives them. There's the love affair between violinist Vilde Frang and her Guarneri, as well as tenor Nicky Spence's fascination with songs about fatherhood. Both have residencies next season. As does the young British composer Daniel Kidane, who talks about his omnivorous appetite for sounds from Baroque to classic rock. Fauré's centenary will be celebrated by conductor Hervé Niquet, whose Le Concert Spirituel brings the *Requiem* to St James's, Spanish Place; and by cellist Steven Isserlis and friends, who hope to tempt you beyond that much loved piece to Fauré's equally great chamber works. Another great season awaits.

Cassey North © Lisa Melkumov

Cassey North
Head of Membership and Appeals

Welcome to the latest issue of *The Score*, created exclusively for Friends of Wigmore Hall.

We are delighted to delve into our programme to bring you insightful features on many of the wonderful artists performing at the Hall in the months ahead. Friends of Wigmore Hall form the collective heartbeat of our audience. Annual membership contributions, alongside additional gifts to important initiatives such as our Audience Fund, ensure we can continue presenting exceptional talent and ambitious programmes season after season. Thank you for your ongoing support and dedication – you are helping to keep music making live at Wigmore Hall.

Cover image: Vilde Frang
© Marco Borggreve

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Nicky Spence © Ki Price

‘Being yourself on a recital stage is a telling exercise in terror. But with a pianist or another collaborative musician, you can go right to the soul of a song with focus and concentration. That’s what makes the experience of song so original and important – and it’s what Wigmore Hall does so well.’

With a world of songs in his heart

BY DAVID BENEDICT

Nicky Spence OBE is many things. None of them is unadventurous. That’s clear from the citation for his recent win of the Singer Award at the Royal Philharmonic Society, which included a year in which he sang at, among other places, the BBC Proms, Welsh National Opera, Classical Pride and Eurovision. In addition, he was recently given a residency at Wigmore Hall and made President of the Independent Society of Musicians, the UK’s professional body for musicians. And he also toured with Shirley Bassey.

‘That was when I had a jawline and a waistline. I was her warm-up – in a kilt – but we also did a duet during her act. I loved working with her. She has some kind of operatic training because her larynx is completely anchored. We used to talk endlessly about all that kind of technical singing stuff together. She knows exactly what she’s doing.’

Last May he was supposed to be doing more Janáček at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, but when I spoke to him in April he was secretly not too distressed it was cancelled because the timing was handy.

‘The next production is our baby,’ he says, half-jokingly. He and his husband, the pianist Dylan Perez, talked about having a family shortly after they met seven years ago, and their first child, after two rounds of IVF, is due in May. ‘I’ve always wanted to be a dad. We’re very blessed that it has come to fruition.’

Meanwhile, he’s excited by his Wigmore residency, commencing in December with a Shakespeare evening including everything from Shakespeare’s contemporary William Byrd to John Dankworth, whose music he discovered via Dankworth’s wife, Cleo Laine.

‘I went for lunch at Valerie Solti’s house, and Kiri Te Kanawa and Cleo Laine were there: three dames and an impressionable 21-year-old. It was Cleo who told me I should sing John’s Shakespeare settings.’

But first there’s a concert that speaks directly to his personal situation: his 11 July recital 'My Father's Son'. ‘Narrative-led, it’s very much about belonging, starting with my relationship with my own father, through pregnancy, to where I am now: waiting for the child to be born. It would have been very easy to simply programme obvious choices like Mahler’s *Kindertotenlieder*.

But I think this kaleidoscopic range of material makes it more interesting for everyone.'

To create this unique programme he has also drawn on ideas supplied by one of his longstanding accompanists, Malcolm Martineau. 'He brought several things to the table and I'm very open to that, especially discoveries new to me.'

The fascinating result includes familiar composers like Wolf, Schubert, Schumann and Fauré, but also an unusually wide range of songs Spence has performed or has wanted to sing. Some of the less likely suspects include Libby Larsen and André Previn, as well as neglected voices such as the Scots composer Buxton Orr. Even more unusual are songs by Tim Minchin, the composer/lyricist of the smash-hit musical *Matilda*, and 'Litter Bin', a remarkably tender, upsetting song about an abandoned child by Victoria Wood.

Two days later, his attention switches to Noël Coward, for a recital with more good friends, Mary Bevan and Joseph Middleton, alongside readings by Coward's most recent biographer, Oliver Soden [interviewed overleaf].

'We recorded a lot of this material, and it was very much a passion project. We were hammering on doors to make it happen.

'It's setting up a stall for those who may not have come through the door of Wigmore Hall before.'

It's good to do something a little different but still within the realm of 'classical' music. Some songs are by people Coward hung out with, or are a kind of dream dinner party you feel he might have chosen.' That explains, for example, songs by William Walton from his maverick 1922 entertainment, *Façade*.

He's also singing the rueful, yearning 'If Love Were All' from Coward's neglected operetta *Bitter Sweet*. It was written for a woman. 'He was necessarily closeted while he was alive. This allows us to give voice to his queerness. As a gay man I'm happy to be able to sing it.'

Spence sees the programme – which runs to Poulenc, Stravinsky and George Gershwin – as a sort of musical map around Europe via music that resonates with Coward's travels, complete with its own style of presentation.

'I adore the Janet Baker style of formal recital that just lets the music speak for itself. But this will be quite semi-staged, a bit more dynamic. It's setting up a stall for those who may not have come through the door of Wigmore Hall before. To welcome them in would be a privilege.'

Much as he loves opera, his dedication to song is abundantly clear. 'The joy of song is that you have three minutes to tell a story. In opera, you have the assistance of everything from a dramaturg to the wig mistress and the bells and whistles of theatre. Being yourself on a recital stage is a telling exercise in terror. But with a pianist or another collaborative musician, you can go right to the soul of a song with focus and concentration.

'That's what makes the experience of song so original and important – and it's what Wigmore Hall does so well.'

Forthcoming Concerts and Events:
THU 11 JUL 2024, 7.30PM: MY FATHER'S SON
SAT 13 JUL 2024, 7.30PM: A MOST MARVELLOUS PARTY!

SUN 29 DEC 2024, 7.30PM: RESIDENCY – TWELFTH NIGHT
TUE 21 JAN 2025 & WED 22 JAN 2025, 1.00PM: MASTERCLASSES
FRI 21 MAR 2025, 7.30PM
FRI 20 JUN 2025, 10.00PM

Nicky Spence © Ki Price

Noël Coward, musician extraordinaire

Biographer Oliver Soden answers questions about Coward's marvellous output and why it deserves a special place in our musical history.

We love Noël Coward's songs, but do we undervalue them?

Yes, I think we do. They range much further and wider – in music and in words – than I had ever realised, and they have a serious place in the history of British music, partly for what they unleashed. His success was such that you could argue he was among the first to popularise American music such as jazz and blues in this country, moving popular song on from the wartime romance of Ivor Novello. The songs can be starting points, not end points. I'd love the composer Michael Finnissy to do some Coward arrangements, as he did with Gershwin.

Coward was in the air when composers such as Britten and Tippett were students; Tippett titled his autobiography *Those Twentieth Century Blues* (after a Coward song) and quotes Coward's 'Dance Little Lady' on the first page of his opera *New Year*. Ian Bostridge has said that the Coward songbook is up there with Schubert. I would temper that by saying I think Coward is first and foremost a wordsmith; as a composer he is a pasticheur – which isn't to deny the invention – but it's the lyrics that elevate the songs.

He called his singing a 'lost cause'? Did he underrate his musicianship?

Coward underrated very little about himself, and somehow even his modesty is a form of boasting. His early singing is hard to judge as distance makes it sound so dated, the epitome of the interwar sound: all head-voice, even falsetto. In later recordings the voice has strengthened and deepened. He could sing well enough for his own songs, which were often (not always) written with himself in mind. But putting across a song without a real voice is a skill in itself (think of Judi Dench). No doubt Coward had a fabulous musical ear: he couldn't read or write music, but he could pick up amazingly complex things and recreate them at the piano almost instantly.

Who was Elsie April and why should Coward fans be grateful to her?

She was his amanuensis for three decades, taking dictation from his playing and singing, and notating everything – often doing the accompaniments, too. Indispensable. His orchestrations and overtures were done by others, too; but then that could be said of Arthur Sullivan or Charlie Chaplin.

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Some of the other composers in the 13 July concert's line-up are more 'modern': Britten, Weill, Poulenc, Walton. How do Coward's songs sit alongside theirs?

'Modern' is an interesting word to use of Walton and Poulenc, because their modernity often expressed itself in a mistrust of modernism and the avant-garde; a kind of radical conservatism, which is a good description for Coward too, and his central oxymoron: radical, daring, inventive, modern, but suspicious of radicalness, daring, inventiveness, modernity… He is especially like Poulenc in that he has a romantic nostalgia tempered by something much sharper and more wicked, and he works in gossamer lightness, can seem lightweight, even, while being profound on the sly. Poulenc was famously a 'monk and ragamuffin'; Coward had no religion, but he was equally contradictory, a romantic and a cynic – he wrote pastiche Viennese waltzes that curdle into jazz. Coward even recorded

Noël Coward © Allan Warren

the narration for Poulenc's *Babar*, with the composer at the piano – there's no record of what they thought of one another, alas.

As for Walton… Coward was at the première of *Façade*, Walton's collaboration with Edith Sitwell, and hated it. He wrote a successful parody, which Walton took in good part. (Edith Sitwell… not so much.) And Benjamin Britten attended Coward's *Cavalcade* as a teenager; the Aldeburgh Festival would host Coward concerts. At Britten's last public appearance, Pears sang Coward's song 'I'll See You Again', knowing that, very soon, he wouldn't. The bluesy scores Britten wrote for Auden's plays at the Group Theatre post-date Coward's

In 1937, American satirical singer Vandy Cape became the first person to perform Noël Coward on the Wigmore stage

Julie Haydon and Noël Coward in *The Scoundrel* (1935)

Coward's ear was like an antenna tuning into the new sounds of the 1920s, melding his national inheritance with what was happening on the continent and in America. He heard Gershwin play at private parties and picked up the music by ear, performing excerpts from *Rhapsody in Blue* on stage in London before it had been given its British première.

blues songs and seem almost to be written in Coward-ese. And when you hear Coward's sophisticated savagery covered by Marianne Faithfull, it sits brilliantly alongside her renditions of Weill.

Modernism in literature and art was decidedly urban, but interwar classical music in Britain mainly resisted that urban impulse (you have to turn instead to Varèse or Gershwin). There's a rather feeble five-minute section of an Arthur Bliss chamber work called *In the tube at Oxford Circus*, but that's about it. Coward was the first British musician to create a modern urban soundscape – songs about modern industrial cities, great big towns, the advance of technology, the rush and bustle of burgeoning populations, a London of automobiles and sirens and construction sites and radio waves. He created a ballet called *The Automobile Age*; he worked with Massine; one revue was scored to a saxophone quartet. Igor Stravinsky even suggested they collaborate, but Coward turned him down. I'd love to hear Coward's 'London Pride' programmed alongside its distant cousins, Vaughan Williams's *A London Symphony* and Luciano Berio's *Cries of London*… they all share material.

His first hit song, 1922's 'Parisian Pierrot', was influenced by a trip to Berlin. How did his many trips outside the UK influence the development of his artistry?

Hugely. If you heard 'Parisian Pierrot' and didn't know who wrote it, you might well guess Poulenc or Satie. Coward's ear was like an antenna tuning into the new sounds of the 1920s, melding his national inheritance – Edwardian musical comedy, Gilbert and Sullivan, parlour songs – with what was happening on the continent – Weimar cabaret, French *chansons* – and in America. He went very early on to jazz bars in Harlem and worked with a number of Black musicians. He heard Gershwin play at private parties and picked up the music by ear, performing excerpts from *Rhapsody in Blue* on stage in London before it had been given its British première.

You suggest Coward was essentially an angry young man long before the Royal Court came up with the term. In what way?

He wanted to be open about homosexuality at a time when it was illegal and, in Britain, was subject to censorship from the Lord Chamberlain, at which he raged in public. He wrote about modern life among the young after the First World War, about women getting drunk and enjoying sex… deeply shocking for the time. He castigated the government for betraying soldiers who had returned from the trenches, showing church, state and government in near-fascist collusion. Between the wars he was the epitome of radical theatre and it now seems clear he was a huge influence on the post-war Angry Young Men with whom, at the time, he was at loggerheads.

Do you have a favourite Coward song?

Out of 675 it's almost impossible to choose! For lyrics: 'A Bar on the Piccola Marina'. For melody: 'If you would only come with me'. For both: 'Dance Little Lady'. But ask me again tomorrow.

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SAT 13 JUL 2024, 7.30PM
Oliver Soden will give an introductory talk at this concert at 6.00pm

Masterpiece for the many: Hervé Niquet on Fauré's *Requiem*

BY HUGH CANNING

Like so many practitioners of the music of France's *Grand Siècle* – essentially the reign of the Sun King, Louis XIV, from 1638 to 1715 – Hervé Niquet began his career as a member of William Christie's pioneering French Baroque ensemble, Les Arts Florissants, singing tenor in the choir. Since 1987, when he founded his own ensemble, Le Concert Spirituel, he has emulated his mentor by branching out into much later music, such as Fauré's popular *Requiem*, which he will conduct at St James's, Spanish Place on 22 November.

Hervé Niquet
Director of Le Concert Spirituel
© Guy Vivien

This unique Requiem Mass exists in three 'authorised' editions. Which version will you conduct, and what are the reasons for this choice?

We'll be playing the original version, which is for two violas, two cellos, a solo violin, two horns, harp and organ. This is a more pared down but more intense version. Nobody can hide behind the immensity of the symphony orchestra, and everyone is obliged to invest themselves in making this pared-down version work and speak for itself. It's exhilarating.

The large-scale concert version of 1900 – by far the best known – was not performed in London until 1936, yet in this form the *Requiem* has become perhaps Fauré's best-known work. How do you account for this?

It is clear that this masterpiece speaks to many, for every human being has the memory of the loss of a loved one. And this requiem is all the more moving because Fauré breathes soft, warm, enveloping music into our ears.

Famously, Fauré disliked the big 'theatrical' requiems of the 19th Century. Do you think the absence of drama gives his *Requiem* its unique consolatory character. It's a comforting vision of the afterlife, isn't it?

There are 50 years between Berlioz's *Requiem* and that of Fauré. The Church and its liturgies had changed a great deal, and the architecture of places of worship had evolved: Berlioz had known the light and airy places of worship of the 18th Century. Towards the end of the 19th Century, the chapel of the Blessed Sacrament went from yellow and gold to the darkest blue, and the dark oak panelling made even the smallest chapel look like a bourgeois salon. It's hardly surprising to see chapel masters adapting

‘It is clear that this masterpiece speaks to many, for every human being has the memory of the loss of a loved one… this requiem is all the more moving because Fauré breathes soft, warm, enveloping music into our ears.’

their works to the decorative fashions of places of worship. Fauré was also an atheist. He believed piety should belong to the private sphere.

At the 1888 première performance with chamber orchestra at the Madeleine Church, a boy from the choir sang the soprano solo, ‘Pie Jesu’, but the concert version established the tradition of using an adult female soprano. Which do you prefer? Does it depend on the context of the performance, whether in church or in a concert, or according to which version you perform?

Let's not forget that this work is used for funerals. And like all funerals, they are priced and billed to the family of the deceased. So there are all sorts of combinations. For this evening, I'm having a baritone sing ‘Hostias’ and ‘Libera me’, while ‘Pie Jesu’ will be sung by all the sopranos in unison.

You are perhaps best known, from your discography anyway, for your work in French Baroque music. Do you feel a connection between Fauré and the music of the Grand Siècle, and what does Fauré mean to you, personally?

My discography includes about 100 recordings of Baroque music, as well as some 60 recordings of operatic and symphonic repertoire from 1800 to 1950. Above all, I'm curious about everything that makes people happy.

I believe every nation has its music written around and about its language. And so the language and sociology of each nation is the thread, the bond, the common blood of their artistic productions. So yes, there is a strong link between Lully and Debussy, between Campra and Saint-Saëns, between Rameau and Dutilleux: the French language!

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FRI 22 NOV 2024, 7.30PM

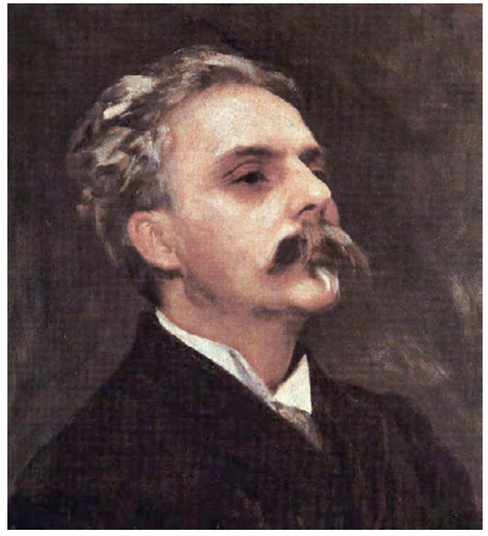
Music utterly unlike any other composer’s

Steven Isserlis talks to Hugh Canning about the unique genius of Fauré’s chamber works

Steven Isserlis © Kevin Davis

I remember our conversation when you referred to Fauré and Schumann – whom I think you have often programmed together – as ‘kindred’ spirits. Do you think the cause of Fauré is gathering momentum, or will he, perhaps because the lack of a comparable symphonic repertoire, remain a ‘niche’ interest?

Schumann was Fauré’s hero – and it shows through the music! (Both of them are my heroes.) I think you’re right that the lack of large symphonic works has counted against Fauré: he didn’t enjoy orchestrating. But I also think that the sheer subtlety of his originality has, too. Debussy and Ravel swept aside old forms, proclaiming their innovations, rejecting



Portrait of Gabriel Fauré by John Singer Sargent

Germanic orthodoxy. Fauré created an entirely new harmonic language, mostly within classical forms, albeit substantially transformed. His genius is quieter – but no less important for that. As Fauré said in a wonderful letter to the pianist Alfred Cortot: 'If you rate [Debussy and Ravel's] music higher than mine, you are more modest on my behalf than I am myself!'

Ha! I love that letter: Fauré was deeply modest and self-critical, so for him to write that, he must have been strongly provoked, and he's so right.

Faure's chamber music forms a substantial corpus of his large-scale works and negates his reputation as a 'miniaturist'. So Wigmore Hall's Fauré Festival is a big statement for considering him as one of the great composers. Is that the thinking behind this focus on his instrumental works?

Absolutely! I think it's fair to say that all Fauré's major works, from the first Violin Sonata to the String Quartet, are masterpieces. No other French composer comes close to him in that regard (much though I love the few chamber works by Debussy and Ravel and the many by Saint-Saëns). The very essence of Fauré's being seems to be communicated through those works.

Fauré is often described as a musical 'conservative', and yet his truly conservative colleagues at the Conservatoire denounced him as 'Robespierre' for his changes to the curriculum and championship of Ravel. Do you think that is nonsense, or is it just that, 100 years after Fauré's death, we have become more open to a variety of styles?

I certainly think it's nonsense to label Fauré a conservative! His music is utterly unlike that of any other composer. I think that perhaps the reason for his comparative lack of popularity is more that he is actually *too* daring, *too* different. People (still) find it hard to grasp his harmonic language. There have been a few works, the first Cello Sonata, the String Quartet, with which I've struggled at first. It's as if I have been outside them somehow. But once I have found the key and stepped inside the door, I just can't understand why I was ever outside it. His music makes perfect sense – it just inhabits its own, deeply personal world.

Here's a tough one: given your long-standing passion for all things Fauré, could you possibly choose a favourite work? What is it about Fauré's many faceted chamber compositions that fires you and your fellow musicians?

Given that Fauré is one of my all-time favourite composers, it would be very hard to choose

'Fauré's last music is for me like late Beethoven in that he created a truly magical realm of ecstatic profundity. If we manage to make people revalue Fauré through this festival, we will have achieved our goal.'

one work. I suppose if you were to tie me to a tree, point a gun at me and force me to choose one work, I'd have to choose the Piano Trio, with that life-enhancing slow movement. But I'd be miserable for the rest of my life – partly from post-traumatic stress, but also because I'd lose the String Quartet, so much glorious choral music, the duo sonatas, the 13th Piano Nocturne…

I don't think you have seen Fauré's opera *Pénélope*, which made such a strong impression on me at Wexford in 2006, but I am sure you know the live recordings with Régine Crespin or Josephine Veasey, let alone *Promethée*? It seems a pity that one of our opera companies could not have stepped up to the plate. Puccini died in the same year, and his operas are done everywhere.

True, I've not seen *Pénélope*, alas, but I've heard it… Magnificent! But I've heard only a short extract from *Prométhée* – as far as I know there is no recording of it. Ridiculous! It was probably Fauré's greatest success during his lifetime. You can be sure that I beg every conductor friend of mine who does opera to do *Pénélope* – they all say they'd love to, but it hasn't happened yet. It all comes down to finances. Puccini is rightly beloved, his operas are gorgeous. But yes, *Pénélope* really deserves a hearing, no, many hearings!

But there's responsibility here: a problem for Fauré, particularly the later music (and exactly the same goes for late Schumann) is that is it is played without understanding, it does sound like weak music. In fact, Fauré's last music is for me like late Beethoven in that he created a truly magical realm of ecstatic profundity. If we manage to make people revalue Fauré through this festival, we will have achieved our goal.

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Fauré Centenary Concerts, featuring Steven Isserlis, Joshua Bell, Blythe Teh Engstroem, Jeremy Denk, Connie Shih, Irène Duval and Quatuor Agate:

FRI 01 NOV 2024 – TUE 05 NOV 2024, NIGHTLY AT 7.30PM

‘We met at Wigmore Hall’: how Vilde Frang fell in love

BY JESSICA DUCHEN

According to Vilde Frang, making music in Wigmore Hall is, sonically speaking, ‘like cutting through butter’. The Norwegian violinist is looking forward with a passion to her time as one of the venue's resident artists next season. ‘It's one of the most fulfilling acoustics and the most inspiring spaces you can imagine,’ she says. ‘You can feel the energy when you set foot in that hall, even without playing a note. The atmosphere in there is charged, and to me everything about it, the light, the smell, is London in a nutshell.’

Frang, who was born in Oslo in 1986, made her debut aged only 12 in a concerto with the Oslo Philharmonic, at the invitation of Mariss Jansons. She went on to study with Kolja Blacher and Ana Chumachenko, the latter at Germany’s celebrated Kronberg Academy, then went on to hold a fellowship with the young artists’ scheme at the Borlotti-Buitoni Trust. Her personal sound is high in intensity and power, while also being acutely adaptable to different eras of music; Gramophone has praised her for ‘playing with almost intimidating dexterity and polish, not to mention impeccable intonation … [and] an impression of honesty and naturalness’.

Her Wigmore residency brings her three concerts, each focusing on a specific area of repertoire and allowing her to collaborate with admired colleagues of her choice. First up, on 8 October, is a Baroque bonanza of an evening with Arcangelo, conducted by Jonathan Cohen and featuring the soprano Julia Doyle; the programme includes Purcell, Handel, Telemann and Bachs JS and JC.

‘Jonathan is an old friend of mine, and I’ve worked with him as a conductor on orchestra tours,’ Frang says. ‘He’s also a fantastic cellist and a genius harpsichord player – one of the most inspiring musicians I know. Back in 2012 he introduced me to his brand-new ensemble, Arcangelo, and I immediately became a huge fan. I ended up recording Mozart violin concertos with them. They have had a ground-breaking, eye-opening effect on me as a musician, really expanding my horizons. I'm so grateful for that.’

Vilde Frang
© Marco Borggreve

The programme intertwines soprano repertoire with music for violin and orchestra and was inspired by Frang's admiration for Doyle. 'I first discovered Julia Doyle in a BBC documentary about Bach, *A Passionate Life*, about ten years ago. I thought she was the most amazing singer I had ever heard. It's something about her exquisite phrasing, and the naturalness of it – I have been dreaming of collaborating with her for years. I feel that being close to her musicianship is almost the closest I've been to the essence of Bach.'

Next, on 20 February, Frang steps into some adventurous early 20th Century music for string duos and trio, with the violinist Valeriy Sokolov and the violist Lawrence Power. 'Lawrence is my long-time chamber music collaborator and I consider him the greatest violist in the world. Working with him is never routine. He will always push the boundaries and explore, while also being the most kind-hearted and grounded person you can imagine. Valeriy is the same age as me, and we first met studying together in the Kronberg Academy. I've always considered him very, very special and I've wanted to play with him for years. This is our first opportunity to embark on a project together.'

The two violinists are tackling the rarely heard Duo Sonata by Eugène Ysaÿe. 'It is the perfect piece, rich music filled to the brim with polyphony and incredible challenges for both performers. It takes a lot of concentration, but I can't wait to indulge in it!' The programme moves on to further unusual gems: Bjarne Brustad's *Capricci* – 'like little postcards from Norway, in 20th Century language, but still undeniably folkloristic', Frang says – and then to Hungary, with Kodály's *Serenade* for two violins and viola. 'It was Lawrence who introduced me to this masterpiece by one of my favourite composers. I don't know why it is so infrequently played.'

In June 2025 Frang turns to the Schumann piano trios, with the pianist Denis Kozhukhin and cellist Maximilian Hornung. 'For me, these trios are very exciting,' she says. 'While Schumann's Lieder, symphonies, and viola, cello or piano works have always been a significant part of my life, I have only got to know his violin repertoire relatively recently. Embarking on the trio cycle has shown me a new, refreshing aspect of him, which makes that journey especially exciting. The Brahms piano trios tend to be played in cycles, while Schumann's have somehow remained hidden treasures. Oddly, with their string quartets, it is the other way around. So I feel we are very much in exploratory mode.

Wigmore Hall has one crucial extra significance for Frang. It was here she first tried out her beloved 'Rode' Guarneri del Gesù of 1734, which was among several violins J & A Beare brought in for her to sample after hearing her Wigmore Hall recital in the 2018-19 season. She has been playing it, on loan from a benefactor, ever since.

'This is where I picked up this violin for the first time, the violin of my life and of my dreams, and played my first notes on it. "We met at Wigmore Hall": that sounds quite classy, doesn't it?' It will be excellent to hear them together here, and plentifully so.

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Forthcoming Concerts in this Residency:
TUE 8 OCT 2024, 7.30PM
THU 20 FEB 2025, 7.30PM
TUE 24 JUN 2025, 7.30PM

The Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition

BY MARK PULLINGER

String quartets are at the very heart of chamber music, and many ensembles find their spiritual home at Wigmore Hall. From veterans like the Borodin and Takács Quartets to younger groups such as the Leonkoro Quartet, ensembles queue up to fill the roster of recitals every season. The Hall fosters new talent through its triennial Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition.

Leonkoro Quartet winning the Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition in 2022
© Benjamin Ealovega

Esmé Quartet in the Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition-winning performance in 2018
© Benjamin Ealovega

The contest one of the most competitive in the world, had its origins as the Portsmouth International String Quartet Competition – the Takács were the inaugural winners in 1979 – before it became the London International String Quartet Competition from 1988 and then Wigmore Hall took over in July 2010, since when the Quatuor Van Kuijk, the Arcadia, Esmé and Leonkoro Quartets have been the victors.

'It's one of the most successful things we do,' says John Gilhooly, Chair of the jury and Wigmore Hall's Artistic and Executive Director. 'Some of the quartets, even if not winning but perhaps getting to the semi-finals or the final, have gone on to have great careers. I expect the Leonkoro – the last winners – will do so too. The marking sheet almost marked itself.'

Gilhooly considers that the Wigmore Hall 'brand' itself is attractive to entrants. 'We have enough clout now to help them on the way. We've been involved with most of the winners, helping them get record contracts. We set up a winner's tour across the UK for them – that's part of our function. The major labels are gone now, and it's hard to get an agent, especially as a string quartet, so there's lots we can do to make a string quartet commercially attractive.'

The competition returns in 2025 for the next edition. What does it take to be successful against such stiff opposition? What qualities are the jury members looking – and listening – for? The judging panel is made up of experienced players. Two of them – Heime Müller (formerly of the Artemis Quartet) and Lesley Robertson (St Lawrence String Quartet) shared their thoughts.

'At the end of the day,' says Müller, 'it should come down to: 'Would I spend money to buy a ticket to see them play again?' The winning group has to have the technical skills to build a career, both instrumentally and ensemble-wise. But they have to touch me, to move me, to convince me artistically. They have to have something unique, something I haven't heard before. I want to be surprised.'

Robertson is also looking to be surprised. 'At this level of performance,' she says, 'I would expect to hear exceptional quartet 'chops' – the foundation of quartet skills that underpins a great quartet comes together only after exacting work.

'But more than anything else,' she adds, 'I look for performances that move you, those that deliver the emotions encoded in the musical scores directly into the heart of a listener. Rapture, hilarity, heartbreak, joy and sorrow should fill the listener's being as surely as the intoxicating scent of a freshly baked loaf or the mind-bending odyssey of a complex curry!'

Gilhooly is looking for chamber musicians who can 'show us that they're a cohesive whole, that there's give and take between the four of them, that they're listening and taking cues from each other, that they're not dominated by one voice. Four Rolls-Royce players can make music, but having that ability to yield, when you notice how a tune is handed on, how they're listening to each other, that's what we come to hear. We don't just want another mundane reading. Once it

'I look for performances that move you, those that deliver the emotions encoded in the musical scores directly into the heart of a listener' – Lesley Robertson

Lesley Robertson © Marco Borggreve

Heime Müller © Maximilian Busch

becomes workaday, it becomes very dull, so they must always have enthusiasm for repertoire old and new.'

Jury members are also looking closely at repertoire choices, which should embrace the string quartet tradition from Classical to contemporary. 'The list presented by an ensemble can provide a revealing glimpse into its world, its influences, tastes and inclinations,' states Robertson. 'It is just one line on an ensemble's calling card, but it can be a telling one.'

'Repertoire choices for competitions are always very interesting,' Müller reflects. 'I remember in my own quartet: on the one hand you want a piece that shows you at your best, where you can bring something special to the repertoire; on the other, it has to be a competition piece. For example, Mozart's A major Quartet, which I think is the best of the cycle dedicated to Haydn, is for sure not a competition piece! In my experience, you can play it as fantastically as possible and people will only applaud politely. But if you play the 'Dissonance' Quartet, people will be much happier.'

Some composers are compulsory. For example, they all need to play Haydn and Mozart, and, in 2025, Judith Weir. Gilhooly explains that Shostakovich has been removed from the repertoire lists. 'I'm not damning Shostakovich,' he counters, 'but it's got a gliding quality that can fool a jury. Sometimes a charismatic performance of a Shostakovich quartet gets a group through, and then you hear their Haydn or Mozart and it's not quite right. The change has helped our process. It's probably quite controversial, but I'm glad we did it because juries are fallible. They endure long, tiring days, and then someone comes on and smashes it with Shostakovich, so of course you're tempted to mark them up. But then it might be that they don't deliver the goods.'

After recorded auditions – judged by a different panel – the early rounds are scored by jury members without any discussion. Members of the panel offer individual feedback to each quartet only when they are eliminated from the competition. Gilhooly explains that there is discussion at the semi-final and final stages, where the decisions inevitably become more difficult. His role as Chair, in a non-voting capacity, is to steer the discussion 'hopefully in the right direction'.

'John is a good spirit above it all,' Müller summarises. 'He is completely clear that he is not there to interfere with the decisions of the jury, except to see that it is a very fair process. He does that with a certain distance very well.'

'By the time they get to the final, quality isn't an issue,' considers Gilhooly, 'but it's about taste. That's where the Chair comes in, when you're trying to negotiate taste. One person's soup is another person's poison!'

The keys to a long and happy career

Pianist Kathryn Stott is retiring from concert-giving this year, after half a century of performances. What form will her musical life take next?

Kathryn Stott
© Jacqui Ferry

Where, and when, did you start as a professional musician?

I had a steep trajectory into professional life by winning fifth prize at the Leeds International Piano Competition. It was 1978, and I was a 19-year-old student. By the next morning I had an agent, followed by 80-90 concerts quickly booked into my diary. I think before that I had given one recital and perhaps played two concertos. It was fun at the beginning...

Programme for Kathryn Stott's Wigmore Hall solo debut

How has concert-giving changed over the course of your career?

Musicians are now much more aware of how they programme in recital or chamber music settings. When I was growing up, repertoire choices seemed much smaller, and if one didn't play core repertoire, the chances of having a professional life appeared more distant. Verbal communication was reserved for introducing encores (if that!). So it feels good now to be able to say a few words if the situation feels right. I definitely felt completely separated from audiences when I was starting out.

Are audiences different? More or less knowledgeable? Noisier or not?

Audiences are much more informed than when I started, because of the internet. Access really was confined to concert-going, radio or buying a recording. Now everyone can listen to a galaxy of music from pretty much any place on the planet, at any given time. When I've worn my Artistic Director hat, I've discovered so much music via the internet, so I'm personally grateful to have that as a treasure trove of musical information.

I still love 'live' concert-going as my favourite medium. When I'm an audience member, I sometimes notice how people really struggle with concentration but we live in a world of fast soundbites, and so this is not surprising. As performers we can never take for granted that everyone will come with us on the musical journey, but that's part of the challenge. Audience noise goes in waves. The first time I performed in Japan after the pandemic, the silence was so incredible, I almost cried mid-performance.

Can you explain how you chose the pieces in your final concert?

It's not easy thinking what one might play as a final recital programme! Over the length of my career, I've probably played much of the large-scale canon of repertoire, but over the years, I kept stretching out into other corners. I wasn't sure in which direction to take this, but here we are and I'm happy with the outcome. I experimented with a playlist concept at the Wigmore Hall a few years ago (performing without a break between pieces) and firstly wanted to return to this idea. However, I will have a few moments to chat! The pieces are works that have significant personal meaning, and connections to people, countries and occasions.

Do you have a career-high – and career-low – experience you are happy to share?

Kathryn Stott performing at Wigmore Hall

I can never answer questions about career-highs in my performances, because I've had so many fulfilling moments in my professional life. I don't really think of pinnacles in terms of how I played or at which venue.

I've had great satisfaction programming for other musicians and, if pushed, I'd say I'm enormously proud of my first-ever festival as an Artistic Director (Fauré and the French Connection) in 1995, because I basically created it on my kitchen table, raised all the money, invited enough artists for 12 concerts and booked an orchestra for four of them. It nearly killed me, but I survived!

Career-low? Putting up the music for a recital at least 25 years ago and hearing a promoter tell me my career would be over if I continued to do that. I ignored his advice and never looked back or played from memory again.

What kind of music making will you be doing after December?

I will be concentrating on working with young people. I already have my regular class at the Royal Northern College of Music but hope to have opportunities for more coaching, particularly chamber music. The world of musicians is much more crowded now, so I hope to pass on knowledge that will help the younger generation find their path. Otherwise I will enjoy being in the audience more often.

What will you miss about performing — and not miss?

No idea!

—

FRI 11 OCT 2024, 7.30PM

‘We live in an age where every sort of music is at our fingertips, all we have to be is inquisitive and open-minded.’

Daniel Kidane
© Kaupo Kikkas

A composer for the here and now

BY CORY OLDWEILER

Daniel Kidane, who is just starting his Wigmore Hall residency, is very much a composer of the moment. The compositions of the 30-something Briton draw from a vast range of contemporary musical influences, with recent work bearing traces of jungle, garage and grime, and often address headlining topics such as the pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and cuts to UK arts funding.

Kidane began his musical education at the age of eight as a violinist, and his composing career some four years later with a piano piece ‘in the style of [Soviet composer Dmitri] Kabalevsky’ called *Arlekino*. The title, which means harlequin in Russian, shows the early influence of his multiethnic heritage – his mother is Russian and his father was Eritrean.

In March, Kidane’s first composition for the violin, a 25-minute concerto, had its well received première by Julia Fischer and the London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Edward Gardner. He had intentionally created space between playing the instrument himself and composing for it, but now that the seal has been broken, Kidane says: ‘There are many more ideas that I would like to explore for the instrument. Watch this space!’

As a musical omnivore, Kidane takes full advantage of the freedoms of the digital moment. ‘We live in an age where every sort of music is at our fingertips, all we have to be is inquisitive and open-minded.’ To this end, he is perpetually receptive to discovery, whether by ‘talking to friends, listening to the music of colleagues and embarking on listening safaris’ or simply crawling around online. While he has been fortunate to have worked with a range of prominent collaborators ‘who are on the same wavelength and can share an artistic vision’, he has also learned to be as open to possibility in his working relationships as he is in his audio exploration.

‘I have come to find that “dream collaborators” are not always as dreamy as one would have hoped. I therefore always keep an open mind and find pleasure in collaborations where the end result beats your own expectations. It's always a pleasure coming away from a collaboration and looking forward to that next time you work together again.’

Later this year, Wigmore Hall will devote an entire day to Kidane’s compositions, with three programmes featuring his music performed by the Leonore Piano Trio, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group and Manchester Camerata, along with various

Does your process differ when you are writing specifically about a contemporary theme or do world events find their way into your music even when it isn't explicitly intended?

I write about things that are close to my heart [...] I am of mixed heritage, and I believe promulgating the importance of diversity is needed; I lost my father to cancer during the pandemic, which is why that period of time will forever be with me; my mother is Russian and my wife is of Ukrainian heritage, which is why the current war affects me; and finally, I am an artist living and creating in the UK, and unfortunately the gradual erosion of the UK's arts sector is not something that sits well with me.

How do you deal with the fluid nature of these events while composing?

I write about these things because they have had time to impact me. They may be fluid, but the core of the matter remains – injustice, war, suffering, as well as other themes. These are all issues that a lot of people can relate to on some level.

Is there anything that you wouldn't be able to write about, or is composing your way of making your voice heard, whatever the issue?

I react, through music, to issues that relate to me and I believe I can comment on genuinely. I do not venture into territories that I don't think relate to me being able to speak about them. I always believe that the voice championing the cause should be authentic.

What is the most important factor in recruiting more diverse voices into the classical music world?

Less chat and more action is a good starting point. I've lost count of the number of symposiums, discussions and meetings I've attended in relation to making the classical music industry a more diverse and welcoming place for minorities. Unfortunately, many of these goodwilled talks don't go anywhere because nobody from within the organisations has made enough effort to affect the change. It's easy to pay lip service, it's hard to get rid of deep rooted biases.

Where does the burden for change lie?

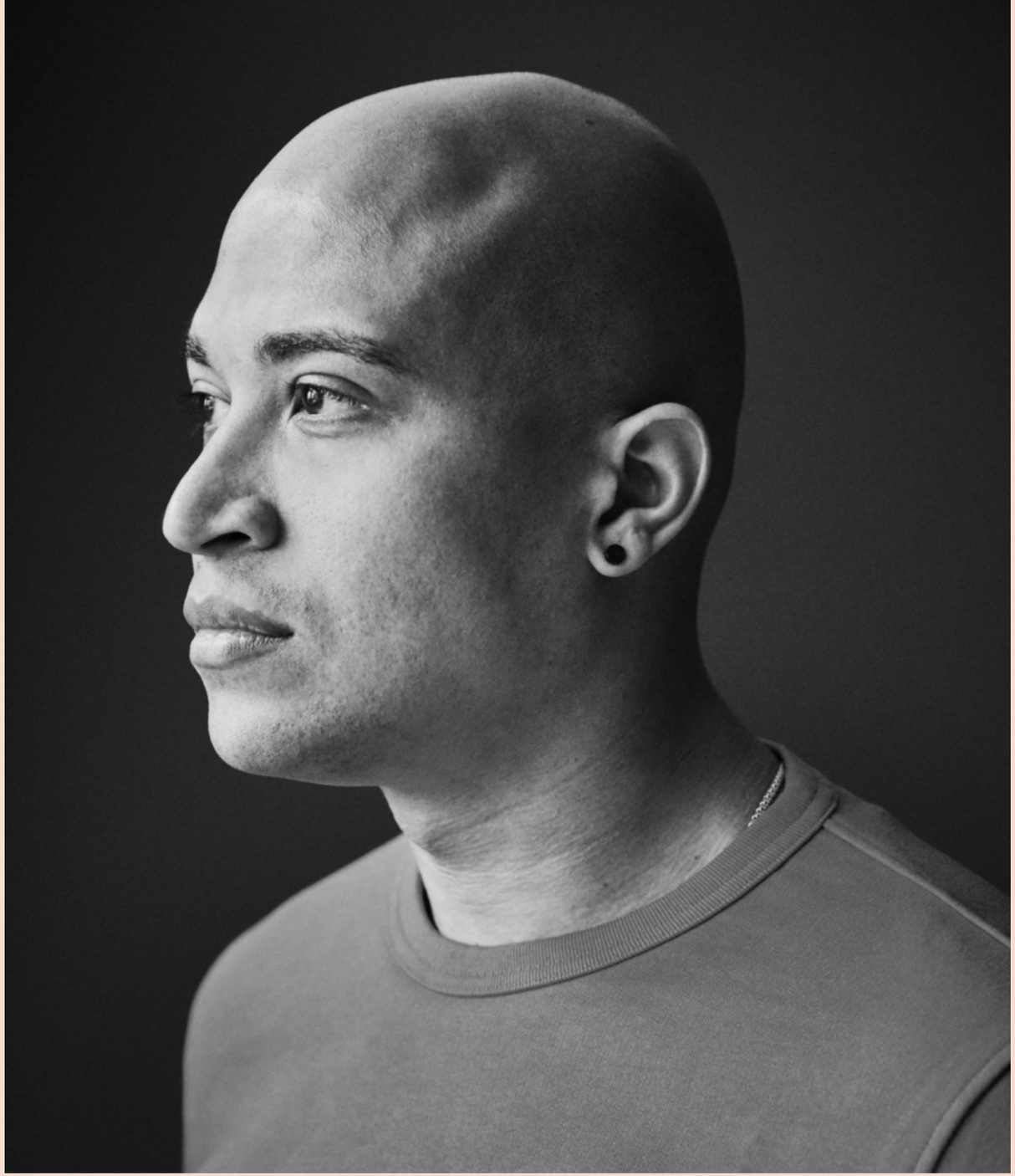
It is the responsibility of gatekeepers at all levels to do their utmost to affect meaningful positive change. I appreciate that any change takes time and effort, but we've been talking about certain things for decades now. The adverse outcome now, after years of hoity-toity gatekeeping, is that classical music is generally seen as a subject that can be axed from curriculums.

What do you listen to in your downtime, when you're not composing?

Everything and anything. Most recently: rare groove, classic rock, drum 'n' bass, house and obviously a lot of classical music.

—

Daniel Kidane Focus Day:
SAT 30 NOV 2024, 11.30AM
SAT 30 NOV 2024, 3.00PM
SAT 30 NOV 2024, 7.30PM



Daniel Kidane © Kaupo Kikkas

Detail from Madonna del Magnificat by Sandro Botticelli

BY ANDREW STEWART

Few works have generated greater labour for musicologists or sparked livelier, often ill-tempered, debate among them, than Claudio Monteverdi's *Vespro della Beata Virgine* or *Vespers of the Blessed Virgin*.

Yet it remains for performers to decide how best to bring the composition to life, which is precisely what Solomon's Knot intends to do at Wigmore Hall on 12 October. The group's interpretation will highlight the monumental score's oceanic breadth of styles, in which ancient Gregorian chants form the basis of modern pieces that display, as one of Monteverdi's colleagues accurately described, 'various and diverse manners of invention and harmony'.

In addition to four majestic psalm settings, the *Vespers* comprises virtuoso motets or 'sacred concertos' for one or more solo voices, a sublime hymn to the Virgin Mary for eight-part choir and the spirited Sonata sopra 'Sancta Maria', a tour de force of instrumental polyphony, crowned by a soprano chant repeatedly petitioning Mary to 'pray for us'. Its score also offers performers a choice of two imposing settings of the Magnificat, each constructed around the chant associated with one of the oldest of all Christian hymns.

The work's striking stylistic range is complemented by its equally diverse instrumentation. Its first edition specifies parts for two violins, four members of the related *viuole da brazzo* family, a *contrabasso da gamba*, three cornetts, three trombones and, in the 'Quia respexit' of the seven-part Magnificat, two *flauti* or recorders, two *fifare* (probably flutes) and continuo. Performances of the *Vespers* during Monteverdi's lifetime probably employed one voice per part, such that it could be delivered by 10 singers, the number needed to perform Nisi Dominus.

Little is known about the birth of the *Vespers* other than that it was created during Monteverdi's time as court choir master to the dukes of Mantua; some sections of it may even pre-date his promotion to the post in 1601. He arranged it for publication in 1610, presented in company with an austere setting of the Latin Mass and dedicated to Pope Paul V. It appears that he hoped to curry favour in Rome and break free from his poorly paid, overburdened work in Mantua.

Although St Peter's never called, the *Vespers* proved a godsend after Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga died and Monteverdi was made redundant. After a year without regular employment, he was invited to audition for the post of chapel master at St Mark's in Venice. He impressed the appointment panel by conducting one of his Mass settings; their decision to offer him the coveted job was also swayed by the 'quality and virtue' of his 'works which are found in print', a clear reference to the *Vespers* of 1610.

Monteverdi's inclusion in the *Vespers* of 'some Sacred Concertos… suited to the chapels or chambers of princes' and two Magnificat settings, one involving virtuoso instrumentalists and seven-part choir, the other for six voices and organ, suggests its constituent parts could be performed in various permutations. It is likely, however, that Monteverdi conceived his *Vespers* as a complete work, partly composed from scratch, partly compiled from existing pieces for performance on one of the church feasts associated with the Virgin Mary.

Recent scholarship has resolved several controversies surrounding the *Vespers* of 1610 and created fresh ones. One speculative theory contends its music was written, not in honour of Christ's mother but of Saint Barbara, dedicatee of the ducal church in Mantua; others have shown that Monteverdi's four 'sacred concertos' or solo motets and the Sonata sopra 'Sancta Maria' belonged to Marian vespers services in 17th Century Italy, the former as substitutes for the usual psalm antiphons, the latter to stand in place of the Magnificat antiphon. Solomon's Knot is sure to bring fresh ideas to the interpretation of one of the great monuments of sacred music.

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SAT 12 OCT 2024, 7.30PM

Champion of Early Music

BY ANDREW STEWART

While some spent lockdown learning Sanskrit or knitting models of Mont Blanc, Tina Vadaneaux used her quarantine time to build a charity devoted to the promotion of Early Music. The Continuo Foundation, launched in September 2020, has grown from a pandemic prospect into an influential funder, distributor of timely financial support to young musicians and grants to established organisations. Its mission, to connect outstanding period performers with audiences across the UK and help sustain their creativity, sits well with Wigmore Hall's wholehearted commitment to Baroque and Early Music.

Tina Vadaneaux

'John Gilhooly sees what we're doing as a win-win for early music,' says Vadaneaux. Her charity enabled Solomon's Knot to take its pre-Christmas Wigmore Hall Bach programme to Nottingham and La Nuova Musica to transport works by Carissimi, Luke Styles and Blow from Wigmore Street to the Deal Festival. It also supported a fruitful collaboration between Siglo d'Oro and the Edinburgh-based Spinacino Consort. Their partnership brought a programme of Tudor and Stuart festive delights to Wigmore Hall last December, honed beforehand on tour around Northeast Scotland.

To date the Continuo Foundation has disbursed over £750,000 to around 170 projects, generating 450 performances in 180 venues from Penzance to Inverness. Its funding stream has helped prime the pump for recordings, supported start-up ensembles and created work for around 1,000 freelance musicians, reaching more than 100,000 people either in person or online. The charity recently launched Continuo Connect, an extensive online listings platform, and is now gathering funds to support an ambitious three-year funding round.

Having worked on Wall Street and in the City, Vadaneaux stepped off the finance treadmill in the early 2000s to pursue postgraduate studies in English and Art History at Kings College London. She gained invaluable experience as a financial disputes mediator before working pro bono for the European Union Youth Orchestra and attracting new audiences to hear The Mozartists, an offshoot of Ian Page's Classical Opera enterprise. 'When the pandemic hit, I saw all these talented musicians losing work,' she recalls. 'I felt the need to help.' Vadaneaux began making calls. Her blend of optimism and determination, backed by the ability to work into the small hours, persuaded prospective donors to invest in the charity.

The Foundation's focused philanthropy is in tune with a sector brimming with fresh programming ideas. 'Everything we do is aimed at growing the Early Music audience,' Vadaneaux says. 'It can radiate out from a Wigmore Hall concert that goes on tour with our support or includes a recording that might not have happened otherwise. The Mozartists, for instance, will record works by Niccolò Jommelli thanks to one of our grants, before bringing them to Wigmore Hall in September.'

'I'm a night owl,' says Vadaneaux. 'That comes in handy!' She soon exceeded her initial £100,000 target and recruited an impressive board of trustees and an expert advisory panel. The latter, responsible for allocating grants, comprises the conductor David Hill, violinist Catherine Mackintosh, festival director and former BBC Radio 3 producer Lindsay Kemp, harpsichordist Joseph McHardy and musicologist Berta Joncus.

Vadaneaux's brainchild embodies her conviction that high quality music making should reach communities rarely touched by it. 'Excellence and bringing music to new places should not be mutually exclusive!' Audiences, she adds, love hearing first-rate performers in action.

'The positive feedback we get from people is wonderful. Ensembles are usually invited back and are developing relationships with audiences around the country. That should create a flourishing future for them and for Early Music.'

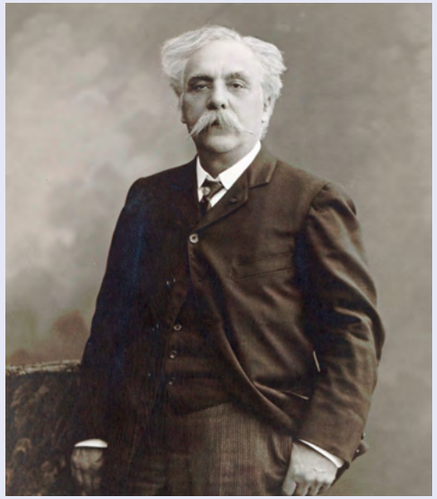
Events for Friends

TUE 15 OCT 2024, 12.00PM

An exploration of the life and works of Gabriel Fauré

We are delighted to be joined by novelist and classical music writer Jessica Duchen, as she offers an insight into the French composer's works and achievements across his lifetime.

£12



Gabriel Fauré © Pierre Petit

WED 13 NOV 2024, 3.30PM

Archive Talk: Wigmore Hall's electric history

It might not be what you expect from Wigmore Hall, but since the earliest days of electronic music making, pioneering performers and composers have been bringing their cutting-edge instruments, experimental works and new perspectives on sound to the Wigmore stage. Join our Archivist for an exploration and celebration of the Hall's electronic history, from the earliest days of Messiaen and Martinů to the electric guitar, amplified wine glasses - and one instrument quite unlike anything that came before or since.

£12

Hugh Davies with his Shozyg I mixer

THE SCORE, 2024 SUMMER ISSUE

WED 04 DEC 2024, 3.00PM

Friends Open Rehearsal: Tenebrae

Friends who give at Benefactor Friends level or above have the opportunity to attend two open rehearsals per season as pre-selected by the Director. The first open rehearsal of the 2024/25 Season allows an audience to see award-winning choir Tenebrae as it prepares ‘a wide selection of carols for all tastes’ ahead of the performance that evening.

FREE (TICKET REQUIRED)

Tenebrae © Sim Canetty-Clarke

How to book

By phone:
Call the Friends Office on
020 7258 8230
(Monday-Friday 10.00AM-5.30PM)

Online:
Visit wigmore-hall.org.uk/friends

You will need to sign in to your online account or set up an account to book.

Friends of
Wigmore Hall

Wigmore Hall News

Simon Majaro celebrates 95th birthday

On 24 June, Simon Majaro celebrated his 95th birthday with a concert from the Wihan Quartet dedicated to him, and performed in memory of his late wife, Pamela. Simon has been a longstanding supporter of Wigmore Hall, and CAVATINA continues to go from strength to strength, providing thousands of young people with free tickets to recitals in London and around the country.
We will always be grateful to him for all his hard work and dedication – happy birthday, Simon!

Wihan Quartet © Liz Isles

East End Learning project

This year Wigmore Hall Learning piloted a Youth Justice Programme with New Town Culture and LBBD Adolescent Services that created a nurturing environment for young people impacted by the justice system in Barking and Dagenham. Led by musician-mentors, participants developed their artist personas through visual arts activities, learned new instruments and production techniques and composed and mixed their own music. One participant said: 'This was the best week in my entire life. People are often paid to listen to me but don't actually care.'

Artwork created by Youth Justice Programme

Director's Fund – Legacy Giving

Grateful thanks to everyone who has been in touch to express an interest in leaving a gift to Wigmore Hall in their Will or confirming their intention to do so. It is strengthening our resolve to do everything we can to ensure a solid financial resource for the Hall over the next 50 years and beyond. If you would like to discuss a legacy gift for the Director's Fund please contact John Gilhooly or Marie-Hélène Osterweil at df@wigmore-hall.org.uk.

Step into summer with our cocktail menu

Negroni? Bellini? Aperol Spritz? Explore the craft and creativity of Wigmore Hall's new cocktail menu, which features a rich variety of alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, juices and liqueurs. Let our bar staff mix you the perfect cocktail, made with fresh, high-quality ingredients and a lot of care.

© Daniel Davies

DIRECTOR

JOHN GILHOOLY, CBE, OSI,
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