

WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 6 November 2022
7.30pm

1722/1822/1922

Tabea Zimmermann viola
Young Soloists of the Kronberg Academy
Martina Consonni piano
Seiji Okamoto violin
Sebastian Fritsch cello
Stephen Kim violin

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) The Well-tempered Clavier Book I, Prelude and Fugue No. 1 in C BWV846 (1722)

I. Prelude • II. Fugue

The Well-tempered Clavier Book I, Prelude and Fugue No. 21 in B flat BWV866

I. Prelude • II. Fugue

Fanny Mendelssohn (1805-1847) Sehnsucht nach Italien (1822)
Mon cœur soupire (1822)
Die Nonne (1822)

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) Piano Quartet No. 1 in C minor Op. 1 (1822)
*I. Allegro vivace • II. Adagio • III. Scherzo. Presto •
IV. Allegro moderato*

Interval

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) Sonata for violin and cello (1920-2)
I. Allegro • II. Très vif • III. Lent • IV. Vif, avec entrain

Paul Hindemith (1895-1963) String Quartet No. 4 Op. 22 (1921)
*I. Fugato. Sehr langsame Viertel •
II. Schnelle Achtel. Sehr energisch •
III. Ruhige Viertel. Stets fließend •
IV. Mässig schnelle Viertel •
V. Rondo. Gemächlich und mit Grazie*

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In the beginning was **Bach's** *Well-tempered Clavier*. If one wanted to situate the starting cry of the 'Austro-German' tradition in Western music in a specific year, it would have to be 1722. This was when JS Bach, a court musician in the tiny principality of Cöthen, wrote his first book of 24 preludes and fugues through all the keys, of which our programme features Nos. 1 and 21, in C and B-flat major respectively. The *Well-tempered Clavier* was not published for many decades, but circulated widely in manuscript copies, and soon became the mother's milk of almost every European composer from Beethoven to Brahms to Britten and beyond. Many have riffed on its C-major opening number – from Chopin and Liszt to multitudinous jazz artists – while Gounod turned it into an *Ave Maria*, and many more openly copied Bach's overall example by writing preludes or fugues or both through all the keys – from Chopin to Rachmaninov, Hindemith to Shostakovich. Bach's fugal art was seen as old-fashioned before he died in 1750, but by the early 20th Century he had become revered as a potential fount of the new. So when the Neoclassicists of the 1920s needed a motto for their up-to-date endeavours, it was – of course – 'back to Bach'.

Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn are surely the best-known composer siblings in music history. They could have had competition from Wolfgang and Nannerl Mozart, had the latter not been compelled to forgo a musical career upon reaching marriageable age; no music of hers has survived. The professional difficulties faced by Fanny Hensel née Mendelssohn have also often been upheld as an example of the sexist patriarchy, though matters were rather more complex than that, and Felix himself seems to have been supportive of her. His letters to her frequently praise her songs, and the three heard in viola arrangements here, all from 1822, testify amply to Fanny's innate gift for melody. The text of 'Die Nonne' is by Ludwig Uhland, 'Sehnsucht nach Italien' by Goethe, two of the favourite German poets of the early Romantics. The text of 'Mon cœur soupire', by contrast, appears to be by Rétif de la Bretonne, for it was published in his novel *The last adventures of a man of 45 years* – though Fanny presumably found it in an anthology, for Rétif's books were otherwise beyond the pale for a nice upper-class girl of her day (it was reportedly he who bequeathed us the word 'pornography'). In 1822, Fanny also completed a piano quartet, though it remained unpublished and was long overshadowed by a work that her little brother Felix wrote for the same forces at the same time, and which was published a few months later as his Op. 1. It is still audibly reliant on older models – there are echoes of piano sonatas by Mozart and Beethoven, and we can hear now and then that Felix also knew his Rossini – though it is in fact remarkable how well he has already digested all outside influences.

'No one can reject the rhythms of today', replied **Ravel** when asked about the influence of jazz on his music. Like many of his post-war works, Ravel's Sonata for violin and cello, completed in 1922, revels in his exposure to the popular trends from across the Atlantic. Yet this Sonata is no popular pastiche, for it hovers frequently on the verge of atonality, while its manifold double stops and inventive harmonics reveal a fastidious ear for timbre and instrumental effects; sometimes it sounds as if a whole string quartet is playing. This Sonata is cast in a conventional four-movement form, though it shares motivic material across its movements and even features a fugato towards the close of its rondo finale. It was not initially a success with the public, but has since established itself as one of Ravel's most significant chamber works, even eliciting the later admiration of Pierre Boulez.

The last of our centennial works in this programme is **Paul Hindemith's** Fourth String Quartet Op. 22, first performed by the Amar Quartet at the 1922 Donaueschingen Festival, with Hindemith himself on the viola. It begins with a slow, quiet *Fugato* reminiscent of Beethoven's String Quartet Op. 131. Its second movement is a motoric scherzo with lyrical interludes, while the third is a haunting, plodding exploration of pizzicato and legato sonorities in which the first violin seems at times to mimic the winding cor anglais solo from Wagner's *Tristan*. The fourth movement begins with an extraordinary cello cadenza whose virtuosity is successively taken up by the other instruments and then leads without a break into the final, fifth movement – a graceful, playful *Rondo* that seems to nod alternately to the finales of Beethoven's String Quartet Op. 130 and his Seventh Symphony. This quartet became one of the Amar's most popular repertoire pieces, with more than 170 performances over the next decade. Hindemith wrote to Schott on 1 March 1922 that it was 'very easy to listen to and to play', and while the latter half of that claim is an exaggeration, this Fourth Quartet did indeed prove popular with audiences everywhere, even in the more provincial venues on the road. In Breslau in early 1925, for example, an anonymous critic enthused about the 'unanimous acclaim' that it had enjoyed with the audience. In Cobbett's chamber music encyclopaedia of 1929, the English critic Edwin Evans noted the work's 'strong desire for clarity', and there is indeed a sense of consolidation about this Fourth Quartet that contrasts with the dissonant, progressive striving of Hindemith's music before it. The sometime explorer's urge to find new worlds of sound is here superseded by a desire for their peaceful exploitation.

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