

Wethersfield Chamber Concerts

22 April 2018 – 4pm

Sheku Kanneh-Mason
Cello

Isata Kanneh-Mason
Piano

PROGRAMME NOTES *by John Woollard*

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 – 1750): Sonata No. 2 in D major for viola da gamba, BWV 1028

The viola da gamba was one of Bach's favourite instruments which he used in both his Passions and several of his cantatas. It was used mainly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and was a type of viola held either on the lap or between the legs. The three sonatas which Bach composed for the instrument are more often heard today on cello and piano although the timbres of the instruments and the resonance are quite different. The gamba was not as powerful as the modern cello; it had a softer, more delicate tone. Another difference was the fact that it had five strings which were tuned in thirds and fourths.

In 1717, Bach had been appointed Kapellmeister and director of chamber music to Prince Leopold of Anhalt at Cothen. This called for an increased production of music for entertainment rather than for the church. These sonatas were composed around three years after the appointment, probably for Christian Ferdinand Abel, who was a virtuoso cellist and gamba player in Bach's court orchestra. It has been suggested that they could even have been for the Prince himself to play (who played several instruments) although this is not as likely.

It is interesting to read Philip Spitta's huge study of Bach and his work (published in 1873) where this second sonata

is almost entirely dismissed as being inferior to the other two and "possessing a certain stiffness in the first Allegro." The other two are worthy of almost four pages of discussion. However, it is an interesting work if not the most musically rewarding. It is written in the form of a Church Sonata. (Movements are slow, fast, slow, fast) which was the point of departure for the classical sonata form. The principle of the trio-sonata is used to provide a texture which consists mainly of cellist with the right-hand of the keyboard part as a duet, and a fairly simple bass line underneath.

The opening Adagio is more like a short introduction to the much more lively second movement. Here, the keyboard part almost predominates throughout the dance-like Allegro. Bach uses the key of B minor for the Andante, which is rather like a meditative prayer in the lilting rhythm of a siciliano. It is full of lyricism in contrast with the Allegro finale which is more strongly rhythmical. The bass line here becomes less static resulting in a much more even three-part texture. The cellist has a much livelier and more technically demanding role in this movement, which provides a sparkling finish to the work.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827): 'Cello Sonata in G minor, Op. 5 No. 2

1. Adagio sostenuto ed espressivo
2. Allegro molto più tosto presto
3. Rondo: allegro

Between May and July of 1796 Beethoven was in Berlin as part of a concert tour, traveling, as Mozart had done in 1789, with Prince Lichnowsky. While there, he began a number of important works, including the two cello sonatas of Op. 5 and the Variations for Cello and Piano in G major on "See the conqu'ring hero comes" from Handel's oratorio, Judas Maccabaeus, WoO 45. The Op. 5 cello sonatas are dedicated to Friedrich Wilhelm II, King of Prussia, a capable amateur cellist. Beethoven occasionally sought to dedicate works to influential people in the hopes of obtaining a reward. In the case of the Op. 5 sonatas, Beethoven received a gold snuff box filled with louis d'or -- French 20-franc gold pieces.

The first cellist of the Court Orchestra (and Wilhelm II's teacher) was Jean-Pierre Duport (1741-1818), for whom Beethoven composed the two Op. 5 cello sonatas. The premiere of the two sonatas was given in Berlin in May or June of 1796 and it is possible that Beethoven performed the works not with Jean-Pierre Duport, but with Duport's younger brother, Jean-Louis. Certainly, the style and

ability of these two cellists influenced Beethoven's compositions. In fact, a few aspects of the cello writing in the Op. 5 sonatas appear in a tutor for the instrument later published by Jean-Louis Duport. The two sonatas of Op. 5 were printed in February 1797 by Artaria & Co. in Vienna. Both are in two movements with a slow introduction to the first movement and a rondo-form finale.

Beethoven's composition of sonatas for cello and piano was unprecedented; he had no models in the works of Haydn or Mozart. Only recently had the instrument begun to liberate itself from its role in the traditional basso continuo. Beethoven was the first to completely write out the keyboard parts for large-scale cello and keyboard works. Although he composed variations for cello and piano -- Op. 66, WoO. 45, and WoO. 46 -- Beethoven would not write another sonata for the combination until 1807, when he began the Cello Sonata, Op. 69. The sonatas of Op. 5 are remarkable in the density of their material as well as Beethoven's increasing ability to relate more distant keys to the tonic. In these aspects, the two sonatas have no parallel in their time.

Each of the two sonatas of Op. 5 features a slow introduction in the manner of Haydn's symphonies; that

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for No. 2 opens in G minor, the key of the piece, but moves astray into flat harmonies. The main theme of the Allegro is brief in comparison to that of the first movement of Op. 5, No.2, and sounds once in each instrument before being subjected to motivic transformation in the transition to the second theme area. On the relative major (B flat), the

second theme has a shape exactly the opposite of the first. The implications of the "flat" harmonies in the introduction are realized in both the second theme area and the brief development section. As in Op. 5, No. 1, the Rondo finale proves to be a vehicle for virtuosity that must have tested the limits of even the best players of the time.

----- Interval -----

Claude Debussy (1862 – 1918): 'Cello sonata in D minor

1. Prologue - lento
2. Serenade
3. Finale - Anime

Although they represent only half of a projected series of works, Debussy's three chamber sonatas bear testimony to the composer's developing identification with a more abstract -- that is, less visually, textually, or otherwise extra-musically oriented -- musical process. The first of these works, the Sonata No. 1 for cello and piano (1915), is cast in three movements, the last two of which are played without break. The Prologue opens with a noble keyboard statement in D minor, well defined harmonically (an unusual feature in Debussy's music) and tinged with modal color, to which the cello provides a highly ornamental response. The entire movement is but 51 measures in length, yet encompasses a wealth of expression. Throughout, musical phrases are allowed to develop and collapse with no clear boundaries; as with much of the composer's later music, the distinction between melody and ornamentation is deliberately obscured.

The absolute saturation of the ensuing Sérénade (marked *Modérément animé*) with the percussive tones of the cellist's pizzicati came as a great shock to Parisian audiences of Debussy's own time. The few arco passages that invade the texture quickly dissolve away, save for an outburst of triplet rhythms midway through the movement. The bass staccati in the piano serve to make the occasional melodic, legato inserts all the more powerful. The finale, marked *Animé*, follows without pause. At 123 bars, it is of greater length than the two previous movements together. Although in performance its quicker tempo compensates for its proportions to some degree, a great deal of the Sonata's musical weight is invested in this energetic movement. Debussy calls for the cello to play with a "light and nervous" character, while he includes no fewer than 17 tempo indications that emphasize the psychological tension. The music builds to several climaxes, only to have the bottom drop out each time in one of Debussy's favorite musical strategies. The cello makes a final passionate, unaccompanied melodic plea, as at the beginning of the entire work, before the Sonata concludes in a flurry of great percussive strength.

Johannes Brahms (1833 – 1897): 'Cello Sonata in F major, Op. 99

1. Allegro vivace
2. Adagio affetuoso
3. Scherzo: Allegro appassionato
4. Finale: Allegro

This sonata dates from Brahms' most fruitful mature period between 1877 and 1889 when all four symphonies were written as well as the Violin Concerto and many of his finest chamber works. He spent the summers of 1886–88 in Switzerland, renting a villa at Hofstetten (in Berne) and in his first stay there produced this 'cello sonata, the Double Concerto for violin and 'cello and many songs. The summer of 1886 also saw the production of Brahms's Second Violin Sonata and the C minor Piano Trio, altogether some of his most important chamber works. It was first performed the following November in Vienna with Brahms himself at the piano. The 'cellist was a member of the famous Joachim quartet, Robert Hausmann, who was probably chosen because he had the strong tone needed to balance the powerful piano part.

However, it is interesting that, although Brahms's music was very much directly linked to his personal experiences, he was branded an anti-romanticist by his contemporaries. To quote Dr. Colles: "There is a story at the back of all Brahms's great works, but it is a personal story, not a dramatic one like the stories of Berlioz and Liszt, and it is told only in music."

The slow movement is in the distant key of F sharp major, gently plodding pizzicato from the 'cello being accompanied by something which almost seems unconnected, a solemn yet very lyrical theme. Brahms the pianist is very evident throughout this work. Here the piano is not merely an accompaniment but almost an equal. Pizzicato is again used very effectively, a device which ensures the tone of the 'cello is noticed even if the piano is duplicating its register. For a while we seem to lose the tonal centre of the movement, as a strange shift to F minor takes place, but we are soon restored to the home key for a gentle ending.

It is an emotionally turbulent work, very extrovert and dramatic, and contrasts greatly with the first 'cello sonata which was written more than 20 years earlier. Although Brahms was not a string player himself (his father was a double-bass player in the Hamburg Philharmonic Orchestra) he uses the register and abilities of the instrument to the full, specialising in using the high register and effects like pizzicato and tremolo. Stormy tremolos by the piano accompany a leaping, dramatic theme right at the opening of the sonata. This Allegro is a very powerful movement, one that most listeners today would have no hesitation in describing as romantic.

The emotional peak is reached by this next scherzo movement which is rhythmically very forceful and has an extremely busy and adventurous piano part. There is constant conversation between the instruments, worked in a very skillful manner. The final rondo is more relaxed with a lyrical, folk-like theme Brahms' poetic nature is evident here, in strong contrast with the heroic energy of earlier movements. The final hearing of the rondo theme is particularly effective as gentle piano triplets accompany Scotch snaps played pizzicato. Finally a brief coda section brings this much-loved sonata to an excited close.

We hope that you will join us for our concerts next year - on 14 & 28 April, 12 May 2019

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ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Sheku Kanneh-Mason is the 2016 BBC Young Musician, a title he won with a stunning performance of the Shostakovich Cello Concerto at London's Barbican Hall with the BBC Symphony Orchestra. In April 2017, Sheku returned to the hall for another performance of the concerto, this time with the National Youth Orchestra and Carlos Miguel Prieto after which the Guardian wrote that "technically superb and eloquent in his expressivity, he held the capacity audience spellbound with an interpretation of exceptional authority" and the Telegraph acknowledged "what a remarkable musician he already is, bringing other-worldly tone to the haunting slow movement and displaying mature musicianship in his handling of the extended cadenza"

Only eighteen years old, Sheku's international career is developing very quickly with engagements in the 2017/18 and 2018/19 seasons including the CBSO, the Philharmonia Orchestra at the Newbury Spring Festival, a return to the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra, Barcelona Symphony, Netherlands Chamber Orchestra (his debut at the Concertgebouw), Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra (Sheku's concerto debut in North America), Louisiana Philharmonic, and the Seattle and Atlanta symphonies. He will also return to the BBC Symphony Orchestra to perform the Elgar Concerto in his hometown of Nottingham and make his debut at the Vienna Konzerthaus with the Japan Philharmonic. In recital, Sheku has several concerts across the UK with highlights over the next two seasons including his debuts at Kings Place as part of their Cello Unwrapped series, Milton Court, and Wigmore Hall. He will also perform a series of concerts in Canada in December 2017, and further recitals at the Zurich Tonhalle, and the Lucerne Festival.

In 2016, Sheku performed at the BBC Proms in the Park in Wales and returned to make his Proms debut at the Albert Hall in summer 2017 with the Chineke! Orchestra, an ensemble with which he enjoys a special relationship having taken part in their debut concert at the Royal Festival Hall in 2015, returning as soloist to perform the Haydn Concerto with the orchestra in April 2017: "You aren't ever going to hear this Haydn Concerto more engagingly performed" The Arts Desk.

Isata Kanneh-Mason is twenty-one years old and is an undergraduate at The Royal Academy of Music, studying piano with Carole Presland, having been awarded the prestigious Sir Elton John Scholarship. She performed with Elton John in Los Angeles in 2013.

Isata was in the Piano Category Final of The BBC Young Musician 2014, winning The Walter Todds Bursary for the most promising musician before the Grand Final. She has won The Royal Academy Iris Dyer Piano Prize four times and won the Mrs Claude Beddington Prize for outstanding recital results in her second year as an undergraduate at The Royal Academy.

Isata held the Elsa and Leonard Cross Scholarship at The Royal Academy of Music, Junior Department, studying piano with Patsy Toh. She won two ABRSM Gold Awards at age 10 and 11 for the highest marks in the UK for grades 7 and 8 Piano.

She has performed around the UK and abroad, with concerto appearances, in chamber ensembles and in solo

In February 2017, Sheku performed an arrangement of Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" for Cello and String Trio at the BAFTAs Awards show at the Royal Albert Hall, an interpretation which brought the celebrity-filled audience to their feet and which has subsequently been shared and viewed by nearly two million people on social media sites. He has an exclusive recording contract with Decca Classics and his first concerto recording for the label will be released in 2018.

Sheku began learning the cello at the age of six with Sarah Huson-Whyte and then studied with Ben Davies at the Junior Department of the Royal Academy of Music where he held the ABRSM Junior Scholarship. In September 2017, he started a full-time degree course at the Royal Academy, studying with Hannah Roberts. He has received masterclass tuition from Guy Johnston, Robert Max, Alexander Baillie, Steven Doane, Rafael Wallfisch, Jo Cole, Melissa Phelps and Julian Lloyd Webber and in July 2017, participated in the Verbier Festival Academy in masterclasses with Frans Helmerson and Miklos Perenyi. A keen chamber musician, Sheku performs regularly as a member of the Kanneh-Mason Trio with sister, Isata and brother, Braimah.

Sheku is passionate about the importance of making classical music accessible to all and is the first London Music Masters Junior Ambassador. With his siblings, the Kanneh-Mason seven-piece ensemble, he has performed in many venues across the UK including at Marlborough House in front of HRH Prince Charles for Commonwealth Day and on ITV's Britain's Got Talent, both in the semi-finals in 2015 and then as special guests on the final show in June 2017 performing with dance group, Diversity.

He plays an Antonius and Hieronymus Amati cello c.1610 kindly on loan from a private collection.

Sheku Kanneh-Mason appears by arrangement with Enticott Music Management.

Sheku Kanneh-Mason records exclusively for Decca Classics

recitals, including at the Wigmore Hall, The Royal Festival Hall, St Martin-in-the-Fields, The Duke's Hall (Royal Academy), The Royal Concert Hall, Nottingham, Kings Place, London. She has performed several concerti, including Mozart K466, Haydn Hob XVIII, Grieg Piano Concerto, Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto No 2 and Schumann Concerto. In 2014, Isata performed Mozart's Triple Concerto with two of her sisters. She has given solo recitals at The Hebden Bridge Music Festival, Belper Music Festival, Lincoln Music Festival, Grantham and Newark Music Club Recital Series. She performed in the Piano Series at Nottingham's Royal Concert Hall, The Colour of Music Festival in Charleston, USA, Yellow Lounge, Amsterdam, in The Barbican Sound Unbound Festival, The Elgar Room at The Royal Albert Hall, Cheltenham Music Festival, Leicester International Chamber Music Festival, the Caribbean, The Cayman Islands and Canada.

Isata is very grateful to the Nottingham Soroptimist Trust, the Nottingham Education Trust, to Mr and Mrs John Brydon, to Frank White of Ladystone Violins and to Elton John.

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