

Wethersfield Chamber Concerts

12 May 2024 – 4pm

CHARLOTTE SPRUIT

Violin

PROGRAMME NOTES *by John Woollard*

JS Bach (1685-1750) : Sonata No. 1 for solo violin in G minor, BWV 1001

Adagio - Fuga (Allegro) - Siciliana - Presto

Wherever his fortunes took him, Bach was incredibly productive. In Anhalt-Cöthen (1717-1723) he flourished as conductor of the court orchestra and produced, among other works, orchestral pieces, concertos, and a dozen particularly amazing compositions, six for violin alone and six suites for cello alone.

The pieces for violin alone and cello alone are bold in ways that most other virtuosic string pieces are not. They demand not only unfaltering facility in matters of digital and rhythmic dexterity and preciseness of pitch, particularly in the multiple stoppings, but also the keenest musical insights and inner-ear sensitivity to implied polyphonic and harmonic textures.

The six violin pieces were designated by Bach three as sonatas, three as partitas. The sonatas as a group are more polyphonic than the partitas, each having a formal fugal movement, while the partitas are concerned with the dance movements common to the suites of the period.

The G-minor Sonata opens with an imposing Adagio whose grandeur, so miraculously set forth on the single violin, could not be enhanced if transcribed for a full symphony orchestra. The second movement fugue is one of those Bachian structures that grow to amazing proportions from an almost ridiculously brief and seemingly insignificant subject. A lovely and gentle Siciliana separates the fugue from the whirlwind that comprises the final movement — a presto, perpetual motion Baroque essay in violin virtuosity.

JG Pisendel (1688-1755) : Sonata for solo violin in A minor

No indication - Allegro - Giga

Johann Georg Pisendel was a German Baroque violinist and composer who, for many years, led the Court Orchestra in Dresden as concertmaster, then the finest instrumental ensemble in Europe. He was the leading violinist of his time, and composers such as Tomaso Albinoni, Georg Philipp Telemann and Antonio Vivaldi all dedicated violin compositions to him.

Pisendel's surviving compositions are few in number but high in quality. All of his surviving works are instrumental. They include ten violin concertos, four concertos for orchestra, and two violin sonatas. His sonata for violin solo in A minor possibly influenced Bach's works in the genre.

Pisendel was born in Cadolzburg, a small town near Nuremberg, where his father Simon Pisendel was the cantor and organist. At the age of nine, Johann Georg became a choirboy at the court chapel of Ansbach, where the singer Francesco Antonio Pistocchi was music director, and violinist and composer Giuseppe Torelli was concert master. It is thought that Pisendel studied the violin with Torelli. After his voice broke, Pisendel went on to play the violin in the Court Orchestra. In 1709, he left Dresden for Leipzig to further his musical studies.

On the way to Leipzig, he met Johann Sebastian Bach at Weimar. Pisendel was a member of the Collegium Musicum founded by Georg Philipp Telemann, and conducted it in 1710/11, while Melchior Hoffmann went on

a concert tour. In 1711, after he performed at Darmstadt in an opera by Christoph Graupner, Pisendel was offered a position in the court orchestra there, but declined.

In 1711, he was offered a position as leading violinist at the Dresden Court Orchestra, which he accepted and began in January 1712. He studied composition there with Johann David Heinichen. He remained with the Dresden orchestra for the rest of his life. He was sent to represent the culture of Dresden in Europe by Elector Frederick Augustus II, to Paris in 1714, to Berlin in 1715, and to Venice in 1716, where he stayed for nine months and studied with Antonio Vivaldi.

In 1730, Pisendel became officially concert master of the Dresden Court Orchestra, a position he had filled already since Jean-Baptiste Volumier had died in 1728. Pisendel's pupils included Franz Benda and Johann Gottlieb Graun.

Bach possibly wrote his violin sonatas for Pisendel. Tomaso Albinoni, Vivaldi and Telemann all dedicated works to him. A collection of extant instrumental works from the first half of the eighteenth century, which were kept in the so-called Cabinet II of the Hofkirche, includes these dedications, numerous manuscripts with performance instructions in Pisendel's own hand, and scores he had copied himself. The Saxon State and University Library Dresden and the German Research Foundation completed digitizing the Schrank II collection in the summer of 2011, leading researchers to further study Pisendel's musical legacy.

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György Kurtág (1926-date): Selection from "Signs, Games and Messages"

György Kurtág arrived at the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest in 1946, the year after Bartók's death. At the entrance exams, he first met György Ligeti (1923-2006), who was to become a lifelong friend. Kurtág graduated Béla Bartók first as a pianist (in 1951) and completed his composition studies in 1955. After the Hungarian uprising in 1956, Kurtág fled to Paris where he attended classes given by Darius Milhaud (1892-1974) and Olivier Messiaen (1908-92), and made several discoveries that were to have a lasting impact, including the music of Anton Webern (1883-1945) and the plays of Samuel Beckett (1906-89). Kurtág's two years in Paris were marked by a growing sense of despair and severe depression, and he sought help from the Hungarian-born psychoanalyst Marianne Stein. According to Kurtág, their encounter helped him to 'concentrate on essential things.'

Stein's unusual art therapy included the construction of very small matchstick sculptures. For Kurtág this was a turning point, enabling him to develop what his friend Ligeti characterised as 'fantastic inner concentration on tiny subtle gestures'.

This focus on tiny details within small forms finds some of its most potent expression in the series of pieces called *Játékok* ('Games'), an ever-growing collection of short works for a variety of instruments including piano four-hands and two pianos, viola, cello, double bass, flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, string duos and trios, and even (composed in 1987 and revised in 1991) explores what is

possible taking the sound of the violin's open strings as a starting point.

Another feature of *Signs, Games and Messages* is Kurtág's reference back to earlier music, and this is exemplified by 'Hommage à J.S.B.' which is an elegant and utterly fresh reflection on J.S. Bach's unaccompanied violin writing. 'Hommage à John Cage – Faltering Words' is a poignant, rather desolate piece in which the violin seems to be trying to reach upwards from one note to the next, but constantly falls back. 'In Nomine all'ongherese' was composed in 2001, inspired by the consort music of English composers such as Taverner and Dowland.

While the source may be remote, the spirit of the title is more clearly reflected in gestures and fragments that have the unmistakable stamp of the Hungarian folk music that is so central to Kurtág's musical make-up, as it had been for Bartók. The story behind 'The Carenza Jig' is a delightful one. Kurtág wrote it for an eight-year old girl called Carenza with whose family Kurtág stayed as a guest in Cornwall (it is dated 'Penberth ... Prussia Cove, 1989', with final revisions made in 1997). Marked 'Brisk and Wild', it is one of the most brilliant of the musical postcards that make up this collection. Many of those that follow have very personal connections, including pieces that celebrate the birthdays of friends, and others that are memorials. The last piece is also one of the most substantial: 'Antifóna Hirominak' was written for the violinist Hiromi Kikuchi, one of Kurtág's most devoted champions.

~~~~~ Interval ~~~~~

## JS Bach (1685-1750) : Partita No. 2 for solo violin in D minor, BWV1004

Except for the ciaccona, the movements are dance types of the time, and they are frequently listed by their French names: *Allemande*, *Courante*, *Sarabande*, *Gigue*, and *Chaconne*. The final movement is written in the form of variations, and lasts approximately as long as the first four movements combined.

Performance time of the whole partita varies between 26 and 32 minutes, depending on the approach and style of the performer. It has been suggested that this partita, and especially its last movement, was a tombeau written in memory of Bach's first wife, Maria Barbara Bach (who died in 1720), though this theory is controversial.

Violinist Joshua Bell has said the Chaconne is "not just one of the greatest pieces of music ever written, but one of the greatest achievements of any man in history. It's a spiritually powerful piece, emotionally powerful, structurally perfect." He played the piece busking in L'Enfant Plaza for The Washington Post.

Johannes Brahms in a letter to Clara Schumann described the piece, "On one stave, for a small instrument, the man [Bach] writes a whole world of the deepest thoughts and most powerful feelings. If I imagined that I could have created, even conceived the piece, I am quite certain that the excess of excitement and earth-shattering experience would have driven me out of my mind."

## ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Violinist **Charlotte Spruit** is a passionate chamber musician and soloist, and was a winner at the 2023 Young Classical Artists Trust international auditions. Charlotte has also won the first prize and audience prize and the Genuin Classics prize at the Leipzig International Johann Sebastian Bach Competition.

Charlotte plays frequently at chamber music festivals across Europe, including the Chamber Music Connects the World festival at the Kronberg Academy and the Mendelssohn on Mull Festival where she performed with the Doric String Quartet. She has performed chamber works with acclaimed musicians including Janine Jansen, Gidon Kremer, Tabea Zimmermann, Lawrence Power, and Christian Tetzlaff. She has also made her debuts at the Concertgebouw in the Netherlands, the Wigmore Hall in London and at the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg.

As a concerto soloist, Charlotte has played with numerous orchestras, including the Residentie Orkest The Hague, The Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, the Pauliner Barockensemble, and Ensemble Esperanza.

Charlotte studied at the Guildhall School of Music with David Takeno and at the Royal Academy of Music with Ying Xue. She is currently pursuing her Master's degree at the Royal Academy of Music with Rachel Podger and Pavlo Beznosiuk.

Charlotte plays an 18th-century anonymous Italian violin, kindly on loan from the Dutch Musical Instruments Foundation.

**We hope that you will join us for our concerts next year: 6, 27 April, 11 May 2025**