

LSO St Luke's

CHAMBER MUSIC

BBC
RADIO 3

BAROQUE FANCIES
MAHAN ESFAHANI

Thursday 9 November 2023 1-2.05pm
Jerwood Hall, LSO St Luke's

Wilhelm Friedemann Bach Fantasia in E minor
Viktor Kalabis Six Two-Part Voice Canonic Inventions
Johann Sebastian Bach Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue in D minor
William Byrd Fantasia in A minor MB 13
Jiří Antonín Benda Keyboard Sonata No 3 in D minor

Mahan Esfahani harpsichord

Recorded for future broadcast on **BBC Radio 3**

LSO

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ACOUSTIC TRIAL

While LSO St Luke's undergoes an acoustic trial, there will be window coverings in place until the end of January 2024. We welcome any feedback you may have on the impact of these coverings, be it acoustically, aesthetically and operationally. Please email tickets@lso.co.uk to share feedback.

THE CRYPT CAFÉ & BAR

The Crypt café and bar is open from one hour before the concert and during the interval (where applicable), selling hot and cold drinks. Please note we can accept card payments only. Only cold drinks will be permitted inside the Jerwood Hall.

PROGRAMME NOTE WRITER

Wendy Thompson studied at the Royal College of Music, before taking an MMus in musicology at King's College, London. In addition to writing about music she is Executive Director of Classic Arts Productions, a major supplier of independent programmes to BBC Radio.

In accordance with the requirements of Islington Council persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any gangway.

The taking of photographs and the use of recording equipment are strictly forbidden without formal consent from LSO St Luke's.

Please make sure that digital watch alarms and mobile phones are switched off during the performance.

Fantasia in E minor

Wilhelm Friedemann Bach



1770



11 minutes

Today's programme of 'Baroque Fancies' focuses on the keyboard fantasia, a favourite Baroque genre which allowed composers free imaginative rein within a multi-sectional structure. It opens with a fine example by Johann Sebastian Bach's eldest son.

Wilhelm Friedemann was born in Weimar, and received an intensive musical education from his father. When the family moved to Leipzig in 1723, he was enrolled at St Thomas' School, and went on to study law and mathematics at the universities of Leipzig and Halle.

A talented keyboard player and aspiring composer, he decided to make a career in music. From 1733 to 1746 he was organist at St Sophia in Dresden, and afterwards at the Liebfrauenkirche in Halle, but made himself so unpopular (he was said to have a difficult nature) that, after leaving his Halle job in 1764, he never secured another permanent post. His later years were plagued by financial insecurity, and he died in poverty in Berlin.

Friedemann was a gifted composer, rooted in the contrapuntal Baroque style of his father, but with an individual twist derived from his much-admired skill as an improviser. His works include church cantatas and some instrumental pieces, but are predominantly for solo keyboard, including twelve Fantasias, mostly composed around 1770. This exceptionally brilliant and dramatic example in E minor contrasts slower, meditative sections with explosive showers of virtuosity.

Six Two-Part Voice Canonic Inventions

Viktor Kalabis



1962



15 minutes

The Czech composer Viktor Kalabis studied music in Prague after the end of World War II but found his career (and that of his wife, the harpsichordist Zuzana Růžičková) stymied for several years by their refusal to join the Communist Party. In 1957 his Cello Concerto was performed in Paris, which opened up new opportunities, and he began to get more commissions. At the same time he held a day job in the children's music section at Prague Radio. His works, which were influenced by Béla Bartók and especially Bohuslav Martinů, but also by Igor Stravinsky, are primarily instrumental, and include five symphonies and nine concertos, together with chamber and keyboard music.

He composed this set of six two-part Canonic Inventions for his wife in 1962. These charming and humorous miniatures were clearly inspired by J S Bach's Two-Part Inventions (composed as teaching pieces for Wilhelm Friedemann), as well as Domenico Scarlatti's sonatas, but ingeniously avoid any suggestion of pastiche.

Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue in D minor

Johann Sebastian Bach



1720



12 minutes

This famous keyboard piece, described by Bach's first biographer as 'unique' and 'second to none', was probably composed during the composer's years at Cöthen between 1717 and 1723, and exists in several manuscript versions compiled by his pupils and associates.

The Fantasia divides into three sections: a toccata-like opening, including brilliant runs up and down the keyboard; a middle portion consisting of soft, arpeggiated chords; and a section marked 'Recitative', consisting of a sequence of highly ornamented melodies which culminate in a series of diminished seventh chords, moving downwards chromatically over a single bass. These introduce the Fugue subject, which features ascending chromatic half-steps. The piece has always been a favourite with pianists and harpsichordists, even during periods when Bach's music generally was out of fashion.

Fantasia in A minor MB 13

William Byrd



c 1540–1623



8 minutes

This is one of four fantasias by William Byrd found in the famous collection of keyboard music known as the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book. This manuscript, regarded as the most important source of keyboard music of the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean periods, and containing nearly 300 pieces by composers such as John Bull, Giles Farnaby, Orlando Gibbons, Thomas Tallis, Peter Phillips and John Dowland, as well as Byrd himself, is now kept in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. Byrd contributed around 70 pieces to the volume, more than any other single composer.

Keyboard music formed a significant part of the output of this great Renaissance composer, who worked at the Anglican Chapel Royal of Queen Elizabeth I, despite clandestinely holding Catholic beliefs which could easily have resulted in his prosecution and death. His sacred music – for both Anglican and Catholic liturgies – is still sung in churches today, while his keyboard music is a staple in

the repertoire of both harpsichordists and pianists. It ranges from popular dance types and variations on folk airs, to this intense Fantasia, a complex contrapuntal and improvisatory tour de force in several sections, probably composed when Byrd was a young man in his 20s.

Keyboard Sonata No 3 in D minor

Jiří Antonín Benda



1757



7 minutes

- 1 **Allegro no molto**
- 2 **Andante**
- 3 **Presto**

Like his younger contemporary Joseph Haydn, Jiří Antonín Benda came from a relatively humble background. Born into an artisan musical family in the small central Bohemian town of Staré (Old) Benatek, he was educated by the Jesuits, and at the age of 19 was recruited as a violinist into the recently-formed royal orchestra of Frederick the Great, based first at Berlin and then at Potsdam.

There he worked with the court keyboard player, J S Bach's second surviving son Carl Philipp Emanuel, who was already one of the finest harpsichord players of his age, and a master of the emerging Classical 'Empfindsamkeit' (sensitive) style.

This D minor Sonata, the third of a set of six which Benda published in Berlin in 1757, shows C P E Bach's influence, especially in its intensely expressive, *siciliano*-like slow

movement, and the quasi-improvisational flights of fancy in the final Allegro, in the style of a Fantasia. Benda's keyboard Sonatas and Sonatinas were much admired by Ludwig van Beethoven, while the German-language stage works he composed for the Gotha court later in his career had considerable influence on Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Mahan Esfahani

harpsichord



© Kaja Smith

Mahan Esfahani has made it his life's mission to rehabilitate the harpsichord in the mainstream of concert instruments, and to that end his creative programming and work in commissioning new works have drawn the attention of critics and audiences across the world. In 2022, he became the youngest recipient of the Wigmore Medal, in recognition of his significant contribution and longstanding relationship with the Hall.

His work for the harpsichord has resulted in recitals in most of the world's major series and concert halls, amongst them Carnegie Hall, Sydney Opera House, Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart Festival, Berlin Konzerthaus, Edinburgh International Festival, Aldeburgh Festival and the Leipzig Bach Festival, and concerto appearances with the Chicago Symphony, Munich Chamber Orchestra, Britten

Sinfonia, and Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, with whom he was an artistic partner from 2016 to 2018.

Particularly renowned for his championing of contemporary music, Esfahani has commissioned and premiered solo works and concertos from such composers as Daniel Kidane, Laurence Osborn, Gary Carpenter, Miroslav Srnka and more.

His richly-varied discography includes critically acclaimed recordings for Hyperion and Deutsche Grammophon, garnering him many awards. His latest disc in his solo Bach cycle for Hyperion was awarded a ICMA in the Baroque instrumental category, and his first concerto disc for Hyperion, of Czech concertos, was released in February 2023 and won an Opus Klassik award.

Esfahani studied musicology and history at Stanford University, where he first came into contact with the harpsichord in the class of Elaine Thornburgh. Following a three-year stint as Artist-in-Residence at New College, Oxford, he continues his academic associations as an honorary member at Keble College, Oxford, and as Professor at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Born in Tehran in 1984 and raised in the United States, he lived in Milan and then London for several years, before taking up residence in Prague.

FUTURE CONCERTS

Thursday 16 November 1pm

BAROQUE FANCIES

Johann Sebastian Bach Sonata in E major

Plus music by **George Frideric Handel**,
Nicola Fiorenza, **Georg Philipp Telemann**
and more.

Lucie Horsch recorder
Tom Foster harpsichord

Thursday 8 February 1pm

SPANISH CONNECTIONS

Joaquín Turina Scene andalouse

Maurice Ravel Violin Sonata No 1,
'Posthume'

Enrique Granados The Maiden and the
Nightingale

Joaquín Turina Piano Trio No 1

Nash Ensemble

Thursday 15 February 1pm

SPANISH CONNECTIONS

Manuel de Falla Fantasia bética
Franz Liszt Spanish Rhapsody

Plus music by **Maurice Ravel**, **Claude
Debussy** and **Joaquín Turina**.

Juan Pérez Floristán piano

Friday 16 February 1pm

SPANISH CONNECTIONS

Programme to include songs by **Juan del
Vado**, **Joaquín Turina**, **Enrique Granados**
and more.

Clara Mouriz mezzo-soprano
Joseph Middleton piano

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