LSO ST LUKE'S

CHAMBER MUSIC

BBC RADIO 3

Thursday 26 November 2026 12.30–1.35pm
Jerwood Hall, LSO St Luke's

MAHAN ESFAHANI & FRIENDS

Mahan Esfahani and Lars Anders Tomter

A selection of works by **Johann Sebastian Bach**, **Wilhelm Friedemann Bach**, **Poul Ruders** and **György Kurtág**

Mahan Esfahani harpsichord
Lars Anders Tomter viola

Recorded for future broadcast on BBC Radio 3

LSO

Today's Programme

The Hawksmoor Space is open from one hour before the concert, selling hot and cold drinks. Please note, we can accept card payments only. Only cold drinks will be permitted inside the Jerwood Hall.

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.

Please recycle this programme after use.

The movements of Johan Sebastian Bach's Sonatas in today's concert are interspersed with excerpts from György Kurtág's *Signs, Games and Messages.*

Johann Sebastian Bach
Sonata in G minor BWV 1029
György Kurtág
Excerpts from 'Signs, Games and Messages'

1 Vivace
Hommage à John Cage, Faltering Words
2 Adagio
Perpetuum mobile
3 Allegro

Wilhelm Friedemann Bach
Sonata in C minor
1 Adagio e mesto
2 Allegro non troppo
3 Allegro scherzando

Poul Ruders
Quickstep Rag

Johann Sebastian Bach
Sonata in D major BWV 1028
György Kurtág
Excerpts from 'Signs, Games and Messages'

1 Adagio
2 Allegro
Im Volkston
3 Andante
The Carenza Jig
4 Allegro

Programme Note

Most of Johann Sebastian Bach's life was spent working in a church environment as an organist and choirmaster, but there were short periods when instrumental music took precedence, and when he himself had more opportunities to focus on chamber music. One of these was his employment from 1717 to 1723 as director of music at the court of Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen, where Bach's job was to lead a small orchestra of high-quality musicians. This was the time of much of his instrumental output, and you can well imagine the enjoyment he would have gained from performing his own music with some of the best players he ever got to work with. The three sonatas for viola da gamba and harpsichord that survive from this period were perhaps made for the Prince's gamba player Christian Ferdinand Abel, and were largely adapted from earlier works for other instruments; despite being for only two players (in today's concert the modern viola takes the place of the Baroque viola da gamba) the three-movement **Sonata in G minor** has the stylistic cut of an orchestral concerto as exemplified by Bach's more famous *Brandenburg* Concertos.

Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, Sebastian's oldest son, was a brilliant organist and talented composer but a difficult character whose career, despite the best efforts of his father, failed to run smoothly. In 1733, he was appointed organist at the Sophienkirche in Dresden, and later moved to a similar post in Halle, but a deteriorating relationship with the church authorities there eventually led to him walking out in 1764, and after that he never held another formal post. By the time he died he had been eking out a living in Berlin as a teacher and occasional recitalist, and selling off manuscript scores by his late father. Friedemann's surviving musical output often presents as a mix of the Baroque manners of his father's time with the pre-Classical gestures of his own generation. The **Sonata in C minor** for viola and harpsichord attributed to him in a mid-18th-century manuscript opens with an almost romantically brooding adagio before moving on to a pair of movements driven by a more Baroque motoric energy.

Grammy-winning Danish composer Poul Ruders has often referenced the music of the Baroque in works such as *Concerto in Pieces*, *Handel Variations* and *Sarabande Blues*, but it was to early 20th-century dance music that he turned in the ***Quickstep Rag***, composed 'from the hip in 2023, as a tribute to Mahan Esfahani and his spectacular mastery of the harpsichord'. Ruders had previously written Esfahani a Harpsichord Concerto, but he describes the jagged, rhythmically alert *Quickstep Rag* as 'a short encore, plain and simple'.

Johann Sebastian Bach's **Sonata in D major** has a very different profile from the G minor; its four-movement structure takes in two tender slow movements in alternation with two more buoyant, and in places virtuosic, faster ones. The third movement in particular is often considered one of Bach's most beautiful.

Programme Note (continued)

The Hungarian composer György Kurtág – whose works are here interspersed with Bach's own – celebrated his hundredth birthday last February. Having studied with Messiaen and Milhaud during the 1950s, he later fell under the influence of Webern, Boulez and Stockhausen, and since then his own output has been characterised by a meticulous and intensely focused craftsmanship in which works are fragmentary and in-the-moment, often lasting less than a minute. ***Signs, Games and Messages*** is a substantial set of such pieces that Kurtág wrote and gathered for various instrumental combinations over a period of several decades, some as memorials and homages to friends and colleagues, others to express a focused and intimate emotion. It's from this set that the excerpts you hear today are from. They aren't intended to be performed as a complete cycle; rather, it's their fleeting individuality that give them their expressive intensity.

Programme Note Writer
Lindsay Kemp is a writer and broadcaster specialising in classical music and early music. He joined BBC Radio 3 in 1984, where he became a Senior Producer, and has written regularly for *Gramophone*, as well as contributing to *The Guardian*, *BBC Music Magazine* and other publications. He was Artistic Director of the London Festival of Baroque Music from 2007 to 2017 and is the founding Artistic Director of Baroque at the Edge.

Mahan Esfahani

harpsichord



© Alex Kozobolis

Mahan Esfahani has made it his life's mission to re-establish the harpsichord in the mainstream of concert instruments. He is the first harpsichordist in a generation active in virtually all areas of music-making from large completist projects of earlier composers to commissioning over 20 new solo and concertante works for the harpsichord.

His extensive work in performing modern and new concertos for the harpsichord – from the earlier pioneering works of Falla (1926), Martinů (1935) and Gerhard (1956) to new ones by Coll (2017), Ruders (2021), Srnka (2023) and Bryars (2023) – has seen him as a soloist partnering with the leading conductors of the day: François-Xavier Roth, Ilan Volkov, Ludovic Morlot, Leif Segerstam, Andrew Manze, Joshua Weilerstein, Jiří Bělohlavek, Yalda Zamani, Andris Poga, Ken-David Masur and Thierry Fischer. The totality of these activities is attested by extensive features on his work in *The New York Times*, *Gramophone*, *De Volkskrant* and the Wigmore Hall Prize awarded in 2022.

Esfahani has taken the harpsichord beyond the realm of the esoteric into a new area of appreciation with recitals at The Wigmore Hall, Carnegie Hall, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, the Wiener Musikverein, Klavier Festival Ruhr, the Edinburgh International Festival, Schleswig-Holstein Festival, Konzerthaus Berlin, Suntory Hall, BBC Proms, Walt Disney Hall, Fundacion March, L'Auditori Barcelona, Tonhalle and Beijing's Forbidden City Concert Hall.

Born in Tehran and raised in the United States, he went on to live in Milan, Oxford and London before finally making his home the past decade in Prague.

Lars Anders Tomter

viola



© Nikolaj Lund

Lars Anders Tomter is one of today's most outstanding violists. 'The Giant of the Nordic Viola' (*The Strad*) was born at Hamar, Norway. He began to play the violin at the age of eight and also took up the viola. He studied both instruments with Professor Leif Jørgensen at the Oslo Music Conservatory and the Norwegian State Academy. He then continued his studies with Professor Max Rostal and with Sándor Vegh. He was awarded a special prize for his interpretation of Bartók's Viola Concerto at the International Viola Competition in Budapest in 1984 and then went on to win the Maurice Vieux International Competition in Lille in 1986.

Tomter has commissioned and premiered several concertos. He played the world premiere of a new viola concerto, written by the renowned Estonian Composer Erkki-Sven Tüür. The Tüür Concerto *Illuminatio* is a joint European commission of the the Sønderjyllands Symfoniorkester, Estonian National Symphony Orchestra, the NDR Radio Philharmonic Hannover and the Orchestre National de Lille with the support of Norsk Kulturråd.

Tomter is a regular guest at important festivals such as the BBC Proms, Mondseetage, Schleswig-Holstein, Schwetzingen, Styriarte, Moritzburg and Verbier as well as at a number of festivals in Scandinavia. In addition, he is Artistic Director of the Norwegian Fjord Classics in Sandefjord. His large repertoire includes all major contemporary works, and he has recorded for Simax, Naxos, Virgin Classics, NMC, Somm, Hyperion and Chandos.

SEASON HIGHLIGHTS

At The Barbican

John Adams at 80
with Sir Simon Rattle
Wednesday 6 January 6.30pm
Thursday 7 January 7pm
Sunday 10 January 7pm

Symphonic Cinema: The Planets
with Matteo dal Maso
and Lucas van Woerkum
Sunday 31 January 6pm & 7.45pm

Ondřej Adámek and Mendelssohn
with Alain Altinoglu
and Christian Tetzlaff
Sunday 7 February 7pm

Brett Dean and Bartók
with Maxime Pascal
and Isabelle Faust
Thursday 11 February 7pm

Gershwin and Ives
with Barbara Hannigan
Wednesday 7 April 6.30pm
Thursday 8 April 7pm

Explore the full season
lso.co.uk/2627

FUTURE CONCERTS
BBC RADIO 3

Friday 15 January 2027 12.30pm
Jerwood Hall, LSO St Luke's

DUTCH MASTERS

Lucie Horsch & Jonathan Cohen

Music by **J S Bach, Jacob van Eyck, Anna Amalia of Prussia, Benjamin Britten, Isabella Leonarda** and **Jean-Marie Leclair**.

Lucie Horsch recorder
Jonathan Cohen harpsichord

Recorded for future broadcast on BBC Radio 3

Thursday 21 January 2027 12.30pm
Jerwood Hall, LSO St Luke's

PROKOFIEV SONATAS

Giorgi Gigashvili

Frédéric Chopin
Piano Sonata No 2
Sergei Prokofiev
Piano Sonata No 8

Giorgi Gigashvili piano

Recorded for future broadcast on BBC Radio 3

Friday 22 January 2027 12.30pm
Jerwood Hall, LSO St Luke's

KALEIDOSCOPE CHAMBER COLLECTIVE

Héritte-Viardot & Dvořák

Louise Héritte-Viardot
Piano Quartet in A major, 'Im Sommer'
Antonín Dvořák
Piano Quartet No 1 in D major

Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective

Recorded for future broadcast on BBC Radio 3

Thursday 4 February 2027 12.30pm
Jerwood Hall, LSO St Luke's

MAHAN ESFAHANI & FRIENDS

Mahan Esfahani and Tamsin Waley-Cohen

Music by **George Frideric Handel**, **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**, **Domenico Scarlatti** and **Antonio Vivaldi**

Mahan Esfahani harpsichord
Tamsin Waley-Cohen violin

Recorded for future broadcast on BBC Radio 3