

# Wethersfield Chamber Concerts

## Bart Lafollette

21 October 2012 at 4pm

### PROGRAMME NOTES *by John Woollard*

#### JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH – Suite No. 3 in C major for unaccompanied cello, BWV 1009

1. Prelude
2. Allemande
3. Courante
4. Sarabande
5. Bourrée I
6. Bourrée II
7. Gigue

Bach worked in Köthen from 1717 to 1723 as Kapellmeister for Prince Leopold von Anhalt-Köthen, and it was during his stay in this minor German principality that Bach composed some of his most celebrated music, including the Brandenburg Concertos, The Well-Tempered Clavier and his suites for unaccompanied cello.

At Cothen Bach came into contact with two extraordinary musicians - the violinist and gamba player Christian Ferdinand Abel and the cellist Christian Bernard Linike. Either of these virtuosos may have been responsible for Bach's composition of six solo cello suites between 1717 and 1723. In these scores Bach transcended the limitations of Baroque convention. The cello was used as a virtuoso instrument rather than one that merely filled in a bass line. One of the most striking aspects of these suites is that they are unaccompanied. It was as if the composer were announcing the instrument's emergence. He also challenged the technical facility of the exponents of the new instrument. Here the cellist is totally unsupported. The skill of the performing artist is on display.

#### BEETHOVEN - Sonata No. 1 for cello and piano in F major, Op. 5 No. 1

1. Adagio sostenuto. Allegro
2. Rondo. Allegro vivace

Both Mozart and Haydn, Beethoven's older contemporaries, spent a lot of their career touring Europe and writing music and giving performances as the musical celebrities of their day. In February 1796 Beethoven set off on his own tour of central Europe visiting Prague, Dresden and Berlin, then the capital of Prussia. King Frederick William II was himself a music lover and talented amateur cellist who often played in string quartets and even his own opera orchestra and Beethoven soon set about composing works for the virtuoso court cellists, French brothers, Jean-Pierre and Jean-Louis Duport, during his stay.

The modern cello emerged during the eighteenth century, and the elder Duport is often credited with the invention of the spike which modern cellists use to stabilise the instrument whilst it is being played. Hurriedly composed as they were these two sonatas mark the first modern cello and piano pieces, giving the instrument an equal voice with the piano part, in contrast to the previous obbligato role that composers assigned to the cello. Beethoven faced serious concerns as to whether the newly invented piano might swamp the sound from the gut strings of the cello,

The original manuscript of these cello suites has been lost. Contemporary performances have been based on facsimiles by Bach's widow Anna Magdalena and his student Kellner. These copied manuscripts often omit bowings, tempo markings, and ornaments.

Many cellists have produced their own performing versions of these scores. The great cellist, conductor, and humanitarian Pablo Casals was responsible for introducing these remarkable works to 20th century audiences. While his approach was highly romanticized, Casals's deep love and respect for Bach and his innate humanity shine through every bar of his recordings of the suites. An historically informed performance of these works is as much a personal artistic choice as a performance conceived in more contemporary terms. Casals's more expressive approach with its roots in the 19th century concept of cello playing and composition was informed by works such as the Beethoven and Brahms in today's programme, but is equally valid for its deeply felt eloquence. Casals worshipped Bach above all other composers. One of the fascinating aspects of these suites and the mysteries surrounding them is that each performer can bring his own personal concept and approach to the music. These works totally reconceived the cello as a solo instrument.

especially when playing more contemplative music, and he therefore avoided writing a slow movement for the sonata, providing instead a slow introduction, and an extended cadenza near the end of the work which would give the cellist an opportunity to display the sound of the instrument without being masked by the sound of the piano part.

Beethoven gave the first performance of both sonatas with Jean-Louis Duport at a concert at the Royal Palace which were highly acclaimed, and he also gave several solo piano recitals. On his departure he received from the King a gold snuff-box filled with Louis d'ors and Beethoven declared with pride that it was not an ordinary snuff-box, but such a one as "it might have been customary to give to an ambassador". He later said that he enjoyed his visit to Berlin more than any other city and there is some evidence that the King tried to recruit the composer as his court music director. Sadly the death of Frederick William II the next year put an end to any plans for his return as the new King was far less interested in music.

The works were published the following year in Vienna upon his return, dedicated to King Frederick William II himself.

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## FALLA - Suite populaire espagnole

(6 songs arr. for cello and piano, from '7 Canciones populares Españolas')

1. El paño moruno
2. Nana
3. Canción
4. Polo
5. Asturiana
6. Jota

Manuel de Falla, born in Cadiz in 1871, is today perhaps the most famous exception to the general rule that the best known "Spanish" music was written by Frenchmen such as Bizet, Debussy, Chabrier and Ravel. Falla studied initially in Madrid, but on the advice of his teachers moved to Paris in 1907 where he met many of the composers who had an influence on his style. King Alfonso XIII of Spain granted him a stipend to stay in Paris, where he gradually developed his mature style. In 1914 at the request of a Spanish singer, he completed a set of songs for soprano and piano, which he called "Siete canciones populares Españolas", but declined to allow them a first performance in Paris because he found French audiences preferred Spanish music written by their own composers.

The songs returned to Madrid with Falla when he was forced to leave France after the outbreak of the First

World War, and they received their first performance in 1915 in Madrid, as something of a homecoming celebration for the composer. Following his return, Falla wrote most of the orchestral music for which he is now remembered, and instrumentalists identified the songs as good material for arrangements for them to play. Ten years later, Polish violinist Paul Kochanski reworked six of the songs for violin and piano, and a year or two later, French cellist Maurice Maréchal produced the version of the Suite for cello and piano, which we are going to hear this afternoon.

In the original vocal/piano score, the keyboard evokes all types of Spanish musical voices. In the frequently sparse accompaniments you can identify the strumming of guitars, the clattering of castanets, and the stamping of Flamenco boots on hard floors. The six pieces reflect images of Seville, Andalusia, Asturias, and Aragon.

Sadly Falla, having had to leave France because of the First World War, was further exiled by the Spanish Civil War, spending the end of his life in Argentina, because of his Republican sympathies.

## BRAHMS – Cello Sonata No. 1 in E minor, Op. 38

1. Allegro non troppo (E minor)
2. Allegretto quasi Menuetto (A minor)
3. Allegro (E minor)

Brahms was a severe self-critic, perhaps more than any of the great composers, and destroyed much of the music he wrote. In 1862 he wrote the first two movements of this sonata, together with an Adagio which he then discarded, and it was not until 1865 that he managed to complete the work. The period that he worked on the Sonata marked momentous changes to the composer's life. In 1862 he was a young composer/pianist struggling to make a name for himself in the shadow of the memory of Robert Schumann, who had died in 1856. By 1865, he had moved to Vienna to take up a position as a conductor, a change which was to have a profound effect upon him, and would eventually allow him to concentrate on his work as a composer. It is dedicated to Josef Gänsbacher, a Viennese singing professor and amateur cellist, who had secured the post of conductor of the Wiener Singakademie for the

composer. Brahms himself said of the sonata that it was "a homage to J. S. Bach" and the principal theme of the first movement is based on Bach's The Art of the Fugue.

Brahms performed the sonata with Gänsbacher in July 1865. In the course of a private performance for an audience of friends, Brahms played so loudly that Gänsbacher complained that he could not hear his cello at all. "Lucky for you, too", growled Brahms, and let the piano rage on. Brahms offered the sonata to publishers Breitkopf & Härtel, who turned it down. He also sent the sonata to another publisher describing it, in one of the most inaccurate statements made by a major composer about his own work, as "a violoncello sonata which, as far as both instruments are concerned, is certainly not difficult to play". Simrock published it in 1866, and in 1867 it received its professional premiere in Basel, Switzerland on 12th February, by Moritz Kahnt (cello) and Hans von Bülow (piano).

## ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Cellist **Bartholomew Lafollette** was a pupil at the Yehudi Menuhin School from 1997. In 2003 he won a scholarship to the Guildhall School of Music & Drama where he continued his studies with Louise Hopkins. In 2007 he was selected for representation by Young Concert Artists Trust. As a recitalist and chamber musician Bart Lafollette has appeared at major venues including Wigmore Hall, Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Bridgewater Hall, Fairfield Halls Croydon, the Purcell Room, St. George's Bristol, and Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall.

Pianist **Mishka Momen** is the youngest pupil ever to have been admitted by the Purcell School at the age of six on a full scholarship and where she was a pupil of Ilana Davids. Mishka is now a final year scholarship student at the Guildhall School of Music and has been studying with Imogen Cooper as her only student since 2006. Mishka has won several prestigious prizes and made her solo debut at the age of 10 since when she has performed in all of London's major venues, Royal Festival Hall, Purcell Room, Barbican, Wigmore Hall, etc. She is regularly invited to give recitals hosted by the Beethoven Piano Society of Europe and the Chopin Society UK.

For more information on the artists and on future concerts, please visit [www.wethersfieldchamberconcerts.org.uk](http://www.wethersfieldchamberconcerts.org.uk)