

# WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 24 March 2022 7.30pm

Edges of Europe - Composers born in 1694

Jean-Guihen Queyras cello

{oh!} Orkiestra Historyczna

Martyna Pastuszka violin, director

Adam Pastuszka violin I

Vladimir Waltham cello

Violetta Szopa-Tomczyk violin I

Michał Bąk double bass

Dominika Małecka violin II

Anna Firlus harpsichord

Marzena Biwo violin II

Jan Čižmář lute, theorbo

Dymitr Olszewski viola

Pedro Castro oboe

Leonardo Leo (1694-1744)

Sinfonia concertata for cello and strings in C minor (1737)

*I. Andante grazioso • II. Molto presto • III. Larghetto • IV. Allegro*

Johan Helmich Roman (1694-1758)

Partita in C minor BeRI 8 (?1759)

*I. Largo • II. • III. Con spirito • IV. Andante • V. Largo • VI. Presto e forte • VII. • VIII. Minuetto • IX. Presto*

Leonardo Leo

Cello Concerto No. 3 in D minor (1738)

*I. Andante grazioso • II. Con spirito • III. Amoroso • IV. Allegro*

*Interval*

Johan Helmich Roman

Sinfonia in A BeRI 16

*I. Allegro • II. Arietta • III. Allegro assai*

Suite in D BeRI 2.5

*I. Spicco • II. Allegretto • III. Andantino • IV. Larghetto • V. Allegro • VI. Andante • VII. Vivace • VIII. Allegro*

Leonardo Leo

Cello Concerto No. 4 in A (1738)

*I. Andante piacevole • II. Allegro • III. Largo e gustoso • IV. Allegro*



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The edges of Europe in 1694 are the stiletto heel of the boot of Italy in the warm south - and the icy cap of the Baltic coast in the chilly north - where the two composers in this programme were born in that year. Despite the wide geographical distance, Leonardo Leo and Johan Helmich Roman composed music which happily conformed to a courtly European template. This was characterised by the graceful manners and gestures of dancing aristocrats across the continent in a gently affected style known as *galant*.

The Italian composer **Leonardo Leo** left home in Apulia aged 15 and moved to Naples, where he studied at the Conservatorio Santa Maria della Pietà with such success that a student stage work by him was selected for performance before the Spanish Viceroy. It set a precedent for his career, which continued with commissions for operas not only in Naples where he was based but also in Rome, Venice, Bologna, Turin and Milan. In the meantime, he worked variously for the Viceroy as chapel organist, two Neapolitan churches as choirmaster and his old conservatory as professor.

Leo's three works here were written around 1737, probably for his students, and they remained as unpublished manuscripts until the 20th Century. Unless there was a viable local market, publication pre-copyright did composers no favours. Indeed it compromised their exclusivity and led to corrupted versions of the original by pirate publishers. This was why individual cities commissioned their own operas from Leo, who would travel with the score; the above list of towns also indicates his absence from Naples.

Each of the three works is for cello soloist with a small string orchestra including basso continuo. The latter comprises two or three musicians reading the bass line and improvising chords indicated by numbers. The sketched manuscripts give the impression of hurry.

Leo's Sinfonia concertata is a cello concerto in all but name. The first of four movements moves with easy grace to a gentle, polite melody typical of the *galant* style, the soloist entering after a statement of the theme by the orchestra. A breathless, irrepressible *Molto presto* sprint follows and a *Larghetto* as long as the other three movements combined flowing with the lapping motion of a six-eight siciliana. The finale is suitably exhilarating at three-to-the-bar.

**Johan Helmich Roman** was born in Stockholm to a family of Finnish ancestry. His surname probably derives from Rauma west of Helsinki, then part of Sweden. Roman followed his father into the court orchestra as oboist and violinist and the monarch Charles XII, recognising the talent of his 21-year-old prodigy, sent him to London for six years to perfect his style primarily under Pepusch but with much influence from Handel and the Italians Geminiani, Bononcini and Ariosti. He dutifully returned north and was known even during his life as 'the father of Swedish music'.

Roman's nine-movement Partita in C minor has a prominent solo role for his own instrument, the oboe. The slow three-time opening is followed by a long Handelian allegro in four with lively syncopations and bitter suspensions. The *Con spirito* third is dotted and trilled. The fourth is a lyrical *Andante* and the fifth a *Largo*, whispered throughout. The sixth is the opposite, loud and fast over a jolly walking bass. The seventh is a magical pizzicato under muted soloists, the eighth a courtly minuet and the finale a rollicking English jig.

Leonardo Leo's long operatic absences from Naples and his multiple commitments exasperated the Viceroy who once stationed a guard outside his room and refused to let him leave until he had finished the commission in hand. The scrawled manuscript of the Cello Concerto No. 3 in D minor, dated 1738, begins with a genteel *Andante* and a tantalising wait before the soloist enters. The latter is first in, however, with the long phrases of the spirited second movement, indulged by a deferential accompaniment. The amorous third simpers and caresses with phrases in lovers' thirds, dreamy and seductive. The fourth is a lively triple-time dance and a melody batted antiphonally between soloist and ensemble.

Roman's Sinfonia in A opens with a long *Allegro*. The basso continuo discontinues in the *Arietta* second movement, lightening the texture. It resumes in the finale, a rich, swirling *Allegro*. In 1744, Roman composed music for a royal wedding, which took place at the newly-built Drottningholm Theatre, an 18th-century wonder which has survived. His eight-movement Suite in D is comparable with the sumptuous range of dances he provided for their majesties. Its slow *Spicco* introduction is bowed but detached and leads into a heraldic allegro with the pious fervour of a Handelian oratorio chorus. Relief comes in a charming three time *Allegretto* followed by a subdued *Andantino* with a watery, dotted middle section. The fourth is a lyrical slow movement at the heart of the suite. A *da capo Allegro* features 'scotch snap' rhythms either side of a minor middle section. The last three movements are quick, quicker and quickest, the last skipping with exciting jig-like triplets to challenge the nimblest fingers and the most agile of Stockholm's dancers.

The overworked Leo had long aspired to the top position in the Viceroy's chapel, *maestro di capella*, previously held by the great Alessandro Scarlatti. Finally at the age of 50, he achieved this post, but after only a few months dropped dead - probably of exhaustion. His Cello Concerto No. 4, dated 1738, begins with a movement headed *piacevole* ('pleasing'), which was very much the *galant* aim. A bright, breezy *Allegro* follows and a slow third marked *gustoso* or 'tasteful'. The finale is a leaping jig, which would have appealed to the students as they desisted from any clumsy movement that might have upset the Viceroy.

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