



CITY FESTIVAL
of Music, Invention
& Knowledge

St Lawrence Jewry

Thursday, 24th October, 19:00

Bee for Bach

Benjamin Marquise Gilmore *violin*

Tenebrae *choir*

Stephen Disley *organ*

Prof. Milton Mermikides *lecturer*

Locatelli *Caprice for solo violin No.1*

Anna Semple *For thy creature the bee*

Paganini *Caprice for solo violin No.24*

JS Bach *Partita in D minor / Chorales / Ciaconna*

- i. Chorale - Ach Heer, lass dein lieb Engelein (St John Passion)
- ii. Partita - Allemande
- iii. Partita - Courante
- iv. Chorale - Christ lag in Todesbanden
- v. Partita - Sarabande
- vi. Chorale - Den Tod niemand zwingen kunnt
- vii. Partita - Gigue
- viii. Chorale - Wenn ich einmal soll scheiden (St Matthew Passion)
- ix. Partita - Ciaconna (ed. Helge Thoene)

Dufay *Nuper rosarum flores*

Curatorial Notes by Ian Ritchie, Artistic Director of the Festival

The programme of this closing concert draws together the main strands of our Festival, in particular echoing the words of Johann von Goethe (b. 1749) – “Music is liquid architecture, and Architecture is frozen music”– while also recognising not only music’s universal presence in nature but also the nature of music itself. At the centre of our story are three of London’s most remarkable citizens who in September 1666, when the Great Fire destroyed almost the entire City of London, were all in their early 30s, mutually acquainted, proven polymaths and destined to be forever famous for their works. Christopher Wren (b. 1632) was arguably our greatest architect but initially a natural philosopher (scientist, in modern parlance) and inventor (an ingenious transparent hive for studying bees, for example) – in the aftermath of the Fire, he designed and rebuilt more than 50 churches in the City, including St Paul’s Cathedral and St Lawrence Jewry. Robert Hooke (b. 1635) was one of our most versatile scientists (discoveries including elasticity, gravity and the diffraction of light), prolific inventor (including the microscope), astronomer and, eventually, architect – appointed City Surveyor following the Fire, he built the Monument, initially to be an astronomical telescope as well as a memorial, assisted by Wren, and helped with the engineering of Wren’s dome for St Paul’s. Samuel Pepys (b. 1633), who like the other two men was a central figure in the new Royal Society, which held its meetings at Gresham College, was the administrator of the Royal Navy, served as a Member of Parliament and, most famously, wrote a diary which recorded for posterity the life in London before and after the Great Fire.

On 8th August 1666, just a few weeks before the catastrophic conflagration, Pepys noted in his Diary that, after walking across the City, he encountered Hooke in the street outside the Temple: the great scientist described his fascinating findings about the nature of music and comparing the distinct tones produced by the vibrating strings of an instrument with the buzzing musical pitches of the beating wings of insects, such as bees – which brings us back to Wren and into the music of this concert.



Pietro Locatelli (b. 1695), described as 'the 18th century Paganini', composed a hugely challenging set of 24 Caprices for solo violin which greatly influenced and inspired Niccolò Paganini (b.1782, Genoa), who produced his own set of 24 Caprices a century later: we have selected Locatelli's No. 1, which sounds very much like the beating wings of a buzzing bee, and Paganini's No. 24, which is the most popular and famous of all these pieces, stretching the technical and musical limits of what a violinist and the vibrating strings of his instrument can produce. These virtuosic works surround an anthem for choir and organ, Thy Creature, the Bee, which was commissioned by the Worshipful Company of Wax Chandlers to celebrate their 650th anniversary and composed by Anna Semple (b. 1997), who says that "the music takes its starting point from the idea of a hive: full of business and activity, with fleeting organ flourishes introducing more declamatory entries from the choir. As the piece progresses, these vocal lines become less and less four-square, meandering into individual lines, before coming adrift entirely for the final amen - at first swarming, and then gently dissipating as one-by-one they disappear into the distance."

In one of Europe's most misguided and prolonged cultural lapses, JS Bach (b. 1685) slipped into obscurity after his death in 1750, quickly overshadowed by some of his gifted and successful children, and only in the 19th century was he rediscovered and lauded afresh. Paganini may therefore have been unfamiliar with Bach's incomparable set of six Sonatas and Partitas for unaccompanied violin, which was completed in 1720 while he was living in Köthen and working under the patronage of the local Prince. In that year, after spending three months travelling with his patron, Bach returned home to discover that his young wife had died suddenly while he was away and had already been buried. Overcome with grief he completed the Partita No. 2 in D minor with a Ciaccona that is longer and quite different from any other movement in his canon of solo works: it takes the musical form of a 'tombeau' (literally a 'tomb') in which he interred several hidden fragments of funereal chorale melodies within the passages of violin music – these were discovered and 'exhumed' by the German Bach scholar, Dr Helga Thoene, whose realisation of the Ciaccona, with voices, we hear this evening. This is evidently Bach's 'Requiem' for his wife and his choice of D minor has since been adopted frequently by later composers as the key for their own funereal works. In this performance, the movements of the violin Partita are interspersed with verses from apposite chorale settings by Bach: Christ lag in Todesbanden and others from his Passions according to St John and St Matthew.

Hidden meanings are also to be found in the words and music of the final work by Guillaume Dufay (b. 1397?) whose magnificent motet, Nuper Rosarum Flores ('Recently blooms of roses ...'), was composed for the dedication in 1436 of the great dome built by Filippo Brunelleschi (b. 1377) for the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore ('St Mary of the Flowers') in Florence, a city synonymous with flowers. The work has a novel and unique architectural structure which, some say, reflects the actual mathematical proportions of Il Duomo. In any case the two creations are perfectly matched and considered to be the earliest and most important musical and architectural manifestations of the early Renaissance. Completing the circle, inspired particularly by Italian Renaissance and Baroque architecture, Christopher Wren drew upon Brunelleschi's designs (with the additional help of Robert Hooke's structural engineering skills) to create the Dome of his new St Paul's Cathedral more than quarter of a millennium later.



For Thy Creature The Bee was commissioned by the Worshipful Company of Wax Chandlers in celebration of their 650th anniversary, first performed in the church of St Vedast alias Foster. The music takes its starting point from the idea of a hive: full of business and activity, with fleeting organ flourishes introducing more declamatory entries from the choir. As the piece progress, these vocal lines become less and less four-square, meandering into individual lines, before coming adrift entirely for the final amen - at first swarming, and then gently dissipating as one-by-one they disappear into the distance.

The text is taken from the Wax Chandlers' *grace*

*For thy creature the Bee,
The Wax and the Honey,
We thank thee, O Lord.
By the light of all men,
Christ Jesus our king,
May we now be blessed.*

Performers' biographies -



Festival Artistic Director
Ian Ritchie

Producer
Tessa Marchington



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