

barbican

Sheku and Isata Kanneh-Mason

Tue 28 May
Hall

Classical Music
Concert programme



Important information



When does the concert start and finish?

This concert begins at 7.30pm and finishes at about 9.50pm, with a 20-minute interval.



I'm running late!

Latecomers will be admitted if there is a suitable break in the performance.



Please...

Switch any watch alarms and mobile phones to silent during the performance.



Please don't...

Take photos or recordings during the performance – save it for the curtain call.



Use a hearing aid?

Please use our induction loop – just switch your hearing aid to T setting on entering the hall.



Need a break?

You can leave at any time and be readmitted if there is a suitable break in the performance, or during the interval.



Looking for refreshment?

Bars are located on Levels -1, G and 1. Pre-order interval drinks to beat the queues. Drinks are allowed in the hall.



Looking for the toilets?

The nearest toilets, including accessible toilets, are located on Levels -1 and 1. There is a further accessible toilet on Level G.



Carrying bags and coats?

Drop them off at our free cloak room on Level -1.

Sheku and Isata Kanneh-Mason

Tue 28 May 7.30pm, Hall

Sheku Kanneh-Mason cello
Isata Kanneh-Mason piano

Felix Mendelssohn Cello Sonata No 1 in

B flat major

- 1 Allegro vivace
- 2 Andante
- 3 Allegro assai

Ludwig van Beethoven Cello Sonata No 5 in

D major

- 1 Allegro con brio
- 2 Adagio con molto sentimento d'affetto
- 3 Allegro – Allegro fugato

Interval 20 minutes

Gabriel Fauré Cello Sonata No 1 in D minor

- 1 Allegro deciso
- 2 Andante
- 3 Allegro commodo

Frédéric Chopin Cello Sonata in G minor

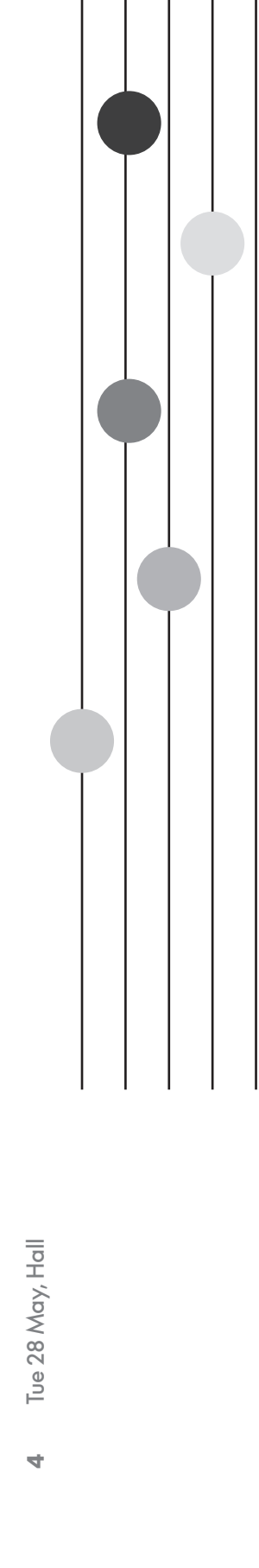
- 1 Allegro moderato
- 2 Scherzo
- 3 Largo
- 4 Finale: Allegro

Produced by the Barbican

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Superstar siblings Sheku and Isata Kanneh-Mason bring their inspiring blend of camaraderie and exhilarating musicianship to four very different cello sonatas, masterpieces all – by Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Chopin and Fauré.

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–47) wrote his sonata for his brother Paul, by day a financier, by night a fine amateur cellist, Felix having previously entrusted him with the taxing *Variations concertantes*. The sonata, which dates from 1838, seems to reflect the congenial setting in which it was created – Mendelssohn was by this time settled in Leipzig, his first child was born that year, and, as conductor at the distinguished Leipzig Gewandhaus, he was involved with all aspects of it, from creating far-reaching programming to demanding better pay for his musicians. In this B flat major Sonata he is unashamedly looking back to the pre-Beethoven sonata, generally avoiding weighty dramatic contrasts and instead imbuing much of it with a crystalline beauty. Just take the opening movement (*Allegro vivace*), whose first theme has a flowing ease to it, even if the second idea is more rhetorical. Even when Mendelssohn pulls the music into the minor, all tension is dissipated by the end. The middle movement is marked *Andante*, but in fact it's a hybrid of slow movement and scherzo, its outer sections a wistful minuet-like theme, which contrast with a gorgeously sustained inner. The finale's rondo theme wouldn't be out of place in one of the composer's *Songs without Words* for piano, the occasional moment of tension in briefly stormy episodes doing little to upset the overall mood.

From here, the Kanneh-Mason siblings move to Beethoven (1770–1827), whose five cello sonatas span all three periods of his creative life. The eminent Hans von Bülow, a conductor, composer and pianist and champion of Brahms and Wagner,

once opined that he wasn't able to play Beethoven's cello sonatas very often because they demanded 'not only a good cellist but a highly cultured human being' – recognition of the high esteem with which they were already held. The Fifth Sonata in D major is one of a pair written in 1815 and published as Op 102. Though Beethoven was by this point profoundly deaf, they were written for a musician he trusted implicitly: Joseph Linke, cellist in the premieres of the late string quartets and the last piano trios. On paper the Fifth Sonata might look like the most conventional of the set, with its fast-slow-fast arrangement of movements. But, from the strikingly vehement opening of the Allegro con brio, in which the piano throws down a gauntlet that is immediately picked up by the string instrument, we're hurled into an unstable world, the mood as unpredictable as the fragments from which Beethoven constructs it. The middle movement couldn't be in greater contrast: its evocative instruction *Adagio con molto sentimento d'affetto* anticipates his last string quartets in the way it is emotionally the core of the piece, unfolding at a heavenly length and suggesting a barely contained grief. If there's balm in the more consoling middle section, it proves all too short-lived. It ends without resolution, forming a musical question-mark that leads straight into the finale (Allegro). Here, the composer takes the simplest of ideas – an ascending scale – which then launches into a fugue (another late Beethoven favourite, not least in the near-contemporary *Hammerklavier* Piano Sonata), one that has a playful trenchancy to it, and whose sign-off is almost comically terse.

We turn now to Gabriel Fauré (1845–1924) and, like the Mendelssohn, his first Cello Sonata. But there the similarities end, for it wasn't written until 1917, making it a late work, drawing comparisons with the Beethoven we've just heard in more ways than one, both composers being deaf by this stage of

their lives. There are other aspects that link these two composers' late styles, not least an uncompromising quality, as demonstrated in the trenchant determination underpinning much of Fauré's compact opening Allegro deciso, ameliorated briefly by a dreamier secondary idea. The Andante opens with the cello uttering two-note phrases, as if in search of a melody; contrasting that is a more passionate idea that reminds us of Fauré the great nocturne composer. The Allegro comodo finale sets the trickling perpetual motion of the piano against phrases on the cello that emerge like breaths. The mood here may be essentially sunny but shadows are never far beneath the surface, and the sonata's sign-off sounds almost shockingly abrupt.

Playing the music of Chopin (1810–49) can be a lonely path for the concert pianist, as much of the time it is spent alone. But tonight we are among friends, and the fact that we have as much music for cello and piano is down to one man: August Franck, who befriended the composer shortly after his arrival in Paris. Of the music written for Franck, the Cello Sonata (1845–6) is the greatest. Just as in Chopin's three piano sonatas, his way with form is unorthodox, quietly breaking the 'rules' so blatantly that many have leapt to the wrong conclusion that he didn't know what he was doing. The reverse is true, particularly when it comes to the relative proportion of its four movements, with the first virtually as long as the following three combined. This Allegro moderato is set in motion by the piano, the grandeur of its thinking already clear in its opening phrases, the two instruments very much equal. That equality continues in a vigorous Scherzo and the duet that forms the Largo. Chopin bids farewell to the genre with a finale (Allegro) that has a delightfully tarantella-ish bent to it, crowned by a coda of virtuoso élan.

© Harriet Smith

Sheku Kanneh-Mason

Cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason's career and performances span the globe. Whether performing for children in a school hall, at an underground club or in the world's leading concert venues, his mission is to make music accessible to all. After winning the BBC Young Musician competition in 2016, his performance at the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex at Windsor Castle in 2018 was watched by two billion people worldwide.

Highlights of this season include performances with the Los Angeles, New York, Oslo, Royal and Royal Liverpool Philharmonic orchestras, Orchestre de Paris, Orquesta Nacional de España, National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland and the Chicago, Cincinnati, Detroit, Gävle Symphony and San Francisco Symphony orchestras. With his sister, Isata, he appears in recital in Japan, Singapore, and South Korea in addition to an extensive European recital tour. He also gives a series of duo recitals with guitarist Plínio Fernandes as well as continuing his solo cello recital tour in the USA and Canada. He returns to Antigua, where he has family connections, as an ambassador for the Antigua and Barbuda Youth Symphony Orchestra. Since his debut in 2017, he has performed every summer at the BBC Proms, including at the 2023 Last Night of the Proms.

He is a Decca Classics recording artist and his 2022 album, *Song*, showcases his innately lyrical playing in a wide range of arrangements and collaborations. His 2020 Elgar album reached No 8 in the overall Official UK Album Chart, the first-ever cellist to reach the UK Top 10. His own arrangements and compositions are published by Faber.

Sheku Kanneh-Mason is a graduate of the Royal Academy of Music, where he studied with Hannah Roberts; in 2022 was appointed as the Academy's first Menuhin Visiting Professor of Performance Mentoring. He is an ambassador for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, Future Talent and Music Masters. He was appointed MBE in the 2020 New Year's Honours List.

He plays a Matteo Goffriller cello from 1700 which is on indefinite loan to him.

Isata Kanneh-Mason

Pianist Isata Kanneh-Mason is in great demand internationally as a soloist and chamber musician. Her recital programmes encompass music from Haydn and Mozart via Fanny Mendelssohn and Clara Schumann, Chopin and Brahms to Gershwin and beyond. As a concerto soloist she is equally at home in Felix Mendelssohn and Clara Schumann (whose concertos featured on her chart-topping debut recording) as in Prokofiev and Dohnányi.

Highlights of this season include performances with the Philadelphia Orchestra, National Arts Centre Orchestra Ottawa, London Mozart Players, Royal and Stockholm Philharmonic orchestras, Royal Northern Sinfonia, Cleveland Orchestra and Toronto Symphony Orchestra. With her brother, Sheku, she appears in recital in Japan, Singapore and South Korea in addition to an extensive European recital tour. She also gives a series of solo recitals in the USA and Canada, as well as at Wigmore Hall, the Lucerne Festival and across Germany.

She is a Decca Classics recording artist. Her 2019 album, *Romance – the Piano Music of Clara Schumann*, entered the UK classical charts at No 1. This was followed by 2021's *Summertime*, featuring 20th-century American repertoire including a Samuel Coleridge-Taylor world premiere, and 2023's *Childhood Tales*, consisting of music inspired by a nostalgia for youth.

2021 saw the release of *Muse*, Isata Kanneh-Mason's first duo album with her brother Sheku. The two of them gave a recital during the 2020 BBC Proms, which was a vastly reduced festival due to the Covid-19 pandemic and they performed for cameras to an empty auditorium. Last year she made her BBC Proms solo debut, alongside Ryan Bancroft and BBC National Orchestra of Wales.

Isata Kanneh-Mason was an ECHO Rising Star in the 2021/22 season, performing in many of Europe's finest halls. She is also the recipient of the Leonard Bernstein Award, an Opus Klassik award for best young artist and is one of the Konzerthaus Dortmund's Junge Wilde artists.

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Sinfonia of London/Wilson with Sheku Kanneh-Mason

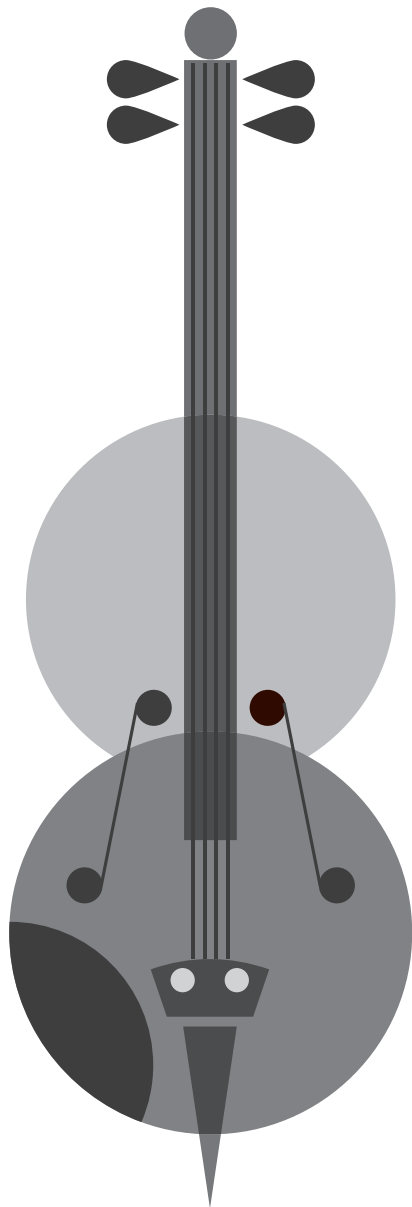
Tue 15 Oct, Hall



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Yo-Yo Ma and Kathryn Stott

Sat 2 Nov, Hall



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