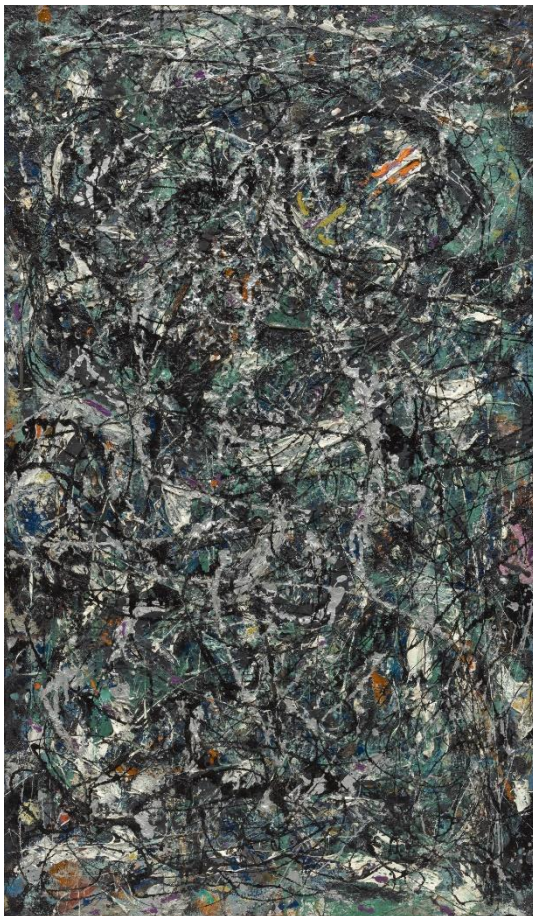


# GUILDHALL SCHOOL OF MUSIC & DRAMA

Silk Street Music Hall

Monday, 3 June 2024 at 5.45pm



## **The Manifest of Gesture**

Vasco Ferrão *cello*

Stephen Gutman *piano*

**Claude Debussy**  
(1862-1918)

Sonata for cello and piano, L.135

- I. Prologue: Lent, sostenuto e molto risoluto*
- II. Sérénade: Modérément animé*
- III. Finale: Animé, léger et nerveux*

**Anton Webern**  
(1883-1945)

Drei Kleine Stücke (Three Little Pieces), Op. 11

- I. Mäßig*
- II. Sehr bewegt*
- III. Äußerst ruhig*

**Harrison Birtwistle**  
(1934-2022)

*Variationen from Bogenstrich* (2009)

**Ludwig van Beethoven**  
(1770-1827)

Sonata for cello and piano Op.102 No.2

- I. Allegro con brio*
- II. Adagio con molto sentimento d'affeto*
- III. Allegro – Allegro fugato*

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The program begins with one of Debussy's late works, the Sonata for Cello and Piano L.135 in D minor. This piece exemplifies Debussy's mature style, showcasing his innovative use of harmony, texture, and form as he moves away from impressionistic color towards a more streamlined and expressive language. Although Debussy's work and Birtwistle's "Variationen" are separated by nearly a century, both compositions deeply explore the expressive and technical potential of the cello. They feature both violent and lyrical passages, extended techniques, and sudden changes in character and tempo, reflecting a modernist approach with less traditional and more fragmented forms. Each segment offers a distinct reinterpretation of thematic material.



Harrison Birtwistle, a leading member of the post-war generation of modernist composers known as the Manchester Group, played a significant role in the development of British contemporary classical music. His piece "Bogenstrich" written in 2006 and first performed by cellist Adrian Brendel and pianist Till Fellner, was later expanded into a cycle. Birtwistle's

music often exhibits cubist shapes with very few bridge passages. He describes his abstractions as journeys within a cube, with each piece acting as a bridge to something unresolved. He reaches a certain point and then begins anew with another cube. His early works were influenced by composers like Messiaen and Stravinsky. He later developed his own distinctive style, which is marked by a rejection of strict serial techniques in favor of a more intuitive and organic approach to composition.



In contrast, Anton Webern presents a style developed by Arnold Schönberg in the 1920s, characterized by one of the most concentrated aesthetics in music. Complete statements of the twelve chromatic tones are presented as musical ideas where seemingly small gestures carry great significance. *Drei Kleine Stücke* Op. 11 are atonal pieces, meaning they lack a traditional key center. Instead, Webern organizes the twelve chromatic tones using serial

techniques, where each of the twelve pitches in the chromatic scale is ordered in a series or row, which then governs the composition's pitch organization.

Birtwistle experimented with serialism but struggled to find chords he wanted to include in his compositions, despite manipulating pitches extensively. While studying at Princeton University, he took a class on combinatoriality in twelve-tone sets, which focused on pitches but neglected the intervals between them. Birtwistle believed that intervals had more character than the pitches themselves,

a perspective that shaped his understanding of modes and their distinctive flavors, which to him explains the ability to tell certain styles and musical traditions apart (Scottish, Hebrew, Oriental, etc).

Birtwistle admired classical composers, particularly Beethoven, whose Sonata for Cello and Piano in D major Op.102 No. 2, composed in 1815, marks a period of profound personal and artistic transformation. This work, along with its companion piece, the C major Sonata Op.102 No.1, represents a pivotal moment in Beethoven's output, transitioning from the heroic style of his middle period to the introspective and innovative approach of his late period. Throughout the work, Beethoven employs a remarkable economy of concise yet potent themes, allowing for extensive development and transformation. These themes, often short and fragmentary, are developed through various keys, textures, and dynamics, creating a sense of constant evolution and variation. This compactness is a hallmark of Beethoven's late style, where he distills his musical ideas to their essence and explores them in depth. This approach ensures a high degree of structural coherence and intensity, making every note and phrase significant.



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Vasco Ferrão (b. 2002) started playing the cello at the age of 6 in the class of Marília Peixoto. He benefited from lessons with renowned artists such as Adrian Brendel, David Dolan, Robert Levin, Paulo Gaio Lima, Xavier Gagnepain, Johannes Meissl, Pedro Carneiro, among others. In 2015 he founded Da Caprio, a trio awarded with 1st prize in several competitions, including the Young Musicians Award 2018 Antena 2. With this group he toured in Germany in 2019, having performed at the Dusseldörf Tonhalle as part of the Clara Schumann Festival.

He has played in venues across Europe, such as the Barbican Hall, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, the Ateneul Român and Konzerthaus Berlin, as part of Young Euro Classic festival (2019, 2022). Vasco made his concerto debut with Da Caprio and the Portuguese Youth Orchestra, playing Beethoven's Triple Concerto. He has also worked with the Portuguese Chamber Orchestra and the Australian Chamber Orchestra.

As a young conductor, he has led chamber groups and orchestras in workshops and concerts, with repertoire from the 18th century to music by living composers. He was recently appointed assistant conductor for the upcoming summer tour with the Portuguese Youth Orchestra and will be making his international debut in Portugal and Germany (Kultursommer Nordhessen Festival). He is currently at the end of his undergraduate studies in cello (with Adrian Brendel) and conducting (with David Corkhill and Tim Redmond) at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, kindly supported by the Guildhall School Trust.



British pianist Stephen Gutman has performed in the Royal Festival Hall, the Wigmore Hall, Carnegie Weill Hall in New York, Ueno Bunka Keikan in Tokyo, and throughout Europe. Born and based in London, he studied at the Royal College of Music and with Vlado Perlemuter in Paris, and was awarded first prizes in the Brant Competition and the British Contemporary

Piano Competition.

Passionately committed to the music of our time, Stephen has encouraged the creation of new work in a series of projects which have placed large-scale commissioning in the context of significant but possibly neglected repertoire. Julian Anderson, John Casken, Tansy Davies, Michael Finnissy, Simon Holt, Gabriel Jackson, Colin Matthews, Anthony Payne and John Woolrich are some of the many composers who have written for him.

Active as a player of chamber music, Stephen has performed with distinguished artists including György Pauk, Yfrah Neaman, and Karine Georgian. He has an ongoing collaboration with soprano Sarah Leonard. One of his projects, in duo with percussionist Richard Benjafield, created a sequence of compositions out of the fantasy *What strikes the clocke?* by 17th century composer Edward Gibbons which integrated new work by people of all ages and backgrounds. Stephen has worked with many ensembles including Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, Composers Ensemble, Endymion, the Esbjerg Ensemble, New Music Players, 'Sharp Edge' (RPO), and the Verbier Festival Ensemble.

Cover artwork: *Full Fathom Five* (1947) by Jackson Pollock (1912-1956)

On the occasion of my final recital as an undergraduate student at the School, I would like to thank my family, mainly for encouraging me to find a place to study overseas; my friends in London who have become my extended family and an important part of what I am; last, but not least, my master and friend Adrian, for his teaching on music and life, for never letting me aim for any less than what he thinks I can do.

V.

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*www.vascoferrao.com*