

## Sheku Kanneh Mason and the Cassadó Ensemble

Fri 11 Dec Kings Place Hall One  
6pm [Concert I] | 8pm [Concert II]

### Programme

---

#### **Maurice Ravel (1875–1937)**

Sonata for violin and cello

[opening Concert I]

- I. Allegro
- II. Très vif
- III. Lent
- IV. Vif avec entrain

#### **Joseph Haydn (1732–1809)**

Piano Trio No. 29 in G, Op. 67 [Hob. XV:15]

[opening Concert II]

- I. Allegro
- II. Andante
- III. Allegro moderato

#### **Gustav Mahler (1860–1911)**

Piano Quartet Movement in A minor

#### **Ernst von Dohnányi (1877–1960)**

Piano Quintet No. 1 in C minor, Op. 1

- I. Allegro
- II. Scherzo: Allegro vivace
- III. Adagio, quasi andante
- IV. Finale: Allegro animato

### Performers

---

#### **The Cassadó Ensemble**

**Sheku Kanneh-Mason** cello

**Braimah Kanneh-Mason** violin

**Ayla Sahin** violin

**Didier Osindero** viola

**Isata Kanneh-Mason** piano

The young Sheku Kanneh-Mason is a cellist of enormous charisma and heart-stopping musicality. When we invited him to perform in our *Master Series*, he chose to bring along his siblings and friends for an evening of chamber music.

Two of the pieces in their original programme now serve as alternative openings for tonight's performances. Sheku and his brother Braimah open the first concert with Ravel's scintillating and virtuosic sonata for violin and cello with its bluesy, percussive inflections. The second concert sees Sheku and his brother, Braimah and sister, Isata open with Haydn's Op. 29 Trio. Sheku writes, 'it's such a humorous and joyful piece which we as a trio really enjoy.'

They then move on to Mahler's precious piano quartet movement prefaces the Hungarian Dohnányi's Piano Quintet, in the cellist's words, 'this is just an amazing piece, surging with a wild energy.'

## Programme Notes

---

### Ravel – Sonata for violin and cello

Ravel's Sonata for violin and cello is a celebration of the compatibility between two kindred sonorities, as Ravel described it, his self-styled 'machine for two instruments' within which he discerned a stylistic shift as great as that in his *Miroirs*: 'The music is pared down to the bone. The allure of harmony is rejected and increasingly there is a return of emphasis on melody'. Not that the Sonata is by any means as austere as that might imply. The War, coupled with the death of his mother, had left Ravel at a low ebb, and although begun in 1920 (as 'in memoriam' for Debussy), the Sonata was not completed until 1922 – at which point Ravel 'purged' himself with a delicious Berceuse as an affectionate tribute to his esteemed erstwhile teacher Fauré.

Much of the Sonata's material can be deduced from the opening theme, cool, a touch inscrutable. From it, the Allegro generates several strong ideas to sustain its essentially linear imperatives, though ethereal harmonics signal release at the end. The Scherzo's *pizzicati* recall both Ravel's String Quartet and Piano Trio (whose *Passacaille* theme also hovers close to the long solo that introduces the spacious slow movement). Ravel claimed the finale imitated a rondo by Mozart, but it also honours the French cyclical tradition by pointedly revisiting old friends from the earlier movements.

© Paul Riley

### Haydn – Piano Trio No. 29 in G, Hob. XV:15

Haydn scored his three *London* Trios, composed in 1790, for either flute or violin with piano and cello, expanding the scope of the form for a larger public audience. The Trio No. 29 in G immediately asserts a certain authority in the piano part (six peremptory chords), but also a degree of independence of the violin with its airy response: a preliminary game between the partners observing and taking each other's measure. The 6/8 *Andante* is in the form of a very relaxed cantabile Lied, with a C minor middle section featuring an appealing incursion into E-flat major. The finale, *Allegro moderato*, plays the part of the rondo of the sonata, followed by a coda. It is one of Haydn's more elaborately-wrought movements, characterised by jubilant spirits.

© Jean-Yves Bras (trans. Derek Yeld)

### Mahler – Piano Quartet Movement in A minor

Thought to date from 1876, the Piano Quartet in A minor is one of Mahler's earliest works and the composer's only surviving chamber piece. Only the opening movement exists (bar fragments of a puckish Scherzo), and a stamp on the manuscript from publisher Theodor Rattig suggests the young composer had submitted it for publication (and seen it rejected).

Opening with raindrop-like triplets in the piano, the quartet's central motif features a hook-like minor-sixth leap. Mahler scores three subjects instead of the customary two in this sonata-form movement, with the first two themes cast in the same unsettling A minor, while the chromatic third subject is tonally ambiguous. After a turbulent development section, the minor-sixth motif returns, now rendered uncertain as it drifts across the ensemble. A full-blooded cadenza for solo violin then leads into a lyrical but retreating coda as the work reaches its sober conclusion. © Kate Wakeling

### Dohnányi – Piano Quintet No. 1 in C minor, Op. 1

In 1895, while still at the Budapest Music Academy, Dohnányi's first published work, his First Piano Quintet, appeared and was championed by no less an authority than Brahms. Never known for passing out gratuitous compliments, Brahms, after having had a chance to look at the Quintet remarked, "I could not have written it better myself." After hearing it through once, the senior composer immediately arranged for a public performance of the Quintet in Vienna and played the piano part himself. It was an immense success.

The first movement has been characterised as one of rugged passion, aggressive writing and complex textures. Dohnányi was of course a virtuoso pianist, but the string treatment displays undoubted technical mastery. The scherzo is marked by constant syncopation. The central section of the scherzo as well as the slow movement seem most conventionally turn-of-the-century Viennese. The finale is in form an energetic rondo, with episodes alternating between 5/4 and 6/4 meter markings. The main idea is clearly Hungarian, its ethnic roots emphasised by the irregular meters. The coda of this movement is really the finale of the entire quintet, as it features a reprise of the opening of the first movement.

© Edmund Trafford



## Biographies

---

### Sheku Kanneh-Mason

---

Winner of the 2016 BBC Young Musician competition, Sheku Kanneh-Mason is in great demand from orchestras and concert halls worldwide. He became a household name in May 2018 after performing at the Wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex at Windsor Castle. In January 2020, Sheku released his second album, *Elgar*, featuring the Cello Concerto, which he recorded at Abbey Road Studios with Sir Simon Rattle and the London Symphony Orchestra. On its release, it reached No. 8 in the UK Official Album Chart, making Sheku the youngest classical instrumentalist and the first cellist in history to reach the UK Top 10.

Sheku has made debuts with orchestras such as the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Netherlands Chamber Orchestra at the Concertgebouw, the Seattle Symphony, the Atlanta Symphony, Japan Philharmonic, BBC Symphony, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, London Philharmonic, Frankfurt Radio Symphony, and Baltimore Symphony orchestras. Forthcoming highlights include performances with the City of Birmingham Symphony, Toronto Symphony, BBC Scottish Symphony, and Stockholm Philharmonic orchestras.

Recent recital performances include Wigmore Hall, Zurich Tonhalle, Lucerne Festival, Festival de

Saint-Denis, Théâtre des Champs Élysées Paris, Teatro della Pergola Florence, and a critically acclaimed tour of North America that took in Los Angeles, Berkeley, St Paul, Vancouver, Ann Arbor, Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Sheku's recital debut at Carnegie Hall New York. Upcoming recital debuts include London's Barbican Hall, L'Auditori Barcelona, Madrid's Auditorio Nacional, and the chamber hall of the Berlin Philharmonie.

Sheku is passionate about making music accessible to all and is an ambassador for Music Masters and Future Talent. During the Covid-19 lockdown in spring 2020, Sheku and his siblings performed in livestreams from their family home in Nottingham to audiences of hundreds of thousands.

Sheku is currently a full-time ABRSM Scholarship student at the Royal Academy of Music, studying with Hannah Roberts. He began learning the cello at the age of six with Sarah Huson-Whyte and then studied with Ben Davies at the Junior Department of the Royal Academy of Music where he held the ABRSM Junior Scholarship. He has received masterclass tuition from Guy Johnston, Ralph Kirshbaum, Robert Max, Alexander Baillie, Steven Doane, Rafael Wallfisch, Jo Cole, Melissa Phelps, and Julian Lloyd Webber and, in July 2017, participated in the Verbier Festival Academy in masterclasses with Frans Helmerson and Miklos Perenyi. A keen chamber musician, Sheku performs with his sister, Isata and brother, Braimah, as a member of the Kanneh-Mason Trio.

Sheku was appointed a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) in the 2020 New Year's Honours List. He plays an Antonius and Hieronymus Amati cello c.1610, kindly on loan from a private collection.

### The Cassadó Ensemble

---

The Cassadó Ensemble is quickly building a reputation as a charismatic and dynamic group of young players all deeply committed to chamber music. Close friends from an early age, the ensemble comprises The Kanneh-Mason Trio (Isata, Braimah and Sheku Kanneh-Mason), Ayla Sahin and Alinka Rowe (replaced by Didier Osindero tonight) who have been performing together since they began their studies at the Royal Academy of Music.