PARTITA

I. Prelude

II. Fugue

III. Chaconne

Instrumentation

4 Violins

2 Violas

2 Violoncellos

In March 2019 I was a juror at the Carl Nielsen International Competition for violin. I heard many superb performances of the Bach solo Sonatas and Partitas, and for ten days, my head was filled with Bach.

Felix Mendelssohn was strongly influenced by Bach and Handel, and this is evident in his brilliant Octet. I have taken the idea of a partita, which is traditionally a suite for a solo instrument. A string octet could be seen as a single entity – almost like a bowed keyboard – as well as being an ensemble of soloists.

The Prelude uses a fragment from the prelude to Bach's D minor Partita for solo violin and weaves it into an ostinato, first performed by Viola 1. This begins to fragment and break apart, reaching a climax which converges onto a single note.

The Fugue is based on the same quotation from Handel's *Messiah* that is used as the subject of the fugato in the last movement of Mendelssohn's Octet. It is used as a slow-tempo subject in the eight-part fugue.

The Chaconne makes use of another theme by Mendelssohn, which is heavily disguised. After a fanfare-like opening by the lower strings there are eight chaconne variations, each featuring a different member of the octet. The solos range from wistful to playful – the last soloist being Viola 1, which attempts to reveal the identity of the hidden theme.
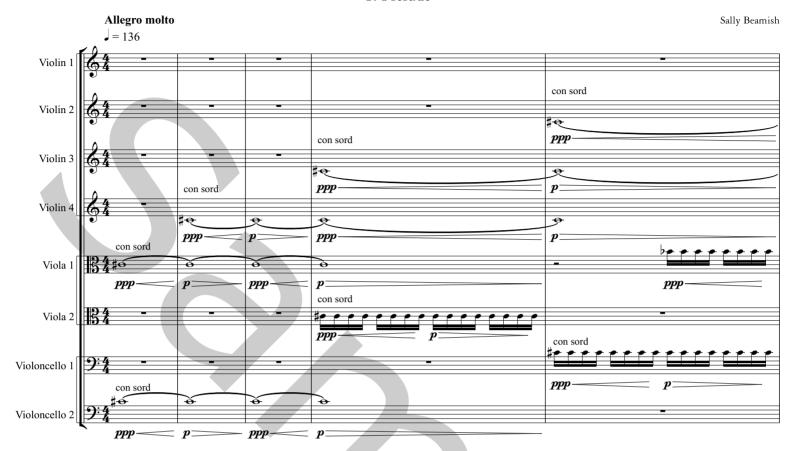
Partita was commissioned by the Academy of St Martin in the Fields. It is one of two works written during my residency with the Academy; the other being *Hover* for chamber orchestra.

It is dedicated with love to my husband, Peter Thomson, and also inspired by the unique, virtuosic dynamic of these musicians, whose playing I know so well.

The world premiere was given by the Academy of St Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble, at the River Centre for the Performing Arts in Columbus, Georgia, USA, on 4th October 2019.

Sally Beamish 2019

for the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, and dedicated to PFT

Partita

1. Prelude

Sally Beamish

2. Fugue