

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 17 February 2024
7.30pm

The African Concert Series African Chamber Music

Tunde Jegede kora

Mohamed Gueye African percussion

NOK Orchestra

Rowland Sutherland flute

Lorraine Hart oboe

Olá Akindipe clarinet

Michael Elderkin bassoon

Lisa Ridgway horn

Harry Plant trumpet

Zita Silva harp

Vincent Ademola Hastrup

violin I

David Etim violin II

Según James Adetunji viola

Elliott Bailey cello

Olalekan Mumuni Adebayo

bass

Joby Burgess percussion

Tunde Jegede (b.1972) Mandé Suite (2018)

*I. Kaira • II. Jairaby Ballad • III. Masane Cissé •
IV. Tabarah • V. Jairaby*

Kora Concerto (2016)

I. • II. • III.

Interval

Trad/African

African Suite: arrangements of African Songs

arranged by Tunde Jegede

I. Ririovara by E. Ogholi • II. Joromi by V. Olaiya •

III. Taxi Driver by B. Benson • IV. Barka (Gratitude) by F. Onowwerosuoke

Tunde Jegede

Invocation (2012)

I. The Call of Divination • II. The Tragic Heroine •

III. Affirmation in the Wilderness • IV. The Fire of Invocation

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Tunde Jegede is today one of the most greatly significant universal composer-instrumentalists of his generation. Born in London in 1972 of Nigerian-Irish parentage, he studied both at the Purcell and Guildhall Schools of Music, following which his exceptional creative range has led to him becoming established as a leading world figure as composer, producer, cellist and kora player, active in contemporary classical, African and pop music. As a child, he learned the art of the native kora stringed instrument in Africa, and is regarded as one of the leading players in the world, specialising principally in the West African classical tradition. The kora itself is a 21-stringed instrument, plucked by the fingers, and thereby shares features of the European lute and harp. Tunde Jegede's wide-ranging musicianship as composer, arranger, performer and producer, an artist who successfully bridges a number of varied musical styles and genres, is fully demonstrated throughout tonight's programme.

Tunde Jegede's *Mandé Suite*, for kora and string orchestra with guitar, is founded on original material basically inspired by, and naturally melodically in the style of, traditional Mandé music; the gently-swaying opening movement, *Kaira*, over a rhythmic softly-plucked bass ostinato, at once draws the listener into this fascinating, at times almost hypnotic, yet profoundly subtle musical language. The second movement, *Jairaby Ballad*, equally naturally follows a likewise folk-based construction style, but this enchanting musical world is inherently slower in pulse, more contemplative and enveloping. In this movement, the kora is less prominent as a stand-out soloist, although its constant instrumental colouration almost throughout is unmistakable, leading to a concluding 'fade' which is a quite magical and expressive effect. It is the kora that is reasserted soloistically by having a more principal role in the third movement, *Masane Cissé*. This haunting, ruminative and all-enveloping study in slow motion, above a gently pulsing rhythmic impetus, is an inherently calm invitation to contemplation. The fourth part, *Tabarah*, contrastingly opens in more complex fashion – displaying a fine layering of varied, gently-paced rhythm patterns and melodic lines which, in compelling texturalisation, weave fascinating tapestries of pure contrapuntal sound, before the entrancing final section gently winds its way to a barely-perceptible conclusion. The final movement, *Jairaby*, is faster in its inner pulsation, being edged on by rhythmic pizzicatos which remain always gently subtle in expression, and taking this deeply original concert music towards its warmly embracing conclusion.

The Kora Concerto was commissioned by the Psappha Ensemble with funds from the Britten-Pears Foundation. It is scored for chamber orchestra (four wind instruments, piano, percussion, string quintet) and opens with a slow, haunting sense of rhythmic momentum creating a wondrous atmosphere of quiet expectation. This prefaces a new level in which the piano introduces a quasi-lullaby theme against which the kora continues its own melodic line from which other instrumental strands

evolve. A secondary section is notable for its expressive slowly-moving contemplation with the kora weaving fine lines above. A third quasi-movement has a gently hand-drumming introduction which underlines slow-paced string lines around which the kora is given its fully expressive head in a chiaroscuro of gentle sounds. Faster speeds return with strings and gentle percussion underlying strands of melody against which the kora colours and comments upon these events; a slower-paced section has the kora momentarily silent before pulse and dynamics increase to herald the final great part of this fascinating and wholly original masterpiece.

African Suite is an orchestral collection made up of various arrangements and instrumentations from the music of four different composers, arranged by Tunde Jegede.

Jegede's four-movement *Invocation* is effectively a *concerto choréographique* for cello and orchestra (recalling a similarly-conceived work for piano and orchestra by Francis Poulenc), cast as dialogues between solo cello, dancer, African percussion and chamber orchestra, and described as being 'steeped in the concepts and cosmology of the Yoruba Orisha tradition, a religious belief system which is still practised in Nigeria and throughout the African Diaspora in places such as Brazil, Cuba and the USA.'

Invocation follows the narrative of a hero (the solo cello, personified by the dancer) making a journey to the world beyond to bring back knowledge for his people. The work was commissioned by Orchestra Live and given its first performance at the Derby Assembly Rooms by Matthew Barley (solo cello), Bode Lawal (dancer/choreographer) and Viva Sinfonia conducted by Nicholas Collon. The first movement, *The Call of Divination*, has an interior unfolding pulse which broadly outlines the slow, engrossing, material, an exordium that displays the nature of the subsequent developmental movements. This utterly compelling beginning then moves to a very new creation, *The Tragic Heroine*, now fast and multi-rhythmic - musically and choreographically fragmentarily recalling aspects of Stravinsky's *Le sacre du printemps*, yet far less violent, with extended stretches of subtler *piano-pianissimo* dynamics.

The third movement, *Affirmation in the Wilderness*, unfolds through a slow, almost lazy, solo line before other instruments enter with faster underlying pulses. Eventually, the music fades to a simple duple pulse before a brilliantly-orchestrated accompanying passage which coalesces into a repeated four-note accompanying chordal figure. In *The Fire of Invocation* sudden orchestral chords interrupt that renewed solo cello line, before leading to and unfurling an *allegro molto* multi-rhythmic dance – and then a sudden, joyous ending reveals the unstoppable power of the creative human spirit.

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