

# WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 17 July 2025  
7.30pm

Ning Feng violin  
Yeol Eum Son piano

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)

Divertimento from *The Fairy's Kiss* (1928, arr. 1934)

*I. Sinfonia • II. Danses suisses •  
III. Scherzo • IV. Pas de deux*

Alfred Schnittke (1934-1998)

Violin Sonata No. 1 (1963)

*I. Andante • II. Allegretto •  
III. Largo • IV. Allegretto scherzando*

*Interval*

Karol Szymanowski (1882-1937)

3 Paganini Caprices Op. 40 (1918)

*I. Andante dolcissimo – Vivace scherzando – Andante  
dolcissimo 'Caprice No 20' • II. Adagio, molto espressivo  
ed affettuoso 'Caprice No 21' • III. Thème varié: Vivace –  
Variations I-X 'Caprice No 24'*

Sergey Prokofiev (1891-1953)

Violin Sonata No. 2 in D Op. 94bis (1944)

*I. Moderato • II. Scherzo. Presto •  
III. Andante • IV. Allegro con brio*



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**Stravinsky** may have bewitched early 20th-century Paris with the vivid sequence of nationalist ballets – *The Firebird*, *Petrushka*, *The Rite of Spring* and *Les Noces* – that he wrote for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, but in *The Fairy's Kiss*, he showed a tender and more affectionate side of his musical personality. Here, he arranged a sequence of songs and piano miniatures by Tchaikovsky, the 35th anniversary of whose death was marked in 1928, to accompany a ballet based on Hans Christian Anderson's story, *The Ice Maiden*. This was not the hyper-romantic Tchaikovsky of the *Symphonie Pathétique*, but the classicist who revered the rococo elegance of the 18th Century. The ballet opened at the Paris Opera on 27 November 1928 with choreography by Bronislava Nijinska, but it met with little success. In 1934, Stravinsky salvaged about half of the score, rearranging it as a stylish *Divertimento* for violin and piano with the help of his friend, the violinist Samuil Dushkin. Dushkin and Stravinsky programmed the *Divertimento* in their chamber recitals, alongside the *Duo Concertant* and the *Suite Italienne* (itself based on movements from the ballet, *Pulcinella*), and Stravinsky would honour their creative partnership in his Violin Concerto.

**Schnittke** was born in 1934 in Engels, a city on the River Volga that was home to a community of ethnic Germans who had settled in the Russia Empire as long ago as the 18th Century. Schnittke's mother belonged to his group, whereas his father had moved to the Soviet Union from Frankfurt in 1927. The family spent part of the 1940s in Vienna, and it was here that Schnittke received his earliest musical education – an experience that would shape the rest of his creative life. Returning to the Soviet Union in 1948, Schnittke embarked on further studies in Moscow, eventually graduating from the city's conservatory in 1961. It was a heady time in the arts. After Stalin's death in 1953, Khrushchev had presided over a decade-long period of tentative liberalisation that is sometimes referred to as the 'Thaw'. Socialist realism became less rigid, foreign influences were tolerated and artistic experiment was permitted, albeit within strictly defined limits. When Glen Gould visited Moscow in 1957, he introduced audiences to the modernism of Berg, Schoenberg and Webern, and both Maria Yudina and Andrei Volkonsky proselytised the latest works of the Western avant-garde.

Like many composers of his generation, Schnittke seized on the opportunities that the 'Thaw' afforded him. Written in 1963, the Violin Sonata No. 1 dates from a period when he was immersed in Schoenberg's serial technique, according to which compositions are fashioned out of 'tone rows' consisting of each of the 12 notes of the chromatic scale. The very opening bars consist of one such row, played by the solo violin, and as a whole, the sonata is often astringently dissonant. Yet there is no sense that Schnittke was merely imitating Schoenberg and his school. Although it

would be some time before he fully developed his characteristic approach to 'polystylism' (the self-conscious and often ironic juxtaposition of deliberately contrasting musical styles), the sonata already looks ahead to this compositional breakthrough. There are echoes of Stravinsky (who made his first and only visit to the Soviet Union in 1962), and even of Jazz. And as the sonata unfolds, it slowly discloses a four-note cell spelling out BACH (B flat, A, C, B natural in German notation). The sonata's haunting final bars linger in the memory long after its turbulence has passed.

Born into a Polish family in the Ukrainian village of Tymoszwówka in 1882, **Szymanowski** studied first in nearby Kirowograd (modern-day Kropyvnytskyi), before heading to Warsaw. There, he established himself as a leading member of the 'Young Poland' movement, but his muse was always cosmopolitan and outward looking. The 3 *Paganini Caprices* date from 1918 and were written to be played by the violinist Wiktor Goldfeld and the composer himself at the piano. They are based on three of the 24 *Caprices* that Paganini wrote between 1802 and 1817 for solo violin, and to which Szymanowski added lush piano parts very much in the spirit of late romanticism, especially the first two of the set. Listeners will surely recognise the theme of the third caprice, which has attracted so many composers both before and since.

Like many Soviet artists, **Prokofiev** was evacuated to safety when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941. He headed first to Georgia, but by the summer of 1943, he found himself in Almaty, Kazakhstan. There, he worked on the score for Eisenstein's historical epic, *Ivan the Terrible*. He also found time to compose a Flute Sonata, Op. 94, that is as far removed from both the Second World War and the medieval tsar's bloody reign as can be imagined. In an interview, Prokofiev explained his motivations: 'I had long wished to write music for the flute, an instrument which I felt had been undeservedly neglected. I wanted to write a sonata in delicate, fluid classical style.' By turns spirited and wistful, its four elegantly proportioned movements do indeed evoke the musical world of the 18th Century. There was a more recent source of inspiration too: the sonata's main themes were drafted before the war and look back to the years that Prokofiev had spent in Paris after the October Revolution. There, he had been captivated by the charm and virtuosity of the French woodwind tradition, especially the playing of flautist, Georges Barrère. After the sonata was premièred in Moscow in December 1943, Prokofiev worked with the great virtuoso David Oistrakh – for whom he would also write the Violin Sonata No. 1 between 1938 and 1946 – to rework the solo part for violin.

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