

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 20 July 2024
11.30am

African Concert Series African Art Music for Woodwind

Rowland Sutherland flute
Rebeca Omordia piano
African Cultural Group
Baba Gallé Kanté fulani flute
Moussa Dembele percussion
Richard Olatunde Baker percussion

Traditional

Solode filutu
Alanole

Improvisation

Joshua Uzoigwe (1946-2005)

Ilulu from *Oja Flute Suite* (1995)

Fred Onovwerosuoke (b.1960)

From *3 Pieces for flute and piano* (1988-91)
Ayevwiomo • Iroro
From *24 Studies in African Rhythms* (1986-2007)
Study No. 23 'Sanza' • Study No. 24
'Raging River'

JH Kwabena Nketia (1921-2019)

From *Republic Suite* (1959-60)
Movement 3 • Movement 5

Bongani Ndodana-Breen (b.1975)

Visions I (2000)
Visions II (2000)

Akin Euba (1935-2020)

Òré méta from *6 Yoruban Songs*

Traditional

Alanole
Bemihala
Tama

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Throughout human history, from earliest times to the present day, one musical instrument has remained constant – the flute: a suitable hollow reed, blown into, or across the top, produces a musical note. Primitive man found that modifying these reeds can support singing or dancing. Such natural music – the very breath of life – exists across the planet, passed from one generation to the next, ethnically identifiable, each with individual musical characteristics.

Over and above such identification has been the similarity of human moods thus conveyed. Deep-rooted expression that today draws listeners to such music may have been created many hundreds of years ago, inherited by generations of natural musicians – but emotionally and expressively remaining as relevant today as when first heard.

The flute's versatility, cultural significance and expression make it integral to African aesthetic heritage; music of varied ethnicity across the continent is found in today's first concert, beginning with traditional pieces followed by a solo improvisation. The Fulani flute (or tambin), a traditional West African instrument, possesses a unique sound. Having just three holes, its timbral range is wide and when sometimes partnered by the player's vocalising it can truly exert an unforgettable impression.

Our concert thus opens with *Solode filutu* ('Magic flute'), weaving a haunting melodic line, succeeded by *Alanole* - which became enormously popular in the 1950s. *Alanole* has several meanings (one often quoted is 'No-one can know God'), all concerned with contemplating contemporary life.

Joshua Uzoigwe (1946-2005) was a Nigerian composer, ethnomusicologist and poet who studied composition at the Nigerian University of Nsukka, at London's Guildhall College of Music and also at Queen's University Belfast. Uzoigwe's music demonstrates his skilful juxtaposition of African and Western melodic lines, notably in *Ilulu* from the *Oja Flute Suite*. More like a whistle, the wooden oja is an end blown flute about six inches long with three holes, covered in various combinations with the fingers of both hands, giving a range of about a sixth. Master oja players employ creative fingerings and require great breath control.

The first movement of the *Oja Flute Suite* stylistically reflects an oja performance. *Ilulu* refers to the first part of the Ukom ceremony called *Ilulu nkwa* – a lamentation and invocation of the dead, often accompanied with a drum. A perpetual emotive outpouring is often reflected, whereby no theme is expressed in exactly the same way twice.

Fred Onovwerosuoke, born in 1960 in Ghana to Nigerian parents, later studied composition at Principia College, Illinois. Now an American citizen, his music embraces strands from the African and North American continents. He is famous for his haunting chant *Bolingo* in the 2006 Robert de Niro feature film *The Good Shepherd*; his solo piano music is headed by the series of *24 Studies in African Rhythms*, music which has inspired other works in his large output, including the *3 Pieces* for flute and piano. He has written, 'I began to sketch some of these studies in 1984 when I gave piano lessons to pay my way through university. No. 3, *Udje*, based on a similarly-

named Urhobo dance, provided sketches for the later *Ayevwiomo* ('Birth'), for flute and piano. The "events" of that "first night" often call for communal dance and more celebration!"

Iroko ('Reminiscences') reflects the initiation ceremonies of Igbe priests and princesses, a cult of the River Goddess in Nigeria. The piece also portrays xylophones and large bamboo flutes in the accompanying piano, the lead flute played by the alto flute. Contrasting in timbre, demonstrating Onovwerosuoke's multi-faceted creativity, Rebeca Omordia plays the original *Studies in African Rhythms* on which the composer later based the flute recompositions.

JH Kwabena Nketia (1921-2019), a world-renowned musical scholar, taught music in the USA, Australia and China and in his native Ghana. Nketia's *Republic Suite* was written to honour Ghana's first Republic Day and was premièred by the composer and flautist Charles Simmons before the country's first President, Kwame Nkrumah, in July 1960. Each movement depicts aspects of Ghana's independence from Great Britain in 1957: a dance in the style of the Francophone countries which surround Ghana; Nketia drawing from Western and traditional African music in a piano accompaniment alternating between melodic and rhythmic African drum patterns; a call and response texture between flute and piano voices; countermelodies, counter rhythms and parallel harmony found in Ghanaian traditional music, underpinned by European-based tonalities.

Bongani Ndodana-Breen was born in 1975 in Queenstown South Africa, and studied music at Grahamstown's Rhodes University, South Africa and at Stellenbosch Conservatory. His large output has been performed worldwide, and he is best-known for *Winnie the Opera* (2013) – an operatic treatment of the life of Winnie Mandela. He has also composed oratorios, symphonies and chamber music, and his musical style is described as 'influenced by the lyricism and rhythms of Africa, blended with an eclectic post-modern approach to contemporary music'. This approach is best heard in his *Visions I and II* for solo flute, composed in 2000, which can be performed either separately or together – the second *Vision* perceived almost as a refraction, or contemplation, on aspects of the first.

The innovator of 'African Pianism', the Nigerian-born Professor **Akin Euba** (1935-2020) held lectures and symposiums on inter-culturalism in musical composition and performance across the world, and published numerous academic books and articles. His widely-admired and influential concept of 'African Pianism' refers to the similarities between the piano as a western instrument and Nigerian traditional instruments, using the piano as a support to express certain features of Nigerian traditional music. *Oré méta* ('Three years') will receive a world première performance by (European) flute, piano and talking drum, followed by further traditional songs in similar instrumentation.

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