

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 20 June 2022 1.00pm

Sabine Meyer clarinet

Alliage Quintett

Daniel Gauthier soprano saxophone

Miguel Valles Mateu alto saxophone

Simon Hanrath tenor saxophone

Sebastian Pottmeier baritone saxophone

Jang Eun Bae piano



This concert is being broadcast on BBC Radio 3



CAVATINA
Chamber Music Trust
www.cavatina.net

This concert is part of the CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust ticket scheme, offering free tickets to those aged 8-25

George Gershwin (1898-1937)

Cuban Overture (1932) *arranged by Itai Sobol*

Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826)

Aufforderung zum Tanze Op. 65 (1819) *arranged by Bernd Wilden*

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Prelude from *The Gadfly* Op. 97 (1955) *arranged by Levon Atovmyan*

From *Ballet Suite No. 3* (1952) *arranged by Levon Atovmyan*

Gavotte • Elegy • Waltz

Polka from *Ballet Suite No. 1* (1950) *arranged by Levon Atovmyan*

Stefan Malzew (b.1964)

Macabrum Sanctum (Fantasy after Saint-Saëns's *Danse macabre*) (2019)

Aleksandr Porfiriyevich Borodin
(1833-1887)

Polovtsian Dances from *Prince Igor* (1869-87) *arranged by Stéphane Gassot & Camille Pépin*

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Imitations, adaptations and arrangements have always been integral to classical music-making down the years. Before the advent of recording, broadcasting, downloading and streaming, piano transcriptions were just about the only way that many music-lovers could appreciate the orchestral repertoire outside the concert hall, and popular numbers from operas were often published separately so that amateur singers could perform them at home. And arranging is not just a pragmatic act – it can be a creative art as well. Some pieces of music are just too memorable and enjoyable to be limited to their original scoring, and transcribing them for another combination of instruments becomes a form of respectful homage (or, just occasionally, ironic parody). New versions have been made to celebrate the talents of particular virtuosos (as in the case of today's soloist, clarinetist Sabine Meyer), and to explore new and often unusual sonorities (such as the four saxophones and piano that make up the Alliage Quintett). Like a monochrome reproduction of a gaudy oil painting, or a tinted photograph, a new arrangement can often reveal things about an original that we never perceived before.

Gershwin visited Havana in February 1932 and came back to New York full of the impressions of the bars and nightclubs he had frequented there. Originally entitled 'Rumba', his concert overture was – in its composer's own words – 'a symphonic overture which embodies the essence of the Cuban dance.' As a jazz musician, he would surely have been delighted by the idea of a transcription, so it is fitting that this version of his *Cuban Overture* should have been made by the contemporary pianist, composer and arranger, **Itai Sobol**.

Weber's *Aufforderung zum Tanze* ('Invitation to the Dance') might suggest a rather more genteel affair than Gershwin's riotously syncopated shimmying. Yet that would be to forget that the waltz – the dance form that Weber employs for his 'rondo brillante' – had once been seen as a distinctly scandalous social pastime. A late 18th-century sentimental novel contains the following suggestive description of its dubious allure: 'he put his arm around her, pressed her to his breast, cavorted with her in the shameless, indecent whirling-dance of the Germans and engaged in a familiarity that broke all the bounds of good breeding...' By 1819, the waltz had become altogether more respectable. According to the programme that Weber himself provided, the *Aufforderung zum Tanze* opens with a gallant gentleman's attempts to persuade a society lady to dance. After a decorous refusal and some well-mannered conversation, she accepts. After they have waltzed, they part – full of the wistful memories of their intimacy. Berlioz orchestrated *Aufforderung zum Tanze* for a production of Weber's *Der Freischütz* in 1841, and it is here heard in a version by the contemporary Germany conductor and composer, **Bernd Wilden**.

Shostakovich is perhaps best known for his symphonies, concertos, string quartets and other chamber works, but he was

also a prolific composer of film scores and dashed off a large number of lighter pieces, usually to order. The music for *The Gadfly* was written in 1955, and even if the film is seldom seen today, some of its numbers are still familiar as transcriptions (the famous 'Romance' featured in 1983 British television series, *Reilly, Ace of Spies*, for instance). In 1948, Shostakovich was criticised by the Party for 'formalism', and many of his more serious works were removed from the repertoire. The four *Ballet Suites*, compiled between 1949 and 1953 by Shostakovich's friend and assistant, Levon Atovmyan, offered Soviet audiences more optimistic and accessible musical fare. But the suites served another purpose too, allowing Shostakovich to recycle music that had either been censored or otherwise forgotten. The *Gavotte* and *Elegy* feature music originally composed for a 1934 stage production of Balzac's *The Human Comedy*, and the *Waltz* and *Polka* are taken from Shostakovich's 1935 ballet, *The Limpid Stream*, which was taken off the stage after being denounced in *Pravda* in February 1936. Atovmyan arranged Shostakovich's music for various instrumental combinations – and it has been adapted again for today's performers.

'Traduttore, traditore' – 'the translator is a traitor'. This Italian saying may sound cynical, yet it contains a crucial grain of truth. Sometimes a literal version can be correct in all respects, but equally it can miss out on the spirit of the original. Betrayal can, paradoxically, be a higher form of fidelity, and a freer approach allows the arranger to see the original in a new light. According to the composer, **Stefan Malzew**, *Macrabum Sanctum* 'is not, in the strict sense, an arrangement of the *Danse macabre* for a special instrumentation, but is a more or less free fantasy on motifs from which the original is also built, whereby it becomes in many respects an independent composition.' Commissioned for Sabine Meyer and the Alliage Quintett, it was premièred in Ludwigsburg in 2019. Interestingly, the version of *Danse macabre* with which we are probably most familiar is itself an arrangement. **Saint-Saëns** originally composed it as a song in 1872, to words by Henri Cazalis. He wrote his more famous tone poem for symphony orchestra two years later.

Another orchestral showpiece, the *Polovtsian Dances* come from the opera *Prince Igor*, left unfinished on **Borodin's** death in 1887. The opera itself was completed by his friends and colleagues, Glazunov and Rimsky-Korsakov, but it is the set of exotic oriental dances that occur in Act 2 that have become most famous. They were seen in Paris in 1908, when Diaghilev brought his Ballets Russes to the French capital, and in 1953, the 'Dance of the Maidens' was reworked as 'A Stranger in Paradise' in the musical *Kismet*. The dances are here heard in an arrangement by **Stéphane Gassot** and **Camille Pépin**.