

# WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 21 January 2024  
7.30pm

## 12 Ensemble

Eloisa-Fleur Thom violin I    Matthew Kettle viola  
Roberto Ruisi violin I        Connie Pharoah viola  
Zahra Benyounes violin I     Max Ruisi cello  
Tanja Roos violin I            Sergio Serra cello  
Alessandro Ruisi violin II     Toby Hughes double bass  
Oliver Cave violin II  
Ellie Consta violin II  
Coco Inman violin II

Samson Tsoy piano  
Tine Thing Helseth trumpet

Edmund Finnis (b.1984)

Hymn (after Byrd) (2023)

Andrew Norman (b.1979)

Gran Turismo (2004)

*Pedal to the Metal - Interruption - Tempo I -  
Interruption - Overdrive - Floor It*

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Piano Concerto No. 1 in C minor Op. 35 (1933)

*I. Allegro moderato • II. Lento • III. Moderato •  
IV. Allegro con brio*

Interval

Orlande de Lassus (c.1530-1594)

Stabat mater dolorosa (pub. 1585) *arranged by 12 Ensemble*

Alfred Schnittke (1934-1998)

String Quartet No. 3 (1983) *arranged by 12 Ensemble for string  
orchestra*

*I. Andante • II. Agitato • III. Pesante*

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This evening's programme with 12 Ensemble sees dialogues through centuries, finding resonances between Renaissance, Modernist and contemporary composers through music that contrasts serenity, joy and beauty with satire, terror and tragedy. The two larger works by Shostakovich and Schnittke provided the impetus for the curation, which responded to each composer's preoccupation with musical collage, quotation and parody.

Underlining the recurring theme of multilayered connections woven through time, in the opening work, *Hymn (after Byrd)*, composer **Edmund Finnis** reflects on the Elizabethan composer William Byrd's setting of a yet older 5th-century hymn 'Christe, qui lux es et dies'. The original hymn was sung for Compline, or what Anglo-Saxon monks then called *nihtsang* ('night song'). Nature's elemental cycles of time, like the flow from dawn to dusk, are also present beneath the surface of Finnis's piece, an orchestration of the fourth movement of his first string quartet from 2018. In his own words about Byrd's hymn: 'that ancient melody is a prayer for light within the darkness of the night. The falling and rising contours within the hymn became integral to my work [...] as did the mental image of the setting and rising of the sun.'

Following these calm and open vistas, the American composer **Andrew Norman's** *Gran Turismo* flings us abruptly into the modern age. Norman's 2004 work for violin octet found its genesis in the eclectic convergence of three preoccupations he had at the time of the unusual commission: the Italian Futurists, 'the legacy of virtuosic Baroque violin music', and the racing video game *Gran Turismo*. Emerging from this collision of references is a relentless flow of rapid ostinati, jagged cuts across registers, and sudden explosions of spiky timbres. The violins work together as one multi-articulated machine, bombing down the highway at ever greater pace, hacking, spinning and shunting.

Of similarly uncommon instrumentation, **Shostakovich's** Piano Concerto No. 1, composed in 1933, combines solo pianist with strings and a solo trumpet; a remnant of an abandoned plan to compose a trumpet concerto. While the piano soloist takes precedence too frequently for the piece to be a true double concerto, the trumpet nonetheless plays a prominent recurring role, marking exciting passages and slow winding melodic arches. The concerto's odd format poses a witty commentary on the tradition of grand Russian piano concertos, such as the orchestral giants of Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov, but it also reveals influences from other contemporaneous models such as Stravinsky's Concerto for piano and winds from 1924. Shostakovich's affinity with Mahler is also evident in this work through the abundance of parody, and the juxtaposition of humour, the grotesque and tenderness. As with Mahler, Shostakovich gives equal-handed treatment to musical references of every stock, from the opening snatch from Beethoven's 'Appassionata' Sonata and the later 'Rage over a lost penny' *Rondo*, to quotes of Haydn and Rossini, a street song from Odesa, and evocations of early jazz bands and cabaret.

Shostakovich's stylistic departure from conventions does not, however, carry over to musical structure, where he conforms to a familiar four-movement concerto format.

The sonata form of the first movement contrasts a reflective first theme with a more dance-like if tumultuous second. The second movement unwinds as a slow yet emotive waltz, marked by an impassioned solo piano interruption, and followed by the trumpet reprising the strings' gentler opening theme. The short third movement breaks the hushed stillness with an extended solo piano passage that the strings meet with expressive ardour, and the fourth movement brings back ever more exuberant energy. Bordering on the cartoonish and slapstick, the piano, trumpet and strings chase each others' tails at rapidly pressing pace before the final triumphant climax, marked by an off-kilter outburst in the piano, like chewed-up ragtime.

Echoing the opening of the first half of the concert, the second half begins with a more meditative offering. **Orlande de Lassus's** *Stabat mater dolorosa* sets the 13th-century hymn that meditates on the suffering of Mary during the crucifixion and Passion of Christ. First published in 1585, the setting by Lassus sees the majority of the voices split into different groupings based on high or low registers. By the end of the piece, all eight voices of the original, here reimaged for string orchestra by 12 Ensemble, combine in a rich and resounding polyphony.

In **Schnittke's** String Quartet No. 3 from 1983, arranged here for string orchestra by 12 Ensemble, Lassus provides the serene opening quotation before the music launches centuries into the future with more ominous fragments from Beethoven's final quartet and the monogram motifs of Shostakovich (DSCH) and Beethoven (DGAB). This opening situation epitomises the quartet's larger concerns and Schnittke's distinctive polystylism, which treats countless fragments as found objects that form a collage of musical history, emphasising extreme emotional contrasts between brutality, vulnerability, pathos and irony.

Schnittke creates correspondences between the quartet's three movements with the use of recurring material. The first movement introduces the proliferations of various quotations through juxtapositions, imitative canons and moments of monolithic terror. The second movement spirals out as a wonky and erratic waltz which the composer disrupts through chorales, suspenseful tremolo and desolate dead-ends. The fierce final section of unrelenting ascending harmonic shifts propels us into the third movement, which follows without a pause. The third movement reprises the ardent C minor chord from the first movement, before liquifying and returning to a disquiet mosaic of melodies, trills and canons. The Lassus quotation returns throughout as a kind of *idée fixe* or punctuation mark, its possible meaning constantly changing depending on the context. It is not necessary to know or recognise all the quotations to experience the quartet, because the piece forms something new and substantive in its transformation of the original materials to be heard on its own terms; a prism of musical time that leaves listeners space to find their own orientation in the unresolved juxtaposition of emotions and personas, as most evident in the slow and unwinding coda of the final movement.

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