

WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 21 June 2022 7.30pm

Kian Soltani cello

Aaron Pilsan piano

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

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Adagio and Allegro in A flat Op. 70 (1849)
I. Adagio • II. Allegro

Valentin Silvestrov (b.1937)

Postludium for cello and piano (1981)

Alfred Schnittke (1934-1998)

Cello Sonata No. 1 (1978)
I. Largo • II. Presto • III. Largo

Interval

George Enescu (1881-1955)

Rhapsodie roumaine Op. 11 No. 1 (1901)

Reza Vali (b.1952)

Persian Folk Songs (2018)
*Longing • In Memory of a Lost Beloved • The Girl from Shiraz •
Love Drunk (mastom-mastom) • In the Style of an Armenian Folk Song •
Imaginary Folk Song • Folk Song from Khorasan*

Ástor Piazzolla (1921-1992)

Le Grand Tango (1982)

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'The piece is splendid, fresh and passionate, just as I like it!' wrote the pianist Clara Schumann in her diary in 1849, shortly after performing the première of her husband's *Adagio and Allegro*.

Robert Schumann had originally composed the work for piano and French horn, but he also created an arrangement for cello. With a pleasing contrast between movements, it feels equally suited to both instruments. We begin with a songlike, legato melody, whose sweetness reminds us that Robert originally gave this movement the title of *Romance*. The second movement is heroic and adventurous in mood, with hunting-call triplets that recall the piece's brass origins. No wonder concert pianist Clara was satisfied with it: from the opening bars, it is clearly a duet between equal partners; two instruments in dialogue.

Composer **Valentin Silvestrov** was born in Kyiv in 1937. He studied, composed and lived there all his life, until 2022, when the war in Ukraine forced him to flee to Berlin. His luminous *Postludium* for cello and piano creates a space of reflection, with phrases that ebb and flow like the tide. As Silvestrov himself puts it: 'Music should be so transparent, that one can see the bottom and that poetry shimmers through this transparency.'

Born in 1934 to a Jewish father of Latvian descent and a Russian-born Catholic mother of German descent, **Alfred Schnittke** grew up in the German Volga region of Soviet Russia. During his teens, he studied piano and music theory in Vienna, before returning to Soviet Russia to complete his musical studies at the Moscow Conservatoire. A prolific composer of ballets, symphonies and film soundtracks, Schnittke is known for the dark, and often darkly comic, character of his music. He drew on diverse musical influences, and often in quick succession within individual pieces, to the extent that he became known for his 'polystylism'. Yet despite his allusions to multiple idioms, his music is never derivative. Unsurprisingly, his anarchic clashing of musical ideologies frequently caused him to fall foul of the state-approved guidelines of Socialist Realism. Yet thankfully, Schnittke had a number of powerful allies who promoted his music abroad, including the cellist Mstislav Rostropovich, violist Yuri Bashmet and conductor Gennady Rozhdestvensky.

Schnittke composed two cello sonatas: this, the first, dates from 1978 and was dedicated to the formidable cellist Natalia Gutman. The mood of the opening is desolate and plaintive. Initially unaccompanied, the cello intones a mournful lament, see-sawing between the upper and lower registers, with double-stopping and astringent harmonies that flicker between major and minor. The second movement explodes into life, the cello buzzing with chromatic semiquavers like a frenzied chorus of bees, while the pianist stomps up and down the keyboard with thunderous chords and demonic energy. In the final movement, a bleak and desolate howl erupts from the cello, culminating in a strangely dreamlike

conclusion to the Sonata, with pizzicato cello asides, and a meandering piano line that floats upwards, seemingly dissolving into thin air.

Tonight's second half begins with the first of **George Enescu's** *Rhapsodies roumaines*. Originally composed for orchestra in 1901, this lively, playful piano transcription showcases the soloist's virtuosity at every turn. The varied tempo and sense of spontaneity is typical of the genre of *lăutărească* music: a Romanian term related to the word for lutenist, which later came to typify all kinds of folk musicians, whether they played the *scripkar* (fiddle), *cobza*, or the *Lăuta* (lute). If the whirling finale to the first rhapsody leaves you feeling dizzy, intoxicated, or even inebriated, this is to be expected: the folk tune Enescu quotes translates roughly as: 'I have money and I want to spend it on drink', or more literally: 'I have a leu [a Romanian coin] and I want to drink it.'

Characterised by Western musical critics as the 'Persian Bartók', composer **Reza Vali** was born in 1952 in Ghazvin, Persia (known today as Qazvin, Iran). From his early musical studies in Tehran, he has dedicated much of his career to collecting traditional Persian folk melodies and using them as inspiration for his own original compositions, which are typically scored for Western classical instruments. His folk-infused works range from songs for voice and piano, to chamber works - including these lively and varied songs for cello and piano - as well as pieces for string quartet and string orchestra.

As a child **Ástor Piazzolla** was a prodigy on the bandoneón; the square-built button accordion that originated in his native Argentina. As a teenager, he earned a living performing in tango ensembles in Buenos Aires, and later studied composition with Alberto Ginastera and Nadia Boulanger, gaining the tools to experiment with - or, as his critics alleged, to *murder* - the tango. It wasn't until he garnered critical acclaim abroad that his sidesteps into jazz, dissonance and fugal sophistication were celebrated at home.

The sonority of the bandoneón stalks *Le Grand Tango*, like a dancer's shadow. The opening chords buzz and hiss with dissonance like its rasping bellows, and the passionate interplay between the cello and piano recall conjures the smoky atmosphere of an Argentinian tango bar. Syncopated melodies bristle with tension, languid harmonies unwind with sensual abandon, and always, there is that nagging, beating pulse that refuses to let the listener - or the dancers - go. 'For me,' Piazzolla said, 'tango was always for the ear, rather than the feet,' but many listeners may disagree, hearing music of such magnetic, toe-tapping charisma.

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