

# WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 21 September 2024  
1.00pm

Peter Jablonski piano

Ronald Stevenson (1928-2015)

Manru Suite (1961) *based on Ignacy Jan Paderewski*  
*I. Introduction and Gipsy March • II. Gipsy Song •*  
*III. Lullaby • IV. Cracovienne*

Karol Szymanowski (1882-1937)

Sérénade de Don Juan from *Masques* Op. 34 (1915-6)

Calypso from *Métopes* Op. 29 (1915)

Mazurka Op. 50 No. 1 (1924-6)

Mazurka Op. 50 No. 2 (1924-6)

Grażyna Bacewicz (1909-1969)

Piano Sonata No. 2 (1953)  
*I. Maestoso • II. Largo • III. Toccata*

CLASSIC *fm*

Wigmore Hall £5 tickets for Under 35s supported by Media Partner Classic FM



Ministerstwo Kultury  
i Dziedzictwa Narodowego

Co-financed by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland



SUPPORT OUR AUDIENCE FUND: EVERY NOTE COUNTS

Ensure Wigmore Hall remains a vibrant hub of musical excellence by making a donation today.  
wigmore-hall.org.uk/donate | 020 7258 8220



Join & Support  
Donations

Wigmore Hall is a no smoking venue. No recording or photographic equipment may be taken into the auditorium nor used in any other part of the Hall without the prior written permission of the management. In accordance with the requirements of City of Westminster persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, or to sit in any other gangways. If standing is permitted in the gangways at the sides and rear of the seating, it shall be limited to the number indicated in the notices exhibited in those positions. Disabled Access and Facilities - full details from 020 7935 2141. Wigmore Hall is equipped with a loop to help hearing aid users receive clear sound without background noise. Patrons can use this facility by switching hearing aids to 'T'.



Please ensure that watch alarms, mobile phones and any other electrical devices which can become audible are switched off. Phones on a vibrate setting can still be heard, please switch off.

The Wigmore Hall Trust Registered Charity No. 1024838  
36 Wigmore Street, London W1U 2BP • Wigmore-hall.org.uk • John Gilhooly Director

Wigmore Hall Royal Patron HRH The Duke of Kent, KG  
Honorary Patrons Aubrey Adams OBE; André and Rosalie Hoffmann; Louise Kaye; Kohn Foundation; Mr and Mrs Paul Morgan



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**



During the century and more when Poland disappeared from the map of Europe and its territories were partitioned between Austria, Prussia and Russia, its spirit was represented above all through the music of Chopin. How fitting, then, that when Poland regained her sovereignty in 1918, one of her first prime ministers was the virtuoso pianist and composer, **Paderewski**. His opera *Manru* is not much heard today, but in the early 20th Century, it enjoyed enormous popularity around the world. Premiered in Dresden in 1901, it opened in Lwów (now Lviv in Ukraine) and Warsaw in 1901 and 1902. It was also heard in Bonn, Kyiv, Monte Carlo, Nice, Prague and Zurich, and even at New York's Metropolitan Opera House.

60 years later, **Ronald Stevenson** produced his *Manru Suite* for solo piano. As a proud Scot, Stevenson may well have sympathised with the nationalist aspirations of many 19th-century Poles, and his radical politics meant that he was well-connected throughout the communist world during the Cold War. His affection for Paderewski was, though, artistic rather than ideological. He owed his love of music to his father, a gifted amateur tenor, who performed folk ballads, parlour romances and operatic arias at home for his family. As Stevenson later said in an interview, 'melody is the profile of music', and it was Paderewski's gift for melody that he prized above all. According to his widow, Stevenson discovered the score of *Manru* whilst exploring the collections of the Henry Watson Music Library in Manchester. From the tragic story of the Polish girl, Ulana, and her doomed love for the Romani antihero, Manru, Stevenson took four of the opera's most characteristic moments – *Introduction and Gipsy March*, *Gipsy Song*, *Lullaby* and a lively concluding dance, the *Cracovienne*.

The action of *Manru* takes place in the Tatra mountains to the south of Kraków. It was here, in the tranquil resort of Zakopane, that **Szymanowski** sought artistic inspiration in the 1920s and early 1930s. He had first made his name in 1906, when along with a number of likeminded young composers he formed the Young Poland (*Młoda Polska*) movement in music. Determined to shake off what they saw as the conservatism and parochialism of much Polish music at the time, they embraced the tone poems of Richard Strauss, the impressionism of Debussy and Ravel, the intoxication of Skryabin and the exoticism of the Mediterranean, North Africa and the Middle East. 'Let our music be national in its Polish characteristics,' Szymanowski declared, 'but not falter in striving to attain universality. Let it be national, but not provincial.'

That cosmopolitan imagination finds its fullest expression in the two great piano cycles, *Métopes* Op. 29 and *Masques* Op. 34, that Szymanowski composed in 1915 and 1916. The three *Métopes* – the term refers to a frieze on a Greek temple – take episodes from Homer's *Odyssey*; the second movement, *Calypso*, depicts the seductive song of the nymph who detained Odysseus for seven years on his long journey home.

*Masques* evokes three characters from world literature – Scheherazade, Tantris (the name by which Isolde first encounters Tristan in Wagner's opera) and Don Juan. As a young composer, Szymanowski had rejected the idea of using folklore, yet in the 1920s, after his homeland was one again independent, he seems to have made his peace with that quintessentially patriotic gesture. Between 1926 and 1931 he published a series of twenty mazurkas, inspired both by Chopin's example and the native dances he heard around Zakopane. By turns energetic and acerbic, they are a self-consciously modernist response to the dance form that had once voiced the Romantic longing of the Polish people for self-determination.

Born in Łódź in 1909, **Bacewicz** was born into the generation of Polish musicians that immediately followed on from Szymanowski, and like him, she achieved a productive balance between national and cosmopolitan influences in her work. After studies in Łódź and Warsaw, she moved to Paris – supported by Paderewski – in the 1930s. There, her teachers included Nadia Boulanger, whose Neoclassical influence was paramount in the development of her own musical voice. When Bacewicz returned to Poland, she established a reputation as a performer (she was an outstanding violinist and pianist), as well as a promising composer. Many of her earliest works have not survived, and her first great success came after the end of the Second World War. Bacewicz died in 1969, having been awarded an impressive number of composition prizes at both Polish and international festivals (Warsaw in 1949, Liège in 1951, Paris in 1960 and Brussels in 1965).

The Piano Sonata No. 2 dates from 1953, just a few years after the imposition of communism in post-war Poland. Soviet influence on all aspects of society was profound and pervasive, and creative artists were subject to censorship and the doctrine of Socialist Realism. Bacewicz – who seems to have navigated the dictates of ideology with integrity – premiered the sonata herself in Warsaw on 17 December 1953, some nine months after the death of Stalin. Its three-movement structure is conventional enough, harking back to the Classical and Romantic models of the 18th and 19th Centuries. At the same time, its musical language is strikingly astringent and unsentimental, suggesting the influence of Bartók and even Prokofiev, whose trio of so-called 'war' sonatas (Nos. 6, 7 and 8) had been enthusiastically taken up by Soviet pianists. The opening movement – marked *Maestoso* – is stormy and dramatic. Then comes a *Largo* that opens with a bluesy melody intoned over a solemn chorale that builds to an intensely emotional climax before falling away again. The finale is a virtuoso *Toccata* that employs the energetic rhythms of the *oberek*, a traditional Polish folk dance.

© Philip Ross Bullock 2024

*Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.*