

# WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 25 March 2025  
1.00pm

## Ukraine - A Piano Portrait

Margaret Fingerhut piano

Sergei Bortkiewicz (1877-1952)	Les Rochers d'Outche-Coche from <i>Esquisses de Crimée</i> Op. 8 (1908)
Vasyl Barvinsky (1888-1963)	Loneliness, the Sorrow of Love from <i>Piano Cycle on Love</i> (1915)
Boris Lyatoshinsky (1895-1968)	2 Preludes on the Melodies of Ukrainian Folk Songs Op. 38b (1942) <i>I. Allegro tumultuoso • II. Allegro risoluto</i>
Viktor Kosenko (1896-1938)	Nocturne-Fantaisie Op. 4 (1919)
Valentin Silvestrov (b.1937)	3 Bagatelles Op. 1 (2005)
Mykola Lysenko (1842-1912)	Rhapsody on Ukrainian Themes No. 2 'Dumka-Shumka' Op. 18 (1877)

Margaret will be signing copies of her new CD, *Ukraine - A Piano Portrait*, in the foyer after the concert.



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Born in 1877, **Bortkiewicz** received his earliest education in his native Kharkiv, before going on to study in St Petersburg and Leipzig. He spent the decade between 1904 and 1914 in Berlin, but with the outbreak of war, he returned to the Russian Empire. Unable to accept the October Revolution, he fled Soviet Ukraine, passing through Constantinople, Sofia, and Belgrade, before finally settling in Vienna, where he died – a naturalised Austrian citizen – in 1952. Bortkiewicz was an unrepentant romantic, loyal to the traditions of Chopin, Liszt and Tchaikovsky, and as late as 1948, he defended his conservative style as 'the expression of my most profound mind and soul.' His four *Sketches of Crimea*, Op. 8, were published in Berlin in 1908; 'Les Rochers d'Outche-Coche' solemnly evokes the grandeur of the craggy peninsula.

**Barvinsky** was born in 1888 in Ternopil, in Galicia, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He studied in Lviv and Prague, and many of his compositions were published by Universal Edition in Vienna. Between the two world wars, he was one of the most active Ukrainian musicians in Lwów – as the city was known in independent Poland between the wars. After the end of the Second World War, Lviv became part of the Soviet Union. In 1948, Barvinsky was arrested by the secret police and sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment in Mordovia, some 600 kilometres east of Moscow. He was released in 1958 and died in Lviv five years later. 'Loneliness, the Sorrow of Love' is the opening piece in his triptych, *Love* (1915). Dedicated to Barvinsky's wife, it is an introspective, rhapsodic piece, by turns melancholic and ecstatic.

**Lyatoshinsky** was born in the central Ukrainian town of Zhytomyr in 1895, but would spend most of his life in Kyiv, where he moved to study law and music in 1913. He taught composition at the Kyiv Conservatory from 1919 until his death in 1968, training several generations of modern Ukrainian composers, as well as sharing his knowledge with students of the Moscow Conservatory in the 1930s and 1940s. During the Second World War, he was evacuated to the city of Saratov, on the River Volga. There, he wrote a series of solo piano pieces, including the 2 *Preludes on Ukrainian Folk Songs*, Op. 38b. Socialist Realism demanded that composers should write in an accessible style, but Lyatoshinsky's preludes are more romantic in spirit, closer to Chopin and Rachmaninoff than to authentic folksongs, and even echoing the heroism of Prokofiev's great trilogy of war sonatas.

**Kosenko** was born in the Imperial capital, St Petersburg, just one year after Lyatoshinsky, and in 1898, his family moved to Warsaw (Poland had long been divided between Russia, Prussia and Austria, of course). His father was a high-ranking military officer, and the young Kosenko was expected to follow his father into the army. However, it soon became clear that music was his true vocation. He returned to St Petersburg in 1915, graduating from the conservatory

there three years later. He spent the next decade teaching in Zhytomyr, before moving to Kyiv, where he died in 1938. A virtuoso pianist, he left many works for his own instrument. The *Nocturne-Fantasie*, Op. 4, dates from 1919. A perfumed, passionate piece of late romanticism, it shows the unmistakable influence of Skryabin.

**Valentyn Sylvestrov** was born in Kyiv in 1937 and went on to study with Lyatoshinsky at the capital's conservatory. Stalin's death in 1953 ushered in Khrushchev's 'Thaw', and like many younger composers, Sylvestrov turned his back on Socialist Realism and embraced a more experimental style that borrowed elements from the Western European post-war avantgarde. In the 1970s, his music underwent another dramatic transformation. Now, he abandoned the very idea of innovation and even artistic originality itself, producing a series of works in a style that he himself describe as 'kitsch'. As he later confessed: 'I do not write new music, my music is a response to and an echo of what already exists'. The 3 *Bagatelles*, Op. 1, date from 2005. Improvisatory and replete with flickering, half-heard reminiscences of familiar pieces from the past (and even echoes of pop songs), they are – in the composer's own words – 'sublime trivia in which there is nothing except ... music'. Since the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, Sylvestrov has lived in Berlin, where he continues to compose prolifically.

The composer who stands at the origin of modern Ukrainian classical music is **Lysenko** (1842-1912). He received his first piano lessons from his mother at their home in Hrynky, some 250 kilometres southeast of Kyiv, before studying in Kyiv, Kharkiv and Leipzig. Later on, he took orchestration lessons from Rimsky-Korsakov in St Petersburg before returning to Kyiv in 1876 – the very year that the Edict of Ems prohibited the use of the Ukrainian language in print. Lysenko had been stirred by hearing folksongs in his youth and he later went on to put together important ethnographical studies of traditional Ukrainian music. His Rhapsody No. 2, Op. 18, is based on two contrasting themes. It opens with a 'Dumka' – a dreamy and reflective evocation of an epic ballad, sung to the accompaniment of a *kobza* (a type of Ukrainian lute) or the cimbalom. Lysenko was not the only composer to write *dumki* – there are famous examples by Chopin and Dvořák that show how it was used to express the aspirations of various Slavonic peoples at a time when they fell under imperial rule from St Petersburg, Vienna or Berlin. If Lysenko's *dumka* is full of melancholy, then the 'Shumka' that follows changes the mood entirely. A pert and piquant dance, it is full of energy, resolve and irrepressible *joie de vivre*.

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