

WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 26 April 2022 7.30pm

Andrei Ioniță cello

Naoko Sonoda piano

In Memory of Peter Flatter

George Enescu (1881-1955)

Concertstück (1906) *arranged by Andrei Ioniță*

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Arpeggione Sonata in A minor D821 (1824)

I. Allegro moderato • II. Adagio • III. Allegretto

Interval

Alfred Schnittke (1934-1998)

Suite in the Old Style (1972) *arranged by Daniil Shafran*

I. Pastorale • II. Ballet • III. Minuet • IV. Fugue • V. Pantomime

Sergey Prokofiev (1891-1953)

Cello Sonata in C Op. 119 (1949)

I. Andante grave • II. Moderato • III. Allegro ma non troppo

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The Romanian composer **George Enescu** wrote four short competition pieces for the Paris Conservatoire between 1904 and 1906, of which the *Concertstück* is one. Brahms's stylistic influence is apparent throughout this intensely scored work, with a sense of almost tragic nobility. Initially, the piano part presents a rhapsodic character before developing a passionate and technically challenging dialogue. The viola part, or the cello in **Andrei Ioniță's** arrangement, is notable for the demands of its double-stopping, whilst the piano is at one moment pensive and rapturous the next. With a high degree of drama at its core, Enescu makes much of the possibilities for tonal and emotional contrast throughout the Romantic middle section which appears in a minor key.

Occasionally, music outlasts the instrument for which it is written. **Schubert's** Arpeggione Sonata in A minor D821 is one such case and is the only notable work written for this largely forgotten instrument. Visually similar to a bass viola da gamba, the arpeggione is a six-stringed and fretted instrument tuned like a guitar, with a curved bridge allowing it to be bowed like a cello. Invented in 1823 by Viennese instrument makers Johann Georg Stauffer and Peter Teufelsdorfer, the arpeggione was popular for around a decade. Even though the instrument's foremost exponent, Vincenz Schuster, performed Schubert's sonata, this ultimately did not ensure the arpeggione's longevity. This may explain why the sonata was published in 1871 with parts for cello or violin. The first movement, the longest of the sonata, captures both joy and sadness in its highly lyrical writing. Verging on a *vocalise*, the melody is assigned to the stringed instrument, whilst the pianist takes an accompanying role. Schubert, though, goes emotionally further than might be expected in a work such as this: listen to how he takes a brief downward cadence heard near the movement's beginning and later slows it down to a phrase of heartfelt melancholy. The middle movement's slow E major theme owes a debt to the *Larghetto* of Beethoven's second symphony. As if not constrained by its brevity, the movement sees the music range across a variety of other keys before ending in a rather bleak mood. The closing movement quickly sweeps the dark ambiance aside with a brightly lit and spirited rondo that calls for virtuosic playing from both musicians. Partway through, a piano solo comes to the fore, before the rustic rondo theme re-emerges. The work closes with a series of rising arpeggios, which have been a feature of the work as a whole.

Regarding the genesis of Russian composer **Alfred Schnittke's** *Suite in the Old Style*, the violinist Mark Lubotsky wrote, 'With a harpsichordist, I recorded music for the films *Sport, Sport, Sport* and *Adventures of a Dentist*. They contain several remarkable "Baroque" miniatures written by Alfred whilst wearing an 18th-century costume. I tried to persuade him to combine several pieces – without compromising his good taste, imagination and bold wit – from those scores into a suite "in the old style" for violin and piano;

at first, he refused point blank. Alfred could not accept it as his own music, he was embarrassed by it. I could not understand this. Following publication, the work became extremely popular.' Written in 1972, it was arranged for chamber orchestra or other solo instruments, such as the cello, with piano or harpsichord accompaniment. The work is a stylistic pastiche, rather than an amalgam of styles – Schnittke would adopt that approach in later works. There is little chance of anyone mistaking the writing for an authentic Baroque work. It consists of five movements, as opposed to the six that usually constitute a Baroque dance suite. Tongue in cheek humour deliberately pervades the entire work, despite the fact that fugues, ornamentation and dance rhythms are used. However, whilst the genuine article might possess carefully written refinement, Schnittke's examples often over-extend the melodies or deliberately fail to resolve their phrases. The suite's writing grows in complexity with each movement. Add in the modernist rhythms within the fourth movement and the dissonance of the final movement, then you have a work full of paradox that befits a composer such as Alfred Schnittke.

After spending several years living in Paris and America, **Prokofiev** returned to the Soviet Union in 1936. 12 years later, Joseph Stalin censured Prokofiev and other composers for 'activities against the People' in response to works that were thought to be subversive in their modernist forms and techniques. The cellist Mstislav Rostropovich sprang to Prokofiev's defence. This association eventually led to Prokofiev writing the Cello Sonata in C Op. 119 in 1949, though it was dedicated to Levon Atovmyan. 'I am fascinated with your crazy instrument', Prokofiev told Rostropovich. The work was privately premièred by Rostropovich and the pianist Sviatoslav Richter, who wrote, 'Before performing it in concert, we had to perform it at the Composers' Union where they decided the fate of all new works. Three months later we played it to the Radio Committee; only after that could we perform it in public.' Censors were left to read what they could into the words '*Man, proud-sounding*', with which Prokofiev headed the score. Written in three movements, the sonata largely avoids controversy. The opening movement explores the singing tone at the extremes of the cello's range, with allusions to folksongs that are full of whimsy, presented as a set of variations. A frantic and fate-laden climax subsides to impressionistic harmonics. The middle movement is a maliciously sarcastic 'joke', typical of Prokofiev. The final movement's first theme is romantic and sensitive; the second theme is also seductive. The sonata's opening movement is recalled, bringing a sense of closure. The composer Nikolay Myaskovsky thought it 'a miraculous, fantastic work'.

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