

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 8 May 2023
1.00pm

Ning Feng violin
Thomas Hoppe piano

Alfred Schnittke (1934-1998)

Suite in the Old Style (1972)
*I. Pastorale • II. Ballet • III. Minuet •
IV. Fugue • V. Pantomime*

Manuel de Falla (1876-1946)

Suite populaire espagnole (1914) *arranged by Paul Kochanski*
*I. El paño moruno • II. Nana • III. Canción •
IV. Polo • V. Asturiana • VI. Jota*

Sergey Prokofiev (1891-1953)

3 Movements from *Romeo and Juliet* (1935) *arranged by
David Grunes*
*Dance of the Knights • Dance of the Antilles Girls •
• Masks*

Erich Wolfgang Korngold (1897-1957)

4 Pieces from the incidental music to Shakespeare's *Much Ado
about Nothing* Op. 11 (1918-9)
*I. Mädchen im Brautgemach • II. Holzapfel und
Schlehenwein • III. Gartenszene • IV. Mummenschanz*



This concert is being broadcast on BBC Radio 3



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

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Ning Feng and Thomas Hoppe present a lunchtime recital of music for violin and piano where each composition owes its inspiration either to a specific style, another compositional genre or the plays of Shakespeare.

Regarding the genesis of **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 [Schnittke] 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 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, and you have a work full of paradox that befits a composer such as Alfred Schnittke.

Falla's *Suite populaire espagnole* is an arrangement by the Polish violinist Paul Kochanski of six songs from the 7 *canciones populares españolas*, written in 1914. The original commission came from the soprano Luisa Vela, who was appearing in the Paris première of Falla's opera *La vida breve*, which the composer was on hand to supervise. Vela wanted songs with a Spanish flavour for a forthcoming recital tour; it seems Falla rapidly concluded the composition would feature settings of seven indigenous melodies drawn from different Spanish regions. Vela gave their première accompanied by Falla in January 1915. Being almost the only of Falla's compositions to employ actual Spanish themes, his biographer Suzanne Demarquez has noted that the piano accompaniments were derived from 'the natural resonance...and modal nature of each song, without in any way neglecting the grace, sensitivity and delicate style of his inspiration.' The impact of the songs was such that they virtually single-handedly provided a model for Spanish art song writing which incorporated popular or folkloristic elements. *El paño moruno*, whose accompaniment was inspired by the steely brilliance of the guitar, comes from Murcia in south-eastern Spain.

Nana is an Andalusian lullaby. *Canción* exhibits the pattern of mixed rhythmic stresses that characterises much of Spain's indigenous music. *Polo*, of Andalusian origin, evokes the Gypsy world of flamenco. *Asturiana* is a lament from the northern region of Asturias. *Jota*, mainly associated with the northern province of Aragon, is one of the most familiar of Spanish dance forms.

Prokofiev's ballet *Romeo and Juliet* was written between May and September 1935 following a commission from the Leningrad State Academic Theatre. Following managerial machinations, the Bolshoi Theatre took over the work and rehearsals soon began. However, the *corps de ballet* complained that the music was 'undanceable' and the production was scrapped. The première was given in Brno, then part of Czechoslovakia, in December 1938. During the intervening years Prokofiev tried to create interest in the ballet by inserting music from it into other scores and he created two concert orchestral suites from its various movements alongside solo, duo and chamber ensemble alternatives. The three movements played in this concert demonstrate the contrast of timbres that Prokofiev said he 'took special pains to achieve with a simplicity that will reach the listeners' hearts.' *Dance of the Knights*, the ballet's most famous movement, captures the confrontation between the Montagues and the Capulets with forthright writing. *Dance of the Antilles Girls* calls for greater delicacy, whilst *Masks* highlights the spiky and dissonant qualities often present in Prokofiev's writing.

Korngold was hailed as a child prodigy and became a successful ballet and opera composer, conductor and pianist in his native Austria. Upon hearing Korngold play one of his compositions, Gustav Mahler called him a 'musical genius'. His music garnered several notable performances across Europe before the film director Max Reinhardt, sensing the dangerous rise of the Nazi Party, invited Korngold to emigrate to the United States in 1934. Thereafter, he largely wrote film scores including those for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, which won Korngold his second Oscar for Best Original Film Score. In 1918-9, he wrote incidental music scored for a chamber orchestra to accompany a production of Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing* at Vienna's Schönbrunn Palace. The orchestra was unavailable when the play's run was extended, so Korngold arranged his music for violin and piano and played the keyboard part himself. Publication of concert suites eventually followed in versions for orchestra, solo piano, plus violin and piano duo. The duo version's four movements display a contrast of graceful and more pointed moods. 'The Maiden in the Tower' is charm itself. 'Dogberry and Verges' is a parody of a funeral march that possibly was written with Mahler in mind. The 'Scene in the Garden' is a slow waltz, whilst the 'Hornpipe' concludes things in an animated fashion.

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