

WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 9 January 2024
7.30pm

Anastasia Kobekina cello
Cédric Tiberghien piano

Marin Marais (1656-1728)

Couplets de folies (Les folies d'Espagne) from *Deuxième livre de pièces de viole* (pub. 1701) *arranged by Alexandre Tharaud*

Vladimir Kobekin (b.1947)

The Town Romance (2012)

Nikolay Myaskovsky (1881-1950)

Cello Sonata No. 2 in A minor Op. 81 (1948-9)
*I. Allegro moderato • II. Andante cantabile •
III. Allegro con spirito*

Interval

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Cello Sonata (1915)
I. Prologue • II. Sérénade • III. Finale

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Cello Sonata in D minor Op. 40 (1934)
*I. Allegro non troppo - Largo • II. Allegro •
III. Largo • IV. Allegro*

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Relatively little is known about the life of the Parisian early-Baroque composer **Marin Marais**, who made a career as a viol player at the court of Versailles at the turn of the 18th Century and who left us five volumes of *Pièces de viole*. Marais included a set of 32 variations on the wildly popular 'La Folia' bassline in the second book of his viol pieces, appending 'd'Espagne' to the title in recognition of the tune's Spanish origin. He may have been inspired by his teacher Jean-Baptiste Lully, the great French opera composer, who is often credited with making the first use of 'La Folia' in its later and more standardised form. Unfortunately for Marais, his version was just pipped to publication by a set of 'Folia' variations by Italian violinist Arcangelo Corelli, which has overshadowed the Frenchman's ever since.

Although best known for his operas, Russian composer **Vladimir Kobekin** has turned in recent years to writing cello music for his daughter, Anastasia. Kobekin was born in 1947 in the central Russian city of Berezniki on the edge of the Ural mountains, and has combined a long and successful career as a composer with teaching, latterly at the Urals Mussorgsky State Conservatoire in Yekaterinburg, the city often called the 'gateway to Siberia'. Kobekin composed his short work for cello and piano *The Town Romance* in 2012; it evokes the romantic atmosphere of an old city, laden with history and memory, with an intensely melodic cello line soaring through thickets of agitated detail from the piano.

The music of **Nikolay Myaskovsky** is today far less known than that of his illustrious Russian contemporaries (including his good friend Sergey Prokofiev), but in Soviet musical circles he was honoured as something of an elder statesman. He was, by-and-large, firmly conservative in his musical language, but that suited the strictures of the early decades of Soviet culture, where leading composers still wrote large cycles of symphonies and string quartets. Myaskovsky's 27 symphonies have overshadowed almost everything else he produced, but he also wrote much chamber music, and a pair of cello sonatas bookended his career. The second, written in 1948-9 for Mstislav Rostropovich, emerged in the shadow of the lowest moment of the composer's professional life. His music, along with that of Shostakovich, Prokofiev and Khachaturian, was blasted for being concerned with itself and not with the lives and values of the Soviet people. Those charged with such musical 'crimes' were invited to repent, but Myaskovsky – perhaps sensing the futility of it all – refused. Just two years later, aged 69, he was dead from cancer. The inclusion of Myaskovsky's name in the list of those denounced in 1948 was a bitter irony: here was a composer who never chased affect or stylistic fashion, but who instead wrote music of direct and often uncomplicated emotional power, heard to wonderful effect in the Second Cello Sonata's

Andante cantabile. This is the work of a master of fluent, long-limbed melody and expertly controlled expressive range; here we sense the qualities that placed him so highly in the regard of his colleagues.

Claude Debussy was also in his final years when he turned to writing for the cello. Since his early career as composer, he had written little conventional chamber music, but with encouragement from his publisher Durand, and with a renewed interest in French musical traditions engendered by patriotic feelings during the First World War, he started work on a series of six instrumental sonatas. The Cello Sonata, written in 1915, was the first to be completed. He wrote to Durand that cellists had been begging him for such a work for years, and what he gave them was a compact and beautifully proportioned sonata in three continuous movements. Debussy seems not to have been thinking of any specific cellist when he wrote the piece, and he dedicated it to his wife Emma. Indeed, its first performance came not in Paris but in London, in March 1916 at New Bond Street's Aeolian Hall, performed by cellist C Warwick Evans and pianist Ethel Hobday. Two years later, in March of 1918, with war closer to Paris than ever and having completed only three of the six projected sonatas, Debussy succumbed to the cancer with which he had been battling for some nine years.

Dmitry Shostakovich composed all his instrumental music for colleagues and friends, though rarely at their prompting. Decades before his famous friendships with David Oistrakh and Mstislav Rostropovich produced concertos for violin and cello respectively, Shostakovich penned his first substantial chamber work for a stringed instrument and piano for Viktor Kubatsky, a cellist and conductor who had promoted his music in the 1920s and 30s. He worked on the Cello Sonata in August and September of 1934, in a period of professional success and stability before the storm broke over Stalin's fateful visit to see his opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* in early 1936. Kubatsky was with him on a recital tour when Shostakovich read the infamous review that followed in the Soviet state newspaper *Pravda*, denouncing the opera as 'muddle instead of music'. At the time of writing the sonata, it was Shostakovich's personal rather than professional life which was in disarray, after his brief divorce and reconciliation with his first wife Nina Varzar. It is too easy to read his music as a record of his life and circumstances, but the Cello Sonata's combination of plaintive lyricism and spiky vigour does lend itself to an autobiographical interpretation. At the time, he talked about finding new ways to achieve simplicity in music without imitating the past, but while the classical proportions of the work's four-movement form give it a certain familiarity of design, its emotional complexity is anything but simple.

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