

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 27 November 2021 1.00pm

Timothy Ridout viola

Sinfonia Cymru

Roberto Ruisi violin I

Haim Choi violin I

Daniel Jung violin I

Eloise MacDonald violin I

Bridget O'Donnell violin II

Robyn Bell violin II

Will McGahon violin II

Lowri Thomas viola

Kim Becker viola

Joe Griffin viola

Wayne Kwon cello

Alicja Kozak cello

Louis van der Mespel double bass

Anhad Arora harpsichord

Georg Phillip Telemann (1681-1767)

Viola Concerto in G TWV51:G9 (c.1712)

I. Largo • II. Allegro • III. Andante • IV. Presto

Dobrinka Tabakova (b.1980)

Such Different Paths (2007-8)

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Arpeggione Sonata in A minor D821 (1824) *arranged by Dobrinka Tabakova*

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



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Britain's young musicians, traditionally faced with obstacles and setbacks, have been particularly hard pressed in recent times. Their education has been affected by deep cuts to state school budgets and the axing of university music courses; the narrowing of the curriculum to exclude music from the school timetable and push it to the overloaded margins of after-hours activities; the migration of one-to-one instrumental lessons online during the pandemic; and the lockdown-imposed loss of opportunities to make music with their peers. What happens next is an open question. It is likely, however, that Sinfonia Cymru will help shape the answer.

Sinfonia Cymru stands as a shining example of how to encourage outstanding players under the age of 30 to develop a new model of orchestral performance, driven by its readiness to rewrite conventions and ditch redundant rules. The ensemble, founded as an ad hoc group 25 years ago, became the first revenue funded professional chamber orchestra in Wales. It has since established its credentials in the symphonic repertoire and as a boundary-crossing pioneer, built education programmes at home and overseas, and found fresh ways to connect with young audiences. Its lunchtime programme today forms the coda to a short tour comprising concerts in Newport, Cardiff and Pontyberem's Memorial Hall, the latter a village venue in the heart of Carmarthenshire.

Timothy Ridout first performed with Sinfonia Cymru in 2018 during the orchestra's first concert broadcast on BBC Radio 3. He returns as soloist in **Telemann's** Viola Concerto in G, among the earliest concertos for the instrument. The piece, probably written around 1712 for the court of Duke Johann Wilhelm of Saxe-Eisenach, provides strong supporting evidence for why the strikingly prolific Telemann came to be regarded by his contemporaries as the finest of all German composers. Its opening *Largo*, effectively a slow introduction, is hallmarked by the noble simplicity and lyrical grace of its principal theme. Telemann elevates the viola to the status of first among equals in the concerto's second movement, a boisterous *Allegro* in which soloist and orchestra engage in a dialogue of musical ideas. The central *Andante* reflects its composer's innate feeling for melody, while the finale echoes the rhythmic energy and dramatic interplay of the concerti grossi of Corelli, influential works that first crossed the alps as manuscript copies before being published in 1714.

Dobrinka Tabakova, the daughter of medical physicists, moved to London from her native Bulgaria at the age of 11 following her father's appointment to the Department of Medical Engineering and Physics at King's College Hospital. After graduating from the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, she gained a PhD in composition from King's College London in 2007 and established her reputation with works such as *Dawn*, the Concerto for cello and strings, *On the South Downs* and *Such Different Paths*. The latter, a work of shimmering textures and tonalities, was conceived for string septet and first performed at the Berlin Philharmonie by

Janine Jansen and friends in 2008; its string orchestra version received its première two years later at Vienna's Musikverein.

'In this septet I have tried to capture a sense of journey,' observes Tabakova of *Such Different Paths*. 'The music itself is a building up of material, or paths. The violins enter first, then the violas, then cellos and finally double bass, each playing material which works by itself, but also together with everything else. The music for the first half of the piece is very closely scored, the cellos and violas play in their highest register. Melody lines are passed from one instrument to another, making the septet seem as if one large string instrument. Progressively throughout the piece, the registers of all instruments expand and the individual voice arises towards the end with the solo violin. The work is coloured by various string techniques, often asking the musicians to play as if on a viola da gamba or a folk fiddle.'

Vienna, overcrowded, disease-prone heart of the Habsburg Empire, attracted countless accomplished artisans in the late 18th Century. The Bavarian violinmaker Franz Geissenhof moved there during the early 1780s, earning respect for the quality of his instruments and as a teacher. Among his pupils, the Viennese Johann Georg Stauffer proved a first-class maker of guitars but was less accomplished when it came to crafting violins. He eventually acquired the instrument business of Ignaz Christian Bartl, where, in an effort to produce a marketable novelty and boost sales, he invented what was advertised as a 'guitar d'amour' or 'arpeggione'.

Stauffer's instrument proved a commercial flop but attracted at least one professional musician, Vincenz Schuster. In 1825 he published a guide on how to play this hybrid of guitar and cello. The guitar-shaped arpeggione had six strings and fixed frets; a rounded bridge enabled the player to bow the instrument like a cello or bass viol. It seems likely that it was Schuster who, in the autumn of 1824, convinced **Schubert** to write a work for the arpeggione. According to the preface of the first edition, published long after Schubert's death, the sonata for arpeggione and piano was performed soon after its completion in November 1824. By the mid-1830s Stauffer's invention was almost forgotten, along with Schubert's sonata. The work was among the many Schubert pieces prepared for the press by the Czech-born publisher and composer JP Gotthard, who issued it in 1871 as a 'Sonata for arpeggione or violoncello and pianoforte', complete with textual alterations to enable its performance on the cello.

Gotthard's edition helped establish the Arpeggione Sonata as one of the most popular and widely played of Schubert's instrumental compositions. Dobrinka Tabakova arranged the work for viola and string orchestra in 2004. Her orchestration maintains the original composition's melodic charm while intensifying its tonal warmth and expressive contrasts.

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