

# WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 5 February 2022

African Concert Series Day

CLASSIC *f*M

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More than half a century following the death of Queen Victoria in January 1901, the imperial constraints of British and European rule saw countries across Africa freed from control, with independent democracies taking what they needed from inherited mores of government, law, education, societal standards and art, in the latter case frequently alongside hitherto repressed factors.

It is sometimes claimed that adopting European standards of structure and tonality by non-European composers in what is termed 'art music' runs counter to their ancestral ethos, but such cross-culturalisation facilitates engagement with structures and styles with which otherwise composers would not readily have come into contact. Despite the present-day internationalism of music, artists cannot wholly rid themselves of their ethnicity; nor, one might feel, should they: finely-drawn, that almost indefinable strain remains, nonetheless, in the constantly-changing languages of musical art.

In African musical ethnicity, the rise of jazz in the United States in the early 20th Century best exemplified the global impact of black culture, riding on the waves of broadcasting, gramophone records, sound-on-film and air travel. Musical internationalism received an equally significant boost after the Second World War - popular music from literally across the world - yet the rise of 1960s urban pop, alongside struggles for human rights and the emerging freedoms of African nations, tended to overshadow African composers who turned to European models in creating art music. Our three programmes today contain music by black composers from over 300 years, who - as with all true creative artists - have taken whatever they needed from whatever source. As in all branches of art, it is ultimately not a racial question, but one of merit.

11.30am

**Tunde Jegede** kora

**Intercultural Music Initiative IMI Artists**

**Titus Underwood** oboe

**Ebonee Thomas** flute

**Artina McCain** piano

### **Kora Solo Recital**

Moon Waters (2020)

*Reminiscence • Reflections • Shuna •*

*Moon Water • Breath of Kin • By the Will*

### **African Art Music for Woodwind**

**JH Kwabena Nketia** (1921-2019)

Atwimu (1946) *arranged by Fred Onovwerosuoke*

Dagarti Work Song (1961) *arranged by Fred Onovwerosuoke*

**Gamal Abdel-Rahim** (1924-1988)

The Lotus Pond for flute and piano (1973)

**Fred Onovwerosuoke** (b.1960)

6 Sketches for oboes and piano

*Exhortation • Earth in Balance • Rooster Dance •*

*Tethering Fogs • Storm at High Noon • Epilogue*

## Kora Solo Recital

Born in England to Nigerian-Irish parentage, the music of **Tunde Jegede** reflects his very varied background as classical cellist, singer-songwriter, recording producer, pop and contemporary classical composer. Emphasizing his father's West African musical tradition, the multi-disciplined Jegede is also an accomplished and greatly-admired kora (harp-lute) player – an instrument he learned as a child in Africa. During recent years, Tunde Jegede has been Artistic Director of the MUSON Centre, one of West Africa's few music conservatoires specialising in classical music. Our first programme begins as he plays music from his recent evocative album *Moon Waters* - reaching across to metaphysical inspiration in its contemplative fundamental expression.

## African Art Music for Woodwind

The long-lived Ghanaian composer and ethnomusicologist **JH Kwabena Nketia** was arguably the 20th Century's most significant authority on African music. Government scholarships led him to the University of London, with later studies at the Trinity College of Music: a Rockefeller grant for Columbia University (as a pupil of Henry Cowell) and the Juilliard School followed. His achievements were many and world-wide – lecturer in music at Harvard, Brisbane and Beijing, professorships at UCLA, Pittsburgh, London, Kansas and Ghana – a true giant of global ethnomusicology.

Nketia's music refracts African folk themes and idioms through traditional musical nomenclature. *Atwimu* was written in 1946 before Nketia left Ghana; it exemplifies the country's heartland region through an essential triple pulse, occasionally duple, eventually anchored to a deep E flat tonality.

*Dagarti Work Song* (1961) has geographical connections through the Dagara people, whose habitation adjoins the northern Ghana, Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast borders. This music reflects more traditionally masculine rhythmic expression than *Atwimu* – day-long physical effort, a haunting refrain – a vivid musical picture of African life. These famous pieces are heard here in transcriptions by Fred Onovwerosuoke, one of the greatly significant figures in African art music today.

Born in Cairo to musical parentage, **Gamal Abdel-Rahim** continued his studies in Heidelberg, then in Freiburg under Harald Genzmer before returning to Cairo University as Lecturer in Music, later becoming Head of Composition. The most significant and widely-praised Egyptian composer of his day, combining ethnic melodic phraseology within European structures, Abdel-Rahim left an extensive output. He was admired for his Flute Concerto, the second movement - *The Lotus Pond* - achieving wide success as an independent piece.

Senior amongst contemporary African composers is **Fred Onovwerosuoke**, who was born in 1960 in Sekondi-Takoradi, Ghana, to Nigerian parents from the Igbo tribe. He grew up in Ghana and Nigeria before leaving for the United States on an American scholarship to study theory and composition at Principia College, Elmhurst, Illinois. He is now an American citizen, and his career has ranged into areas other than composition. Although by far better-known as a successful composer, Onovwerosuoke has been the recipient of a number of significant national and regional American awards, his music exhibiting a wide range of characteristic influences from Africa itself and also from Cuba and the Caribbean as well as the southern states of the USA. Fred Onovwerosuoke is doubtless best known internationally from the use of his haunting chant 'Bolingbo' in the 2006 Robert de Niro film *The Good Shepherd*.

Onovwerosuoke's music naturally reflects singular ethnic influences, and his notable output has tended to concentrate more upon chamber music than orchestral or theatrical work, although his melodic inspiration ranges across a widely differing strands from across the continents of Africa and North America. His *6 Sketches* for oboes (oboe, oboe d'amore, English horn) and piano call for just one wind player for each movement, the titles giving a good indication of the character of the individual pieces – a truly delightful suite, a test of the player's instrumental versatility.

3.00pm

**Njabulo Madlala** baritone

**William Vann** piano

**Braimah Kanneh-Mason** violin

**Jeneba Kanneh-Mason** piano

**Benjamin Tyamzashe** (1890-1978)

**Mzilikazi Khumalo** (1932-2021)

**Traditional**

**Trad/South African**

**Trad/South African**

**Trad/South African**

**Trad/South African**

**Trad/South African**

**Joseph Bologne** (1745-1799)

**Samuel Coleridge-Taylor** (1875-1912)

### **The South African Songbook**

Isithandwa Sam (1917)

Princess Magogo (2002)

*Uyephi na • Wangethwes'itshe'khanda Dlothovu • Amahubo 91 • Sengiyeza*

Umlolozelo

Lakutahoni Langa *arranged by Mackay Davashe*

Thula Gugu Lami

Thula S'thandwa Sami

Malaika *arranged by Fadhili William*

Thula mama...Thula Sana

### **Music by Composers from the African Diaspora**

Violin Sonata in G minor Op. 1a No. 3 (c.1770)

*I. Allegro • II. Rondo gracioso*

Violin Sonata Op. 28 (?1898)

*I. Allegro ma non tanto • II. Larghetto • III. Allegro vivo con fuoco*

## The South African Songbook

'Isithandwa Sam' ('My Beloved') is one of the most well-known and consistently popular of all South African songs. Originally composed by **Benjamin Tyamzashe** just over a hundred years ago, it has been said to reflect a stylisation of Restoration musical language from a genuinely African standpoint. This last feature is more pronounced towards the end, where a gentle cross-rhythm, almost unwittingly, betrays the composer's African ethnicity in this hauntingly original composition.

The South African musician and professor of African languages **Mzilikazi Khumalo**, who died last year, two days after his 89th birthday, was a much-admired composer who was also professor emeritus of African languages at the University of the Witwatersrand. Born in Natal in 1932 and educated in Hlabisa and Mamelodi before gaining a PhD from the Johannesburg University of the Witwatersrand, in 1986 Khumalo completed a cantata for the enthronement of Archbishop Desmond Tutu. He was later commissioned by Opera Africa for the opera *Princess Magogo* (2002), on the legendary Zulu princess, musician and poet (1900-1984), who married Chief Mathole Buthelezi - the first opera setting the Zulu language.

The subsequent group of traditional African songs exhibits phraseology and expression familiar to followers of the Continent's folk art - the essence of traditional sung African music.

## Music by Composers from the African Diaspora

**Joseph Bologne**, later the Chevalier de Saint-Georges (1745-1799), was the most significant and best-known musician in Europe of Afro-Caribbean heritage in the latter half of the 18th Century. His father was a wealthy Frenchman, living in Guadeloupe, where Saint-Georges was born. When little more than a child, Joseph accompanied his father on the latter's return to Paris, where the boy's intelligence, handsome appearance, growing physical prowess and natural musical gifts led to him studying music and becoming an accomplished violinist and composer. His output included seven operas and ten Violin Concertos among a number of other significant works. Saint-Georges was also a notable harpsichordist; his original compositions were much admired by Leclair and Gossec, and he also became a sought-after teacher of music - amongst other positions he was appointed Music Director to Marie Antoinette.

Perhaps most astonishing of all, as the Chevalier de Saint-Georges, he was also widely-known as a champion boxer and swordsman - his pugilism and fencing skills earning him accolades far outside the realm of music. And as if those activities were not enough for one man, he was also appointed Colonel of the French Army's Negro Regiment (as commandant of over 1,000 men) in Paris, where he served in that post for three years.

However, as a creative musician, Saint-Georges's three Sonatas for Harpsichord or Fortepiano and Violin were published as his Op. 1a by Le Duc in 1781. As they appear to reflect established forms of somewhat earlier 18th-century models, their composition most probably dates from around 1770. Nonetheless, Saint-Georges's contemporaneous stylisations stretch the expected structures subtly in various ways - very occasionally, his music seems to look as far forward as early Beethoven.

Despite the custom of such works being catalogued as keyboard Sonatas with violin accompaniment, in the first movement of Saint-Georges's Sonata Op. 1a No. 3 the violin is less an 'accompaniment', contributing a freer role, weaving easefully across major and minor modes. This sturdy *Allegro* in G minor possesses a delightful B flat modulation; the second movement's title, *Rondeau gracioso*, is all we need to know as this elegant work proceeds to its conclusion.

No dispassionate musician can fail to appreciate **Samuel Coleridge-Taylor**'s magnificent Violin Sonata in D minor, published as his Op. 28 in 1917. Tragically, the composer had died in 1912 aged 37 in south London, where he had been born to mixed-race parentage.

Coleridge-Taylor enjoyed unparalleled success in the first decade of the century. Visiting America three times, dubbed 'the African Mahler', he was one of the first Black people to be received by an American President at the White House. Coleridge-Taylor's trilogy of *Hiawatha* cantatas enjoyed transatlantic success, but the score and parts of his Violin Concerto were on the *Titanic*, considerably delaying its American premiere (copies were retained in London). Three years younger than Ralph Vaughan Williams, Coleridge-Taylor - had he enjoyed a similar life-span - would have lived into the 1960s, a profound Afro-Anglo exemplar of musical art. There is no knowing what he could have achieved: it may well have been hugely significant.

Coleridge-Taylor was a violinist and gifted pianist; the Sonata throughout is wonderfully written for both instruments, and would have surely impressed both Brahms and Reger. It begins with eight bars for unaccompanied violin: we do not know it yet, but this is the material on which the entire work is based - an apparently simple rising phrase, encompassing a third, the growth of which throughout is fully organic. The idea is taken up by the piano before embarking on developmental passages of varying tonalities - each a third apart: B flat, D major, F, A minor - this last the dominant of D minor, in which 'home' key the music ends.

The central *Larghetto* lowers the emotion, a gentle study yet capable of deep development, before the finale, *Allegro vivo con fuoco*, reveals the power of this original composer in continuous variation of rhythm, tonality and melody until a quasi-*Reminiscenza* coda brings the hushed conclusion.

7.30pm

**Leon Bosch** double bass

**Rebeca Omordia** piano

**Glen Inanga** piano

**Victoria Oruwari** soprano

**Richard Olatunde Baker** percussion

**Tunde Jegede** kora

**NOK Ensemble**

### **African Pianism: Piano Music by African Composers**

**Ayo Bankole** (1935-1976)

Variations for little Ayo

Egun Variations

**JH Kwabena Nketia** (1921-2019)

Volta Fantasy (1967)

**Fred Onovwerosuoke** (b.1960)

24 Studies in African Rhythms

*Study No. 8 'Ayevwiomo Dance 1' •*

*Study No. 11 'Ayevwiomo Dance 3' • Study No. 18 'Pende' •*

*Study No. 23 'Sanza' • Study No. 24 'Raging River Dance 2'*

**Akin Euba** (1935-2020)

Ore Meta for piano and percussion

**Nabil Benabdeljalil** (b.1972)

En attente du printemps

### **The South African Double Bass**

**Allan Stephenson** (1949-2021)

Some Thoughts on African Beer for solo double bass (2000)

**Grant McLachlan** (b.1956)

Sonatina for double bass and piano (2016)

*I. Abdi • II. Nocturne • III. Fugue*

Interval

### **Nigerian Odyssey**

**Akin Euba**

Wakar Duru No. 2

**Bode Omojola**

Ilesanmi

**Joshua Uzoigwe** (1946-2005)

Ukom from *Talking Drums*

**Akin Euba**

Ore Meta from *6 Yoruba Songs*

**Laz Ekwueme** (b.1936)

Oge (Time)

Mgboye (Dirge)

**SK Oretimehin** (b.1980)

Apata (Rock)

Omi (Water)

**Trad/Kalabari**

Ibike *arranged by Babatunde Sosan*

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**Tunde Jegede** (b.1972)

Let the Elements Sing and Dance

Invocation

Mirrors of Memory

## African Pianism: Piano Music by African Composers

**Ayo Bankole** is a tragic figure in African art music following his murder (and that of his wife) aged 41. Despite this tragedy, he left several large-scale piano works, fusing European structures with folk elements; his shorter pieces include *Variations for little Ayo* - 'Little Ayo', the composer's son, now also a successful composer.

Bankole senior trained various choirs; his *Egun Variations*, on an Egun song, *Tona Nowe*, fluently melds a broadly-based Nigerian musical language within a G major tonal structure.

Born in Mampong, Ghana in 1921, **JH Kwabena Nketia** studied in London and America and held professorships in America, Britain and Ghana, becoming one of the last century's chief authorities on African music. Nketia's music frequently places African themes within European forms, as in *Volta Fantasy*, on African dances from Ghana's Volta region, utilising ancient war dances - *Agbadza* ('All dance') - in adumbrated sonata form.

**Fred Onovwerosuoke** spent his childhood and college years in Ghana and Nigeria, where he ran musical workshops and became involved with choral music, before moving to America in 1990 to study composition and music theory, as well as engineering and computer programming. His *24 Studies in African Rhythms* share influences through strands from across Africa. He says, regarding *Ayevwiomo* ('Birth'): "'events" of that "first night" often inspire communal dancing and more celebration! Mastering these various pieces enables the pianist to appreciate a wide variety of African music.' Christopher Morley found Onovwerosuoke's studies '...rhythmically exhilarating, surprisingly western influenced, [with] Chopinesque melodies and textures. *Raging River Dance 2* could have been composed by Bartók.'

Innovator of African Pianism, Nigerian-born **Akin Euba** lectured and published widely on musical inter-culturalism. His concept, *African Pianism*, refers to similarities between the piano and Nigerian traditional instruments, using the piano to express traditional Nigerian features. In his original cycle, Euba arranged for piano several of Nigeria's popular Yoruba songs, among them *Ore Meta* ('Three Years').

**Nabil Benabdeljalil** is the most significant concert composer Morocco has produced. His series of piano *Nocturnes* encapsulates admirably his developmental stylisations. He wrote of *En attente du printemps* (Waiting for spring): 'This began as one of my earliest compositions. Written in Kiev, it was reimagined for the Zakharif ensemble - including piano, saxophone, Ūd and percussion. This version for piano and Târ was realized recently.'

## The South African Double Bass

**Allan Stephenson** emigrated from Cheshire to Cape Town in 1973, becoming one of the city's highly regarded musicians. Prolific composer, conductor and cellist, he directed Cape Town's University Orchestra, additionally lecturing in cello and composition.

Stephenson composed one act of the *Mandela Trilogy* opera, documenting the three stages of Nelson Mandela's life. Other works included three operas, two symphonies and concertos for Piano, Oboe and Piccolo. He also ran the chamber ensemble I Musicanti, and amongst his lighter-veined works is *Some Thoughts on African Beer*, composed for Leon Bosch - the title implying everything listeners need to know!

The significant South African composer **Grant McLachlan** holds degrees from Magdalen College, Oxford and King's College, London, alongside a film music degree from Bournemouth University. He studied with pianist Lise-Martine Jeanneret and composition with Jeremy Dale Roberts. Returning to South Africa in 1994, amongst his recent chamber music is a *Sonatina* (2016) for double bass and piano, composed for Leon Bosch, who premièred it in Cape Town.

The composer has said the opening of *Abdi* comes from music for a documentary about a Somalian wildlife filmmaker. Inspired by music of Zimbabwe and Zambia, the opening, featuring irregular 9/8 pulse, utilises gently-paced cyclical movement. Solo double bass begins the *Nocturne*; the piano counters with dissonant tension, albeit resolving pivotally on G major. A simple melody forms the central section before a variation of the cyclical pattern prefaces the quiet ending. The *Fugue* dissipates, preceding a reprisal of material from earlier movements before ending, stridently restating the *Sonatina's* opening theme.

## Nigerian Odyssey

This journey through Nigerian music includes works by greatly-admired composer and musicologist **Bode Omojola**, composer, scholar and actor **Laz Ekwueme** and the ethnomusicologist **Joshua Uzoigwe**, one of Nigeria's most important composers, in a compendium of works for piano and voice. Songs will be introduced from the stage, to give context and tell the tale behind the texts.

In full circle, we return to the music of **Tunde Jegede** to round off the day.

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