

Igor STRAVINSKY (1882-1971)
 Alfred SCHNITTKÉ (1934-1998)
 Dmitri SMIRNOV (b.1948)

Bozidar Vukotic *cello* • Alissa Firsova *piano*

STRAVINSKY

Suite Italienne for cello and piano

[16:36]

- | | | |
|---|----------------------|------|
| 1 | 1. Introduzione | 2:06 |
| 2 | 2. Serenata | 3:15 |
| 3 | 3. Aria | 4:42 |
| 4 | 4. Tarantella | 2:17 |
| 5 | 5. Minuetto e Finale | 4:13 |

SCHNITTKÉ

Sonata No. 1 for cello and piano

[18:04]

- | | | |
|---|-----------|------|
| 6 | 1. Largo | 3:40 |
| 7 | 2. Presto | 5:48 |
| 8 | 3. Largo | 8:34 |

Sonata No. 2 (Quasi una Sonata)

[14:14]

- | | | |
|----|----------------|------|
| 9 | 1. Senza tempo | 2:47 |
| 10 | 2. Allegro | 4:08 |

- | | | |
|----|------------|------|
| 11 | 3. Largo | 3:26 |
| 12 | 4. Allegro | 2:00 |
| 13 | 5. Lento | 1:51 |

SMIRNOV

14 Tiriél, Op. 41c*

9:30

SCHNITTKÉ

Musica nostalgica for cello and piano

arr. M. Rostropovich

- | | | |
|----|----------------------|------|
| 15 | In tempo di Menuetto | 3:14 |
|----|----------------------|------|

Total duration 61:40

*First recording

Recorded at the Menuhin Hall on 9 & 10 February 2019

Recording Producer: Siva Oke

Recording Engineer: Paul Arden-Taylor

Front cover: *Le Coq d'Or*: Set Design for Act I by Natalia Goncharova (1881-1962). Private collection. Bridgeman Images.

Design: Andrew Giles

Booklet Editor: Michael Quinn

© & © 2020 SOMM RECORDINGS • THAMES DITTON • SURREY • ENGLAND
 Made in the EU



Igor STRAVINSKY • Alfred SCHNITTKÉ • Dmitri SMIRNOV*

*First recording

Bozidar Vukotic *cello* • Alissa Firsova *piano*

This programme brings together 20th-century works for cello and piano by Russian composers Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971), Alfred Schnittke (1934-98) and Dmitri Smirnov (b.1948). Migration was a common experience for all three composers, and among the works here, only Schnittke's First Cello Sonata and Smirnov's *Tiriel* were composed in Soviet Russia, with Smirnov's work later revised after he settled in the UK. The diversity of stylistic approaches in Russian music is also demonstrated, with the Modernism of Schnittke's Second Cello Sonata contrasting the Romantic lyricism of his First and of Smirnov's *Tiriel*, as well as the Neo-classicism of Stravinsky's *Suite Italienne* and Schnittke's *Musica Nostalgica*. The works also document strong personal connections with the Russian school of cello playing, with music dedicated to some of the greatest Russian cellists of the 20th century – Gregor Piatigorsky, Natalia Gutman and Mstislav Rostropovich.

Stravinsky's *Suite Italienne* from 1933 is an arrangement of movements from his 1919 ballet *Pulcinella*, itself a reworking of Italian music of the 18th century. When the ballet was written all of the sources were thought to be by Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (1710-36), but several works are now thought to be by other composers of the period. The ballet's story is also derived from 18th-century sources, albeit based on earlier *commedia dell'arte* traditions from which the lead character of Pulcinella is taken. Stravinsky's score includes three solo voices, and the bass has a particularly prominent role, imitating the *basso buffo* lead characters in comic opera of the Baroque era.

By the mid 1920s, Stravinsky was touring widely as a pianist and made several arrangements of music from *Pulcinella* for performance with string soloists. In 1925, he arranged a *Suite for Violin and Piano, after themes, fragments and pieces by*

Giambattista Pergolesi to perform with the violinist Paul Kochanski. Then, in 1932, he created *Suite Italienne*, a new arrangement for violin and piano, for performance with Samuel Dushkin. Soon afterwards, he returned to the music again, writing a new version of *Suite Italienne*, this time for cello and piano, the cello part written in collaboration with Gregor Piatigorsky. The theatrical origins of the work are evident from the imposing, if slightly self-important, 'Introduzione'. The solo cello is particularly effective in recreating the *basso buffo* voice of the ballet, especially in the 'Serenata' second movement, derived from Pergolesi's comic opera *Flaminio* (1735), and the 'Aria' that follows from a bass solo in the ballet. Piatigorsky's contributions are evident from the virtuosity of the cello part, especially in the vibrant 'Tarantella' and the equally spirited 'Minuetto e Finale' with which the work concludes.

Alfred Schnittke composed his **First Cello Sonata** in 1978. The work was commissioned by the Vienna-based music publisher Universal Edition and dedicated to the cellist Natalia Gutman. Much of Schnittke's music of the 1970s employs what the composer described as "polystylism", featuring audacious juxtapositions of contrasting styles and genres. But the First Cello Sonata is a more intimate work, the style more unified and Romantic. In 1972, Schnittke's mother died unexpectedly and the First Cello Sonata was one of several pieces he composed in the following years that have a sombre and reflective character. The Sonata shares many technical features with Schnittke's Third Violin Concerto, a similarly confessional and inward-looking work, written immediately before.

Like the Third Violin Concerto, the Sonata is in three movements, connected *attacca* (i.e. played without pauses between each). The first is brief and slow, the second a frenetic, diabolical scherzo, and the third an expansive rondo longer than the

first two movements combined. The work opens with a plaintive, unaccompanied cello solo. The piano eventually enters with a horn-call motif, a Mahlerian signal of distance and loss. The second movement plays out as a *perpetuum mobile* reminiscent of mechanistic scherzos by Shostakovich. The main theme here uses a phase shift process, where phrases of different lengths are played together and gradually move out of synch. The cello's continuous semiquavers repeat in a 13-bar pattern while the piano interjections beneath repeat in a 16-bar cycle. The movement builds inexorably to an intense climax culminating in a huge bass cluster. The coda is a hammering repeated figure on the top four notes of the piano, picking out overtones from the fading resonance of the cluster beneath.

Schnittke wrote that the second movement's "frenzied course... finally runs dead. After it comes the slow, reflective finale". The final movement is interspersed with quotes from the first two movements: the first-movement horn call and, later, the *perpetuum mobile* of the second, now a gentle rippling in the piano's upper register. Schnittke described this muted climax as a "faint shadow of the *presto* vortex". The reminiscence continues into the coda, with the final bars a ghostly echo of the incessant ostinato that closed the second movement, then *ffff*, now *ppp*.

By 1994, the year of Schnittke's **Second Cello Sonata**, the composer's style and approach had changed considerably. He suffered a stroke in 1985, and another in 1991, and although he continued to write prolifically after each his music became more ascetic with fewer notes and less complex textures. As a result, the Second Sonata is more austere and plaintive than the First, with only a skeletal piano accompaniment giving the cello an even more prominent role.

The Sonata is in five movements – *Senza tempo, Allegro, Largo, Allegro, Lento* – the tempo indications suggesting an arch form. The first movement is made up of gradually expanding phrases in the cello, all growing out of bell-like repeating low Cs in the piano. In the second movement, the piano plays a series of gradually expanding clusters while the cello plays a line based on expanding cells, the first with one note, the second with two, up to the last which has 12. The third movement is a lyrical *Largo* in which the piano plays a series of isolated and increasingly dissonant sonorities linked by a cello line made up wholly of notes from the piano chords. This approach is also followed in the faster fourth movement although the piano writing is more complex, creating rhythmic imitation and interplay with the cello. The fourth movement functions as a finale and the fifth an ethereal epilogue. Significantly, the final chord of the work is a cluster made up of the notes Bb, A, C, B – in German notation B-A-C-H, a musical monogram that Schnittke used extensively throughout his career.

Tiriel is one of many pieces by Dmitri Smirnov (father of Alissa Firsova) inspired by the work of William Blake (1757-1827), whose poetry has been a lifelong passion for the composer. Between 1983 and 1985 Smirnov created an opera entitled *Tiriel* based on Blake's narrative poem of the same name. The work presented here, a "Poem" for cello and piano (1984, revised 1993 as Op. 41c) was originally written for these forces and later arranged for chamber orchestra to form the Symphonic Prologue to the drama. Blake's poem is an apocalyptic parable, set at the dawn of human history. The blind king Tiriel curses his rebellious children, an act that ultimately condemns the whole of mankind. But the opera ends with a cradle song from the Goddess Mnetha, a gentle farewell to humanity. The Poem for cello

and piano reflects the spirit of this lullaby, its soothing lyrical lines evoking Blake's words: "Sleep, Sleep, beauty bright/Dreaming o'er the joys of night/Sleep, Sleep: in thy sleep/Little sorrows sit and weep".

Both Schnittke's Second Cello Sonata and his *Musica Nostalgica* (1992) were written at the behest of Mstislav Rostropovich. The great cellist had left Soviet Russia in 1974 and so had not experienced Schnittke's rapid rise to national prominence in the late 1970s. But in 1987, he heard Yuri Bashmet, a mutual friend, perform Schnittke's Viola Concerto and immediately wrote to the composer suggesting a series of commissions. The new friendship ultimately resulted in two operas, the Sixth Symphony, Second Cello Concerto, Second Cello Sonata and *Musica Nostalgica*.

Like Stravinsky's *Suite Italienne*, *Musica Nostalgica* went through a series of arrangements, first for violin and then for cello. In 1972, the violinist Mark Lubotsky suggested to Schnittke that he arrange some of his film music as a suite for violin and piano and the result was *Suite in the Old Style*, a series of Neoclassical vignettes with each movement fashioned into a Classical-era dance form. In 1976, Schnittke made an arrangement for two violins of the third movement from the Suite, Minuet, itself taken from his score to the comedy film *Sport, Sport, Sport* (1970). *Musica Nostalgica* (1992) is another arrangement of the Minuet movement, drawing on textures from both previous versions. The music here has a Mozartean character, but for the cello version Schnittke adds several innovative devices to showcase Rostropovich's virtuosity, including a passage in double-stopped glissandos, and a final statement of the theme in artificial harmonics.

Gavin Dixon © 2020



Alwyn & Carwithen Music for String Quartet

SOMMCD 0194

Tippett Quartet

"A compelling... musical argument played with bold incisiveness by the Tippett Quartet"

BBC Music Magazine ★★★★★



Stravinsky Music for Solo Piano/Piano and Orchestra

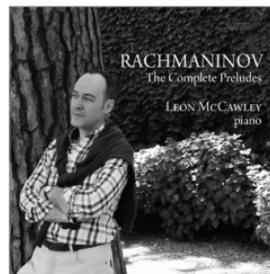
SOMMCD 266-2

Peter Donohoe

Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, David Atherton

"Peter Donohoe has a way with Russian music...
A splendid and engrossing issue"

International Piano Magazine



Rachmaninov Complete Preludes

SOMMCD 0143

Leon McCawley

"Leon McCawley is crisp and characterful...
scrupulously sensitive... This is a distinguished issue"

Gramophone

BOZIDAR VUKOTIC is the founder member of the Tippett Quartet, with whom he performs regularly at Kings Place, Wigmore Hall, Purcell Room, on BBC Radio 3 as well as playing at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, Royal Opera House, Bridgewater Hall, The Sage Gateshead and at the BBC Proms. He has recorded extensively with the quartet, to much critical acclaim, for EMI Classics, Decca, Naxos, Vivat, Signum, Guild, Dutton Epoque, SOMM Recordings, Boosey & Hawkes, Classic FM Records and Peter Gabriel's Real World Records, covering a diverse repertoire of Mendelssohn and Tchaikovsky through to the complete quartets of Tippett, Górecki, Panufnik, Lutosławski, Penderecki, Miklós Rózsa and Bernard Herrmann.



Photograph: Thurstan Redding

As a member of the Tippett Quartet he has worked with many of the UK's leading composers, including Peter Maxwell-Davies, Mark-Anthony Turnage, David Matthews, Anthony Payne, Hugh Wood and Simon Holt. He has also been a keen supporter of young and up-and-coming composers, most recently commissioning works by Alissa Firsova and Freya Waley-Cohen. He has toured throughout the UK, Europe, Far East, USA, Canada and Mexico.

His passion for contemporary music was largely inspired by the experience of working with Sir Michael Tippett as a member of the London School's Symphony Orchestra when they performed his Triple Concerto with members of the Nash Ensemble. It left such a profound impression on him that he named the quartet in tribute to the great composer.

Bozidar studied with Stefan Popov at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, where he was awarded the prestigious Premier Prix. He continued his studies with William Pleeth and completed his training with Alexander Kniazev in Moscow. He has been a prize-winner in the National Federation of Music Societies and Jeunesses Musicales International Cello competitions.

He was the principal cello of the Oxford Philomusica for 10 years and has been invited to play as guest principal with many of the UK's finest orchestras, including the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, English Chamber Orchestra, London Chamber Orchestra, the Royal Northern Sinfonia, Royal Ballet Sinfonia and Spain's Orquesta Sinfónica de Tenerife.

He is a professor at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music, is Head of Lower Strings at Junior Royal Academy of Music and also teaches at the Purcell School. He plays a Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume cello made in 1860.

 @Bozcello

Since winning the BBC Proms Young Composer competition in 2001, **ALISSA FIRSOVA** has received three world-premiere performances at the Proms: *Bach Allegro*, played by the RPO in 2010; *Bergen's Bonfire* in the Bergen Philharmonic's 250th anniversary Prom in 2015; and *Red Fox*, performed by the National Youth Choir of Great Britain and Southbank Sinfonia in 2019.

Her music has also been performed by Imogen Cooper, the Dante Quartet, Netherlands Blazer Ensemble, Seattle Chamber Players, English Chamber Orchestra, Camerata RCO (members of the Concertgebouw) and the Britten Sinfonia, among others. Alissa was recently invited to the Verbier, Asiago and Conques Festivals as pianist/composer-in-residence. Her music was recorded by Henning Kraggerud in his *Munch Suite* on Simax Classics and The Sixteen recorded her Stabat Mater for Coro, which was featured in *Gramophone's* Top 10 Compositions by Women.



Photograph: London Aliga Photography

As a pianist she gave her Wigmore Hall and BBC Proms debuts in 2009, has performed for numerous prominent venues and festivals since, and released her debut CD, *Russian Émigrés*, on Vivat in 2015. She has enjoyed collaborations with distinguished artists such as Stephen Kovacevich, Steven Isserlis, Roman Simovic, Julius Berger, Tim Hugh, Andrew Marriner and Daniel Rowland. Alissa enjoyed a triple debut with the English Chamber Orchestra as director, composer and conductor at London's Cadogan Hall in 2013. She also conducted the Camerata RCO in her *Le Soleil de Conques* at the Conques Festival in 2015 and for the Union Musicale series in Turin in 2016.

Alissa's composer portrait CD, *Firsova Fantasy*, which includes her string quartet *Tennyson Fantasy*, recorded by the Tippett Quartet, was awarded *Gramophone's* CD of the Month in September 2018. The same month, *Die Windsbraut* received its UK premiere by the BBC Philharmonic under Leo McFall, which was broadcast on BBC Radio 3 and will receive its Scottish premiere in March 2020 with the BBCSSO under Mark Wigglesworth. She was also invited to give a solo piano recital for the Amsterdam Piano Series at the Concertgebouw in October 2018, which included her transcription of Mahler's *Adagietto* and will be released on vinyl by Gutman Records.

Exciting plans in the 2018-19 season have included a US tour with the Camerata RCO and concerts in Paris, Geneva, Munich, Prague, Bratislava, the Luberon and London. In July 2019 she became the Artistic Director of the Lincolnshire International Chamber Music Festival.

alissafirsova.com

 [@alissafirsova](https://twitter.com/alissafirsova)