



Part of



University of
Nottingham
UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

ALINA IBRAGIMOVA, VIOLIN & STEVEN OSBORNE, PIANO

Thursday 6 February, 7.30pm
Djanogly Recital Hall

PROGRAMME

Fratres

Arvo Pärt

Sonata for Violin and Piano No.1 in F minor Op.80

Sergey Prokofiev

Interval

2 Pieces for Violin and Piano

Lili Boulanger

Sonata in A major for Violin and Piano

César Franck

Please ensure all mobile phones are switched off. Photographs and videos of the performance are not permitted.

There is a Sennheiser Infrared enhanced hearing system in the Djanogly Recital Hall; please request a headset from our front-of-house staff to enhance your enjoyment of this evening's concert.

Please ensure hearing aids are switched to the appropriate concert setting.

PROGRAMME NOTES

Fratres

Arvo Pärt (born 1935)

Arvo Pärt (pronounced 'pairt') was one of the first of a significant group of composers from the Baltic states to attract a major following in the West. Born in Paide, Estonia, he studied at the Conservatory in the capital, Tallinn. In spite of an early success with a cantata for children's chorus in 1962, his exploration of modernist compositional techniques brought increasing friction with the Soviet authorities. A growing interest in JS Bach influenced his own music, culminating in *Credo*, for chorus, piano and orchestra, of 1968. Denounced by the authorities for its openly Christian ethos, it also provoked a crisis in Pärt's own development, representing as it did an extreme point, from which he needed a change of creative direction.

He spent the next eight years or so building a new approach to composition virtually from scratch, learning – as he put it – “how to walk again as a composer.” Relying on work in films to earn a living, he set himself the task of writing a large number of exercises based on his study of mediaeval music, particularly plainsong. In 1976 he produced a short piano piece, *Für Alina*, in his new style, followed by a group of works that made his name internationally and remain among his most frequently performed, including *Cantus In Memoriam Benjamin Britten*, for strings and bell, and *Tabula Rasa* for two violins, strings and prepared piano (one with various objects inserted between the strings to modify the sound).

Fratres, one of his best-known works, was among the first to be composed in this new style. It was written originally in 1977, for the Estonian early music group Hortus Musicus. Since then, over thirty differently scored versions have appeared, some by Pärt himself, some by other musicians. The title, the Latin for 'brothers', suggests an affinity with monastic chanting.

In any of the versions, it shows Pärt's ability to create music of haunting beauty from very simple materials. A four-note phrase is gradually extended; it is turned upside-down and the process starts again, followed by a brief punctuating gesture. This whole sequence is then systematically repeated over and over again, each repetition at a lower pitch than the one before. What seems, on paper, to be no more than the working out of a strict process leaves an extraordinarily unforgettable effect out of all proportion to its slender means.

Violin Sonata No.1 in F minor, Op 80

Sergey Prokofiev (1891-1953)

1. *Andante assai*
2. *Allegro brusco*
3. *Andante*
4. *Allegroissimo*

Prokofiev's Violin Sonata No.1 was actually the second of his two to be completed. He began sketching it in 1938, but put it to one side in order to work on his opera *Semyon Kotko*, and it was not finished until 1946. By this time Prokofiev had left Moscow for the sake of his health, and settled in the village of Nikolina Gora, to the west of the city. David Oistrakh, to whom the sonata is dedicated, was among those invited to hear Prokofiev play it through; he later wrote “it made a powerful impression...for sheer beauty and depth nothing equal to it had been written for the violin for many a decade.” He gave the first performance, with the pianist Lev Oborin, in the Small Hall of the Moscow Conservatory on 23 October 1946.

During the intervening years Prokofiev had written the Flute Sonata which, with Oistrakh's collaboration, he turned into his Violin Sonata No.2. The two works could scarcely be more of a contrast. No.2 combines wistful geniality and high spirits, whereas No.1 is one of his most powerfully sombre works. He described the first movement as “severe in character and...a kind of extended introduction to the second movement”. The piano sets the tone with its dark opening theme, from which the violin struggles to take flight, like a trapped bird. Towards the end of the movement comes a passage with eerie scales marked *freddo* ('cold') for the violin, muted. Prokofiev told Oistrakh that this should sound “like the wind in a graveyard”.

The pounding rhythms and harsh, blunt energy of the second movement are tempered by its soaring, heroic second subject, and mollified by the cool, fragile beauty of the *Andante*, which Oistrakh played, together with the first movement, at Prokofiev's funeral.

To begin with, the finale bristles with exuberance and intricate rhythms. The impetuosity is briefly held in check by the lyrical second theme, but when it resumes it becomes more menacing, with recollections of the second movement, and the return of the unearthly scale-passage from the first. The final statement of the second theme, withdrawn and poignant, is one of those moments in which Prokofiev's sardonic ebullience is laid aside, and his innate lyricism takes on a brooding, tragic quality.

The Sonata won for Prokofiev his fifth Stalin Prize. This did not prevent him from being one of the composers singled out for attack (specifically aimed at his opera *War and Peace*), on the grounds of 'decadent', 'formalist' tendencies, in the official clampdown of 1948. Such was the see-saw nature of Soviet musical politics.

Nocturne; Cortège

Lili Boulanger (1893-1918)

Lili Boulanger achieved an astonishing amount in her tragically short life, which was dogged by illness following an attack of pneumonia at the age of three. She did not begin formal musical education until she was sixteen, but three years later she became the first woman to win the Paris Conservatoire's prestigious Prix de Rome, following such distinguished predecessors as Berlioz, Bizet and Debussy, and her own father, Ernest, who won in 1836. Her output consists mainly of songs, instrumental pieces and a small but impressive group of choral works.

She made alternative versions of a number of her instrumental pieces. *Nocturne* was composed in 1911, originally for flute and piano, with the title *Pièce Courte* (Short Piece), then adapted for violin; she also orchestrated the piano part. Its gentle character is established by the quietly insistent accompanying figures off-setting the violin's lyrical melodic line.

Cortège exists in two versions: for piano, and for violin and piano. It was written in June 1914, while Boulanger was studying at the Villa Medici in Rome (which Prix de Rome winners were required to do). The French word 'cortège' can mean any kind of procession, not necessarily a funeral one. This procession is full of carnival high spirits.

Violin Sonata in A

César Franck (1822-1890)

1. *Allegro ben moderato*
2. *Allegro*
3. *Recitativo-Fantasia. Ben moderato – molto lento*
4. *Allegretto poco mosso*

Up till the last decade or so of his life, Franck's work as a composer (though not his outstanding ability as a teacher) had, to a large extent, been taken up with church music, on the one hand, and, on the other, operatic projects for which he was wildly unsuited. In 1871, a group of musicians, led by Saint-Saëns, founded the *Société Nationale de Musique* to encourage a more serious attitude to music in general, and chamber music in particular, as a corrective to the perceived shallowness of Parisian taste, and a musical culture dominated by opera and ballet. Franck's association with the society prompted three major chamber works, beginning with his Piano Quintet of 1879, his first large-scale piece of chamber music since a group of piano trios written nearly forty years earlier. It was followed by his Violin Sonata, in 1886, and his String Quartet, three years later. All three works not only set out Franck's belief in the importance of chamber music, but also acted as both beacons to, and potent influences on, other composers.

The Violin Sonata was written as a wedding-present for the Belgian violinist Eugène Ysaÿe. As a friend and champion of many leading French composers, his participation guaranteed the work a particularly high profile. His determination to give it the best possible launch is illustrated by the story of his insistence on completing the first performance despite failing light in the auditorium.

The four movements are unified by the so-called 'cyclic' principle, in which themes from one movement return in others, often changing character, but still recognisable. Though the idea was explored by a number of earlier composers, including Berlioz, Schumann, and Liszt, it is particularly associated with Franck, and his Violin Sonata is a notable example of the technique in action.

The violin makes its haunting first entry with a tenderly rising and falling phrase which is the Sonata's main recurring theme. Out of it grow the first movement's poised melodic lines, the only real contrast coming from a more assertive idea for the piano. The music is marked by a kind of questing serenity, which becomes turbulent in the second movement. The violin's opening theme from the first movement here takes on a new shape, which will return at the end of the finale. Two quieter, slower passages intervene, but each time they are brushed aside as the impassioned tone takes over again.

The third movement owes something to Franck's love of JS Bach. The first section is freely rhapsodic, taking the piano's opening phrase from the first movement in a new direction, with hints of the violin's theme from that movement as well. The slower main section settles into a dialogue between two themes, one gently expressive, the other bold and declamatory; both of these will return in the finale.

The fourth movement itself, one of the most radiantly smiling pieces in all chamber music, is a rondo whose main theme is a two-part canon on a melody which is, again, derived from the first movement's opening idea. The piano usually takes the lead, echoed almost immediately by the violin. The music has a gently exhilarating feel, and the two new themes from the previous movement return to help urge it on to its ecstatic closing bars, in which it is easy to sense the elation of a composer who had at last found himself in the musical territory where he really belonged.

© Mike Wheeler, 2025

ALINA IBRAGIMOVA

Performing music from baroque to new commissions on both modern and period instruments, Alina Ibragimova is recognised for the "immediacy and honesty" (*The Guardian*) of her performances.

The 2024/25 season sees Alina perform with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Detroit Symphony, Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Bamberger Symphoniker, WDR Sinfonieorchester, Düsseldorfer Symphoniker, City of Birmingham Symphony and Swedish Chamber Orchestra, working with Vladimir Jurowski, Hannu Lintu, Anja Bihlmaier, Michael Sanderling, Iván Fischer and Krzysztof Urbanski. She also continues her partnership with pianist Cédric Tiberghien for recital tours of the United States, United Kingdom and Japan.

Over the last two seasons Alina has performed concertos with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Budapest Festival Orchestra, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, Pittsburgh Symphony, San Francisco Symphony, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Camerata Salzburg, Helsinki Philharmonic, working with Robin Ticciati, Ryan Bancroft, Maxim Emelyanychev and Daniel Harding. She was also artist-in-residence with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra and toured Europe with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and Kammerorchester Basel.

In recital, Alina regularly performs at London's Wigmore Hall, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, Berlin's Pierre Boulez Saal, Salzburg's Mozarteum, Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie and at the Royal Albert Hall where she performed Bach's Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin as part of the BBC Proms. Alongside her regular collaborations with pianist Cédric Tiberghien, Alina is a founding member of the Chiaroscuro Quartet – one of the most sought-after period ensembles.

Alina's discography ranges from Bach Concertos with Arcangelo through to Prokofiev Sonatas with Steven Osborne. Her 2020 recording of Shostakovich's Violin Concertos won a Gramophone Award, while her 2021 recording of Paganini's 24 Caprices topped the classical album charts on its release. Her most recent recording is Telemann's Fantasias for Solo Violin.

Born in Russia in 1985, Alina attended the Moscow Gnesin School, The Yehudi Menuhin School and Royal College of Music, studying with Natasha Boyarsky, Gordan Nikolitch and Christian Tetzlaff. An alumnus of the BBC New Generation Artists Scheme, Alina's many accolades include two Royal Philharmonic Society awards and an MBE in the 2016 New Year Honours List.

Alina performs on a c.1775 Anselmo Bellosio violin kindly provided by Georg von Opel.

STEVEN OSBORNE

Steven Osborne's musical insight and integrity underpin idiomatic interpretations of varied repertoire that have won him fans around the world. The extent of his range is demonstrated by his 41 recordings for Hyperion, which have earned numerous awards, and he was made OBE for his services to music in the Queen's New Year Honours in 2022.

A thoughtful and curious musician, he has served as Artist-in-Residence at Wigmore Hall and Bath International Music Festival, and is often invited to curate festivals, including at Antwerp's DeSingel, and for Antwerp Symphony Orchestra. The Observer described him as 'a player in absolute service to the composer'.

Osborne is a regular visitor to the BBC Proms, having performed there 15 times. In 2024 he gave two concerts in the same week, the first in Messiaen's *Turangalila-Symphonie* with the BBC Philharmonic under Nicholas Collon, with whom he performs it later in the season with Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra. He then performed Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* with the Sinfonia of London. He has a lifelong interest in jazz and often improvises in concerts, bringing this spontaneity and freedom to all his interpretations, and performing his own transcriptions as encores. This season he tours the US with a recital programme that includes his own jazz transcriptions and improvisations. Other performances in the 2024–25 season include Ryan Wigglesworth's Piano Concerto, with the composer conducting Tampere Philharmonic Orchestra, Britten with Deutsche Radio Philharmonie, Grieg with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, and a recital at the Aspen Festival. He also tours the US in a duo with violinist Benjamin Beilman.

Osborne has performed in the world's most prestigious venues, including the Wiener Konzerthaus, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Berlin Philharmonie, Hamburg Elbphilharmonie, Suntory Hall and Kennedy Center Washington, and is a regular guest at both Lincoln Center and Wigmore Hall. He has worked with major orchestras around the globe, most recently Czech Philharmonic/Bychkov, Israel Philharmonic/Petrenko, Dresden Philharmonic/Runnicles, Seattle Symphony and Philharmonia/Rouvali, Deutsches Symphonie Orchester Berlin, Oslo Philharmonic, London Symphony, Yomiuri Nippon Symphony and Seattle Symphony.

He has been a Hyperion recording artist since 1998, with releases spanning Beethoven, Schubert, Ravel, Liszt, Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Rachmaninov, Medtner, Messiaen, Britten, Tippett, Crumb and Feldman, and winning numerous awards around the world. His most recent addition, at the end of 2023, was Debussy's *Études* and *Pour le piano*, given five stars by *BBC Music Magazine* and described as 'full of superlatives'. In 2024 he returns to the studio with Paul Lewis to record two piano repertoire by Schubert, Schumann and Brahms.

Osborne was born in Scotland and studied at St Mary's Music School in Edinburgh and the Royal Northern College of Music. He is Visiting Professor at the Royal Academy of Music and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Patron of both the Scottish International Piano Competition and the Lammermuir Festival, and was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 2014.