

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

Voices from the East: Ukraine

Sunday 19 May 2024, 7.30pm | Royal Festival Hall

Classical music is an incredible, centuries-long story. As we at the Southbank Centre – alongside our Resident Orchestras and Resident Artists – share that story with the world today, we're creating as many ways for as many different people as possible to experience this wonderful art form.

Whether this is your first encounter with classical music or one of many, I'm absolutely thrilled that you're joining us for more powerful human experiences. Welcome to Classical Music: Spring/Summer 2024.

Toks Dada, Head of Classical Music, Southbank Centre

Repertoire

de Hartmann Selection from La Fleurette Rouge Suite	18'
Anna Korsun Terricone	12'
Lyatoshinsky Symphony No.4	29'

Performers

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra
Kirill Karabits *conductor*
Tom Service *presenter*

This performance lasts approximately 1 hour without an interval.

Thomas de Hartmann (1885–1956)

Selection from La Fleurette Rouge Suite

1. *Prelude*
2. *Scène et Valse*
7. *Grand adagio*
8. *Pizzicato*
9. *Hungarian Dance*

Today's three concerts celebrating the music of Eastern and former Soviet nations culminate closer to home, in Ukraine, birthplace of conductor and driving force behind *Voices from the East*, Kirill Karabits. It's a country with a rich musical heritage: both Prokofiev and Glière were born in Ukraine, for example, and Tchaikovsky had strong connections too.

The concert opens with a lesser-known but no less remarkable figure. Born in 1884 while Ukraine was part of the Russian Empire, Thomas de Hartmann studied with Russian luminaries Arensky, Taneyev and Rimsky-Korsakov, collaborated with painter Kandinsky and poet Rilke in Munich, and became a spiritual follower of Georgian mystic Gurdjieff, with whom he sought to create an 'objective music' that would guide the emotions and spirit of the listener, circumventing style and taste.

Accordingly, de Hartmann's music went through a number of drastic changes throughout the course of his career. What began in glittering colours and very Russian Romanticism early in his life, absorbed influences from 20th-century European modernism, Eastern ideas and even jazz as the composer's connections and experiences broadened.

La Fleurette Rouge (The Scarlet Flower) is a full-evening ballet, and one of the most ambitious scores that de Hartmann created. At its premiere in December 1907 in St Petersburg's Mariinsky Theatre – with a starry cast including Vaslav Nijinsky, Anna Pavlova and Michel Fokine, in front of an audience including Tsar Nicholas II – it went down a storm, and catapulted its composer to enormous fame inside Russia. (The Tsar was so impressed that he released de Hartmann from obligatory military service, allowing him to devote his time entirely to music.)

Voices from the East is a project with profound personal resonances for the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra's Chief Conductor Kirill Karabits, and one he feels deeply passionate about. Born in Kyiv, Karabits is the son of eminent Ukrainian composer Ivan Karabits, who himself maintained strong professional and personal relationships with many of the composers whose music is featured in today's concerts. 'I remember growing up in this musical environment,' Kirill Karabits explains, 'and that this music from the former Soviet republics was absolutely fascinating. But for many different geopolitical reasons, audiences probably have absolutely no idea about what's been happening musically in these countries. When I first came to the Orchestra in 2008, I felt strongly that they wanted me to propose a very personal project, and one I could take forward and develop over the coming years.' *Voices from the East* began the following year, and has since then travelled widely through countries and little-known repertoire across live performances and well-received recordings.

Also being performed today:

Voices from the East: Azerbaijan & Turkmenistan
1pm | Royal Festival Hall

Voices from the East: Georgia & Armenia
4pm | Royal Festival Hall

The ballet's storyline is based on a Russian folk tale, which is itself based on the more famous story of *Beauty and the Beast*. The nine-movement Suite that de Hartmann extracted from his opulent score allows us to sample key moments. A beguiling 'Prelude' leads us into an enchanted garden, whose flora sway to an elegant and distinctively Tchaikovskian 'Scène et Valse'. The 'Grand adagio' – with a prominent harp solo – is a duet for Angelika (the ballet's Beauty figure) and the eponymous Scarlet Flower. After a gentle 'Pizzicato' movement, de Hartmann closes with a colourful but delicate 'Hungarian Dance'.

Anna Korsun (b.1986)

Terricone

From de Hartmann's luscious Romantic evocations, we're catapulted back to the present day in tonight's next piece. Born in Donetsk and now based in Germany, Anna Korsun is a major figure in contemporary Ukrainian music as a composer, sound artist, soprano, keyboard player and teacher, often blending acoustic and electronic music in pioneering works that have asked instrumentalists to multitask across voice or percussion, or even use their mobile phones as part of performances.

Korsun has explained that she finds it difficult to discuss her music, pointing to the challenge of expressing musical ideas in purely verbal terms. She wrote *Terricone* to a commission from the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, which premiered the piece in January 2023. Its title refers to man-made mountains of waste generated by mining processes (we might more colloquially call them slag heaps), huge edifices that populate the landscape in Korsun's native Donbas area of Ukraine. The composer stresses, however, that the piece's music is not directly connected with the word or the concept it conveys, and that listeners should interpret the work in their own individual ways. *Terricone* is a piece to be experienced viscerally as much as listened to. Sounds of violence and destruction – perhaps industrial, perhaps more threatening – seem to populate the work, which begins noisily but slowly subsides into a bleak sonic landscape within which you might be able to detect snatches of birdsong.

'I hope we can widen listeners' vision of the music and the cultures we experience in concert halls. As a conductor, you constantly face the dilemma of directing standard concert repertoire, or exploring something interesting and fresh that has seldom been heard before. By performing this music, I hope we can remind people that we should all be curious about the things we do.'

Kirill Karabits

Boris Lyatoshinsky (1895–1968)

Symphony No.4

1 Andante sostenuto e maestoso

2 Lento tenebroso

3 Allegro molto risoluto

There's a personal connection between tonight's final composer and the conductor of this evening's concert. Boris Lyatoshinsky was a towering figure in Ukrainian music during the 20th century as both a composer and a teacher. Among his many prominent students at the Kyiv Conservatory during the 1970s was the young composer Ivan Karabits, later father of tonight's conductor Kirill.

Despite a weighty output that encompassed five symphonies, operas, many other orchestra works, plus piano, choral and chamber pieces, Lyatoshinsky's music is barely known to audiences today. That continuing neglect surely indicates the tragic effectiveness of Soviet censure and its long-term repercussions. Lyatoshinsky endured more persecution and interference than many of his contemporaries, leaving much of his music unheard and unrecognised. Nonetheless, he arguably never bent his style to conform to official Soviet dogma, seeming to endure the consequences of official disapproval as the price for pursuing his own distinctive ideas. And his music – in a similar way to that of de Hartmann, heard at the start of tonight's concert – followed a fascinating path from old-fashioned, Schumann- or Borodin-style Romanticism through Western-influenced modernism to a simpler, pared-back language that drew heavily on the traditional music and culture of Ukraine itself.

Lyatoshinsky's Fourth Symphony received huge acclaim at its Leningrad premiere in 1963, and even more adulation at its later Kyiv premiere. It was performed several times in the Ukrainian capital during subsequent concert seasons, and later conducted by the composer in a concert celebrating his 70th birthday in 1965. Lyatoshinsky's Fourth is also probably his most challenging, and most avant-garde symphony: it's a work that unapologetically demands commitment and attention from its listeners, but repays them with music of enormous power, intensity and insight.

A slow introduction kicks off Lyatoshinsky's dense opening movement, contrasting two starkly opposing ideas: a granitic chordal theme in the brass, followed by eerily quiet strings supporting a theme in the bass clarinet. That melody soon becomes the subject of rugged, angular counterpoint in the movement's faster main section, before the introduction's eerie figurations lead it to its unsettled conclusion.

Sepulchral sounds from the depths of the orchestra open the Symphony's atmospheric central movement, before a snare drum ushers in what seems like a cortège, and a prominent glockenspiel beckons us towards brighter material. The movement closes mysteriously to the sounds of bells, tolling tam-tam and a softly spoken harp.

Lyatoshinsky's final movement erupts with an urgent theme from the horns, though its music seems perpetually on the verge of winding down to stasis, only to crank up in energy and volume all over again. Its conclusion is suprisingly optimistic, and even the second movement's tolling bells making a gently radiant return.

Programme notes © David Kettle, 2024

Find out more

▶ Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra

▶ Kirill Karabits

▶ southbankcentre.co.uk