

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra December 8 programme complementary content

There's a fairytale feel to this charming programme of delights which marries the music of two lesser-known 20th Century Mittel European composers with a festive family favourite.

The concert also features the irresistible and joyful playing of accordion aficionado Ksenija Sidorova, who returns to the Liverpool Philharmonic stage for the first time since 2019.

This companion page draws together a range of complementary content that we hope will help shine further light on the pieces, the people who composed them and the performers bringing them to life here in Hope Street.

Elena Schwarz

Award-winning Swiss-Australian conductor Elena Schwarz returns to Liverpool Philharmonic Hall after conducting Saint-Saëns' *Organ Symphony* in February.

The 37-year-old is forging a reputation for her intellect, musical vision, insightful interpretations and emotional intelligence.

Schwarz was born in Lugano and grew up in the Italian-speaking area of Switzerland. She went on to study cello and musicology at the Geneva Conservatoire and University, before turning to conducting.

She is a champion of contemporary music and has held assistant roles with the Orchestre de Philharmonique Radio France and West Australian Symphony Orchestra, and the position of associate conductor at the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra.

In 2018/19 she was selected for the Los Angeles Philharmonic's Dudamel Fellowship programme and is in demand as a guest conductor of both orchestral and operatic works.

Recent engagements have included *Peer Gynt* at Opera de Lyon, and performances with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, Lucerne Festival Academy, CBSO and the Philharmonia Orchestra and Sheku Kanneh-Mason.

Ksenija Sidorova

Ksenija Sidorova proved herself a great favourite with Liverpool Philharmonic audiences when she appeared with the Orchestra in the Spirit of Christmas concerts in 2016 and for the world premiere of Claudia Montero's *Vientos del Sur* three years ago.

Now, the ebullient accordionist returns to Liverpool Philharmonic Hall to perform Václav Trojan's wonderful *Fairytales for Accordion and Orchestra*.

Sidorova was born in Riga and was encouraged to take up the accordion at the age of eight by her grandmother, who was steeped in the folk tradition.

After studying at home in Riga, she became a prize-winning undergraduate at the Royal Academy of Music under Owen Murray, subsequently receiving her master's degree with distinction.

In 2012 she won the International Award of the Bryn Terfel foundation and in 2015, she performed alongside Sting at Terfel's 50th birthday celebrations at the Royal Albert Hall.

György Ligeti

György Ligeti has been described as one of the most important avant-garde composers in the latter half of the 20th century.

Born into a Jewish family in Transylvania in 1923 (he was the great nephew of violinist Leopold Auer), Ligeti grew up in Hungary. During the war, he was sent to a forced labour brigade while his parents, brother, aunt and uncle were deported to concentration camps. Only his mother survived.

Ligeti studied at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music and later taught harmony and composition there, securing his post with the help of Zoltan Kodaly. He fled to the West during the 1956 Hungarian Uprising and settled first in Vienna and then in Germany.

He worked first at the Cologne School of Electronic Music and later in Stockholm, Hamburg and at Stanford University in California. He died in Vienna in 2006.

His *Concert Românesc* – or Romanian Concerto – inspired in part by music he had studied at Budapest's Folklore Institute, was composed in 1951. It wasn't officially premiered until 20 years later though.

Did you know? Ligeti's music features on the soundtrack of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* and the director's 1980 film, *The Shining*.

Václav Trojan

The son of a photographer, Czech composer Václav Trojan was born in Plzeň in 1907. At the age of 16, he joined the Prague Conservatory to study composition.

During the 1930s he was known predominantly as a composer and arranger of dance and jazz music, and from 1937 to 1945 he was a music director for Radio Prague.

After the war, Trojan concentrated on creating music for radio, film and stage. He became particularly connected with Czech puppet maker, illustrator and director Jiří Trnka, creating soundtracks for Trnka's popular animated puppet films including *The Emperor's Nightingale*, *Old Czech Legends* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

During his career Trojan won a number of awards, including the Czech National Prize for his children's opera *Kolotoč*.

Fairytales for Accordion and Orchestra dates from 1959.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

In 1816, German author, composer and artist Ernst Hoffmann wrote a short story called *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*.

Hoffmann's fairytale was adapted into a novel by Alexandre Dumas, published in 1844, and later – in the 1850s – the story inspired composer and pianist Carl Reinecke to create a series of musical pieces.

Four decades on and enter, stage left, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky.

Tchaikovsky had composed the first of what would become three of the world's most popular ballets, *Swan Lake*, in 1875, following it with *The Sleeping Beauty* in 1889.

Ivan Vsevolozhsky – the director of the Imperial Theatres – was keen to capitalise on the success of the second ballet and commissioned the 50-year-old Tchaikovsky to compose music for both an opera (*Iolanta*) and a new dance piece.

The source material Vsevolozhsky chose for the ballet was Hoffmann's fairytale, and Marius Petipa – with whom the composer had worked on *The Sleeping Beauty* – was enlisted to choreograph the new work.

Tchaikovsky began work on the score in February 1891, taking it to America with him that summer, and *The Nutcracker* was premiered at St Petersburg's Mariinsky Theatre in December 1892. It received less than rave reviews (the Sugar Plum Fairy was described, unkindly, as podgy), and within 12 months Tchaikovsky was dead, so he never saw the sweet success *The Nutcracker* would enjoy.

About the Music

György Ligeti (1923-2006): Concerto Românesc

1. Andantino
2. Allegro vivace
3. Adagio ma non troppo
4. Molto vivace

Composed: 1951

First Performed: 21 August 1971, Peninsula Music Festival, Wisconsin, Festival Orchestra, cond. Thor Johnson

When György Ligeti wrote his *Concerto Românesc* in 1951, he was still living in Hungary, where he was finding the prevailing musical and political conditions increasingly hard to bear. Since the notorious 1948 Soviet Composers' Union proclamation, composers all across the Soviet Bloc were expected to renounce 'anti-people' modernism and any kind of intellectualism (labelled 'formalism'), and focus their attention on writing music that would speak directly to the people. Highly adventurous by nature, Ligeti decided to play reasonably safe and emulate his great Hungarian forbear Béla Bartók, who had formed a radical musical style precisely by going 'back to the people' – collecting examples of the richly diverse and colourful folk music of Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Ligeti went out into neighbouring Romania (where he'd been born) and recorded folk musicians, transforming their extraordinarily vibrant, 'uncultivated' rhythms, harmonies and scales into a style that sounded anything but traditional – listeners with sharp ears will notice the strange-sounding 'natural' tuning of the horns at several stages in this work. The Communist authorities were decidedly unimpressed however, and the *Concerto* was banned – it wasn't heard in public until 1971, long after Ligeti had fled to the West. Listening to this brilliant, colourful, at times strangely atmospheric music, one can only wonder at what tin ears those Hungarian officials must have had. Yes, *Concerto Românesc* can be cheeky and deliciously eccentric, but in the end the energy and sheer fun of the writing carries everything – right through to the ever-so-slightly surprising ending.

Václav Trojan (1907-83): *Fairytales for accordion and orchestra*

1. Let's dance into Fairy Tales
2. The Sleepy Princess
3. The Magic Box
4. Enchanted Princess, Brave Princess and Evil Dragon
5. The Naughty Roundabout
6. The Sailor and the Enchanted Accordion
7. Acrobatic Fairy Tale

Composed: 1946

First Performed: 7 December 1947, Czech Radio Broadcast, Symphony Orchestra FOK, cond. Zbyněk Vostřák

While younger audience members whet their appetites for the musical banquet spread out in Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker*, older listeners might want to think back to their childhoods – particularly those of you who grew up in the 1960s and 70s. Children's TV in those days was full of cartoons and animations from then-Soviet Eastern Europe. If you saw some of these, chances are you heard music by the Czech composer Václav Trojan. Trojan was very successful as a film-composer, both for children and for adults. His best-known concert piece, *Fairytales*, is full of echoes of his work for children, but it's definitely the kind of music 'young at heart' adults can enjoy too. Effectively, it's a concerto for accordion and a colourful orchestra (including piano, harp, celesta and a large percussion group) in seven very short, linked movements. You can try following the storylines if you wish – the accordion's 'Evil Dragon' impersonation in the fourth movement and the pranks of the 'Naughty Roundabout' are easy to make out – but *Fairytales* can also simply be enjoyed as a magical musical sequence. You could try making up your own stories to it – the music's delightfully suggestive. Sometimes the best animations are in one's own mind.

Pyotr Tchaikovsky (1840-93): *The Nutcracker, Act II*

Composed: 1892

First Performed: 17 December 1892, Mariinsky Theatre, St Petersburg

Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* is such glorious evocation of a child's ideal Christmas, so generously tuneful and so exquisitely magical in its array of colouristic effects, that one imagines it must have been pure joy to compose. Far from it: Tchaikovsky did a lot of grumbling during the two years (1891-2) he was working on it. Things started badly: when the idea of creating a ballet based on E.T.A. Hoffmann's fairy-tale Christmas story was proposed to him by the Imperial Theatre in St Petersburg, Tchaikovsky's reply was tart. Whatever he thought of Hoffmann's story, he didn't like the drastically pared down version of it prepared for him by the ballet director, Marius Petipa. Even when he'd squared himself to tackling the project seriously, Tchaikovsky was still grumbling about it in letters to his brother:

'I am working extremely hard and am beginning to reconcile myself to the subject of the ballet.'

Yet, as so often with Tchaikovsky, irritation was the grit in the oyster that produced the pearl. And what a pearl it is! Although the first production wasn't a success, most agreed that the problems were on the stage, not in the music. When the much-loved *Nutcracker Suite* (based on excerpts from the ballet score) was heard, also in 1892, it was a triumph, and it has remained so ever since, not least because of the prominent part it plays in the famous Walt Disney animation *Fantasia*. When it comes to the story of the ballet, much less 'happens' in Act II: little Clara has already rescued the Nutcracker Prince from the evil Mouse King and is now rewarded with a fabulous array of edible goodies in the Land of Sweets. Most of the *Nutcracker Suite* was taken from Act II, so many audience members will recognise some of the musical treats. What's marvellous about hearing them in context, is to hear how they combine to form a constantly evolving set of musical tableaux, up to the point where Clara is finally taken home in a reindeer sleigh – with her head full of memories, and apparently no damage whatever to her digestive system. If only all Christmasses were like that!