

Concert Highlights

August-September 2010



Jonathan Biss is at the Edinburgh Festival (14 Aug) and Wigmore (4 Oct)



Lars Vogt plays the Grieg Concerto at the BBC Proms (29 Aug)

Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel.' Samuel Johnson's famous remark is trotted out during the World Cup to counter the jingoism of football fans supporting their national team (doing so this year with the aid of ear-splitting blasts from the vuvuzela). To be sure, patriotism has its ugly side, though World Cup flag-waving is hardly its worst manifestation. And in the classical music world, are we so much better when we insist that a French pianist has instinctual feel for Ravel or an Austrian for the lilt of a Viennese waltz? Are we not just as blindly nationalistic as those football fans?

It's true that pianists often do play music written by their countrymen. Consider this year's BBC Proms, where two French pianists play Ravel – **Jean-Efflam Bavouzet** in the Concerto for the Left Hand (20 Aug) and **Hélène Grimaud** in the Concerto in G (24 Aug; also Grafenegg Festival, 4 Sep), and where the British **Ashley Wass** plays *Dynamic Triptych* by John Foulds (3 Aug) and the Russian **Nikolai Lugansky** essays Rachmaninov's 'Paganini' Rhapsody (18 Aug). The national link vanishes from the rest of the Proms season, however: **Paul Lewis** ends his Beethoven concerto cycle (No 3, 6 Aug; No 5, 6 Sep); **Nelson Freire** in Chopin's Second Concerto (12 Aug); **Boris Berezovsky** in Liszt's First Concerto (19 Aug), **John Tilbury** in the mysterious sound-world of Morton Feldman's Piano and Orchestra (20 Aug), **Richard Goode** in Bartók's Third Concerto and **Leif Ove Andsnes** in Mozart's Concerto No 24 with his Norwegian Chamber Orchestra. At the Proms the task of playing that most Norwegian concerto, the Grieg, falls to the German **Lars Vogt** (29 Aug), who also has a recital the next day featuring Schubert's monumental G major D894 Sonata.

Steven Osborne plays Rachmaninov's First Concerto at the Proms (5 Sep), a week after a wide-ranging recital at the Edinburgh Festival (31 Aug) that includes his own improvisations (he offers a lecture/demonstration on improvisation, 16 Aug). The most atmospherically American of piano works, the Ives 'Concord' Sonata, is played at the Edinburgh Festival by Welsh pianist **Llyr Williams** (28 Aug; he has a Wigmore date on 22 Sep), while the young American pianist **Jonathan Biss** opens the Festival's Queen's Hall series (14 Aug; he also plays an all-Beethoven recital at Wigmore, 4 Oct).

French pianism is at the heart of La Roque d'Anthéron in the very French Provence, but many non-French players have

made their mark at this intense all-piano festival. This year's festival, the 30th, winds up with intriguing performances from **Nikolai Lugansky** (all-Chopin recital, 3 Aug), **Abdel Rahman El Bacha** (8 Aug), **Grigory Sokolov** (10 Aug), **Arcadi Volodos** (15 Aug) and **Nelson Freire** (17 August).

Though Switzerland is stereotyped as the land of banks, chocolate and cuckoo clocks, its leading product of recent years seems to be music festivals. At the Menuhin Gstaad Festival, there are recitals from **Arcadi Volodos** (includes Liszt's 'Dante' Sonata, 5 Aug) and **Reto Reichenbach** (Bach-Busoni transcriptions; 18 Aug).

The Austrians know how to throw up a summer festival as well, as the Grafenegg Festival proves. Festival director **Rudolf Buchbinder** joins the Staatskapelle Dresden in Beethoven's 'Emperor' (27 Aug), while **Nikolai Lugansky** plays the Schumann Concerto (10 Sep) and **Lisa de la Salle** plays *Nights in the Garden of Spain* (5 Sep).

Nationality is a handy identifier, as this issue's cover artist **Mark Bebbington** would agree, and being British has helped him champion neglected composers (he gives the world premiere of Ireland's First Rhapsody at Wigmore on 29 Sep). Likewise, conductor Valery Gergiev is an advocate for the music of his fellow Russian, Rodion Shchedrin, whose Fifth Concerto is played by **Denis Matsuev** and the LSO at the Barbican (25 Sep). At nearby LSO St Luke's, there are two Chopin recitals, from **François-Frédéric Guy** (23 Sep) and **Sergio Tiempo** (30 Sep).

For a third year in a row, Kings Place London opens its season with a circus-like weekend of events (9-12 Sep). One particularly colourful act is **Kenneth Hamilton** in a lecture-demonstration entitled 'How Liszt smashed up pianos: A Fantasy on Bellini's Norma' (12 Sep). More calmly, **Mitsuko Uchida** opens the International Piano Series on the Southbank with Schumann's *Davidstündlertänze*, (5 Oct).

For most pianists, their nationality is interesting, but ultimately irrelevant, and Uchida is a good example of a musician who transcends nationality, as does **Pierre-Laurent Aimard**, a man who seems to specialise in finding connections in music. At the Proms on 2 Aug he gives the London premiere of George Benjamin's first concerto, called 'Duet'. He and Benjamin met when both studied with Messiaen – the start of a perfect *entente cordiale* in a jingoistic age.

Inge Kjemtrup

DETAILS LONDON

Barbican Centre / LSO St Luke's
Tel: +44 (0)20 7638 8891
www.barbican.org.uk

Kings Place
Tel: +44 (0)20 7520 1490
www.kingsplace.co.uk

Southbank Centre
(Purcell Room, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Royal Festival Hall)
Tel: +44 (0)20 0871 663 2509
www.southbankcentre.co.uk

Wigmore Hall
Tel: +44 (0)20 7935 2141
www.wigmore-hall.org.uk

SUMMER FESTIVALS

UK

BBC Proms
16 July-11 September
Tel: +44 (0)845 401 5040
www.bbc.co.uk/proms

Edinburgh Festival
13 August-5 September
Tel: +44 (0)131 473 2000
www.eif.co.uk

FRANCE

Roque d'Anthéron
International Piano Festival
23 July-22 August
Tel: +33 (0) 4 42 50 51 52
www.festival-piano.com

GERMANY

Grafenegg Festival
17 June-12 September
Tel: +43 (0)2735 5500
www.grafenegg.com

SWITZERLAND

Menuhin Festival Gstaad
16 July-5 September
Tel: +41 33 748 83 33
www.menuhinfestivalgstaad.com