

Vida Guitar Quartet

Saturday 28 October 7.30pm

Mark Ashford . Mark Eden . Amanda Cook . Chris Stell

Sergio Assad *Uarekena*

Bach Brandenburg Concerto No 3 in G, BWV 1048 (arr. Mark Eden)

Schubert Fantasie in F minor D.940 (arr. Mark Eden)

Poulenc Sonata for four hands (arr. Chris Stell)

Turina *La Oración del Torero* (arr. Colin Downs)

Bernstein *West Side Story* Suite (arr. Amanda Cook / Mark Ashford)



Sergio Assad (b.1952)

Uarekena

Sergio Assad was born into a family with a passion for popular Brazilian musical traditions. Along with his younger brother Odair, Sergio's father recognised his son's prodigious musical talent for the guitar, moving the family in order to allow the brothers to study the guitar with Monina Távora (1921-2011) herself a disciple of Andrés Segovia. As the brother's guitar ensemble reputation grew Sergio continued to arrange and compose for their duo in order to further enrich their repertoire and fulfil Sergio's desire to perform music by composer such as Astor Piazzolla, Radamés Gnattali and Egbert Gismonti; all of whom had influenced Sergio's own compositional style. Sergio is now renowned as much as a composer and arranger as he is for his performing having worked with

artists including Yo-Yo Ma, Paul Simon, Gidon Kremer and Dawn Upshaw as well being commissioned for large scale works for symphony orchestra and film scores.

The *Uarekena* are original natives of Brazil who inspired the work's main theme; Sergio dedicating the piece as a tribute to Brazil's indigenous people. The work includes a part for seven string guitar and opens with a pulsing note which crosses rhythm with the main compound meter, building up in stages until the main theme emerges. The busy texture and rhythmic energy finally start to recede and a gentle middle section with a melody based on the original theme appears in the major key. Frenzied whole-tone scales cascade over building impressionistic harmonies as the music again becomes more agitated with the re-emergence of the main theme, building to a dramatic conclusion.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Brandenburg Concerto No 3 in G, BWV 1048 (arr. Mark Eden)

The six Brandenburg Concertos are widely regarded as the pinnacle of instrumental writing during the Baroque era; presented to Christian Ludwig, Margrave of Brandenburg-Schwedt, in 1721 as a gift, in order for Bach to gain favourable employment.

Bach's own reference, 'Concerts *avec plusieurs instruments*' - concertos with several instruments - certainly plays down the unprecedented combination of instrumentation for the time. They are richly orchestrated in order to maximise coloristic and dramatic effect, and to display Bach's unparalleled idiomatic instrumentation.

Concerto No 3 in G major is scored for three violins, three violas, three cellos, and basso continuo. The outer movements use the *ritornello* form, to dramatic effect, found in many instrumental and vocal works of the time. The second movement; if it can be called one, consists of a single measure with the two chords that make up a Phrygian half cadence. It is possible that these chords are meant to surround or follow a cadenza improvised by a harpsichord or violin player, or conversely performed with minimal effect, creating a musical semicolon to punctuate the outer movements.

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Fantasia in F minor D.940 (arr. Mark Eden)

Franz Schubert's Fantasia in F minor for piano and four hands, stands as a remarkable gem within the composer's extensive body of work. Composed in 1828, just a year before his untimely death, this Fantasia reflects Schubert's profound artistic maturity and creative prowess.

The work has four clearly defined movements which run continuously creating a musical Odyssey. It opens with an introspective and melancholic theme, drawing the listener into its world of contemplation and yearning. Schubert employs subtle harmonic shifts and delicate nuances, creating a sense of profound unfolding emotions.

The central *scherzo*-like movement forms a counterbalance to the works opening and closing sections. Here the music is vivacious and more light-hearted in character with a

central rondo theme on which Schubert pivots other musical ideas, generating fluid interplay between the parts and demonstrating his prowess as one of the great chamber composers of the era.

The haunting opening returns and Schubert starts to explore new facets of the thematic material in a development section; the music oscillating between tranquillity and turmoil. The musical tempest comes to abrupt halt and the opening mood returns once again.

The Fantasia is a profound musical testament which encapsulates the philosophy of the Romantic era; deep introspection, vivid emotions, and virtuosic brilliance all coming together to create a work of enduring beauty.

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)

Sonata for four hands (arr. Chris Stell)

Francis Poulenc composed his Sonata for Four Hands for piano in 1918-1919, during a period of great artistic experimentation following the devastation of World War I. The work is a testament to Poulenc's unique musical language, combining elements of neoclassicism, impressionism, and jazz-inspired harmonies.

The Sonata is divided into three movements:

1. *Prelude*: The opening movement sets the tone for the entire sonata with its quick tempo and energetic character. It begins with a lively, syncopated theme introduced by the first piano, which is then echoed and developed by the second piano. Poulenc's signature wit and playful musical gestures are evident throughout, creating a sense of joy and exuberance.

2. *Rustique*: The second movement, marked Rustique (Rustic), contrasts with the lively character of the Prelude. It has a more subdued and introspective atmosphere, with its lyrical melodies and delicate textures. Poulenc's use of delicate harmonies and shifting tonalities adds a sense of ambiguity and mystery to the movement, creating a compelling and introspective musical experience.

3. *Final*: The final movement is a tour de force of virtuosity and rhythmic vitality. It is characterized by its fast tempo, intricate interplay between the two pianos, and a constant sense of forward momentum. Poulenc combines elements of neoclassical stylings

with jazzy rhythms and harmonies, creating a vibrant and exhilarating conclusion to the sonata.

Joaquin Turina (1882-1949)

The Prayer of the Bullfighter (La oración del torero) Op 34 (arr. Colin Downs)

'My music is the expression of the feeling of a true Sevillian who did not know Seville until he left it ... yet it is necessary for the artist to move away to get to know his country, as for the painter who makes some steps backwards to be able to take in the complete picture.'

Joaquín Turina Pérez was born into an artistic family in Seville on the 9th of December 1882 and demonstrated from an early age a prodigious talent for the piano. It was composition however that captured his creative imagination and in 1902 he moved to Madrid to hone his skills. There he met another Andalusian, Manuel de Falla, and immediately a strong lifelong bond of friendship developed between them.

Turina's affection and nostalgia for his homeland was a constant theme in his music and he took to heart the advice of Isaac Albéniz, (whom he met in Paris in 1907) who urged him to base his compositions on 'the popular Spanish songs, or Andalusian, since you are from Seville'. After a period living in Paris, Turina settled in Madrid in 1914 where he conducted the first performance of Falla's pantomime, *El corregidor y la molinera*, which would later be reworked into the ballet, *El sombrero de tres picos*.

The Prayer of the Bullfighter was originally a work for piano, but Turina made several arrangements including one for string quartet and one for a quartet of *laúdes* (a Spanish folk instrument with six double metal strings played with a plectrum.) Turina described his inspiration for the piece thus:

'One bullfighting afternoon in the Plaza de Madrid... I saw my work. I was in the horses'

patio and there behind a little door was the bullfighters' chapel, full of religious feeling, where the bullfighters come to pray just before they have to face death. Then, before me I could see in all its plenitude that contrast; the chapel where the bullfighters come to pray to God for their lives, maybe for their souls, for their pain, for the illusions and hopes they may lose forever inside the bullring, full of music and sun; and the merriment of the fiesta about to take place, the noise of music and people coming from the plaza, the public waiting.'

Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990)

West Side Story (arr. Amanda Cook / Mark Ashford)

West Side Story is one of the most influential, poignant and successful musicals of all time. Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is transported to 1950's New York City as two young, idealistic lovers find themselves caught between warring street gangs, the American Jets and the Puerto Rican Sharks. This timeless love story is set against a background of social, racial and ethnic strife, with Bernstein's music reflecting the countless emotions which permeate Stephen Sondheim's lyrics.

In '**Mambo**' we find the gangs engaging in a competitive dance marking the moment when Tony and Maria first meet. Tony, later, declares his love with the song '**Maria**'. Their new bond escalates the feud and during '**Tonight**' both sides anticipate the impending fight. Dreams of a peaceful world are heard in '**Somewhere**', while '**I Feel Pretty**' finds Maria excited experiencing love for the first time. Our finale '**America**' sees the Puerto Rican girls comparing their homeland with their new home in America.

First performed in 1957, the Broadway production ran for 732 performances and marked Sondheim's Broadway debut and became Bernstein's most popular work.

The VIDA Guitar Quartet brings together four guitarists of exceptional artistry and '*unerring musical instinct*'. (Gramophone) VIDA's ability to '*conjure up an orchestral palette of colour and effects*' (Classic FM) combined with their '*exquisite tonal and dynamic control*' has firmly

established them as a passionate and masterful ensemble who sparkle with '*vitality and spontaneity*' (Acoustic).

VIDA's seemingly effortless sense of ensemble and their broad range of timbres and dynamics

evokes 'listening to an entire orchestra and not merely to four guitars. There's only one word for it: magic' (Gramophone).

Since forming in 2007, VIDA has performed to critical acclaim in major UK venues including King's Place (London), London's Southbank Centre, The Sage (Gateshead), and St George's (Bristol). They are sought-after festival artists throughout the UK, Europe, North America, and China.

Since making their U.S. debut in 2011 in Los Angeles and NYC, the VIDA Guitar Quartet has appeared on some of North America's most prestigious stages for classical guitar including the Long Island Guitar Festival, the Allegro Guitar Series in Dallas, Fort Worth, and Las Vegas, and were selected by LIVE on Stage for tours in 2015-16. They have been chosen as the keynote performers for the 2015 Guitar Foundation of America in Oklahoma and more recently in 2017 performed at the Kaufmann Concert Hall at the 92Y in NYC as part of their 'Art of the Guitar' Series.

2017 marked the quartet's debut in China as part of the Changsha International Guitar Festival where they were invited to perform at the closing night's concert. In 2019 the Quartet returned to China, touring extensively and performing in some of the country's largest concert venues.

The VIDA GQ have recorded 4 CDs on the BGS label: *Love, the Magician* BGS118, a Spanish fare of Manuel de Falla, Joaquin Turina, and George Bizet's *Carmen Suite*. *Rhapsody* featuring works by George Gershwin (*Rhapsody in blue*), Malcolm Arnold and Adam Gorb. *The Leaves be Green* is an all English music program of Ralph Vaughn-Williams,

Edward Elgar, Benjamin Britten, Stephen Dodgson, Timothy Bowers, and Warlock. Their latest CD, *Bachianas*, is a homage to Johann Sebastian Bach with works by Howard Skempton, Laura Snowdon, Felix Mendelssohn, and Heitor Villa-Lobos, all of whom have been influenced by the great composer, whilst also featuring Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No 3 as a centralising theme.

VIDA are D'Addario string classical artists.

www.vidagq.com

Vida sparkled with vitality and spontaneity, weaving a rich tapestry of colour and breathtaking range of dynamics and percussive effects that held the audience spellbound ... the visual interplay between them enhancing an already superb performance. These are outstanding musicians, if you can, go hear them play.

Acoustic

...exquisite tonal and dynamic control, super-tight ensemble and unerring musical instinct. There's only one word for it: magic.

Gramophone

*VIDA conjure up an orchestral palette of colour and effects ... they play with technical brilliance and precise ensemble, creating alternately smoky and glittering colours in Falla's *El amor brujo* that suit the gypsy heart of the music so well.* **Classic FM**

The effects were mesmerising and the audience held its collective breath. An ensemble with few peers ... It was obvious they were having a wonderful time, as was their spell-bound audience.

The Herald Tribune, Sarasota

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