



OLGA STEZHKO
piano

Olga Stezhko is an award-winning concert pianist, recording artist and leading interpreter of early and mid-20th century piano repertoire.

Acclaimed by Classical Source in a Wigmore Hall review as 'a supremely delicate master of her instrument' who possesses 'an extraordinary presence', she has performed worldwide at venues including the Barbican Hall, Salle Cortot and the Carnegie Hall. Recent highlights include performances in St Martin-in-the-Fields, Wigmore Hall, the National Gallery, Palermo Classica Festival, Leeds International Concert Season and the 'Belarusians of the World' Arts Festival in Minsk, where Olga was awarded a special recognition by the Ministry of Culture.

Born in Minsk, Belarus, Olga Stezhko is based in London. She completed her Bachelor's and Master's degrees with distinction at the Royal Academy of Music under Ian Fountain. Her studies were supported by some of the UK most prestigious scholarships including the Myra Hess Scholarship and the Philharmonia Orchestra/Martin Musical Scholarship Fund Award. Prior to coming to London, Olga graduated from the Republican Music College in Minsk in the class of the famous Belarusian pianists Oleg Krimer and Evgeny Pukst and was awarded a music scholarship to study at the United World

College of the Adriatic in Italy. Amongst her teachers were the Trio di Parma and the legendary Trio di Trieste, who sparked her interest in chamber music.

As an avid chamber musician, Olga has performed at international festivals within various groups including the renowned cellist Ivan Monighetti and the late Peter Cropper of the Lindsay String Quartet. She is a member of the critically acclaimed Marsyas Trio (flute, cello, piano) whose recent engagements include performances at the Spitalfields Music Festival and St John's Smith Square series. Olga's successes on the competition circuit include the Grand Prix at the 'Halina Czerny-Stefanska In Memoriam' International Piano Competition in Poland, First Prize at the Nikolai Rubinstein International Piano Competition in France and Third Prize at the Prix Amadè de Piano International Piano Competition in Germany.

Olga Stezhko's specialism is early and mid-20th century repertoire and she is particularly distinguished in Scriabin and Debussy. Olga's debut album 'Eta Carinae' (Luminum Records) combined her passion for astronomy with music by Scriabin and Busoni and was hailed by the Gramophone Magazine as 'an outstanding debut' and 'not a record for the faint-hearted but rather for those who enjoy dark and menacing regions of the mind'.

Her second all-Debussy album 'Et la lune descend' was released on Palermo Classica in 2018 to mark the centenary of the composer's death.

Olga Stezhko is very grateful to Massimo Prelz Oltramonti, Rory and Noelle Colfer, Tim and Daška Hatton, Help Musicians UK (formerly Musicians Benevolent Fund), Philharmonia Orchestra/Martin Musical Scholarship Fund, the Kirckman Concert Society, the Tillett Trust, the Solti Foundation, the Park Lane Group and the Royal Academy of Music for their generous support.

Biography



Performing highlights

Kirckman Concert Society	Wigmore Hall	London, UK
Manchester Mid-day Concert Society	Bridgewater Hall	Manchester, UK
Embassy Series	St. Martin-in-the-Fields	London, UK
Concert in aid of Prince's Trust	Barbican Hall	London, UK
Palermo Classica Festival	Palermo	Italy
Camerata Nordica	Kalmar	Sweden
Leeds International Concert Season	Leeds College of Music	Leeds, UK
Philharmonic Hall	Minsk	Belarus
Teatro Miela	Trieste	Italy
Blackheath Halls	London	UK
British Music Society of York	York	UK
Opening concert of the Season	Opéra de Saint-Etienne	France
Animato Series	Salle Cortot	Paris, France
BBC Radio 3 In Tune programme	Live performance	London, UK
The National Gallery	London	UK

Performing highlights

Programme One

Debussy Suite bergamasque
Bach Partita no. 5 in G major
Debussy Images Book II

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Brahms Six Pieces Op. 118
Prokofiev Thoughts Op.62
Scriabin Two Dances Op. 73 and Vers la flamme Op. 72

Programme Two

Poulenc Trois pièces
Debussy Six Épigraphes antiques
Scriabin Sonata No. 10 'Kisses of the Sun'

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Debussy Children's Corner
Gubaidulina Musical Toys
Ravel La vallée des cloches, Oiseaux tristes and Alborada del gracioso
from 'Miroirs'



Reviews



OLGA STEZHKO, ETA CARINAE, LUMINUM RECORDS, 2014

“What to choose for your debut album? Do you play music that is, quite simply, close to your heart, or do you come up with something novel and arresting? For Belarus-born Olga Stezhko there is no problem. She clearly has the best of both worlds, making a masterly conjunction of late Scriabin and Busoni, two of music’s truest originals. And in her assertive and compulsively readable notes, she has few hesitations. For her ‘every composition on this CD is a masterpiece’, and she advises us to listen to the whole in order to comprehend fully ‘an evocative narrative on your senses and imagination’. Again, late Scriabin is ‘simultaneously dark and enlightening, aloof and immediate – a transformation of human reason’. She has similar praise for Busoni, who continues Scriabin’s compulsive world though in a style entirely his own.

All this is complemented by Stezhko, who is blessed with an awe-inspiring command of both idioms and total empathy for two dreamers in strange worlds. Instructions such as *étrange*, *ailee*, *soufflé mystérieux* and *onde caressant* are hardly eccentric to Stezhko but show a reaching-out into starry new territory rather than leading down an obscure garden path. She takes Busoni’s *Toccata* by storm (for Alfred Brendel, ‘probably technically the most difficult piece that I have ever tried’) and her way with the Scriabin *Preludes* is entirely authentic. Not a record for the faint-hearted but rather for those who enjoy dark and menacing regions of the mind. This is an outstanding debut, finely recorded by Luminum Records.”

Bryce Morrison, Gramophone Magazine

“Olga Stezhko makes a strong impression with this imaginative programme of little-played Scriabin and Busoni.

In late Scriabin, Stezhko is excellent at weaving the music’s spell from its unique combination of rhythmic complexity, harmonic daring and evaporating sonorities...

Stezhko admirably meets the demands of the two Busoni pieces, whether the dark Second *Sonatina* or the fearsome *Toccata*... this is a promising talent.”

Tim Parry, BBC Music Magazine



OLGA STEZHKO, ET LA LUNE DESCEND, LUMINUM RECORDS, 2018

“Olga Stezhko writes in her extended sleeve note of wanting “to look beyond the multifaceted beauty of Debussy’s piano pieces and bring out the edge and ambiguity...” There’s the danger that this repertoire can be treated as sophisticated chillout music, with production values to match. One thing I really like about this anthology is the recorded sound. Close and on the dry side, it lets us hear everything; this Debussy looks forward far more than back. Try Stezhko’s thrilling account of the little “Mouvement” from Book 1 of Images. It’s sharp, witty and pungent, anticipating Bartók’s percussive dynamism. The six short movements which make up Children’s Corner also scrub up brilliantly: you can make sense of the flurries of notes which open “Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum”, and “Golliwog’s Cakewalk” really bounces, at times suggesting Gershwin. Even overplayed numbers like “Clair de lune” gleam as if freshly polished. It’s difficult not to grin. Debussy doesn’t often sound this youthful, this extrovert.

Stezhko can do subtlety too; “Cloches à travers les feuilles” is brilliantly controlled, and the aqueous burblings of “Poissons d’or” are startlingly vivid. The disc concludes with the late Six épigraphes antiques, which Stezhko discovered shortly after recording the earlier works. Each piece was inspired by one of the Songs of Bilitis, a collection of Ancient Greek poems rediscovered and translated into French in 1894. Though Bilitis never existed: she was a literary hoax dreamed up by one Pierre Louÿs. No matter. Stezhko’s enthusiasm shines through: “Pour remercier la pluie du matin” sounds as if it’s being composed on the spot, and her cheeky translation of “Pour que a nuit soit propice” made me giggle. The album was launched late last year with an accompanying beer, which “fuses French and Indonesian flavours echoing the sounds of Gamelan music...”. Listening to the disc while drinking the stuff proved to be a multisensory experience to savour. An outstanding Debussy collection with a generous running time.”

Graham Rickson, The Arts Desk

“In her 2014 debut recording, Eta Carinae (Luminum Records LUMOS 1421011), Belarussian born, London-resident Olga Stezhko provided very personal interpretations of a selection of lateworks by Busoni and Scriabin. In her long-awaited successor, she has turned to Debussy, marking the centenary of his death last year. It was originally planned to run to just over an hour, with Children’s Corner (1906-8) and Suite bergamasque (1890-1, rev 1905) framed by the two books of Images (1905; 1907). Having set these down in Palermo in June 2017, Stezhko then fell in love with the solo

piano version of 6 *Épigraphes antiques* (1914, arr 1915), recording them in London ten months later. More often performed in their initial four-hand version, these wonderful miniatures are given a subtle, fluent performance catching their delicious, at times severe, restraint beautifully.

Stezhko's live performances of *Images* have garnered much critical praise. In the first book, Stezhko's swift tempi (not as fast as the live performance on her website) outpace Thibaudet (Decca), for example, but she is equally evocative in *Reflets dans l'eau* and the concluding *Mouvement* rattles along with winning verve. In the second book, Stezhko holds her own, even in *Poissons d'or* (without quite matching Thibaudet's glitter), and Palermo Classica's greater immediacy of sound emphasises the clean precision and fluency of her playing.

The recorded sound may well be the clinching factor for many, Antonio Zarcone having miked Stezhko very closely in Palermo (replicated in London by Pasha Mansurov for *Épigraphes antiques*). Compared to the dreamy acoustics enjoyed by Thibaudet and Angela Hewitt (Hyperion), in *Children's Corner* and the *Suite bergamasque*, that closer sound—almost as if one were sat looking over Stezhko's shoulder—provides a more intimate feeling. Stezhko's involving interpretations are decidedly those of a young player, still to some degree getting to know the music, and she communicates that excitement of discovery throughout.

Guy Rickards, *International Piano Magazine*

“Something special happened here at the Wigmore Hall. The elegant Belorussian pianist Olga Stezhko slipped onto the platform almost unnoticed, such was her lack of ceremony, and that same attractively quicksilver and elusive music-making typified what followed.

Her intelligent and personal programme-note explained the whys and wherefores of a quick-fire series of works almost exclusively from the early part of the 20th-century, from composers who were principally Russian but peppered and contrasted with the work of Debussy. The pieces were predominantly miniatures, and Sofia Gubaidulina’s Musical Toys rushed by with some sections just a few bars long. But the exquisite journey we were taken on gave Stezhko the maximum opportunity to demonstrate her wonderful powers of characterisation as well as an extraordinary will-o’-the-wisp delicacy in much that she played.

With much that may have been unfamiliar territory, there was a particular joy in Lev Abeliovich’s Tarantella (1984), which combines elements of perpetual motion with wildness, a similar angular joy so typical of Shostakovich, Prokofiev and Stravinsky.

Stezhko’s more muscular side came to the fore with the various Scriabin elements, all late works and ending with the massive build in intensity that typifies Vers la flamme. The enthusiastic audience left to the echo of Stezhko’s return to Debussy (‘Serenade for the Doll’ from Children’s Corner) before she disappeared from view having been an extraordinary presence and a supremely delicate master of her instrument.”

Stewart Collins, Classical Source

“The playing was assured and spirited. In Debussy’s Images, Books I and II, Ms Stezhko produced a full range of colours and moods so carefully contained in the music.

Scriabin’s Five Preludes Op. 74 and Vers la flamme Op. 72 were among the last works he composed (...) it was here that Ms Stezhko showed her full mature mastery. This was a recital where her delicacy and power were equal bedfellows... enthralling artistry.”

Edward Clark, Musical Opinion

“A nearly packed Grona Hall at Kalmar Castle welcomed (...) a phenomenally talented pianist. The young Belarusian Olga Stezhko has already been praised by international experts and she showed her extraordinary skill at the concert.

Olga Stezhko’s concert programme was both substantial and varied. In Debussy’s Images Books One and Two, Olga Stezhko elegantly captured the tricky sounds and harmonies.

Johannes Brahms’ 6 Klavierstücke Op.118 was magnificently interpreted and the famous Intermezzo in A major was performed with sensitivity and affection.

In Sergei Prokofiev’s Piano Sonata No. 4 in C minor [Olga Stezhko] emerged as a piano soloist with a great feeling for the composer’s metamorphosis of tempos and nuances. Olga Stezhko finished the concert with [Scriabin’s] Vers la flamme ... a fiery end to a brilliant concert.

A standing ovation was the audience's collective tribute and Olga Stezhko thanked in turn, with music by Vilhelm Stenhammar."

Lage Olsson, Barometern

"Stezhko played [Prokofiev's Sonata No.4 with poise and attitude and made a strong case for the work's inimitability; and the skittishness of the finale – anticipating Poulenc, Prokofiev a Russian soon to be in Paris – was full of brio, its sequence of chords and florid decoration brought off with distinction.

Stezhko also played McCabe's Evening Harmonies (2000), with a titular and expressive leaning to Liszt... Stezhko retained intensity until the evaporating coda."

Colin Anderson, Classical Source

"Stezhko played Emily Howard's Sky and Water with great skill and sensitivity."

Hilary Finch, The Times

"Stezhko made luminous sense of Prokofiev's dour Piano Sonata No 4, and brought more authority to a McCabe study and to Emily Howard's tricky 'Sky and Water' than they deserved. "

Michael Church, The Independent

"[Olga Stezhko] revealed a remarkably distinctive range of dynamics and colour in [J S Bach's Organ Prelude and Fugue in D Major, arranged by Busoni] inexhaustible polyphonic devices.

In Chopin's Scherzo No 2 in B flat minor Op. 31, the pianist communicated to the full a sense of dramatic and poetic feeling. In Nocturne Op 62 in E major Olga Stezhko showed a delicacy of touch and style as well as the poignant lyricism.

For her finale, Olga Stezhko matched technique with her musical intelligence in Prokofiev's Sonata No 2 in D minor Op 14. A characterful and atmospheric performance."

Mary Isaac, Daily Classical Music



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