

Music Minus Borders

Pekka Kuusisto premieres major new violin works by Anders Hillborg and Philip Venables at BBC Proms (5, 17 August 2018) before mind-expanding Wigmore Hall residency

'Kuusisto, an artist of astonishing gifts, booted up his iPad and tackled the daunting score animatedly... His playing was by turns expressive and fiercely vibrant in this journey of many moods,'
Cincinnati.com, January 2017

Two new concertos at the BBC Proms and three Wigmore Hall recitals inspired by cellular biology, human fertility and neuroscience stand among the typically broad sweep of Pekka Kuusisto's artistic schedule this season and next. The Finnish violinist returns to the Proms following his critically acclaimed debut there two seasons ago. He is set to give the UK premiere of Anders Hillborg's *Bach Materia* with the Swedish Chamber Orchestra on Sunday 5 August and present the world premiere of Philip Venables' Violin Concerto with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Sakari Oramo on Friday 17 August. Kuusisto will also join the Swedish Chamber Orchestra in Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No.4. His term as Wigmore Hall's resident artist opens on Thursday 13 September with a new work by Perttu Haapanen, a solo meditation on the process of mutation and variation found in human cancer cells. The series unfolds next year with concerts informed by pioneering medical research and evolving scientific interpretations of everything from biotechnology to cognitive psychology and the nature of consciousness.

"It feels almost like I'm coming to the Proms for a mini-residency," notes Pekka Kuusisto with a smile. "It's great that I get to play two new pieces and in one of the Brandenburgs. I'll be working with a bunch of very talented people, so it's really like an invasion of the Royal Albert Hall!" Having made his mark at the annual festival with Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto in 2016, a performance hailed by the *Arts Desk* for distilling one of the great landmarks of Romantic music 'down to its folk essence', he welcomes the opportunity to give life to two major new scores at this year's Proms.

"When the idea was first suggested that I might play the Tchaikovsky at the Proms, I discussed it with a theatre director friend," Kuusisto recalls. "I said I wasn't sure that this work, one of the most popular of all concertos and with so much baggage from the past, was the ideal piece for my Proms debut. But he suggested that the Royal Albert Hall would be an inspiring space for me to find my position with the Tchaikovsky and so be completely free from any expectations about its interpretation. I ended up having the best time with that performance and am now looking forward to returning to perform two pieces that nobody else has played before; a UK premiere and a world premiere. That's a great situation for me to be in so soon after performing one of the great landmarks of the violin repertoire."

Pekka Kuusisto's first BBC Prom of the summer marks the culmination of the Swedish Chamber Orchestra's *Bach Reborn* project, a series of commissions from six leading composers to create companion pieces for the Brandenburg Concertos. The violinist gave the world premiere of *Bach Materia* with the SCO in March 2017 and recorded the work soon after. He has since performed the piece with several other ensembles, including a series of concerts with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra and in two concerts with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. Around half of Hillborg's score engages the soloist in improvisation, clearly evoking the spontaneous musical invention expected of musicians in Bach's day.

"The amount of improvisation is quite extraordinary," comments Kuusisto. "There are two improvised cadenza areas where you can do whatever you want, without any rules or borderlines imposed by the score. It also allows the soloist to employ musicians from the orchestra to participate in the cadenzas. Anders asked me if it was all right to include so much improvisation and I encouraged him to do it. There are not too many significant pieces that rely so heavily on improvisation from the soloist and members of the orchestra. I believe improvisation is coming back into the repertoire, which is fully present in Anders's piece and in the Violin Concerto that Daniel Bjarnason wrote for me last year. Anders is looking for a contemporary improvisation, not for something in the style of Bach or for shocking effects for the sake of being shocking. It puts a fascinating slant on the whole piece."

Before stepping into the BBC Proms limelight, Pekka Kuusisto will visit the UK to perform Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No.1 with the Philharmonia Orchestra and Vladimir Ashkenazy at St David's Hall in Cardiff and at London's Royal Festival Hall (Friday 18 & Sunday 20 May). "I know it will be a joy to play the Prokofiev with such

terrific partners,” he comments. “And it gives a flying start to this period when I will be playing at the BBC Proms and Wigmore Hall.”

Kuusisto’s Wigmore Hall residency offers a three-concert snapshot devoted to an artist unlimited by traditional genre boundaries and unconstrained by narrow intellectual interests. His residency starts on 13 September with an exploration of medical science through the prism of music, presented during the opening week of Wigmore Hall’s new season. Kuusisto’s concert, billed under the headline title ‘Cancer’, includes the UK premiere of a new work for solo violin by Perttu Haapanen. The Finnish composer’s score, commissioned for this summer’s Silence Festival in Lapland, reflects and resonates with the life, death and afterlife of Henrietta Lacks, the African-American woman whose cancer biopsy supplied one of the most important so-called immortalised cell lines in medical research. Kuusisto’s initial Wigmore programme also includes an extra-musical collaboration with his friends Suvu Savola, Head of Tumour Diagnostics at MRC-Holland, and Maija Tammi, whose striking artworks include photographs of Henrietta Lacks’ cancer cells.

“While thinking about cancer is probably jolly uncomfortable for most people, knowing more about the things we fear can bring lightness to life and free up space for living,” observes Pekka Kuusisto. “I know he was keen to explore this theme because of close encounters with cancer in his Perttu’s family. There’s a significant electronic element to his piece in our first Wigmore Hall concert, which is central to his musical language. It gives another layer of communication to what the audience hears from the violin and provides mutations that, thanks to a computer programme, will follow the apparent logic of cell mutation that has been discovered by cancer researchers. I’m thinking a lot now about how to make sure that what we’re doing in this residency, with ‘Cancer’, ‘Fertility’ and ‘Brains’, is seen not as strange but as another part of the creative offering of Wigmore Hall. This is about exploring the many ways that music has of opening your mind and making our experience of life richer and deeper.”

Looking further ahead, Pekka Kuusisto, together with Samuli Kosminen, is composing the music for a new animation of Tove Jansson’s Moomin stories. The television series, due to air in January 2019, is being produced by the Finnish company Gutsy Animations and the cast includes Rosamund Pike (Moominmamma), Matt Berry (Moominpappa), Taron Egerton (Moomintroll), alongside Warwick Davis (Sniff), Matt Lucas (Teety-Woo), Jennifer Saunders (Mymbly), Kate Winslet (Mrs Fillyjonk), Richard Ayoade (The Ghost).

www.harrisonparrott.com/artist/profile/pekka-kuusisto
[Facebook](#)

For press enquiries, please contact:

Valerie Barber PR

Suite 2

9a St John’s Wood High Street

London, NW8 7NG

Tel: 020 7586 8560

sabina@vbpr.co.uk / www.vbpr.co.uk

Friday 18 May 2018

St. David’s Hall, Cardiff, 7.30pm

Vladimir Ashkenazy conductor | **Pekka Kuusisto** violin | **Philharmonia Voices** | **Crouch End Festival Chorus** | **Students of the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama** | **Philharmonia Orchestra**

Prokofiev *Autumnal*

Prokofiev Violin Concerto No.1 in D major, Op.19

Prokofiev *Cantata for the 20th Anniversary of the October Revolution*

Sunday 20 May 2018

Royal Festival Hall, London, 7.30pm

Vladimir Ashkenazy conductor | **Pekka Kuusisto** violin | **David Butt Philip** tenor | **Philharmonia Voices** | **Crouch End Festival Chorus** | **Students of the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama** | **Philharmonia Orchestra**

Prokofiev *Seven, they are Seven*

Prokofiev Violin Concerto No.1 in D major, Op.19

Prokofiev *Cantata for the 20th Anniversary of the October Revolution*

Sunday 5 August 2018

Royal Albert Hall, 3pm

BBC PROM 29

Thomas Dausgaard conductor | **Pekka Kuusisto** violin | **Antje Weithaas** violin | **Maya Beiser** cello | **Fiona Kelly** flute | **Uri Caine** piano | **Mahan Esfahani** harpsichord | **Swedish Chamber Orchestra**

J.S. Bach Brandenburg Concerto No.1 in F major BWV 1046

Mark-Anthony Turnage *Maya* (UK premiere)

J.S. Bach Brandenburg Concerto No.3 in G major, BWV 1048

Anders Hillborg *Bach Materia* (UK premiere)

J.S. Bach Brandenburg Concerto No.5 in D major, BWV 1050

Uri Caine *Hamsa* (UK premiere)

Royal Albert Hall, 7.30pm

PROM 30

Thomas Dausgaard conductor | **Antje Weithaas** violin | **Brett Dean** viola | **Tabea Zimmermann** viola | **Claire Chase** flute | **Fiona Kelly** flute | **Marten Larsson** oboe | **Håkan Hardenberger** trumpet | **Swedish Chamber Orchestra**

J.S. Bach Brandenburg Concerto No 4 in G major, BWV 1049

Olga Neuwirth *Aello* - ballet mécanomorphe (UK premiere)

Brett Dean *Approach* – Prelude to a Canon

J.S. Bach Brandenburg Concerto No 6 in B flat major, BWV 1051

J.S. Bach Brandenburg Concerto No 2 in F major, BWV 1047 (arr. Felix Mottl)

Steven Mackey *Triceratos* (UK premiere)

Friday 17 August 2018

Royal Albert Hall, 7.30pm

BBC PROM 47

Sakari Oramo conductor | **Pekka Kuusisto** violin | **BBC Symphony Orchestra**

Elgar Introduction and Allegro

Philip Venables / Béla Bartók *Venables Plays Bartok* (world premiere)

Prokofiev Symphony No.5 in B flat major

Thursday 13 September 2018

Wigmore Hall

WIGMORE HALL ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

Pekka Kuusisto violin | **Teemu Korpipää** electronics | **Suvi Savola** speaker | **Maija Tammi** photography | **Jukka Huitila** visual designer

J.S. Bach Partita No.2 in D minor for solo violin

Pekka Kuusisto Three electronic mutations of Easter chorales from Bach's Partita No. 2 in D minor

Steve Reich *Violin Phase*

Perttu Haapanen *In Vitro* (UK premiere - commissioned by Silence Festival Finland)

Wednesday 23 January 2019

Wigmore Hall

WIGMORE HALL ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

Programme 2 *Fertility*

Details TBA

Wednesday 1 May 2019

Wigmore Hall

WIGMORE HALL ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

Programme 3 *Brains*

Details TBA