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The Silvestri Phenomenon

*A portrait of the conductor, composer and pianist
1913-1969*

Fenomenul Silvestri

*Un portret al dirijorului, compozitorului si pianistului
1913-1969*



*The Chapel
King's College London
London
Saturday 2 November 2019*

*Sala Cerchez
Muzeul Național Cotroceni
Bucharest
Wednesday 6 November 2019*

These celebratory events mark the 50th anniversary of Constantin Silvestri's death and the announcement that King's College London has acquired a substantial documentary archive of his life and work.

It is also the occasion for the London Première of Silvestri's Piano Suite Opus 6 No. 1.

Reflecting the way Constantin Silvestri's life and work brought together Romania and Britain, they are made possible by, for London, a partnership between King's College Archives and Research Collections, the Constantin Silvestri International Foundation, the London Schubert Players Trust, the Romanian Cultural Institute in London, Radio România Muzical and the Enescu Museum in Bucharest.

The Bucharest event is presented under the auspices of the Romanian National Radio Music Channel and is supported by the British Council in Bucharest.

Preface

Constantin Silvestri, one of the great conductor-composers of the 20th century, was victim to the divisions in Europe during his own lifetime, his renown obscured by those same divisions after his untimely death in 1969.

*An outstanding musician
and a remarkable man*

The inscription on
Silvestri's memorial stone.
St Peter's churchyard,
Bournemouth, England

Confident and meticulous in his conducting and avant-garde and challenging in his composition, he was a star in his homeland of Romania before he left in 1958 to stamp his mark on the Western music scene and, in particular, that in Britain. But for him, the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra would not have enjoyed the world-wide reputation it has now had for half a century.

He left behind him a repertoire of over forty works as well as wide range of magisterial recordings under his baton by the BSO itself and leading orchestras around the world.

His career came with a considerable personal cost. Once he left his homeland to explore the Western scene, he was, for thirty years, a non-person there with his music banned and his recordings deliberately forgotten. Yet he had been a musical prodigy in pre-war Romania and, in the first years of the post-war Communist regime, had been showered with accolades and honoured with some of the most prominent positions in Romanian musical life.

Silvestri was born in Bucharest, in 1913, in a house just a stroll across the River Dâmbovița to the handsome National Opera. There, 45 years later in 1958, he would conduct the first production in Romania of George Enescu's monumental opera, *Oedipe*. Silvestri had already been granted visas by the Romanian authorities to visit and conduct in the West but when, after conducting six performances of *Oedipe*, he left Romania it was exile for the rest of his life. He had, he explained in private, felt 'suffocated' in his homeland.

Born in the capital, he grew up in the Transylvanian city of Târgu Mureș where Liszt had played decades before. When he was just nine, Enescu heard him play a Chopin Mazurka in the Conservatoire there and predicted a brilliant future for the boy.

It was just the start of a career that prompted Alfred Hoffman, the doyen of Romanian music critics to write years later: 'What a fantastic musician he was, how skilfully he handled instrumental timbres and ingeniously interwove them.'

His compositions, started in his teens, were seen as avant-garde with an advanced musical language and an idiosyncratic world of sound. His *Three Pieces for Strings Opus 4 No. 2* composed in 1932 have been described as among the best-written works based on folk material in Romania.

His 1938 *Prelude and Fugue (Toccata) Opus 17a No. 2* – originally composed for piano – was revised and orchestrated (pictured right). It became one of his signature pieces.

Throughout the 1930s he tried repeatedly to get a position as conductor but was forced to make a living as *répétiteur* at the National Opera. In March 1940 frustration boiled over and he wrote to its director George Georgescu saying 'Unfortunately, I can no longer foresee a future for myself as a conductor.' Somehow that did the trick and two months later Silvestri

Pesante (tenuto e marcato) $\text{♩} = \text{cca } 80$

The image shows a page of an orchestral score. At the top right, it is titled "Pesante (tenuto e marcato)" with a tempo marking "♩ = cca 80". The score is arranged in a standard orchestral layout with staves for various instruments. From top to bottom, the instruments listed are: Flauti 1.2., Flauto 3 e Fl. picc., Oboi 1.2., Corno inglese, Clarinetti 1.2. in Sib, Cl basso in Sib, Fagotti 1.2., Contrafagotto, Corni in Fa (1.2. and 3.4.), Trombe in Do (1.2. and 3.4.), Tromboni 1.2., Tromboni 3 e Tuba, Timpani, Percussion, Pianoforte, Arpa, Celeste, Campanelli, Silofono, Violini I, Violini II, Viole, Violoncelli, and Contrabassi. The music is written in 2/4 time and features a heavy, sustained, and marked character. Dynamics include f (forte) and marc. (marcato). The score shows the first few measures of the piece, with various woodwinds and strings playing sustained notes and rhythmic patterns.

was not only conducting his first concert with the Bucharest Philharmonic but was able to include that *Prelude and Fugue (Toccata)* in the programme. Its next performance was with Enescu conducting in April 1945.

Enescu did not settle in post-war Romania but moved permanently to Paris. He commented at the time: 'I am leaving behind a gifted composer in the person of Constantin Silvestri who will bring fame to our country if he is allowed to do so.' The *if* being the crucial word.

The Bucharest Philharmonic made Silvestri its principal conductor in 1945 and its director in 1947. In 1953 he became the artistic director of the National Opera and of the Radio Symphony Orchestra. His reputation soared across Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. He guest conducted for concerts or recordings with all the major orchestras of Eastern Europe.

In Moscow, Dmitri Shostakovich was in the audience when Silvestri conducted the Russian composer's *First Symphony*. Shostakovich went back stage to tell him: 'I relived the creation of my symphony during this performance. If I were to conduct it myself, I would probably do it the same way.'

Scouting for talent among East European musicians in 1956, the British music critic Malcolm Rayment happened to hear a rehearsal of Shostakovich's *Tenth Symphony* under Silvestri's baton while being shown around Radio Bucharest. 'A truly electrifying account of the *Tenth*,' he later recalled. The following year, Silvestri was conducting the London Philharmonic Orchestra in London. The journalist John Gritten, later Silvestri's biographer, noted at the time the great ovation given to his rendering of Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*. Another reviewer wrote of 'the tumultuous, almost frenzied, applause in which the players themselves joined.'

He returned to London for seven concerts with the LPO, recordings with the Philharmonia

and concerts in Paris and three other West European capitals early in 1958. It was then back to Bucharest for months of intensive rehearsals before those six performances of *Oedipe*.

In fact, his first destination when he left Romania was the Soviet Union for concerts in Moscow and Leningrad – St Petersburg today. But there was the continued frustration over Enescu's *if*. In the Romania of the 1950s, people did not speak freely but in private conversations he had told others of his deep disagreement with the intensely restrictive musical policies of the regime. He did not return to his homeland.

For three years he lived in the French capital and conducted around the world beginning an association with the great performers of the time such as Yehudi Menuhin, David Oistrakh, Paul Tortelier, Mstislav Rostropovich, Daniel Barenboim and Vladimir Ashkenazy.

Guest conducting the great orchestras in all the world's continents was an exciting experience but he looked for something where he could deliver what he knew needed longer-term, detailed preparation. He demanded lengthy and exacting rehearsals before any performance so that, whatever the size of the orchestra the musicians would 'play with the sensitivity of a chamber group'.

The London Philharmonic had allowed him only two days before his first concert with them. Shocked, he complained later: 'Unfortunately, the time factor was our sovereign enemy with the English insisting "Time is money, every penny counts".'

Bournemouth's council had founded an orchestra in 1893. In 1960 there was a vacancy for principal conductor and the orchestra organised twenty successive weeks playing under different candidates for the post. Silvestri was the one chosen by both management and players and he became the BSO's principal

conductor in September 1961, living locally and conducting up to 70% of its performances.

He now had the time he needed to shape an orchestra's performance in the way he wanted – and an orchestra that would bend to his will as it did not have an established international reputation. Yet he was certain that what he wanted would be good: the BSO, once dismissed as a 'seaside band', 'would become internationally famous'.

The overall result of his methods was a vast improvement in technique throughout the orchestra but, as the principal clarinettist throughout his eight-year reign at the BSO, Raymond Carpenter, recalled later, it had meant the 'systematic dismantling of the whole orchestra's memory of how music was traditionally played'.

One of the distinguished soloists who played under him in those years, violinist Ida Haendel, recalled: 'He was quite different from many other conductors in the sense that he did some things that were unconventional musically speaking. At the same time it was so artistic and convincing that I would say to myself this has to be the only way to interpret it. That's how magnetic he was.'

The legacy he has left is a formidable volume of recordings characterised by this attention to orchestral detail which enabled him to get large orchestras delivering a refined sound that in its day was revolutionary. Tchaikovsky's *Manfred* symphony and Liszt's *Tasso* are among the finest recorded performances which may last in reputation across generations.

Sadly, his career was cut short by cancer at the comparatively early age for an international conductor of 55. By then he had been a British citizen for two years. As his father's forebears came from northern Italy and his mother's from Bohemia, like Romania parts of the far-flung Austro-Hungarian empire, he did not in fact obtain Romanian citizenship until he was 22.

Presented to the Duke of Edinburgh after one London concert in 1966, legend has it that he quipped: 'Your Highness, we have something in common: we are both mongrels.' May be, but there was nothing mongrel about his own music or the performance of that of other composers that he drove the world's best orchestras to deliver under his demanding baton.

For further details of his music and life please refer to

A musician before his time:

Constantin Silvestri, conductor, composer, pianist

Author John Gritten

Foreword by Yehudi Menuhin

Published by Kitzinger, London, 1998

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Introductions

Geoff Browell

*Head of King's College London Archives
& Research Collections*

HE Dan Mihalache

Ambassador of Romania to the Court of St. James's

Recital

Anda Anastasescu *Piano*

Piano Suite Op. 3 No. 1

Children's Games (1931)

Lead soldiers. Pastorale *The little shepherd.*

Chinese shadows. The cane. Blind man's bluff.

The Sandman. Catch me if you can.

Piano Suite Op. 3 No. 2

Children's Games (1931-33)

Hide and seek. Sleeping Doll. Clown.

Slumber. In Grandma's crinoline. Little Imp.

The Bogeyman. Spinning Top.

Piano Suite Op. 6 No. 1

(1933) UK Première

Preludio. Duetto. Capriccio. Notturmo.

Danze sacre. Bacchanale.

Audio visual

Silvestri conducts the French National
Orchestra in his own work

Prelude and Fugue (Toccata)

Metamorphosis: The Transformation

of the Bournemouth Symphony (excerpt)

Silvestri rehearses Elgar's

In the South (Alassio) with the BSO

Silvestri conducts the French National

Orchestra in Liszt's poem *Tasso* (excerpt)

Round table

A panel discussion of Silvestri's work methods as a conductor, his relationship with the players of the BSO, the individuality of his compositions, aspects of his life and career and the work achieved by the Constantin Silvestri International Foundation and Silvestri enthusiasts in generating a Silvestri renaissance in the UK and Romania.

Liliana Staicu *Chair*

Manager, Radio Romania Music Channel

Director, Romanian Radio orchestras and choirs

Lord Michael Berkeley

Composer & broadcaster

Producer, BBC Radio 3's programme 'Private Passions'

Nicholas Braithwaite

Associate Conductor to Constantin Silvestri 1967-1969

Brian Johnston

Violinist with the BSO during Silvestri's tenure

Anda Anastasescu

Pianist

President, Constantin Silvestri International Foundation

Glen Gould

Silvestri audio restoration engineer

Creator, Silvestri YouTube channel

Bunny Laden

Producer of the film 'Metamorphosis:

The Transformation of the Bournemouth Symphony'

Exhibition

Courtesy of the George Enescu Museum Bucharest, a special exhibition on Constantin Silvestri will be on show

Anda Anastasescu

It was in 1990 when I ‘discovered’ Silvestri the composer. Soon after forming my group, The London Schubert Players, I took them on a 1,300-mile journey to Romania to raise funds, to entertain and to offer friendship to 2,000 disabled children and orphans. The 20 Players were the first British orchestra – certainly since the 1989 Romanian revolution and probably the first ever from London – to visit Romania.

For our concerts, I had searched for works by Romanian composers that could symbolise our friendship, trust and support. Serendipitously, a Romanian musicologist supplied me with Silvestri’s *Three Pieces for Strings*. They had not been performed in Romania since before Silvestri left the country in 1958. We fell in love with the music, performed them to enthusiastic audiences and that with the viola section wearing the colours of the Romanian *tricolore* – in the right order!

Costi, as he used to be called, started his musical studies at the age of nine in the sumptuous, art-nouveau Music Conservatoire in Târgu Mureş – a handsome city in the heart of Transylvania with a strong tradition of classical music, where Liszt once performed. When his stepfather’s appointment as the Prefect of the region ended, the family moved back to Bucharest where Costi, now 17, became a piano pupil of the famed Florica Musicescu in whose class was also the legendary pianist Dinu Lipatti.

While still at the conservatoire Silvestri gained a reputation for his brilliant public improvisations. People flocked to his performances where they would hand him themes, sometimes on scraps torn from newspapers, and he would improvise in the style of famous classical and contemporary composers. George Enescu attended one of these sessions and is said to have remarked to the young performer: ‘And now, what about doing something in the style of Silvestri?’

At 18, he wrote his two piano suites *Children’s Games*, as early experiments in harmony and polytonalism. He dedicated them to the boy-Prince Michael who became King of Romania but was forced to abdicate after the war. Because of that dedication, the new regime prohibited their public performance.

Charming miniatures and effectively descriptive, the suites present considerable difficulties of execution and interpretation in spite of their easy-sounding titles. They are based on Romanian folk material and use diatonic as well as intensely chromatic melodies and bi-tonal chords. Some of the themes sound as if they were spontaneous, almost accidental creations of his fingers on the keys while others are thoughtfully worked out. They reflect his talent for improvisation and for Rubato and his rejection of Musicescu’s scholastic attitude to piano exercises: ‘Why should I kill myself with so many exercises, scales and technique when my fingers know how to play by themselves?’ Indeed, to make his musical ideas and colours come alive performers need to invent their own fresh and appropriate techniques.

Silvestri was 20 when he composed the third piano suite, an extraordinary and demanding idiosyncratic work with a high degree of eloquence and an array of strong emotions and sounds climaxing in a frenzied Bacchanalia. The six pieces could almost be perceived as *pictures at an exhibition*, each proposing an imaginary emotional scene with a well defined structure, musical idea and colour. Of special interest is the *Nocturne*, with its combination of Romantic, post-Romantic, Expressionistic and lyrical folk ingredients.

Later in life, in a radio interview, Silvestri revealed his hope that ‘modern’ music will explore ever new human emotions and tonal palettes’. I think his third piano suite testifies to Silvestri’s radical change of direction and to his courage in asserting himself as an avant-gardist in Romania at that time.

Geoff Browell

Browell is Head of Archives and Research Collections at King's College London, a major collection that includes valuable historical papers relating to the study of science, technology, medicine, the arts and the history of war. His work has focused on the use of technology to assist public engagement and digital scholarship. He is also chair of the AIM25 charity, a consortium of 150 cultural organisations in London, and of the Health Archives and Records Group, which provides support and training relating to records of health and medicine throughout the UK.

Anda Anastasescu

Awarded the decoration *Commander of the Order of Cultural Merit* by the President of Romania in 2004, Anda Anastasescu was one of the four women selected in the arts in Great Britain in 2003 to receive the *European Women of Achievement Certificate* 'in recognition of an outstanding contribution to pan-European understanding and progress that provides an inspiration to others'. In 2013, she received from the Romanian Embassy in London the accolade of *Romanian of the Year*.

Awarded First Prize unanimously by the jury of the 1974 Debussy International Piano Competition in Paris presided over by composer Georges Auric, she has performed on five continents in prestigious festivals and leading concert halls such as the Royal Festival Hall, Wigmore Hall, Purcell Room, Kings Place, CBSO Centre (Birmingham); Winter Gardens (Bournemouth); Athenaeum Barcelona; Athenaeum Bucharest; Hjertnes (Sandefjord, Norway); Cecilia Meireles (Rio de Janeiro) and Serghei Lunchevici (Kishinev, Moldova).

In 1989, she formed The London Schubert Players Chamber Orchestra as the orchestra-in-residence of the French Institute in London. With them, she pioneered British music overseas and introduced works by foreign composers to Britain. At the invitation of the British Council

as a British artiste, she introduced for the first time in Romania the music of Sir Lennox Berkeley and Malcolm Williamson, Master of the Queen's Musik 1975 - 2003.

Anastasescu's performances have been consistently praised for their artistry, passion and imagination and she has given many UK and worldwide Premières of works by the revered Romanian composers Constantin Silvestri, George Enescu and Dinu Lipatti. Her performances in the Wigmore Hall established Silvestri as a 'composer awaiting thorough investigation' (*International Piano*). Under the patronage of the late Yehudi Menuhin, she established in Romania the Silvestri International Festival, Competition and Summer Academy. Malcolm Williamson has been one of the festival's special guests at the Romanian Première of his Symphony No. 2, *Pilgrim on the Ocean*, dedicated to Silvestri and the BSO.

As President of the Constantin Silvestri International Foundation and supported by the generosity of the independent schools Pocklington (York), Stewart's Melville and Mary Erskine (Edinburgh), she established the Silvestri Scholarships, awarded annually through a national competition, to 16-year-old Romanian musicians to study in Britain.

Her ground-breaking composition project, *Invitation to Composers*, was selected by the European Commission for its 2009 - 2012 cultural programmes and her recordings with the London Schubert Players – with music ranging from Mozart, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Saint-Saëns, Enescu to contemporary composers – were acclaimed as a remarkable international success.

Her late husband, journalist John Gritten, wrote Silvestri's biography *A Musician Before His Time*. Together, Anda and John embarked in 1990 on a sustained international campaign, which sparked the Silvestri revival in Britain and Romania.

Lord Michael Berkeley

Composer Michael Berkeley became a CBE in 2012 for services to music and was made a life peer in 2013. His works have been played all over the globe and by some of the world's finest musicians. He is the eldest son of the composer Sir Lennox Berkeley and a godson of Benjamin Britten. Singing played an important part in his early education when he was a chorister at Westminster Cathedral. He studied composition, singing and piano at the Royal Academy of Music and won the Guinness Prize for Composition in 1977. Two years later he was appointed Associate Composer to the Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

Berkeley was also Composer-in-Association with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, a Visiting Professor in Composition at the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama, Artistic Director of the Cheltenham Music Festival and international guest curator of chamber music programmes at the Sydney Festival, Australia's largest arts festival.

He has written for the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, the BBC Proms and the Royal Ballet and, for several years, he has been the featured composer for the New York Philharmonica.

Major works include: the oratorio *Or Shall We Die?* to a text specially written by Ian McEwan and made into a film for Channel 4 by Richard Eyre; *Secret Garden*, premièred by the LSO under Sir Colin Davis; *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, a BBC Proms commission premièred by the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain under Mstislav Rostropovich; two operas to librettos by David Malouf: *Baa Baa Black Sheep* (based on Rudyard Kipling's childhood) and *Jane Eyre*; chamber and choral music, including *Listen, listen O my child* commissioned for the enthronement of Justin Welby as Archbishop of Canterbury in 2013 and the *Magna Carta Te Deum*, for the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta in 2015.

Nicholas Braithwaite

Nicholas Braithwaite's career has been unusually wide-ranging, both musically and geographically. His first appointment was Assistant Conductor to Constantin Silvestri with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. Since then he has held positions as Music Director or Principal Conductor from Norway to New Zealand and many places in between, including the Tasmanian and Adelaide Symphony Orchestras. His repertoire has centred around German and Russian music and he is regarded as an outstanding Wagner conductor, having conducted all of that composer's works from *Rienzi* onwards, including 7 Ring Cycles.

Concurrently with his work in Australia, he was Principal Conductor of the Manchester Camerata and Permanent Guest Conductor of the Norwegian Radio Orchestra. He has been a frequent guest conductor for all the major orchestras in the UK, has toured Japan and Korea with the London Philharmonic Orchestra as Associate Conductor to Sir Georg Solti, and appeared with many orchestras throughout Europe, Scandinavia and Australasia.

Braithwaite was Associate Principal Conductor of Sadler's Wells / English National Opera, Music Director of Glyndebourne Touring Opera, and Musiksjef of Gothenberg's Stora Teater. He has also conducted opera at Covent Garden, Hamburg, Norwegian Opera, Scottish and Welsh National Operas, and many companies in Australasia.

In recent years, Lyrita Recorded Edition have released more than 28 CDs of Braithwaite conducting the London Philharmonic, London Symphony, Royal Philharmonic and Philharmonia Orchestras in music by English composers.

Brian Johnston

Violinist Brian Johnston studied at Wandsworth School in London and later at the Royal Academy of Music. He freelanced in London where he worked with all the British conductors from Sir Malcolm Sargent to Norman Del Mar. He also worked with Ferenc Fricsay and Antal Dorati.

Johnston joined the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra in February 1962, when Silvestri was its principal conductor. In 1969, after Silvestri's tragic death, he joined the newly-formed Bournemouth Sinfonietta and continued to play regularly for the BSO. After 1999 he returned to the BSO as an extra player until July 2011, during the tenure of Kirill Karabits. He also played for the Welsh Opera and the Glyndebourne Touring Opera and is still active as a violinist.

Brian Johnston gives regular talks about his musical experiences – in particular about his memories of Silvestri whom he reveres.

Glen Gould

Glen Gould received his BA in Physics and Mathematics from Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington. After a career in engineering at Boeing, Hewlett Packard, and Globalstar, his life-long love of classical music drew him into audio restoration. He specializes in cleaning up recordings of Arturo Toscanini and Constantin Silvestri, his two favourite conductors. He maintains a YouTube channel of restored Silvestri recordings:

www.youtube.com/channel/UCiExn07UD0ob13n1oDCCjzg/videos

and was the restoration engineer for the CD set *A Bournemouth Love Affair*.

Glen has served on the boards of Opera San José, Steinway Society, The Wagner Society of Northern California, and Romanian Musical Adventure.

Bunny Laden

Bunny Laden received her PhD in Cognitive Science and Music from the University of Washington where she then became a Research Assistant Professor. After teaching at university for several years, she joined Apple and worked on every major technology over a 22 year period. Most recently, she started an internal artificial intelligence education program for Apple engineers.

She has served on the boards of Symphony Silicon Valley and The Wagner Society of Northern California. Bunny became acquainted with Silvestri's recordings more than 8 years ago. After realizing the historical importance of the story of Silvestri and the Bournemouth Symphony, she was driven to make a documentary about the metamorphosis of the BSO under Silvestri's baton.

Liliana Staicu

Liliana Staicu is a Romanian musicologist and broadcaster and currently the Manager of Radio Romania Music Channel, a 24-hour station dedicated to classical music and jazz. She is also Director of the Romanian Radio orchestras and choirs. Since 1990, she has presented an important number of radio programmes related to classical music and live broadcasts from national and international events such as the BBC PROMS and the George Enescu International Festival.

THE TEAM

Initiator & project manager

Geoff Browell
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Artistic director

Anda Anastasescu, pianist

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Silvestri exhibition

Cristina Andrei, Director
George Enescu Museum Bucharest
Adina Sibianu, Curator

King's College London

Events Team
Ian Hughes
Christine Ayre

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The organisers are honoured to host the distinguished panel and grateful to the invited guests for giving their services in Silvestri's memory

We would like to thank King's Venues and the following supporters for their generous help:

Sir George Iacobescu (*for sponsoring the Steinway piano*)
Mrs Elizabeth Nussbaum
Mrs Doina Cruttenden
SMRUK (Societatea Medicilor Romani UK)

Notes

John Gritten
Anda Anastasescu
Chris Myant

Instrument

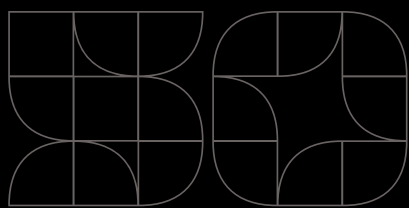
The Steinway concert piano chosen and hired by Anda Anastasescu for this performance is supplied and maintained by Steinway & Sons, London



The 'Silvestri' titling font used on the front cover of this programme is OTC Monoblocks, designed by Andrei Ogradă. Andrei works from his type foundry in Runcu, Dâmbovița, Romania and his contemporary typefaces are sometimes influenced by folk art. The sweeping curves of his Monoblocks letters are reminiscent of the movements of a conductor's baton. In contrast, the text font used in this programme is an 18th-century English typeface designed by John Baskerville in Birmingham, UK.



Cover images Constantin Silvestri
Köln, March 1960



1913-1969

