

# SUMMER PIANO FESTIVAL: TITANIC PIANO

TUESDAY 16 JUNE, 10.30AM  
DAVID JOSEFOWITZ RECITAL HALL



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Professor Jonathan Freeman-Attwood CBE

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## Charles-Valentin Alkan (1813-88)

Concert Etude 'Le Preux', Op 17

Symphony for solo piano, Op 39 No 4  
I Allegro moderato

Canon, Op 65 No 3

Concerto for solo piano, Op 39 No 10  
III Allegretto alla barbaresca

**James Mayhew** piano

## Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji (1892-1988)

Opus clavicembalisticum

Introito

Preludio-Corale

Fuga I

**Harry Bowden** piano

*'With a wracking head and literally my whole body shaking as with ague, I write to tell you I have just this afternoon finished Clavicembalisticum... the closing four pages are as cataclysmic and catastrophic as anything I've ever done. The harmony bites like nitric acid, the counterpoint grinds like the mills of God...'*

Sorabji writing to a friend on 30 June 1930

In a repertoire of epic virtuosity and visionary aspirations, the piano music of Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji and Charles-Valentin Alkan still stands out. Both wrote piano cycles of unprecedented complexity and enormous originality, often lasting several hours; they stretched technical demands to the limit. Two of our Academy pianists, **Harry Bowden** and **James Mayhew**, take these titans on, including movements

from Sorabji's colossal four-hour *Opus Clavicembalisticum*.

**Charles-Valentin Alkan** was part of a large family in the Jewish quarter of Paris, Le Marais; born Charles-Valentin Morhange, he took his father's first name as his surname. Alkan showed phenomenal ability as a child, and entered the Paris Conservatoire at five. He had a warm friendship with Chopin and was admired by Liszt. Although he lived for long periods as a recluse - he seems to have had bouts of depression and self-doubt - he would return occasionally to the concert platform as a virtuoso, and his piano music is spectacular. The *Trois grandes études* consist of a fantasy for the left hand alone, and variations for the right; the three-movement *Concerto for Piano* lasts fifty minutes. Alkan was one of the first composers to incorporate Jewish melodies into classical music, and was fluent in Hebrew and Greek. A genial personality with a sense of humour (he wrote a *Funeral March in C minor for a Dead Parrot*, for a quintet of singers, three oboes and a bassoon), this enigmatic, sometimes quirky, composer is still considered to have written the piano world's most notoriously difficult music.

**Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji** was born Leon Dudley in Essex, to an English mother of Sicilian and Spanish descent and a Parsi father; he changed his name in honour of his Parsi heritage. Sorabji started out as a concert pianist and a music critic before becoming a prolific, intensely focused composer in his late twenties; he lived a reclusive life in the Dorset village of Corfe Castle with his companion of 35 years, Reginald Norman Best. His taxing works - his *Jami Symphony* was a thousand pages in

length, and lasts five hours - defeated players at first. Sorabji placed a ban on performances of his music until the late 1970s, when Yonty Solomon became known for his interpretations. He blended Asian influences from his Persian lineage with beautifully textured, complex polyphonic rhythms.

## BIOGRAPHIES

### Harry Bowden

Harry Bowden is a 19-year-old pianist from Bolton, studying as a first-year undergraduate with Christopher Elton. Harry began piano lessons aged 6, joining the Junior Royal Northern College of Music in 2022 studying piano with his long-time mentor Les Chisnall, alongside organ with Simon Mercer and conducting with Juan Ortuño. During this time he also received guidance from Peter Donohoe. After winning the 2024 JRNCM Concerto Competition Harry performed Liszt's First Concerto with the JRNCM Sinfonia under Eduardo Portal. Other competition successes have included 1st prizes in the 2020 Chopin Festival in Mazovia and 2021 Città di Arona Competition, and 3rd prize in the 2023 Future Stars International Piano Competition. He has performed in multiple venues across London and the north of England, including recitals at the Royal Northern College of Music, Forsyth's in Manchester, and St James's Piccadilly in London.

### James Mayhew

James Mayhew is a second-year undergraduate pianist at the Royal Academy of Music, under the tutelage of Ian Fountain. He studied with Hilary Coates and Joseph Tong for four years at Wells Cathedral School, reaching the

finals of its concerto competition with Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No 1; more recently he won the second prize at the Oxford Piano Competition for Aspiring Professionals. As a composer he has performed his own works numerous times, most notably his *Fugue-Fantasy*. James enjoys exploring lesser-known works including those by Alkan and the Russian composer and pianist Samuil Feinberg, known for their extraordinary difficulty; and he loves collaborating with other musicians whenever possible.

## DON'T MISS OUR OTHER SUMMER PIANO FESTIVAL EVENTS

### Tuesday 16 June 11.30am

Chamber Rolls II: Debussy and Dvořák  
David Josefowitz Recital Hall

### Tuesday 16 June 1pm

Tomos Boyles  
Chopin, Debussy, Ligeti, Prokofiev  
Duke's Hall

### Tuesday 16 June 2.30pm

Chamber Rolls III: Sviridov and Shostakovich  
Duke's Hall

### Tuesday 16 June 3.30pm

Piano, Multimedia, Film  
Angela Burgess Recital Hall

### Tuesday 16 June 5.30pm

Piano Lab Premieres  
Duke's Hall

### Wednesday 17 June 10am

Schumann: The Complete Piano Works IV  
Duke's Hall

**Wednesday 17 June 1pm**

Royal Academy Wigmore Hall Piano  
Series  
Khrystyna Mykhailichenko  
Bach/Busoni, Brahms

**Wednesday 17 June 2.30pm**

Schumann: The Complete Piano Works  
IV  
Duke's Hall (final edition)

**Wednesday 17 June 6pm**

Messiaen's Quartet for the End of Time  
Duke's Hall