

BALKAN BOLERO



CHAMBER MUSIC OF ISIDORA ŽEBELJAN

Borislav Čičovački (oboe, oboe d'amore, cor anglais, oboe sopile)
and ensemble

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Borislav Čičovački (oboe, oboe d'amore, cor anglais, oboe sopile)

with

Isidora Žebeljan, piano (tracks 2-4, 7, 16, 23-24) and percussion (track 2)

Aleksandar Madžar, piano (track 6)

Miloš Veljković, piano (tracks 9-11)

Aneta Ilić, soprano (tracks 2, 4, 5)

Juljia Hartig, violin (tracks 6, 8, 12-15)

Mirjana Nešković, violin (tracks 23-24)

Nataša Petrović, viola (tracks 2-5)

Boban Stošić, double bass (tracks 2-5, 7, 25)

Aleksandar Stefanović, accordion (tracks 25-26)

Miroslav Karlović, percussion (track 7)

Neda Arsenijević, flute (track 2)

With the Žebeljan Orchestra conducted by Premil Petrović (tracks 1, 12-15, 17-22)

violins: Jelena Dimitrijević (track 1; leader, tracks 12-15, 17-22), Vladan Lončar, Danilo Novaković, Aleksandra Milanović, Ana Kovačević Bojan Glušica, Julia Hartig (leader, track 1), Dušica Mladenović (track 1), Bojana Jovanović (tracks 17-22), Đorđe Pintor (track 1)

violas: Jožef Bisak, Nataša Petrović, Vladimir Popović

cellos: Marko Miletić (track 1), Julijana Marković (tracks 12-15), Dejan Božić (tracks 17-22), Nebojša Janković

double bass: Srđan Aleksić (tracks 1, 12-15), Boban Stošić (tracks 17-22)

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|---|------|--|--------------|
| 1 Dance of the Wooden Sticks | 7:07 | 16 The Miracle in Shargan – 2 | 2:43 |
| for cor anglais, oboe sopile and string orchestra | | oboe and piano version | |
| Leonce and Lena | | New Songs of Lada without Words | |
| Suite for soprano, flute, oboe, viola, double bass, piano and percussion | | Suite for oboe, cor anglais, oboe d'amore and string orchestra | |
| 2 Overture | 2:55 | 17 Song One. A Cradle Song | 3:10 |
| 3 The King | 1:28 | 18 Intermezzo No. 1 | 0:52 |
| 4 Travelling | 1:30 | 19 Song Two. Downtown, in Novi Sad a Rose-Tree I Planted... | 2:30 |
| 5 My Tired Footsteps | 3:30 | 20 Intermezzo. No. 2 | 0:16 |
| 6 Sarabande | 3:57 | 21 Song Three. All the Yawl Men... | 3:09 |
| for cor anglais, violin and piano | | 22 Song Four. Oh, Die, My Love... | 2:03 |
| 7 Girotondo | 3:06 | The Mousetrap | |
| for oboe, piano, double bass and percussion | | Diptych for cor anglais, violin and piano | |
| 8 The Miracle in Shargan – 1 | 2:46 | 23 Three Blind Mice | 1:20 |
| oboe and violin version | | 24 Epilogue | 1:56 |
| Simon and Anne | | Two Songs of Bride of the Wind | |
| Suite for cor anglais and piano | | for cor anglais, accordion and double bass | |
| 9 Hymn | 2:13 | 25 Bride's Song 1 | 1:20 |
| 10 Psalm | 3:59 | 26 Bride's Song 2 | 3:07 |
| 11 Réjouissance | 1:27 | Total time | 65:30 |
| Three Goat's Ears | | | |
| Suite for oboe, violin and string orchestra | | | |
| 12 Slaves | 2:47 | | |
| 13 Intermezzo. Morning | 0:27 | | |
| 14 Felicya | 3:47 | | |
| 15 Bacchanal | 1:55 | | |

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The musical style of Isidora Žebeljan by Borislav Čičovački

Although born in Belgrade, Isidora Žebeljan spent much time as a child in the region of Banat, visiting her grandparents in their village. In that part of the Pannonian Plain, between the Tisa river and the Carpathian mountains, Bartók and Kurtág were born, and Ligeti was born not far away. It was in this area, nowadays divided among Serbia, Romania and Hungary, that Isidora Žebeljan grew up listening to Serbian, Romanian, Hungarian and Gypsy music. This music, with its melancholic and passionate melodies, rich with ornaments, its rhythms complex and elusive, sparked Isidora Žebeljan's original and ongoing enthusiasm for sound, and defined the basic outlines



Miloš Veljković, Isidora Žebeljan

Nevertheless, the folk music tradition is just a starting point from which she creates her own world of music. This world also includes the experiences of popular music and jazz such as be-bop, and in this way her music becomes a universal form of emotional expression for the contemporary human being. In the words of a critic for the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* magazine: "Her music is like a feverish fantasy, screaming and sobbing, mocking and hitting, celebrating and exploding, travelling between... Belgrade and New York..."; and in the *London Times*: "...a belter from the Balkans – wild, dance-like and off-kilter."

In Isidora Žebeljan's mature works, the form of her pieces is entirely subject to the unpredictable flow of the musical content, which has parallels to the act of creating a short story, or a film. This is based on the sequencing of different musical events to form a single complete experience. Each musical event involves a particular motif. The various motifs of a piece are not developed into themes, they are not used as contrast, nor do they originate from different style periods: the form they create is not a mere collage. What these motifs have in common

is first and foremost a narrative function, with each one representing a paragraph in an imaginary short story or a sequence in a film. Each motif is built on a complex, authentically structured rhythm, so that melody, metre and rhythm are inextricably linked. The origin of such a complex rhythmical texture lies in the layers of rhythmical heritage from the Balkans – and the entire Old World – but its specific expression in the works of Isidora Žebeljan is new and unique.

This music might seem to have little in common with the slow, sultry, Spanish Bolero; but right from the start of track 1 (*Dance of the Wooden Sticks*), as the cor anglais seems to improvise over held string chords, there is a sense of held-back energy. The parallels are more obvious in *The Miracle in Shargan* (tracks 8 and 16). More generally, the condensed passion of Žebeljan's music, which is sometimes stretched by the rhythmical patterns, can create an impression of the imposing strength of a Bolero, especially in the slow movements.

Žebeljan's music for oboe and cor anglais by Borislav Čičovački

The compositions in this CD – concert, solo and chamber pieces – include all the works that Isidora Žebeljan has written for the oboe and similar instruments. They are divided into two groups based on their origin, which are represented equally on this CD: one group includes compositions written for the concert stage, while the other group comprises arrangements of pieces from her various incidental music. In this new form, extracted from the emotional frame of the plot, these miniatures represent little jewels of chamber music with oboe.

As they were originally created as incidental music, they possess a certain emotional charge which was needed for a certain scene, i.e. they are determined as belonging to a certain genre, whether by evoking a certain musical form (such as sarabande or forlana) or supporting a certain event or action in the plot (a journey, bathing an emperor, or a wedding). This is why the form and content of these miniatures are based on the primary role of a melody. However, regardless of the dramatic context for which they were created, the melodies are always marked by the unique melodic expression of Isidora

Žebeljan (e.g. *My Tired Footsteps*, *The Miracle in Shargan*, *Felicya* or *Bride's Song 2*), as well as by the composer's natural passion for rhythmical extravagance (as in *Travelling* and *Bacchanal*). On the other hand, works created primarily for the concert stage are characterised by the composer's mature style expressed in a multi-motif narrative form, based on connecting motifs structured in a specific way as regards melodies and rhythms (*Dance of the Wooden Sticks*, *Girotondo* or *Hymn* and *Réjouissance* from the suite *Simon and Anne*). Nevertheless, there is a clear and unquestionable stylistic connection between these two groups of work: the authenticity of melody and a wildness of rhythm, which account for the unique quality of her music.

What Isidora Žebeljan did, when starting to compose for oboe and cor anglais, was to try to research and exploit the possibilities of these instruments by constantly attempting to expand them and take them outside their established sound idiom. She particularly wanted to achieve an expansion of various sound colours of the instruments, to comply with the demands of the character of the music itself. It is, then, the character of the sound in a given context, rather than its generalised beauty, which is the subject of the composer's research into sound. Hence the use of virtuoso passages in a high register (*Girotondo*, *Morning*, *Bachhanal*), or of robust sound (*Girotondo*, *Hymn*), or imitation of the sound of medieval or folk instruments (*Overture*, the beginning of *Bachhanal*) or achieving discreet dynamics, often in a low register and using a mute (*Sarabande*, *Felicya*). These are some ways which enable the sound of the instrument to move beyond its stereotype and to change its character and colour, depending on the emotional content of the music. Isidora Žebeljan found her model for this kind of approach to instruments in the art work of Maria Callas, who changed the colour of her voice depending on the role she was singing. In that sense, there is not much difference as to whether Isidora originally composed her pieces for oboe (as in *Leonce and Lena*, *The Miracle in Shargan*, *Three Goat's Ears*) or they were created as new versions of already existing compositions.

The challenge in searching for a different character and expression of sound remains the composer's primary aspiration when working on this music. The new versions, of course, differ from the previous ones, and not only in that they use different registers (for example, the first concert version of *Sarabande* was written for flute, soprano and

piano). First and foremost, there is a deepening of certain sound qualities, due to a wider range of possibilities of the instruments (the oboe and cor anglais), which leads to a new presentation of the emotional characteristics of the music itself. One of the most distinct examples for this is the composition *Dance of the Wooden Sticks*, originally written for horn. Since the demands of this music call for the use of sound effects, Isidora looked at what might be possible on the cor anglais, also considering the extremes. This is why, among other things, she used flutter-tonguing which resembles whistling, as well as a new, unusual sounding instrument, the oboe sopile. Also, she scored the movements from the cycle *New Songs of Lada without Words* for three different instruments – oboe, cor anglais and oboe d'amore – depending on the emotional expression of the song and the music itself. In addition to that, she devoted special attention to amalgamating the sound colours of instruments in chamber ensembles, very noticeable in *Sarabande* and *Two Songs of Bride of the Wind*, in which a special richness of the sound is achieved through a combination of the cor anglais and accordion. Throughout this CD, the cor anglais is freed from its traditional role as a pastoral instrument in slow cantilenas. It becomes a flexible virtuoso instrument, capable of quick, bouncy, rhythmically complex passages in all registers (*Dance of the Wooden Sticks*, *Réjouissance*), as well as of performing in a wide dynamic range without any limitations in the register (*Cradle Song*, *Psalm*). It can also resemble folk instruments or the saxophone in its colours (*The Mousetrap*, *Bride's Song 1*).

The Žebeljan orchestra, with Borislav Čičovački, Zoran Marinković (engineer/editor), Premil Petrovi (conductor)



1. Dance of the Wooden Sticks (2008/2013) is a concert piece for cor anglais and strings, and its title comes from an old legend from Eastern Serbia. According to this legend, the Orion constellation came into existence a long time ago when an old lady's daughter got kidnapped by seven young men. Using witchcraft, she threw seven wooden sticks at them. These wooden sticks became the Orion constellation (in Serbian tradition, known as 'Old Lady's Sticks'), and the seven young men turned into the Pleiades. In some regions of the Western Balkans a pagan ritual dance involving wooden sticks has been preserved. The legend and the ritual dance served as inspiration for the creation of this composition, which was originally written for horn and strings.

The piece starts with a cadenza for cor anglais with calls from a distance – *lontano* – followed by a sequence of music segments with complex, frenzied rhythms. As the textures becomes denser, and the tempo speeds up, these segments sound as if they are accompanying the actions of a magic ritual, ending in a furious trance dance.

Apart from her virtuoso treatment of all the instruments, Isidora Žebeljan also used numerous sound effects to achieve a powerful impression of a ritual. These include microtones, glissando, flutter-tonguing, applying considerable air-pressure (which creates whistle-like sounds), playing string instruments (such as mandolins) using plectrums, as well as using the percussive potential of the belly of the double bass. Furthermore, this piece also uses the oboe *sopile* (an instrument I created at Isidora Žebeljan's request) which is characterized by its piercing and thunderous reedy sound, in the most frenetic ecstasy at 6:13, immediately before the coda. The instrument consists of a standard oboe but using the reed of an Istrian folk instrument, the *sopile*, mounted on to the oboe using specially bound staples. The reed is made from cane growing in Istrian swamps. It is 15 mm wide and 68 mm long, making the instrument sound a semitone lower than an oboe. Use of the standard oboe fingering enables the performance of chromatic passages instead of the microtonal diatonics of the folk instrument. Isidora Žebeljan used the oboe *sopile* for the first time in her opera *The Marathon* (2008) and later also in the opera *Two Heads and a Girl* (2012).

2 – 5. Just as Georg Büchner reached for the structure of the old fairy tale in his drama **Leonce and Lena**, so Isidora Žebeljan looks to the sounds of renaissance courts and squares in her suite in four movements (1998/2011), created from music she wrote for the Belgrade production of Büchner's piece. The vocal and instrumental line-up, consisting of a soprano (mostly without lyrics), flute, oboe, viola, double bass, percussion and piano (deputizing for a virginal or a zither), reminds one of a troupe of minstrels. There are also evocations of the forms of the *forlana* (*Overture*) and the slow menuet (*The King*). Yet, as well as this homage to the past, we can sense an unrestrained spirit coming through, as a response of the rhythmical wildness of today to that of a long time ago (*Travelling*).

The last movement returns to the echo of former times in a duet for soprano and oboe (*My Tired Footsteps*). In Büchner's verses the soprano sings *My poor, tired feet, you have to dance/ In shoes so gay,/ And yet you'd sooner rest deep, deep/ Beneath the clay... My poor, poor eyes, you have to sparkle/ In the candles' light,/ And yet to flee your pain you'd sooner sleep/ In darkest night.*

6. Sarabande for cor anglais, violin and piano (2002) was originally composed for a love scene in the play *Dirty Hands* by Jean-Paul Sartre, which was put on in Belgrade in 2000. What makes this miniature nobly touching is the echo of Spanish renaissance music seen through the prism of the composer's melodic sense, which is achieved with a minimum of harmonic devices, over a rhythmic ostinato in the bass. Here, as in other compositions of Isidora Žebeljan, the awareness of the musical past is not an attempt to revive it, but merely a layer of creative foundation from which a new and different music language is developed. This is one of the most popular and most frequently performed miniatures by the composer, which also has versions for soprano, flute and piano, for alto flute, viola and harp, for viola, cello and harp, for solo piano, for piano trio and for a string orchestra.

7. Girotondo (1994/2003) for oboe, double bass, piano and percussion is a concert miniature in which Isidora Žebeljan's interest in amalgamating elements of two essentially remote sources of inspiration – folk music and popular music – reached one of its

most effective and brilliant peaks. The title is the Italian equivalent of the Serbian fast folk round-dance called *kolo*. In the piece we can hear, on the one hand, melodic and harmonic devices based the interval of a second, which is a characteristic of folk music in the Balkans; and on the other hand, pointed rhythms and percussive patterns which hint at jazz. The flow of the composition grows into a long *accelerando*, finishing with a furious coda containing wide range register jumps in the oboe. The first version of this composition was with saxophone, and this version was premièred in Amsterdam in 2003.



Borislav Čičovački, Julija Hartig

8. For the Belgrade production in 2002 of one of the best-known drama pieces in Serbian literature, **The Miracle in Shargan** by Ljubomir Simović, Isidora Žebeljan composed this melody originally for piano. It possesses certain characteristics of the folk music of Central Serbia, decorated with melismas and forebeats, while in its triple time, uniform accompaniment and repetitive theme it resembles a bolero. The drama is about a stranger, a mystical eccentric who turns up in a place in Serbian provinces. He takes upon himself the illnesses, sufferings and troubles of all the people he meets, but instead of making their lives easier in doing

so, the eccentric turns them into victims of his desire to help. This version was premièred in the Hague in 2003 and since then it has also been performed frequently in its other versions: for solo oboe, for oboe and piano and for oboe and accordion.

9 – 11. There are two reasons why Isidora Žebeljan entitled her suite for cor anglais and piano **Simon and Anne** (2012/13). One is the religious and spiritual importance of the New Testament Saint and Prophetess, who were the first to recognize the Messiah in baby Christ, when the Mother of God and Joseph first brought him to the temple of Jerusalem.

The other reason is in connection with the names of the protagonists of her opera *Simon, the Chosen* (premièred in Mülheim in 2009). In this opera, Simon, having committed a sin out of ignorance and negligence – an incestuous relationship with his own mother whom he hadn't recognized – looks for and finds atonement with the Lord. Hence, the inspiration for this composition was found in a religious context. This is where the context of the suite comes from – the noble hymn-like expression in the first movement and the moving prayer-like expression in the second movement.

The first movement (*Hymn*) is in a fast tempo, with complex rhythmical patterns and with phrases shaping an unusual narrative form. Textures are dense, perhaps marking the coming of an event such as entering a temple. The second movement (*Psalm*) generates the atmosphere of a humble prayer over human transience and frailty, by repetition of the initial melody in stanzas that sound as if they are interrupted by crying. This seems to make the boiling cheerfulness of the third movement (*Réjouissance*) sound the more boisterous and improbable. The atmosphere is achieved with the exceptional mastery of exuberant, dance-like melodies in both instruments, in a tempo verging on the unplayable. There is also a version of the suite for cello and piano.

12 – 15. The name of the suite **Three Goat's Ears** (2002), for oboe, violin and string orchestra (also existing in a version for oboe, violin and piano), comes from a theatre play for children by the best known Serbian children's author, Ljubivoje Ršumović - *Emperor Trayan Had Goat's Ears*. The four movements of the suite come from the music for the play, which was staged in Belgrade in 1999. Because it was intended for children, this music is extremely melodious with a relatively simple texture, but it also has certain characteristics of Serbian and Romanian folk music. The play, based on a fairy tale from the Balkans, is about a barber of the emperor who discovers that the emperor has goat's ears. He cannot keep quiet about it, so he lets it out into a hole he has dug in the ground next to an elder tree. The tree later speaks and gives away his secret. Despite experiencing a lot of trouble, he still manages to keep his head above water and even marry the emperor's daughter.

Slaves represents a scene in which female slaves bathe the emperor, pouring water over him. *Intermezzo. Morning* announces the barber's discovery, while *Felicya* represents a

love scene between the barber and the emperor's daughter – among the most touching and gentlest in Isidora Žebeljan's opus. The music for their wedding is *Bachhanal*, a furious wedding dance resembling the wild Vlach (or, as Bartók spelled it, Walachian) round-dances of East Serbia, but with Isidora's lucid melodic style, and full of virtuoso ornaments.

16. This version of **The Miracle in Shargan**, uses a piano instead of a violin. The piano is treated here as a percussion instrument, a cymbal, while in the middle section the oboe carries the melody which in the previous version was entrusted to the violin.

17 – 22. The composition **New Songs of Lada without Words** (2006/13) owes its existence to another composition by Isidora Žebeljan, a song cycle for soprano and string orchestra (or string quartet) called *New Songs of Lada*, which was set to the verses of anonymous poets of Vojvodina from *An Anthology of the Serbian Towns and Cities Poetry of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries*. This suite for oboe, cor anglais, oboe d'amore and strings is an instrumental version of the songs.

Lada is the Old Slavonic goddess of love and springtime. The first movement, *Cradle Song* is a lullaby for a child, full of forebodings and fear of unknown forces which will not let the child fall asleep. The melody of this song, written for the cor anglais, is discretely related to Serbian folk music from Vojvodina. However, the melody is separated from it by numerous chromatic melismas which make it almost impossible to discern the folk elements. The melody reaches its climax gradually, painfully, transcending the musical frame of a lullaby and becoming an expression of uneasiness and fear.

The sharp edge of unwavering staccato and acrid accords of the strings of the *Intermezzo No. 1* warn about the tragic nature of the entire cycle, and the second song, *Downtown, in Novi Sad a Rose-Tree I Planted...* emerges almost imperceptibly after it has quieted down. It is sung by a girl in love, rejected and ignored by her sweetheart who passes her by as if she was not there. The spirits of Slavonic folk songs and of Turkish *Sevdah* meet in it – which is why the orchestra accompanying the oboe may suggest a Turkish orchestra from a small town from past centuries, even though the irregular shifts in the metre of the melody point to elusive rhythmical patterns of the music of an unknown nation.

The thunderous uniformity of the rhythm of *Intermezzo No. 2* continues the tragic premonitions from the previous *Intermezzo*. It leads to an sinuous oboe d'amore melody of the third song *All the Yawl Men...* which is repeated infinitely as it flows – the same, but also different every time - like a lowlands river. This is sung by a girl and it is about yawl men – 18th century warriors on river ships from Vojvodina, who have gone to war in a distant country. One of them has been left behind, and he may be the one the girl's heart has chosen. The mid-part of this 'aria', at 1:59, presents an unusual sound texture: finely shaded arabesques of solo viola spread out around a varied, ornamented melody of the oboe d'amore.

The fourth song of the oboe, *Oh, Die, My Love...*, unfolds over interrupted chords of the cello, which builds up into an ecstasy of sound, with oboe and strings merging in an entirely unique way. This is a song by a girl who is not allowed to marry the man she loves, so she chooses to die, rather than marry someone else. And once she is dead, there, in Heaven, in Eternity, she will get the chance to be with her loved one. A powerful melody grows out of this above a pulsating ostinato from the entire orchestra, to create an expression of utmost tragic relentlessness. There is also a version of this composition with accordion instead of the string orchestra.

The Žebeljan orchestra led by Jelena Dimitrijević



23 – 24. The diptych **The Mousetrap** for cor anglais, violin and piano (1995/2013) was developed from the incidental music for the play based on Agatha Christie, which was put on in Belgrade in 1995. This is also one of the earliest incidental music by Isidora Žebeljan. In the first movement, prevailing feelings are those of tension and foreboding, achieved through repeated rhythmical patterns and descending chromaticity. Not even the use of a modified quotation of *Three Blind Mice*, an English nursery rhyme dating from the beginning of the 17th century helps to resolve these feelings. . Perhaps the music is echoing the words of the excerpt from the nursery rhyme used in this movement: *They all ran after the farmer's wife, Who cut off their tails with a carving knife.*

The second movement is a waltz, and it seems to serve as storage for the flow of suppressing or resolving the tension, but it leaves behind the question of renewed fear, extended to infinity.

25 – 26. **Two Songs of the Bride of the Wind**, for cor anglais and the accordion, accompanied by the double bass in the first song (2003/13), have been derived from the incidental music for the play *Bride of the Wind*, by the most significant Croatian playwright of today, Slobodan Šnajder. The two songs are based on the pentatonic scales from Medjumurje (the region between the Drava and the Mura rivers in Croatia), and as so

often in the music of Isidora Žebeljan they carry in them the ancient and the modern simultaneously. The sound-world is achieved by amalgamating the tone colours of the cor anglais and accordion. These two songs are variations of each other: the melancholic patina of ancient times of the second song, which sounds like it is extending across mid-European rivers and forests, and the wild rhythms of the first song alternately flow in and out of each other, each one mirroring and contrasting the other.



Borislav Čičovački, Aleksandar Stefanović, Boban Stošić

ISIDORA ŽEBELJAN (Belgrade,1967) is the most outstanding and internationally acclaimed Serbian composer. She has attracted international attention with her opera *Zora D.* which was commissioned by the Genesis Foundation from London. The opera was première in Amsterdam in 2003 and directed by David Pountney and Nicola Raab. The same production opened the 50th season of the Vienna Chamber Opera in 2003.

Describing the music of Isidora Žebeljan, David Pountney wrote: "When I was trawling through the entries for the *Genesis Opera Prizes 1*, amidst an absolute welter of indistinguishable representatives of what one might call 'academic modernism', Isidora Žebeljan's music struck me immediately as something original, fresh, and above all emotionally expressive - a rare commodity, but an essential one for interesting theatrical story telling." (From the booklet for the opening of the 50th season of the Vienna Chamber Opera.) John Manger, former Managing Director of the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, has said of Isidora that she has "a genuinely original voice and a truly impressive talent. Her professionalism and craft are amazing, and her original talent is of the first order." (www.genesisfoundation.org.uk).

The success of *Zora D.* was followed by numerous commissions by significant ensembles, institutions and festivals such as Venice Biennale (*The Horses of St. Mark*), Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, London Brass, Bregenz Festival (opera *The Marathon*), Netherlands Chamber Choir, Brodsky Quartet, Musiktheater im Revier Gelsenkirchen (opera *Simon, the Chosen*), Accademia Musicale Chigiana Siena (opera *Two Heads and a Girl*) and the City of London Festival.

Isidora Žebeljan's compositions have been performed throughout Europe and in the United States and Asia as well as at music festivals among which are the Venice Biennale, the Bregenz Festival, City of London Festival, RAI Festival Nuova Musica (Turin), Settembre musica (Milan-Turin), ISCM Festival (Gothenburg), the WDR Music Festival, Galway Arts Festival, Ultima Festival (Oslo), Walled City Music Festival (Derry-Londonderry), Festival Nous Sons (Barcelona), Festival L' Est (Milan), Festival Classique and Crossing Border Festival (the Netherlands), Swaledale Festival (UK), the Music Biennale in Zagreb, Belgrade Music Festival, etc.



Isidora Žebeljan

The ensembles and musicians who have performed Isidora Žebeljan's music include the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, Wiener Symphoniker, RAI Symphony Orchestra of Turin, the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, the Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra, the Belgrade Philharmonic, the Westphalia New Philharmonic Orchestra, Haydn Orchestra, EurOrchestra Bari, Brodsky Quartet, London Brass, Nieuw Ensemble, Zagros Ensemble, Sentieri selvaggi ensemble, with conductors Paul Daniel, David Porcelijn, Christoph Poppen, Pierre-André Valade, Lorraine Vaillancourt, pianists Kyoko Hashimoto and Aleksandar Madžar, hornist Stefan Dohr, clarinetists Joan Enric Lluna and Alessandro Carbonare, and others. A very special artistic connection has been made between Isidora and Brodsky Quartet. Brodsky's performed and recorded all her compositions which include string quartets; some of them were composed for this fabulous ensemble. The exclusive publisher of Isidora Žebeljan's music is Ricordi-Universal.

Isidora Žebeljan studied Composition at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade with Vlastimir Trajković (a pupil of Olivier Messiaen). She has been Professor of Composition at the same Faculty since 2002. In 2006 she was elected to the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, and in 2012 was elected to the World Academy of Arts and Sciences (WAAS).

Isidora Žebeljan is also one of the most prominent Serbian contemporary composers of theatre and film music. So far she has composed music for more than thirty theatre productions in all significant theatres in Serbia, Croatia and Montenegro. In addition, Isidora Žebeljan worked on a number of film scores, including the orchestration of Goran Bregović's music for the films *Time of the Gypsies*, *Arizona Dream* and *Underground* (directed by Emir Kusturica), *La Reine Margot* (directed by Patrice Chéreau) and *The Serpent's Kiss* (directed by Philippe Rousselet).

Isidora Žebeljan also regularly appears as a performer (conductor and pianist) of her own works and of the works by other composers. She conducted concerts in London (with The Academy of St.Martin-in-the-Fields) and in Amsterdam, and performed and recorded as a pianist with Brodsky Quartet.

(official biography, taken from the website www.isidorazebeljan.com)

BORISLAV ČIČOVAČKI (Sombor, 1966) started playing the oboe at the age of nine, at the request of the then music school principal who ran a semi-professional symphony orchestra in his hometown and was in charge of rejuvenating the orchestra. A year later he got as a gift a record of Han de Vries which played a decisive role in his creating a close bond with the oboe and with music in general. Yet he never thought music would be his only career. In high school he was very interested in Botany so he took up studying the oboe and Biology simultaneously at the University of Novi Sad. The person who played a decisive role in his definitive commitment to music was his oboe professor Ljubiša Petruševski (a pupil of Pierre Pierlot), whose assistant Borislav was at the Academy of Art in Novi Sad upon graduating. He also acquired a degree in Biology, but it has never been his profession.

He wanted to continue his development in music with his oboe idol Han de Vries, so from 1991 to 1993 he was his student at the Amsterdam Conservatory. After his studies, he went on living in the Netherlands, performing as a chamber musician and a soloist, playing mostly contemporary music (e.g. as a member of the Tickmayer Formatio ensemble from Orléans). He has performed at the premières of about 60 chamber and solo compositions for the oboe by Serbian, Dutch and German composers, 40 out of which were written for him. He has performed as a soloist with the Belgrade Philharmonic, Zagreb Philharmonic as well as with leading chamber orchestras from the former Yugoslavia and Serbia, and with conductors such as David Porcelijn, Conrad van Alphen, Mladen Jagušt and Igor Gjadrov. As a chamber musician he has had concerts around Europe, performing in festivals in Sweden (Lapplands Festspel), France (Musique en scène Lyon), Germany (Wittener Tage für neue Kammermusik), etc.

In the second half of the 1990s, a wish that he had had for years came true when he became a writer as well. His first novel was published in Amsterdam in 2000 and to this day he has had 8 novels and short story collections published there (by Atlas Contact Amsterdam), and they have all received critical acclaim in the Netherlands and Belgium. Immediately after his first visit to Serbia – nearly 10 years after he had left for the Netherlands to study – he met Isidora Žebeljan who soon became his wife. The couple's



Borislav Ćičovački, Isidora Žebeljan

partnership isn't restricted to their private life, nor is it – as this CD may suggest – solely a composer-musician relationship, professionally speaking; Borislav also writes librettos for Isidora's operas. On his own or as a co-author, Borislav Ćičovački has written librettos for four of Isidora Žebeljan's operas, which have been put on stage in Amsterdam, Vienna, Bregenz (Bregenz Festival), Siena (Settimana Musicale Senese), Mülheim, Zagreb, Rijeka, Belgrade, etc. These have been directed by people such as David Pountney and Nicola Raab, among others. Apart from this, Borislav Ćičovački is also actively involved in musicology, dealing primarily with Serbian music of the 20th century. He writes articles for Serbian, Dutch and German magazines and texts for CD booklets, and he gives lectures. For a while, he also organised concerts and other events which promoted significant works of Serbian and Yugoslav art in the Netherlands. He is a professor of chamber music at the Faculty of Art and Philology of Kragujevac University (Serbia). All the compositions in this CD were written for him and he premièred them.

Milica Žebeljan

The **ŽEBELJAN ORCHESTRA** is made up of the best and most promising young Serbian musicians, and its setting varies from string to chamber orchestra. It was established in 2005 with an aim to perform recent and contemporary music, primarily by Serbian composers. The orchestra premièred two of Isidora's operas (*The Marathon* and *Two Heads and a Girl*), and it has also recorded music for the German record label CPO. The orchestra's first conductor is the charismatic **Premil Petrović**, a passionate interpreter and an

exceptional connoisseur of Isidora Žebeljan's music who conducted the world premières of the previously mentioned operas in Bregenz and Siena. Additionally, some members of the orchestra, such as the violinist **Mirjana Nešković**, the violist **Nataša Petrović** and the flautist **Neda Arsenijević**, often play Isidora Žebeljan's music in chamber ensembles.

The other musicians and soloists have been working with Isidora intensively for years:

Aneta Ilić is a leading Serbian soprano and most of Isidora's vocal works have been written for her. She performed and recorded these with the Brodsky Quartet and she sang the leading role at the première of the opera *Two Heads and a Girl*.

Aleksandar Madžar, an internationally renowned pianist, a winner of prizes at Leeds and Bolzano competitions, and a professor at the Royal Conservatory of Brussels, played Isidora Žebeljan's music back when they were studying together in Belgrade, which is when their friendship and cooperation began.

Julija Hartig, a wonderful violinist, member of the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, has been cooperating with Isidora intensively for years. She performs in the premières of her chamber music, as a soloist and an orchestra leader of the Žebeljan Orchestra.

Miloš Veljković is an exceptional Serbian pianist and chamber musician of the young generation who has performed as a soloist with the Žebeljan Orchestra; and he plays in a duo with Borislav Ćičovački.

Miroslav Karlović is an irreplaceable partner of Isidora's when it comes to discovering unusual possibilities for percussions, and he has also edited percussion parts in some of her compositions.

Boban Stošić is Isidora's favourite double bass player, a member of the Žebeljan Orchestra who played and recorded her music with the Brodsky Quartet.

Aleksandar Stefanović is a promising young accordionist, a pupil of Iñaki Alberdi, who has cooperated with Isidora in editing a few of her compositions for the accordion and has premièred them.

Borislav Ćičovački



Isidora Žebeljan www.isidorazebeljan.com

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Oboe, oboe d'amore and cor anglais by Rigoutat, cane by Alliaud

CD notes by Borislav Čičovački and Milica Žebeljan, translated by Zorica Petrović

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