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## How Dobrinka Tabakova shaped her double concerto for Lucas & Arthur Jussen



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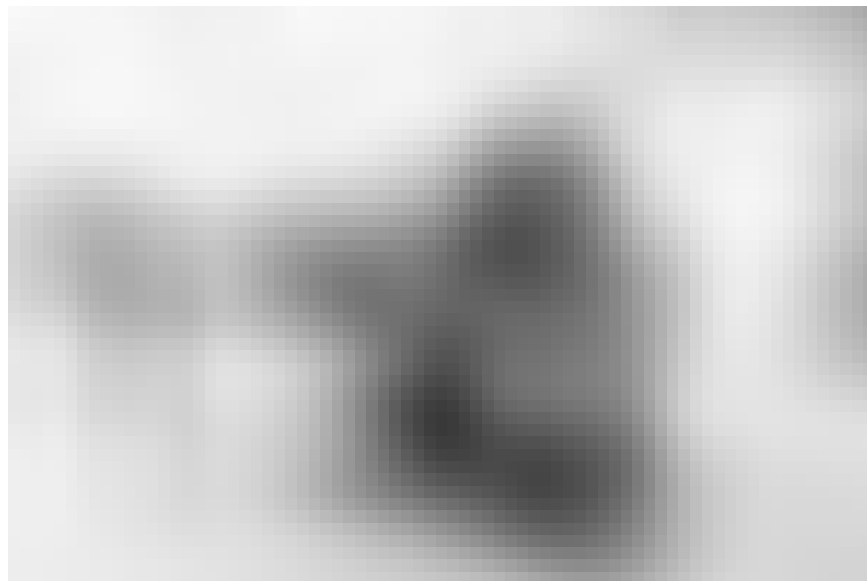
The Bulgarian-British composer Dobrinka Tabakova (1980) writes music that is highly lyrical and communicative. On Thursday 16 November a new double concerto will be premièred in Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ: *Together Remember to Dance*. She composed it at the request of Amsterdam Sinfonietta, for this occasion supplemented with Slagwerk Den Haag. Soloists are the famed pianists Lucas and Arthur Jussen.

**What characterizes you as a composer?**

Improvising was perhaps my first passion, as soon as I started piano lessons when I was around 7 years old. This quality of free expression, while aiming to communicate is an important part of my language. I am happy when people say they feel moved by the music, but I am also intrigued by the question how sound becomes structure in time.

## How did your new composition come about?

Amsterdam Sinfonietta premiered my *Concerto for Cello & Strings* at the Amsterdam Cello Biennale in 2008. We worked wonderfully together, and then they came up with the idea of this double concerto. I am excited to work with Lucas and Arthur Jussen for the first time, and Slagwerk Den Haag. The new concerto for 2 pianos, percussion and strings is called *Together Remember to Dance*. The title is made up of the names of each movement; I was inspired to write a work which would be uplifting and with a buzzing energy.



Arthur (above) and Lucas Jussen, foto Dirk Kikstra

## How have you shaped this double concerto?

I remember immediately having an idea of its structure: three movements, creating a classical symmetry of 'fast-slow-fast'. It's

important for me to imagine how the time will flow for the duration of the new piece. Then I start sketching and improvising to find the themes and timbres of each movement. Out of all 'classical' forms, the concerto is the one I feel closest to, for the early baroque relationship between soloist(s) and ensemble appeals to me: a dialogue rather than a declaration with background.

In *Together Remember to Dance* the pianos, percussion and strings all have their own roles and layers; our attention continuously shifts from one to the other. This was the key concept of the first movement, 'Together'. It sets off with a clash between arpeggio's in the piano's and clusters in the strings.

The traditionally slow middle movement, 'Remember' is a whirling waltz in which I create a sense of spiralling: themes and gestures recur, but each time with a new twist. As if you discover something new while reliving certain memories. The final movement, 'Dance', has a constant pulse, but also catches us unexpectedly.

## **Your piece is on the programme with Bartók's classic Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta. Has this inspired you while composing?**

Works like Bartók's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*, or Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* are among the icons of 20th century music and it is impossible as a composer not to have absorbed and admire them. However, while writing I am so involved with what I am trying to express that it would be difficult to concentrate fully if the thought of another work were hovering in the background.

That Bartók researched music from my home country Bulgaria and uses its rhythms in his final movement is close to my heart. The last movement of my concerto is also a fast paced, kaleidoscopic dance, though the effect is different; it's like a perpetuum mobile. Writing for this combination of instruments will always carry with it a certain link with Bartók, but that goes for any structure or work which bears resemblance to a past form. It is our responsibility as composers and creators to be aware of the past but also to reflect the present and make steps forward.

## **You were born in Bulgaria, but moved to Britain, where you studied music. Why?**

My parents and I moved to London in 1991; they're medical physicists and my father was offered a position at King's College. By that stage I was playing the piano and improvising, but it wasn't until we came to London that I auditioned for a place at the Royal Academy of Music and started studying composition formally. My parents sensed that music would be important in my life, maybe more as a performer, but they were always encouraging and supported my interest in composition.

## **You studied with Simon Bainbridge, Diana Burrell and George Benjamin. Who was the most influential?**

The most important thing is that each of my teachers has their own compositional voice, and I never felt pressed to create pieces which match their styles. For years I studied with different tutors at the same time, so I experienced all of these different techniques of teaching and composing. My first degree was at a conservatoire, which is a very practical environment. At least compared with the more academic university, where I received my PhD.

At the conservatoire, being around performers all the time created a very fertile environment for composition. We could put on our own concerts, which meant finding the musicians who would perform, making rehearsal schedules, conducting... It took composition away from the desk and the lesson and into the concert hall. I treasure the conversations and discussions with each of my teachers, but it was the rehearsals with musicians where you see all of these techniques coming to life.

## **You also took master classes with Louis Andriessen. Could you say something about this experience?**

Louis Andriessen was in London for concerts in the early 2000s. One of the great things about studying in a conservatoire next to the Barbican Centre is that visiting composers would often come over to give presentations and masterclasses to students. I remember submitting a

portfolio and having the chance to show some of my works to Andriessen, including some sketches for a chamber opera. We spoke about collaborating with different artists, experimentation, about challenging audiences and choosing different venues. I have a great respect for him and hope he'll come to the première of *Together Remember to Dance*.

*More info and tickets.*