

Dobrinka Tabakova  
String Paths





**Dobrinka Tabakova** (\*1980)

1 **Insight**

9:35

for string trio

*Dedicated to ASCH Trio*

**Roman Mints** violin

**Maxim Rysanov** viola

**Kristina Blaumane** cello

2–4 **Concerto for Cello and Strings**

*Dedicated to Kristina Blaumane  
and Amsterdam Sinfonietta*

I. Turbulent, tense

7:19

II. Longing

8:42

III. Radiant

4:52

**Kristina Blaumane** cello

**Lithuanian Chamber Orchestra**

**Maxim Rysanov** conductor

5      **Frozen River Flows**      6:12

for violin, accordion and double bass

**Roman Mints**    violin

**Raimondas Sviackevičius**    accordion

**Donatas Bagurskas**    double bass

6–8      **Suite in Old Style**

for solo viola, harpsichord and strings

*Dedicated to Maxim Rysanov*

I. Prelude: Fanfare from the balconies      6:01

Back from hunting

Through mirrored corridors

II. The rose garden by moonlight      7:30

III. Riddle of the barrel-organ player      5:04

Postlude: Hunting and Finale

**Maxim Rysanov**    viola, conductor

**Vaiva Eidukaitytė-Storastienė**    harpsichord

**Lithuanian Chamber Orchestra**

**Džeraldas Bidva**    concertmaster

9 **Such different paths**

16:57

for string septet

*Dedicated to Janine Jansen  
and Spectrum Concerts Berlin*

**Janine Jansen, Julia-Maria Kretz** violins

**Amihai Grosz, Maxim Rysanov** violas

**Torleif Thedéen, Boris Andrianov** cellos

**Stacey Watton** double bass

*Concerto for Cello and Strings*

commissioned by Amsterdamse Cello Biënnale  
with support from the Eduard van Beinum Stichting

*Frozen River Flows* commissioned by new noise

*Such different paths* commissioned by Spectrum Concerts Berlin  
with support from Hauptstadtkulturfonds, Berlin

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[www.dobrinka.com](http://www.dobrinka.com)



## Dobrinka Tabakova – String Paths

This first full album devoted to the music of Bulgaria-born, London-educated composer Dobrinka Tabakova reflects different paths to a convergent artistic end, like a garden maze where multiple trails finally come together. In Tabakova's compositions – richly melodic, texturally sensuous, emotionally radiant –, there resides the new and the familiar, or rather the familiar within the new, and vice versa; there are the spirits of East and West coursing through the pieces, usually hand in hand; and just as the composer's technical virtuosity is apparent, she possesses a desire, and a talent, for open-hearted communication that can be heard in virtually every measure.

Tabakova's music has a particularly 21st-century feel for its broad palette – its free mix of tonality and modality, of folk-music influence and the example of past masters. Her ECM debut came about after a happenstance meeting of the composer with label founder-producer Manfred Eicher at the Lockenhaus Festival in Austria, where violist-conductor Maxim Rysanov was performing Tabakova's *Suite in Old Style*. The resulting album presents Tabakova works from 2002 through 2008, with the music performed by players who have close ties to the composer and to each other. "Performers give composers a voice," Tabakova says. "Without them, the pieces you write are just notes on a page. I love writing for specific performers, musicians I know. I trust that they believe in my music and sense the message of

the compositions intuitively. With all the performers on this recording, I knew that their technique is so high that I had total freedom in the way that I composed. Moreover, there is a good feeling that comes from knowing that the music I write for such players will have a life – not just through their performances, but through the inspiration they will undoubtedly give to other musicians.”

The album opens with the string trio *Insight*, which Tabakova wrote especially for the performers on this recording: Rysanov, violinist Roman Mints and cellist Kristina Blaumane, all of whom attended London’s Guildhall School of Music and Drama with the composer. Tabakova explores various techniques of string playing only to transform the trio, virtually, into a single instrument, one that breathes: an accordion, to her mind; in other passages, the strings hint at a brass choir. “How we visualize sound is one of my fascinations – the way we create pictures in our minds from the sensations that music evokes, the memories, the emotions,” she explains. “With *Insight*, I wanted to challenge the preconception we have when we see a string trio onstage, and this is how the idea of ‘morphing’ the sound to that of different instruments came about. I wanted to create an abstract sonic picture.”

Tabakova composed her *Concerto for Cello and Strings* expressly for Blaumane, the Latvia-born principal cellist of the London Philharmonic

Orchestra. The work presents challenges for the cellist with leaps across the fingerboard in its interrelated first and third movements, “Turbulent” and “Radiant.” The middle movement, “Longing,” is the pensive heart of the work, the cellist tracing and embellishing a pentatonic theme until it blooms expressively and then fades to a whisper. Tabakova says: “The cello resonates with me as a composer for many reasons – its rich sound and overtones, its extensive range, its closeness to the human voice. But also because it is the most grounded, literally, of the string instruments. I wanted to acknowledge this grounded quality, and then try to go beyond it. This is partly woven into the concerto’s structure – the first movement like a stormy sea, the solo cello a ship trying to anchor itself; the lyrical, human second movement; and the floating, ascending opening of the last movement. Kristina is inspirational in that she can go quickly from playing of great technical virtuosity to the most tender sound – both with equal musicality, maintaining a natural, almost singing, phrasing throughout.”

The composer’s inspiration for *Frozen River Flows* – a meditation for violin, double bass and accordion – stemmed from the wintry image of a mountain brook flowing underneath a frozen crust. There is a melancholy to the piece that evokes Schubert’s *Winterreise*, an impression underscored by the vocal lyricism of the violin, the lonely

tolling of the double bass, the hurdy-gurdy-like drone of the accordion. "I originally wrote *Frozen River Flows* for percussion and oboe, and it was at the request of Roman Mints that I transcribed it for this instrumentation," Tabakova explains. "Years ago, I heard Messiaen's organ cycle *La Nativité du Seigneur* performed on the accordion – a magnificent achievement. I imagine the accordion as this extremely versatile one-man orchestra, like a folk-music organ. The introduction of the sound world by the accordion reflects my initial image of the icy brook. Gradually, as the piece unfolds, the music mirrors the realization of a flowing stream underneath the ice – a beautiful natural phenomenon."

*Suite in Old Style*, for viola and chamber orchestra, shares its title and impetus with works by Górecki, Schnittke and Penderecki, among others finding a muse in the music of the Baroque and Classical eras. Tabakova wrote her glowing, touching piece at Rysanov's request, with this now making a triptych of suites that she has written for the violist (as well as a concerto). "Max is passionate about expanding the viola repertoire, and he plays with total dedication and stunning musicality – a real gift for a composer," Tabakova says. "He had been performing the Schnittke Viola Concerto quite a lot, and Schnittke's *Suite im Alten Stil* provided a good precedent to write a piece with an historical flavor, as did Respighi. I especially admire the Italian com-

poser for his freshness in combining music of the past and present, the way he retains the character of the Baroque and Classical styles while elegantly transporting and updating them. I aimed to capture some of this effortless ‘conversation’ with the past that Respighi manages so well. With my *Suite in Old Style*, the conversation I wanted to have was with Rameau. His fast-paced, ‘espresso’ movements – short movements with the highest concentration of musical ideas – grabbed my imagination early on. Later, when I would study his harpsichord miniatures, I always found that same condensed, saturated musical form, bursting with colors and layers. There are no direct quotations from Rameau in my piece, but I used the letters of his name in musical notation to make the melody of the movement *Riddle of the barrel-organ player*. The suite draws from architecture as well as music, including the idea of clean, symmetrical structures with inner decoration, reminiscent of the Baroque.”

Tabakova composed the album’s concluding string septet, *Such different paths*, for silver-toned violinist Janine Jansen. This magical piece consists of one avenue of musical material after another: the violins enter first, next the paired violas, then the two cellos and, lastly, the double bass, with melody lines passed from one instrument to another until the ensemble blends; the solo violin eventually rises sky high, perhaps in a distant allusion to Vaughan Williams’ *The Lark*

*Ascending* (a piece that happens to suit Jansen particularly well). “When Janine approached me to write the piece,” Tabakova explains, “I discovered that chamber music is at the heart of her approach to music making. It’s something that she grew up with, an ideal that she applies to her performances whether concerto or chamber. I was inspired not only by her readiness to communicate with the other musicians, but also by her special sound. That blend of the conversations between the musicians together with the blossoming of the solo line is something I had in mind while composing. The beauty for me in any great chamber work is the discovery of the dialogue between the voices: the layers and the shifts in perspective, like a camera zooming in and out of focus on the background or foreground.”

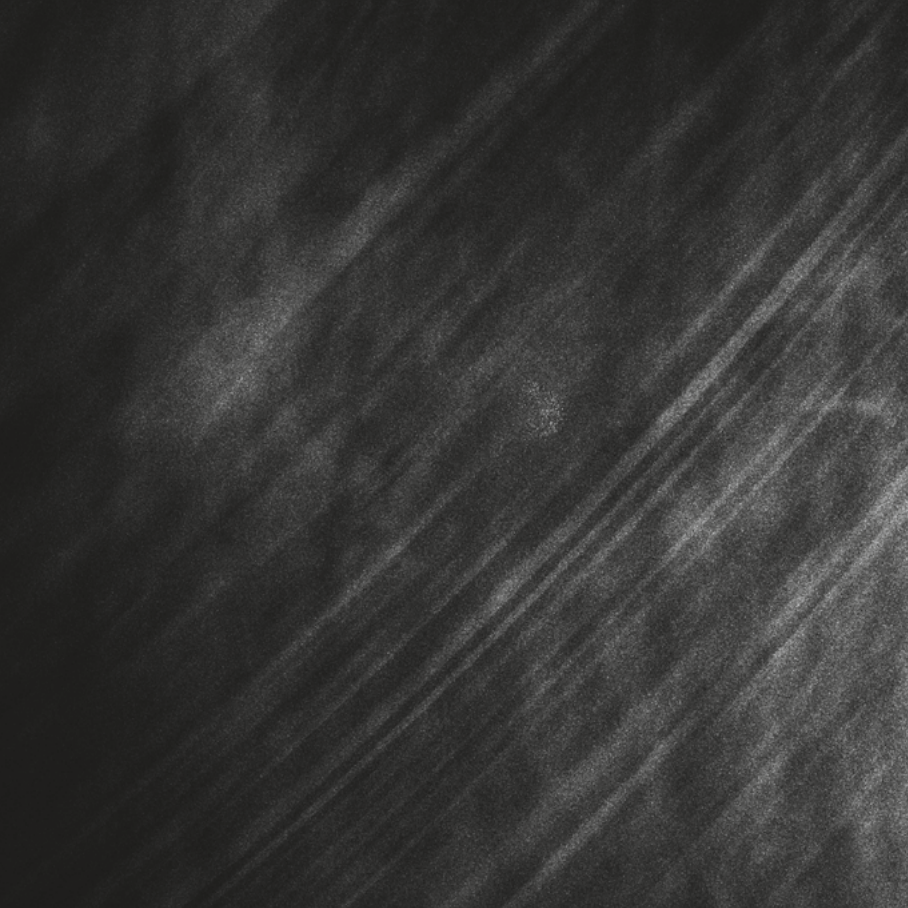
Dobrinka Tabakova was born in 1980 to a family of scientists, doctors and academics in Plovdiv, Bulgaria; in 1991, she moved with her family to England, where she eventually graduated from Guildhall School of Music and Drama and then earned a doctorate in composition from King’s College, London. Long before then, Tabakova was initiated into the magic of music by her grandfather’s LP collection: “I got excited by the records because he was so excited by them – it was the ritual of listening to music,” she says. “We would put on Brahms and Schubert, and he would point out what to listen for.” A revelatory concert experience came at age 6, with the program in-

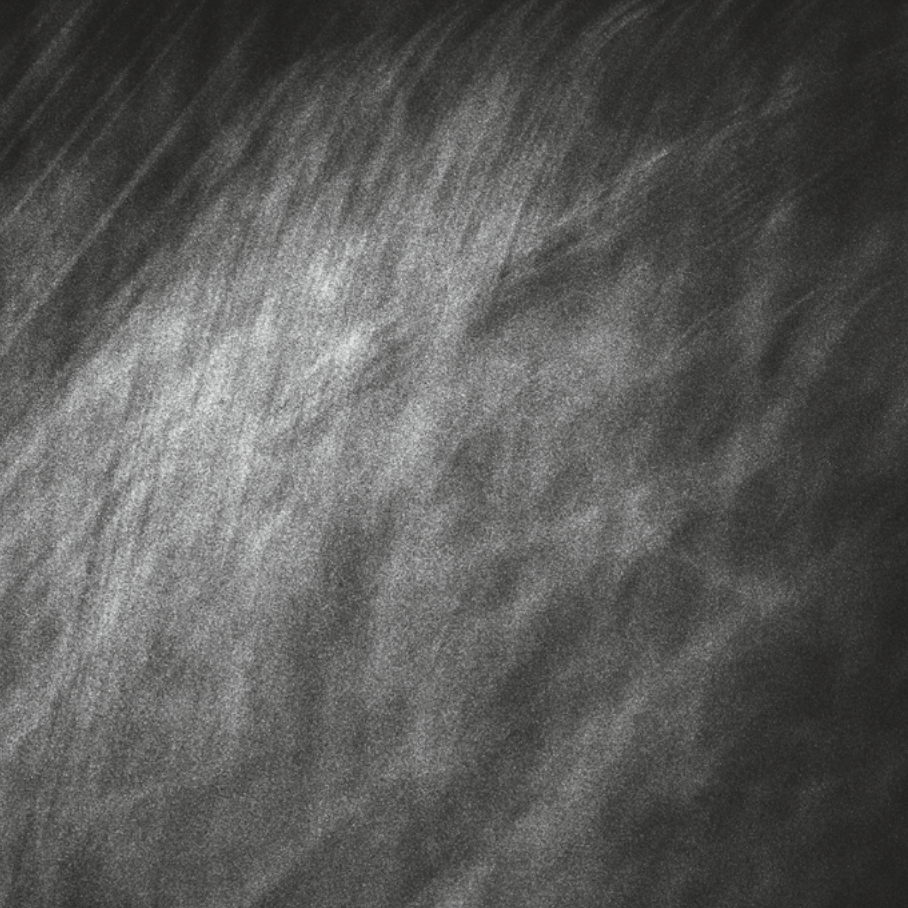
cluding Gershwin's *An American in Paris*. "The music really did make you feel as if you were in a bustling, colorful city like I imagined Paris to be – the energy was so exciting," she recalls. "And the sheer love of sharing music in a place where people had come together – the performers, my family, the audience – has stayed with me ever since." The Third Symphony of Georgian composer Giya Kancheli was another revelation, when Tabakova was a student: "It was mesmerizing – the opening phrase that sounded like a call through the centuries, the distinctive harmonic pace and melodies, the block structure. His work also made me realize that you could write music that was new without necessarily following precepts of the 1950s avant-garde. I saw Rostropovich perform Sofia Gubaidulina's cello concerto *Canticle of the Sun*, and that was another key experience, as I was struck by its almost theatrical, ritualistic quality."

Whether it is Gubaidulina or Gavin Bryars, Somei Satoh or John Adams, it is music that speaks directly that holds the greatest allure for Tabakova – "music that grabs you and has something to say," she says. "This goes for all sorts of music. I picked up Keith Jarrett's album *Köln Concert* in the library as a student, and it immediately spoke to me. He's telling you a story all the way through. You and I could perceive that story differently, but we both feel how important it is to him. That's powerful. I'm naturally drawn to mountain music,

too, whether it's from the Appalachians or the Alps or the Rhodopes of Bulgaria, so I felt another instant connection when I heard blue-grass singer-violinist Alison Krauss and her band Union Station. I love her voice and the way she and her band can make pieces that they play each night sound fresh and personal every time. I have a deep respect for that sort of music making, no matter where it comes from."

Bradley Bambarger













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by Laura Jurgelionytė and Valdemaras Kiršys,  
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