

## Victoria Simonsen - cello



*Photograph by Dirk Rietveld*

Described as 'a musician of rare quality' by The Strad and 'beautifully sensitive and composed' by The Times, Victoria Simonsen has developed a varied career as soloist and chamber musician, and has performed widely not only in the UK but also in France, Far East Asia and New Zealand.

Victoria regularly collaborates with several brilliant young pianists and her UK recital highlights include Queen Elizabeth Hall, BBC Proms Composer Portrait, Leeds International Recital Series, Manchester International Cello Festival, Buxton Festival and Ripon Cathedral. Victoria was winner of the 2008 Royal Over-Seas League Strings Competition, adding to her existing competition accolades which include the Barbirolli Cello Prize, Leonard Rose Prize, Countess of Munster's 'Star Award', New Zealand Young Musician of the Year, New Zealand Performer of the Year, Royal Over-Seas League Travelling Scholarship and the prestigious Silver Medal of the Worshipful Company of Musicians.

As winner of the English-Speaking Union Music Scholarship 2010 she attended the International Master Classes at the Banff Centre for the Arts in Canada and gave several concerts, including one with acclaimed Canadian clarinetist James Campbell. Victoria has been a Solo Artist on the Countess of Munster's Recital Scheme and won a place as a Park Lane Group 'Young Artist' under which she made her Purcell Room London debut in 2009. Master classes have included Mstislav Rostropovich, Bernard Greenhouse, Anner Bylisma, Philippe Muller, Johannes Goritzki, Luis Claret, Maria Kliegal, Gary Hoffman, Patrick Demenga, Colin Carr, Raphael Wallfisch and Ralph Kirshbaum.

As a committed chamber musician, Victoria is regularly invited to the IMS Prussia Cove Open Chamber Music Sessions and for six years, until mid-2009, she was a member of the Barbirolli Quartet. During that time the quartet's achievements included being selected for the ECHO 'Rising Stars' Series, winning a Tunnell Trust Award, a Kirckman Concert Society Award, The Countess of Munster Musical Trust Recital Scheme, 'Quartet in Residence' at Salford University and a Guildhall Artists Fellowship. Engagements with the quartet included the Wigmore Hall, Purcell Room, Chelsea Festival, Cheltenham Music Festival, St David's Hall Cardiff, Harrogate International Festival, Manchester Mid-Day in Bridgewater Hall and St John's, Smith Square.

Born in 1983 in Auckland, Victoria has lived in England since 2002. Her studies at the University of Auckland were followed by postgraduate degrees at the Royal Northern College of Music where she received tuition from renowned cellists Ralph Kirshbaum and Karine Georgian. In 2004 she graduated gaining distinctions in both performance and composition, and in 2006 was awarded the Gold Medal, the highest award bestowed by the college, and at the same competition was voted winner of the Audience Prize. Her interest in contemporary music led to studies with Anthony Gilbert and her own compositions included a work performed by the RNCM Symphony Orchestra and a string quartet premiered at the 2006 Sonic Skylines Festival. Her studies in the UK were enabled by the generous financial support from awards including the Countess of Munster Trust, Patricia Pratt Scholarship (NZVCC), Creative NZ, Philharmonia/Martin Musical Scholarship Fund and the Craxton Memorial Trust. While still a student, Victoria was appointed Section Principal Cellist of the Orchestra of Opera North (2005-2007). Victoria has held a job-share position with the Philharmonia since 2008 and has been Guest Principal Cellist with orchestras such as Scottish Opera, Philharmonia, Northern Sinfonia, Irish Chamber Orchestra and Lancashire Sinfonietta.

Victoria currently lives in London and receives continuing musical guidance from Professor Julius Berger at the Leopold Mozart Zentrum in Augsburg, Germany.

Victoria is exceptionally grateful to Miss Barbara Hilda Knapton, Mrs Kathleen Mary Cavill and the Countess of Munster Musical Trust for enabling her to acquire a cello by Giovanni Grancino, Milan 1687.

### Excellent and Talented Partnership - 5 Stars - Darlington Arts Centre

#### **Dave Robson - Darlington and Stockton Times, 22nd Jan 2010**

In their recital for Darlington Music Society, the gifted young New Zealand cellist Victoria Simonsen and her accompanist Sam Armstrong showed a strong partnership in their deftly phrased projection of Beethoven's Seven Variations on a Theme by Mozart.

Their expression of Schumann's Drei Fantasiestücke op 73 offered a richly romantic foil to the Beethoven, as did their other Schumann offering, the Adagio and Allegro in A flat op 70 in celebration of the 200th anniversary of the composer's birth.

A century plus later, the gentle humour of Paul Hindemith's Germanic took on the old English nursery rhyme, A frog went a courting, and provided a quirkily off-beat and often comical retelling of the story, in refreshing contrast to Schumann's more intense romanticism.

Another 20th century piece, Edward Gregson's Serenata Notturmo (1998) perhaps echoed Schubert in its ability to create a reflective nocturnal moods – even in the 12- note series used in the opening – through dreams to the light of day; an effective and approachable work.

The evening ended with a robust, yet refined, account of Brahms' Cello Sonata in E minor, op 38 from this excellent and talented partnership, plus a bonus encore of more Schumann.

"everything was brilliantly played"

#### **Tully Potter - The Strad, April 2009**

### Beautifully sensitive and composed cello playing

#### **Hilary Finch - The Times, 12/1/09**

#### **Park Lane Group - Thursday 8th January 2009; recital shared with the Sirocco Saxophone Quartet:**

The recital was shared with the beautifully sensitive and composed cello playing of Victoria Simonsen: her performance of the eight short, eloquent movements of Atta for Solo Cello by her New Zealand compatriot, Lyell Cresswell, focused both technical and imaginative prowess. Her Berio Sequenza XIV, too, showed exactly what the instrument was made of: as much drum and resonating board as singer and dancer.

### Victoria Simonsen's brilliant account ....utterly compelling

#### **Stephen Pritchard - The Observer, 11/1/09**

Charlotte Bray is a young composer to watch. Her Throw Back, written last year for the Sirocco Saxophone Quartet, is a rhapsody of great haunting beauty, evoking something of the dense, mysterious fog that rose from the nearby Thames .....

Something of that fog from the river found its way into Victoria Simonsen's brilliant account of Matthias Pintscher's *Figgura V/Assonanza* for solo cello. Consisting entirely of harmonics, the piece ghosted along in an ethereal, whispering dream; gossamer-light and, in Simonsen's hands, utterly compelling. Those same hands hammered alarmingly at the belly of the cello in Luciano Berio's *Sequenza XIV*, a fantastically complex piece imbued with the rhythms of Sri Lanka, before she plunged into Lyell Cresswell's exhausting *Atta* for solo cello, her brow furrowed with the strain of its hellish, furious, triumphant conclusion.

### Victoria Simonsen and Ben Powell in Plymouth

#### **Philip R Buttal - The Plymouth Herald, 17/11/08**

PLYMOUTH Chamber Music has now notched up more than 100 concerts, yet this recital by Victoria Simonsen and Ben Powell was only the third cello and piano duo in the series.

Rather than keeping to the well-proven pattern of both instruments combining continuously, Victoria chose to open with Bach's quite substantial *Third Suite* for solo cello.

There was an initial slight sense of shared adjustment, especially during the opening *Prelude*, but the scintillating playing which followed, bringing together a gloriously rich tone with the neatest articulation and linear shaping, produced a reading of the highest order.

Brahms' first Cello Sonata was a perfect choice, where both cello and piano combined in a flawless ensemble which finely captured every nuance of the composer's essentially somewhat sombre writing.

Ben gave a first-rate performance of the *Two Poèmes* by Scriabin, in fact an ideal aperitif for the final work, Shostakovich's early Cello Sonata in D minor.

This proved the evening's undoubted highlight, with both players almost nonchalantly dismissing the bristling technical difficulties, and equally capable of creating moments of tender lyricism or sardonic wit.

Given the wonderful repertoire out there for cello and piano together, the jury's still out as to whether two individual solos did quite compensate, but this could in no way detract from a superbly enjoyable recital by these two talented and highly personable young artists.

### Tonal Contrast

#### **Mike Wheeler, mvdaily 11/10/08**

Derby Chamber Music's new season was launched by a recital from award-winning cellist Victoria Simonsen (Multi-Faith Centre, Derby University, Derby, UK, 26 September 2008). She was partnered by Simon Lane, replacing the advertised pianist, who was indisposed.

In J S Bach's 3rd Cello Suite, Simonsen made the music really dance, with a lively sense of rhythm balanced by beautifully clear phrasing. The pair of *Bourrées* was crisp, with finely judged tonal contrast between the two, and the final *Gigue* positively skipped along.

Simon Lane played four pieces from Schumann's *Kinderszenen* .....

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After the interval the two players joined forces for Schumann's Fantasiestücke, Op 73. The middle section of No. 2 was playful, and they caught the mercurial changes of mood in No 3.

Well-integrated mood swings were also a feature of their playing in the first movement of Shostakovich's Cello Sonata. There was drive and energy in the second movement (and Simonsen's arpeggio harmonics were faultless). There was a sense of unhurried unfolding to the Largo, and the sharp contrasts that mark the finale were pointed up without being melodramatically exaggerated.

The second of Schumann's *Fünf Stücke in Volkston* (Five Pieces in Folk Style), Op 102, was the aptly-chosen wind-down at the end of the evening.

### Sir Jack Lyons Concert Hall, York

#### **David Denton - The Yorkshire Post, 18/1/08**

"At a time when young instrumentalists are being accused of placing technique above musicianship, Victoria Simonsen stands apart as one of the most talented cellists to have emerged over the past decade.

Thought, affection and expression had been brought to every note in this remarkable recital, while at the same time the technical challenges posed by the sonatas from Debussy and Shostakovich were hardly apparent in her total command of the instrument.

Will we ever hear that sweeping melody that emerges in the first movement of the Shostakovich played with such love and beauty, and I doubt that we shall again experience so many delicate shades in the Debussy.

All of these virtues were signalled in the programme's opening *Pohadka* by Janacek, a score that needs detailed interpretation if it is not to sound slight and uneventful, while the Five Pieces by Schumann sang in long sweeping pages.

She was partnered by an equally notable young pianist, Ben Powell, potentially one of the finest accompanists since the days of the legendary Gerald Moore.

Together they form a formidable partnership."

### New Zealand Young Musician of the Year

#### **Lindis Taylor - The Evening Post**

Final - with The New Zealand Symphony Orchestra

"Cellist Victoria Simonsen's exquisitely touching performance of the Elgar concerto ... she revealed a profundity of understanding, as well as splendidly projected tone and plenty of vigour when needed. Even in the highly personal slow movement her insight seemed not too remote from that of some of the world's great interpreters."

"She has a tremendously deep understanding and profound respect for music"

**Maestro James Judd, conductor**

**Auckland Philharmonia, Auckland Town Hall**

**William Dart - NZ Herald**

"Simonsen tackled the Elgar Concerto with the vehemence and poetry of a young Jacqueline du Pre. From those soul-wrenching chords of the opening bars through to the scurrying Finale ... this was a performance with attitude and vigour. Drawing some lovely sounds out of her instrument ... she made the Adagio an elegy to remember, working in perfect rapport with the orchestra."

**Ryedale Festival**

**David Denton - The Strad**

"...a musician of rare quality..."