

Kremerata Baltica

Artistic director – Gidon Kremer

Twenty years ago Gidon Kremer created the ideal conditions for a musical revolution. The internationally acclaimed violinist unveiled his compelling new initiative at Austria's Lockenhaus Festival in the summer of 1997, giving life to what was destined soon to become one of the world's finest chamber orchestras. Kremerata Baltica – comprising twenty-three outstanding young musicians from Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia – captivated its first audience with playing of unrestrained joy and exuberance and with the variety and vitality of its programming. Those qualities remain essential to its identity as the ensemble enters its 20th anniversary season.

Kremerata Baltica was conceived as Gidon Kremer's 50th birthday present to himself. The new orchestra, which immediately embodied its founder's tireless energy and visionary artistry, arose from the Latvian artist's determination to share the fruits of his rich experience as a soloist and chamber musician with young colleagues from the Baltic States and to enhance the region's cultural life. The learning process allowed no room for artistic compromise; in fact, the ensemble's ethos has been ruled from the beginning by ideals of artistic excellence and adventure. Its outlook has also drawn on an innovative approach to programming, one open to artistic experiment, creative daring and bold challenges to convention.

When interviewed by the *New York Times* in 1999, Gidon Kremer described Kremerata Baltica as a musical democracy: "open-minded, self-critical, a continuation of my musical spirit". Its performances, he continued, should always deliver "a sense of spontaneous music-making that makes a concert dramatic and sensuous, a continuation of the creative process". His high aspirations for the ensemble have been realised with striking consistency ever since.

The headline events in Kremerata Baltica's history and the achievements of its members, past and present, contain ample material for a book-length study. Since the turn of the 21st century, the orchestra has performed in over 50 countries, appeared in more than 600 cities and given over 1,000 concerts. It has secured lasting support from the governments of its three home nations. In addition, it has created a discography of over two dozen albums, including the 2002 ECHO Klassik and Grammy Award-winning *After Mozart* on Nonesuch Records and other critically acclaimed titles on the Deutsche Grammophon and ECM labels. The ensemble's albums of works by Georges Enescu and Mieczysław Weinberg were both nominated for Grammy Award, while its recent recording of Shostakovich's piano concertos with Anna Vinnitskaya for Alpha Classics won the ECHO Klassik 2016 in the category of "Concert Recording (Music of the 20th/21st Centuries)".

Kremerata Baltica is set to celebrate its 20th anniversary and Gidon Kremer's 70th birthday year throughout 2016-2017. The milestone season's highlights include a nine-concert tour of the United States in January and February and an Anniversary Tour with almost 40 concerts across Europe, opening in Vilnius on 18 February, progressing through the Baltic States, travelling to Germany, Switzerland, Spain, the

United Kingdom, France, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Czech Republic, the Netherlands and concluding with Asia tour in May. All tours will be led by Gidon Kremer, who will be joined by celebrity soloists such as Martha Argerich, Khatia Buniatishvili, Tatiana Grindenko, and several young “rising stars” such as Clara Jumi Kang, Lucas Debargue, Pablo Ferrandez, and Martynas Stakionis. The orchestra’s 2016-17 season opens in September with the annual Kremerata Baltica Festival in Jūrmala and closes next May with a tour of Asia.

In 2003 Kremerata Baltica established its own festival in the Latvian hillside town of Sigulda. It also makes regular appearances in major European concert series such as those at Berlin’s Schloss Neuhardenberg, Bavaria’s Schloss Elmau and Schloss Esterházy in Eisenstadt. In recent seasons the ensemble has pushed back the boundaries of its work to include events such as “To Russia with Love”, a concert staged at Berlin’s Philharmonie in 2013 to promote the cause of human rights in Russia, and “All About Gidon”, a part-scenic autobiographical show in which Gidon Kremer performs works close to his heart and speaks about the life and career of an artist. Since 2013 Kremerata Baltica and Gidon Kremer have partnered the famous Russian clown and mime artist Slava Polunin and his Academy of Fools in “Snow Symphony”, a joint project based on Polunin’s pioneering “Snowshow”. In 2015 the ensemble launched its creative project “Masks and Faces”, collaboration between Gidon Kremer and the Russian painter, polemicist and philosopher Maxim Kantor. The latest Kremerata Baltica project “Pictures from the East” is a joint venture with a Syrian artist, Nizar Ali Badr, which focuses on the dramatic situation in the Middle East and the current refugee problem.

Since its early years Kremerata Baltica has worked with soloists and conductors of the highest stature. The ensemble’s characteristic responsiveness and intense focus – qualities that have been fostered and sustained under Gidon Kremer’s leadership – have developed thanks not least to collaborations with the soprano Jessye Norman, pianists Martha Argerich, Evgeny Kissin, Oleg Maisenberg, Mikhail Pletnev and Daniil Trifonov, violinists Lisa Batiashvili, Patricia Kopatchinskaja, Didier Lockwood, Vadim Repin and Thomas Zehetmair, and cellists Yo-Yo Ma, Mischa Maisky and the late Boris Pergamenschikov. Its artistry has also deepened over the course of projects and tours conducted by, among others, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Christoph Eschenbach, Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla, Heinz Holliger, Roman Kofman, Kent Nagano, Sir Simon Rattle, Esa-Pekka Salonen and Saulius Sondeckis.

Kremerata Baltica’s individual identity is closely bound to the diversity and imagination of its programmes. Its players have gained distinction with performances of works from within and beyond the mainstream repertoire. They have given many world premiere performances, including compositions by Lera Auerbach, Leonid Desyatnikov, Sofia Gubaidulina, Giya Kancheli, Victor Kissine, Artūrs Maskats, Arvo Pärt, Georgs Pēlecis, Alexander Raskatov, Raminta Šerkšnytė, Valentin Silvestrov and Pēteris Vasks. The variety of the orchestra’s repertoire is mirrored in its discography, which encompasses everything from Mozart’s complete violin concertos with Gidon Kremer, orchestra versions of Quartets by Schubert and Beethoven, Enescu’s Octet and Astor Piazzolla’s *Tango Ballet* to world premiere recordings of works by Giya Kancheli, Victor Kissine and Stevan Kovacs Tickmayer.

Many of the ensemble's recordings document its close association with particular composers. Its latest album on the ECM label, released in October 2015 to mark Giya Kancheli's 80th birthday year, included world premiere recordings of the Georgian composer's *Chiaroscuro* for violin, string orchestra and percussion and *Twilight* for two violins and string orchestra, with Gidon Kremer and Patricia Kopatchinskaja as the soloists. *De profundis*, released on Nonesuch in 2010, contains the first recording of Pärt's *Passacaglia* in the version created by the composer as a 60th-birthday gift for Gidon Kremer. Other landmark recordings in Kremerata Baltica's catalogue include *Hymns and Prayers*, an anthology of works by Kancheli, César Franck and Tickmayer; *The Art of Instrumentation: Homage to Glenn Gould*, comprising eleven new scores and arrangements that quote from or are inspired by works – mostly by Johann Sebastian Bach – recorded by the inimitable Canadian pianist Glenn Gould, and Deutsche Grammophon's 2015 release of *New Seasons*, featuring Gidon Kremer as the soloist in Philip Glass's *Violin Concerto No 2* together with works by G. Kancheli, A. Pärt and S. Umehayashi.

To mark Kremerata Baltica's 20th anniversary a new album of all Mieczyslaw Weinberg's chamber symphonies has been released on the ECM label in the January 2017.