



bachtrack

FEATURES

INTERVIEWS

OPINION

PLAYLISTS



FESTIVAL  
**PALAZZETTO  
BRU ZANE**  
PARIS

*Le rendez-vous  
de la musique  
romantique française*  
**FROM 24 MAY  
TO 2 JULY 2025**

**BOOK NOW!**  
[bru-zane.com](https://bru-zane.com)



Events

Reviews

Articles

Video

## Joy, sorrow and accordions: Ksenija Sidorova

By [Simon Cummings](#), 16 May 2025

Big careers can have strange and unpredictable beginnings, and in the case of Latvian musician [Ksenija Sidorova](#), her journey to becoming one of classical music's most well-known accordionists could hardly have been more low-key, being practically accidental. It began, she says, with her grandmother. "When she introduced me to the accordion, it was purely by chance. She thought, 'let's pick a hobby' – it was something she thought would be fun to do over the summer. And by the end of the summer I could pull off playing a few songs with her."

"It's a child, it's kid number four... I sometimes call it The Beast"

### RELATED CONTENT

Classics at the crossroads:  
Sofia Philharmonic's autumn  
season

Bachtrack, 6th September  
The Bulgarian capital is truly at the  
meeting point of world cultures, and  
the Sofia Philharmonic offers a heady  
mix of the world's best classical  
soloists, as well as homegrown  
talent.

Rare Everest: Emanuel Ivanov  
on Busoni's one-of-a-kind  
Piano Concerto

Thomas May, 3rd April  
The Bulgarian pianist fulfils his  
ambition of performing Ferruccio



Ksenija Sidorova

© Kaupo Kikkas

Next to her secondary school was a music school. “I was seven at the time. My mom asked me, ‘Do you want to go in?’ We were greeted by some staff of this school, and they said, ‘Does she play anything?’ ‘Oh yes, she plays the accordion!’ They said, ‘How odd! Do you *want* to play the accordion?’ Apparently I said yes – and this is how it began.”

Things became more serious a few years later. “I was around 12 years old, and I had to change my instrument. My parents had to sacrifice a lot to save up and buy me a better instrument. And the question was simply, ‘Do you want to continue playing?’” She did, and she got her new accordion. “I remember going to pick it up, playing the first note, and crying at how good it sounded.” Continuing to play and improve – “I liked practising by that point” – the time came to decide where to go to study more intensively. Two weeks trying out a music college in Riga didn’t work out, but the unexpected next step came from the Royal Academy of Music in London.

“Owen Murray, who still teaches there, got hold of my little demo disc and invited me to play for him. So my mother and I packed our bags in the beginning of December.” They arrived, only to find themselves in the midst of all the prospective students attending auditions. “I said, ‘Great, that doesn’t apply to me. I’m still just 16 and didn’t graduate from my school.’” She went and played for Murray, and was then asked to play again, this time for the then principal, Sir Curtis Price. The result was Sidorova being offered a scholarship to begin undergraduate studies, an opportunity she regards as one of the highlights of her musical

Busoni’s epic *Piano Concerto in C major* – for the first time in his home country – when the Sofia Philharmonic and Emil Tabakov present the work on 27th June.

---

## Sofia’s musical polymath: Nayden Todorov

---

David Karlin, 8th September  
The Director of the Sofia Philharmonic talks about concert programming, conducting, serving a term as Bulgarian Culture Minister, and an impossible wish to clone himself.

---

## Looking for Thomas Adès in the Aquifer

---

Lawrence Dunn, 26th March  
In residence in Manchester with the Hallé, Thomas Adès talks about recent pieces *Aquifer* and *Wreath*, and how bigness and smallness are never exactly quantifiable.

---

## Sun, fish, pigs and children: Borealis 2025

---

Lawrence Dunn, 25th March  
This year’s Borealis festival in Bergen presented a mix of at times bizarre new ensemble, theatre and operatic works from Jason Yarde, Okkyung Lee and Bastard Assignments.

---

## Dreams and documentaries: opera world premieres

---

Bachtrack, 30th August  
We preview nine major new operas on stage this season in Europe, from composers including Unsuk Chin, Rebecca Saunders, Mark-Anthony Turnage, Philip Venables and Toshio Hosokawa.

---

life. “I didn’t know it was possible. There were people who really believed.”

An interest in both old and new music was important to her from the outset. Her first professionally-produced solo album, *Classical Accordion* (2011), opens with Arne Nordheim’s *Flashing*, and features works by Schnittke, Berio – the challenging thirteenth *Sequenza* – and Yuji Takahashi alongside music by Bach, Scarlatti and Mozart. The Nordheim was especially important to Sidorova. “It’s my favourite. I love this piece, and it was my introduction to contemporary music when I was in London, and to beautiful sound production on the accordion, which is an art on its own. This piece is so delicate.”

Flashing



Ksenija Sidorova performs Arne Nordheim's *Flashing*.

Sidorova’s interest in new music led to her actively seeking out new repertoire for the instrument. “It was a dream that I would be collaborating. There wasn’t so much repertoire, so we knew we needed to create it.” During her time studying at the Academy, she became friends with Bulgarian composer Dobrinka Tabakova. Sidorova asked if Tabakova had anything she could play, and received a movement from her *Piano Concerto*, “and I said: I love this piece! Do you mind if I do something with it?”

Tabakova didn't mind, and the reworked result was *Horizons* – included on her 2024 album *Crossroads* – and now Tabakova has composed a new concerto specifically for her.

A few weeks after its world premiere in May, Sidorova will be bringing Tabakova's Concerto to the composer's native Bulgaria, performing it on *19th June in Sofia*, with the *Sofia Philharmonic* conducted by Nayden Todorov. She hasn't performed with the Sofia orchestra before, but is looking forward to it, in no small part because Tabakova will be attending to hear its Bulgarian premiere. "She'll be there, and she's a very warm person, so I feel her support."

Even though Sidorova wasn't actively involved in its composition – "I'm not a composer, I don't want to interfere", she says – the new work was actively inspired by her playing. I asked Tabakova about this, and she recalled, "I heard Ksenija perform an arrangement of a Bulgarian folk dance with mandolinist Avi Avital, which was at the back of my mind when writing the multiple time-signatured final movement." This leans in to Sidorova's perceptions of the nature of the accordion. "It's multifaceted," she explains, "I never want to forget its roots in folk music. Composers often turn to the folk side of it. They always include something, like Dobrinka is doing. The last movement is very folky. I think it's a big part of the instrument."

Avi Avital & Ksenija Sidorova (WORLD.MINDS ...



Ksenija Sidorova performs with Avi Avital.

Considering the poetic and evocative titles Tabakova tends to give her compositions, it seems surprising that this new work has an entirely functional title, *Concerto for Accordion and Orchestra*. Yet its individual movements – 'Blazing Ground', 'Whispered Memory', and 'Ancient Patterns' – shed some light

on the subject matter, rooted in considerations of the relationship between machines (such as technology and AI) and the soul, summarised by the question, in Tabakova's words, of "how will our fragile human souls cope with a virtual reality, which aims to substitute real connection and curiosity?"

Thinking about this tension between humans and machines gets me wondering to what extent Sidorova regards her accordion as a machine, something external, or more inextricably part of herself. "It's a child, it's kid number four," she says, referencing her three (human) children, and though she's quick to point out "I'm not that crazy that I give it a name", admits that "actually I sometimes call it The Beast." Her description makes the accordion sound like the essence of Tabakova's concerto, something combining real and artificial life. "There's all these metal parts to it, so yes, it is a machine. But then it has bellows, so it's a breathing creature." That breath, she emphasises, has given voice to people through the ages. "It's a traditional instrument in so many countries, an accompaniment to many songs. It brings out joy, sorrow – it's emotional." This informs her attitude to choices of repertoire. "I think I've found my language. I tend to follow my heart – I want to like the music that I perform because, if I don't believe in it, I'm never going to convince the audience to believe in it."

She describes the itinerant soloist experience, moving from orchestra to orchestra, as "a little bit like being adopted by a family for a little period of time." This 'adoption' process involves Sidorova continually making adjustments to the way she utilises her instrument. "It's a journey, always, with orchestras. I love it, I really do, because there's so many sounds you can work with. With Dobrinka's piece, I can't wait to get into the first rehearsal because I'm sure, with the registration, I'll have to change a lot. And it's a bit of pressure, you know," she says, smiling broadly, "it's happening very fast!"

## Ksenija Sidorova: Piazzolla - Aconcagua (Unex...



Sidorova performs Piazzolla's *Concerto for Bandoneon and Chamber Orchestra* 'Aconcagua'.

Sidorova's relationship with contemporary music is deep and long-lasting, and her repertoire of concertos includes Vaclav Trojan's *Fairy Tales*, Piazzolla's *Concerto for Bandoneon and Chamber Orchestra* 'Aconcagua' (Piazzolla features extensively in her output) and Artūrs Maskats' *What The Wind Told Over The Sea*, all of which she has recorded. Concertos also feature in her future plans, with a new one coming from Turkish composer Fazıl Say, and a forthcoming recording featuring concertos from two fellow Baltic composers, Erkki-Sven Tüür's *Prophecy* and Tõnu Kõrvits' *Dances*. More immediately, she'll be participating in a residency at the *Bodensee Festival* in May and June, and making her debut at Carnegie Hall in a *solo recital in November*.

I ask if she sees her role as an ambassador, advocating for the accordion in contemporary music. "Absolutely. My teachers started this journey, they were the true pioneers. It's a big task, so I just continue doing that, and of course there's a lot of colleagues of mine nowadays. The calling is there, and they're doing the same thing. So I think we're all raising awareness." Her advice to prospective accordionists is simple: "Be open to everything. This is your time, you've got the time, don't waste it. Enjoy it!"

*Ksenija Sidorova performs with the [Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra](#) on 19th June in Sofia, conducted by Nayden Todorov.*

*This article was sponsored by Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra.*



Simon Cummings



Simon Cummings is a composer, writer and researcher based in the Cotswolds. He composes instrumental and electronic music, exploring aspects of algorithmic composition, and has recently completed a Ph.D. in composition at the Birmingham Conservatoire under the supervision of Richard Causton and Howard Skempton. His musical tastes are ludicrously broad but are focused most on contemporary/avant-garde classical and electronic music. When not composing, he writes regularly about new music; Simon is the author of the contemporary music blog 5:4 (5against4.com), and regularly contributes articles for a variety of books, journals and websites. Follow him on Twitter @5against4.

---

[Site map](#) [Contact us](#) [About us](#) [Link to us](#) [Cookies](#) [Privacy](#)

© 2010-2025 Bachtrack Ltd. All rights reserved. [Click here for conditions of use](#)

This product includes GeoLite2 data created by MaxMind, available from <https://www.maxmind.com>