

## Ksenija Sidorova in Conversation with Romano Viazzani

September 2014



***Ksenija, wow! What a busy time you have had! I must admit that the first time I met you at the Royal Academy, I think you were eighteen years old...***

*... Sixteen...*

***... sixteen! My goodness! No. Well you didn't look it and you didn't play like it either!... well I knew right away that you would be one of the accordionists that would enjoy a high profile career the likes of which have probably never before been witnessed in the UK by a British-based accordionist. Did you think it would be like this?***

Thank you so much for your nice words but actually I didn't think it would be like this. I had a wish of where I would like to get to or maybe my little aims but I worked towards it. If I had been thinking that I was already there nothing would have happened I'm sure.

***But it was definitely what you aimed for...***

Yes, and there is still so much work to be done. (She laughs).

***So what made you want to study in London...what does the accordion department of the Royal Academy of Music and more generally London the city, offer a young accordion student like you were when you came here?***

Well, it was a successful accident of coming to London really because at the time I was lost and I really didn't know where I wanted to study. It might have been Russia because accordion music there is an old fact, but the fees would have been high because even though I am Russian by blood I'm considered a foreigner by passport, which is a problem. Somebody, one of my friends gave a demo disc to Owen Murray which I made when I was sixteen and he emailed me back and said I could come to play at the Academy, which I thought might have been an invitation to a master class, so I arrived with my mum and it turned out to be an exam, so this is where the accident happened. My language skills were ok, I could write an essay and my musical skills, solfeggio or rather my aural skills were ok too so I went into the exam and you know when you are under stress you can do nothing else but give your best of what you know at the time. Then I received this letter of invitation from the

Academy which I didn't take seriously at first so I double-checked everything and it was true. So my parents started to save up money for me to go and despite all these extra problems nevertheless it happened and I think London is a great place for any instrumentalist. For accordion its fantastic because there is a little niche which needs a lot more people to work in it because as you know everyone is busy and everyone has, thank God, concerts and something to do, so I think all Owen's students, past, present and future will enjoy a full schedule of fun events and not only fun, but difficult things too. So it's a challenge and I took this challenge with great joy. At home I couldn't really grow in the Contemporary music field for example, which was weaker, so I'm glad I did it. The decision to send me here was taken by my parents. Now I consider London as my home.

***So London as a city has offered you...***



Oh Gosh, massive, massive opportunities. Opportunities to go to concerts first of all, countless concerts. Everyone comes here or passes through, on the way to America coming back from America, great people, phenomenal artists and musicians. You can go to many exhibitions too which can inspire you. That's a great thing. I'm just lucky to be here.

***You already spoke English fluently though didn't you when you came to London?***

Yes, because my parents were always keen and in Soviet times they didn't have the opportunities to learn languages as we do now, growing up in post-Soviet times. It wasn't just because it was a cool thing to do, they really wanted me to do more. I do speak a little bit of German and I'm trying to do more. Then I also speak Latvian and Russian so English was the foreign language to learn too. I did a lot of extra lessons before I came here; I would just love to read that essay I wrote for my audition because I'd like to know how I did it! (She laughs out loud)

***I just remember you speaking perfect English even back then. I don't remember you struggling at all with the language...***

It was more about getting used to the slang words or the accent. The first time I got into the cab to go to the Academy was actually one of the first times I'd left the country besides Italy and Lithuania at all those accordion events, but the UK was something special, such history, an incredible place and I remember asking the taxi driver to drive past Big Ben and he said what's that? I should have said The Houses of Parliament, of course. Anyway, he didn't drive us there so I left it to when I came to study here to see it. So in the taxi I said to him, "We are going to the Royal Academy of Music", and he replied but I did not understand a thing! He may have been Scottish and he was really hard to understand. It was really tough

***(Laughs)***

Then after you just start to get used to it. I was sixteen and everything was easier. Now if I had to move or go somewhere to explore somewhere else for experience it would be much harder. It's such a tough step to make. You really have to believe in something...back then, I

didn't know.

**When you're young you just jump in and swim!**

Yeh, give it a try.

**Now, I would say you are a marketing dream because you have a fearsome talent, a phenomenal technique, power coupled with a rare, dare I say, feminine sensitivity, and you have emotional depth – a combination that is not always common in accordionists. Then you have a fabulous personality and the looks of a fashion model! Does this combination help you to succeed or do you encounter sexist prejudices which lead to people misjudging you at first?**



I think it's a common problem now in the music world, and generally in the arts world; just yesterday I was reading Norman Lebrecht's blog about female conductors...

... **Yes I saw...**

... and Nicky [Nicola Benedetti] was being interviewed yesterday by the BBC and was saying that there are far more top violinists now that are female rather than male now. She mentioned Alina Ibragimova, Vilde Frang, Anne-Sophie Mutter, herself, actually she didn't mention herself, I am...she is a very humble person. You do encounter this...ok it can help anyone to look good or something...it's just a package thing which some people do judge you when they see it, but some say that it [success] is just because of that and they don't look at

your musical skills and what you can do but I think once they hear you and close their eyes, this is what matters, because if you close your eyes and nothing is happening then there is a problem. When you record a disc there is no visual aspect so it's just audio and I try to do my best. This is not the main point. The main point is something else. If you really want to stay in a music career and you care about longevity then you accentuate your best skills in music not in looking pretty because this is all going to go at some point. People get older and they change. You become a more mature musician, more knowledgeable you start having other skills. It does help I'm not denying it but I try to accentuate other skills. Anyway with accordion all the bits are covered! (They laugh)

**Exactly, you can't wear a wet t-shirt for example like Vanessa-Mae...**

... Who was recently very successful at the Olympics!

**Was she?**

Yes! In the ski-ing

**No! Vanessa Mae?!! With the violin or without? (He jokes)**

(She laughs) Yes and she went through to the final!

**Was it in the ski-jump, because it was the first time that women have been allowed to participate in the ski-jump this time. Previously it was deemed too dangerous for women apparently.**

Giant slalom she was on the Chinese team, I think...or...

**... [checks Wikipedia] She's British, half Thai half Chinese and was born in Singapore! She could have skied for any of them!**

She probably plays the accordion too! (Laughing)

**Yes, like Yuri Medianik whom I hope to interview in the future for Strumenti e Musica and who is equally brilliant on accordion and violin.**

Yes, I had the chance to hear him in the summer when he came to Riga playing a Tango programme. Great. An all-round phenomenal musician.

**Your old classmate Martynas Levickis has enjoyed some amazing success too with his number one album in the UK Classical charts last July. Do your paths cross much these days?**

We sound so old..."old classmates"... (she laughs).

**How long were you there together for?**

I think we graduated about two or three years ago. It's very recently really.

**Yes it is.**

Unfortunately I haven't seen him for a long time but we are in touch on Facebook.

**I know when I interviewed him he mentioned that you did something together in Lithuania?**

Yes because there is music festival there which has a week of accordion because Lithuania is much bigger than Latvia with regard to the accordion scene and they have so many wonderful students and teachers. There is a big association and he is the director of that accordion week. He invited me and also some accordionists from Poland to contribute to the week. We did have a big concert. It was massive in a big church and a lot of people came. I think he is doing incredibly well in every field because he also does very serious concerts.

**I know. In fact we talked about this with him in the interview as obviously he has gone down the popular classics route and someone maybe hearing his album my not realise that he has all the training that everybody else had at the Royal Academy and he has also played very, very demanding and emotionally deep pieces as well.**

Yes, and it's not an easy route either and he has a really tough schedule.

**I think it's a really good thing that there are two of you in the UK at the moment who are in the media spotlight and he is reaching a lot of people that have maybe never...**

... Considered buying an accordion album...

**... Yes, and people have seen him on BBC Breakfast TV, and I know some of my young students who have seen and who speak some colourful 'street slang' say of Martynas, "He's sick man!" which to the uninitiated means that he's really good!**

... (she laughs) Yes, it's quite incredible the coverage he gets and the amount of people he

reaches.

***And then there is yourself, simultaneously going down the less popular route and getting amazing success too.***

Well I think he had this coming because he entered Lithuania's Got Talent and it was his idea. He was working on all the arrangements and trying not to make them too cheesy.

Actually he's done it really well because he hasn't done it in a cheesy way. Everything is very well played and in good taste. You can tell there's substance there. Maybe someone who didn't have his training may play the same pieces but in a less refined way.

Everyone chooses their paths and what they're comfortable with and that's what matters and I think he does it great. He has great charm and there is an extra personality which opens up when he's on stage.

***My daughter Adelaide says "I love the way his hair flicks about 'shoom, shoom, shoom' while he is playing," which makes me laugh.***

Ah yes but now recently he has a new look with straight hair, a sleek look.

***He looks like Toralf Tollefsen now. I have compared pictures of them on my Facebook page. There is also Peter Dranga who looks the image of Wolmer Beltrami.***

Did you put a double photo? (She laughs) Who do I look like?

***Well there weren't many famous female accordionists in that era to compare you to! We have to find a female accordionist from the 1940s as that's when these other players were from that era. It's like they're reincarnated!***

I have to see.

***I have been listening to your recordings recently too. I must say they are superbly played and superbly recorded. Your solo album has some real classical and contemporary tour de forces. 'Flashing' by Nordheim is for me, how everyone should play this kind of repertoire. The way it's played and the way it's recorded is truly amazing. You understand the piece completely and therefore the listener too understands it completely which is so important in contemporary music.***

Exactly, well whatever you believe then the listener will believe too.

***And your Scarlatti is amazing as is your Bach and you have some real show pieces in the Mozart Variations on A vous je direi maman, which most people in the UK know as the nursery rhyme Twinkle, Twinkle little star, then the Schnittke Revis Fairy Tale, Berio, the philosophical Takehashi, then rounded off with Piazzolla Five Tango Sensations. That's a lot of content for one album.***

Well thank you. The latest one was actually the concerto with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales...

***... Which I'm also coming too.***

Well, all these pieces were very much going for the mixed recital approach. I wasn't expecting it to be covered with reviews and stuff. And turned out that it did. The Daily Mail gave it five stars, The Independent, everyone so I didn't expect it at all. It was a lovely chance to record for this small label – Champs Hill, which is West Sussex based, with a lovely producer who is now chief executive of the company and even though he is so young he has a huge knowledge and fantastic ears. When I first met him I thought, you're not going to listen to my

Berio are you? Then when I started playing he came out with these comments which made some things change in my head about those pieces. Actually 'Flashing' was one of the first contemporary works I did at the Royal Academy and when I came here I was scared that would have to play all those pieces that I would not enjoy and every time Owen suggested a piece I would ask him, "Is it very contemporary?"

***It was your stock answer, or rather, stock question.***

Yes I needed to know the level of contemporary-ness! I used ask him "what is this one?" and "what is this one?" and he would say "chew it over for me". Then I would go off and learn it and he would explain then how the sound works. It's a perfect piece to work on the sound and the bellows technique because it has everything so it's like a massive etude. I have enjoyed playing since and I feel really comfortable with it. All the repertoire I recorded are my core works so I'm glad it went down so well. Then there was also the opportunity to record 'Five Tango Sensations' even though it was only one movement. Some of the other movements have not been included but I'm hoping to release them a little later with the Sacconi Quintet, who are one of the leading young quartets of today with a busy, busy schedule. To have those people in the room, and it was the first time I met them and we had to record immediately, and with no rehearsal but we connected so well and had many concerts after that.

***Wow! Brilliant! And no rehearsal, straight to recording.***

I don't know how I did it. Now, I would have thought ten times before doing it. Luckily, on my journey as a musician I met those wonderful people, like yourself, (RV gasps), no seriously, who are wonderful supporters of the accordion, people who believe, can give constructive criticism, which is important because you always need to watch out and be attentive to what you do. It's not always praise.

***You're making me cry... (teasing)***

(She laughs) No!

***Then there is your guest appearance on Nicola Benedetti's album Silver Violin. How often do you get to work with these big stars like Benedetti and Karadaglic?***

Well I have had the chance also to be on Milos's [Karadaglic] disc. We started working even before he started the first disc. So it was a funny one because I saw him bloom like a flower, it was happening in front of my eyes, and I saw him grow into this fantastic star. He's always actually been one, it's just that he got to other people too. He's a phenomenal musician, very sensitive. So afterwards he recorded all that album, then he recorded the 'Latino Pasion', including a version of 'Libertango' and so I said "Darling, there is accordion in 'Libertango'!" And so he said, "Ok let's try and do something." Then we received this invitation to participate in The Classical Brit Awards on TV so we decided to sit down and figure out an arrangement, so we just jammed for an hour and came up with this arrangement and then said he wanted to re-record the album and he did, this time calling it Latino Gold, this version, and this is where I appeared. He said, "I'm so happy to have you, we should have done it like this from the beginning." So he believed in it after all. And Nicky [Benedetti] I was introduced to her by the producer of my two albums, Alex Van Ingen and as soon as she opened the door to her flat where we rehearsed I felt like I'd known this person for years. She is one of those really friendly people who means so well to anyone, just a super-nice person, a very rare person...

***You can see that she is very she is very intelligent...***

She's very clever, very sincere, and hard-working. She never gets tired!

***You actually beat me to it because a few years ago I had a little tango ensemble with Simon Mulligan, Yaron Stavi and Melody Castellari, all brilliant musicians, and we needed a violinist and we needed somebody good, hopefully high-profile so I thought ah, Nicola Benedetti. The next thing I know...too late...Ksenija but I'm really pleased for you... grrr!***

(She laughs). It was for the recording of this album about film music and of course Por una cabeza has featured in an endless amount of movies so we just worked then started meeting outside of work, just as friends and later she invited me to be on another album which is The last decade which is her latest album and where we recorded Brahms' 'Hungarian Dance No.5' and Monti's 'Czardas' in a funny arrangement which was incredible fun of course. It's just incredible that I had a chance to meet them and they were pleased to meet me too so now we keep in touch.

***And you concerts with them too?***

I did a tour with her for 'The Silver Violin' album which was in October-November. Now she is in India.

***Yes I heard about that on the radio yesterday. She's with the Scottish composer James MacMillan. He's getting very into Indian music apparently.***

Yes. What interests about Nicky is also her love for working with children. She dedicates a lot of her time working for Outreach. I have just started with. I'm a baby compared to her. Since the age of sixteen she has been in the spotlight and what I admire is how she dealt with it. She never turned it to a pop career although she could have just like that. She really cares about her profile and how it's going to be over the years so whatever she does is always high quality work. So I'm just learning from this how to work. It's a great environment.

***Your orchestral album which we mentioned before – an excellent performance of Vaclav Trojan's Fairy tales. How was it playing with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales? Also Thomas Gould makes a guest appearance in Oblivion. Were you at the Royal Academy together?***

Yes, actually I think he was graduating when I came. I remember a day when I was booking a practise room and I entered the room and it was Tom, and I didn't know who he was and didn't care less because I needed to practise and told him to get out of here, (she laughs). And he said "Okay", and left and he still remembers this! Of course he was the star student then and I had only just arrived. Now we are playing together and we are having a few UK festivals, Petworth Festival, I think the Gower Festival in the summer. He's a different violinist to Nicky, a different kind and we have different repertoire together. It's very exciting for me to do all of those things.

***You said you played with Joshua Bell as well?***

No, I played for Joshua Bell for the Young Arts Alumni.

***Any other big names we should know about?***

Er... Mandolinist Avi Avital. I will tell you a bit more about that later. Thomas Gould was a phenomenal addition to this album. I can't even say he was an addition because it was just for one track Oblivion. It's a very violinistic piece – the arrangement we played. He's a really big guest on it and I'm really glad that this track is now on the radio because I think we made a

nice duo and I really didn't expect...again, both this orchestra and Tom were brought on the day for the recording. The orchestra were phenomenal because of course at the beginning they were thinking "what are we doing here for an accordion, seriously", but by the end, this is such a concerto which you cannot leave without smiling. It's a complete cartoon, like the Nickelodeon channel or something or cartoon network. They enjoyed it and I enjoyed it. They are an incredible orchestra to put this all together and of course Clark Rundell, the conductor, who just held the whole thing together. We had six hours to record the whole thing. New for me because I had never played it with an orchestra before only with a second piano and for the orchestra it was a first and now it is one of my repertoire pieces. Then Tom came in at the end of the session so we literally had an hour to record the piece which is very little if you compare it with pop albums where they may take months to record. What we did was an incredible task. Also it's one of the first concertos which has stayed in the repertoire to the present day since it was written in 1959. Apart from the Olè Schmidt concerto it's the only one for Free Bass from then. It's really beautiful. I really like this work.

***I find that with those kind of orchestra don't often say much to begin with because they don't really know what to say. Then by the end it's always positive. Maybe it's an impression we get as accordionists that they look down on our instrument but maybe that's us that imagine that rather than it being the reality of what they really think. It's easy to develop a victim mentality playing the accordion with these pillars of the classical music world and that maybe it's easy to feel we are not deemed worthy of them...***

... I'd say maybe a fighter mentality. You can't go in as a victim because you have to go in being so sure, mentally sure, and this is thanks to Owen and the Academy again and their mental training for musicians which I would really recommend to everyone. It does help and every now and then I come back to my written records of the classes because you have to be so strong. When you go to an orchestra like that is so high profile you need to make sure you know one hundred percent every note of what everyone is doing. You can't afford to give yourself time to relax. Everything has to be controlled and I see this with these phenomenal soloists like Nicky, or Milos maybe who works with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra on a regular basis, the New York Philharmonic, Berlin Phil, you know, it's something that they know so well and I see that me as an accordionist I cannot afford any less. You always have to do one step more.

***As I say, by the end they always say what a great instrument it is...***

... And only you know how much work is included to make them feel that. To be able to prove that to someone you have to be 150% ready or more.

***Strumenti&Musica readers like to hear about the age-old question regarding systems. You play piano-bayan with B system free bass. Is this the usual system played in your native Latvia? Being a piano-accordionist myself I know that piano-accordionists can often be made to feel a bit like second-class accordionists in accordion circles by some adjudicators in competitions, some teachers, when compared to our button-playing colleagues due to some of the genuine and valid advantages buttons have over piano keys such as their pitch range and how far one can stretch with one hand etc. Their expectations seem somehow less from piano accordionists. Have you ever encountered some of these prejudices? And if so has it made you stronger in proving you are musically equal?***

Obviously I have encountered this but mostly this happened in my accordion world days because now that I'm in a bigger world amongst other musicians they couldn't care less what system I play. They don't know, first of all and this is a little "minus" in our accordion world.

There is no one system. It hasn't been thought through yet, it's very different, it's difficult because you cannot have this one standardisation and this is something which eventually will come, I don't know when, many years I think maybe even a century, because at the moment there are too many differences going on. In my country we have the one system which is the "Russian" or B system in the left hand and the high notes are at the top or chin-end of the instrument.

The fingerings are very different from the C system or what they play in Serbia for example so when you do a master class you really need to know both systems to give advice on where to put the fingers and even if it is a button accordion I try my best to get my interest in there as well because I think no child or no student should feel discriminated against because of their system.

It really doesn't matter. If you ask violinists if they have any differences, sometimes they too use different bows which ultimately make little difference to the outcome so I think it's absolutely fine for now but I can say that I'm lucky now that nobody asks me this question anymore. Any problems I have with stretches I have to sort myself like every other accordionist. I'm sure you do it as well.

Whatever works best for you is the way and I remember when I met Vladimir Zubitsky where I met him for the first time in Italy said to me, "I don't care what you play with, it can be your nose, as long as it sounds well then this is how it should be done, so I have my fingering systems, sometimes I call it "the thumb technique" which Owen said like "Oh show me this", because you have to stretch you hand so much sometimes and it doesn't matter as aesthetically it looks alright, it doesn't look like 'oh, what's happening there', I think it's fine, so,

I hope one day there will be standardisation because it will be easier for exercise books for teaching. I use some of Jacomucci's books for study written for button bayan and I couldn't care less because some of them work also on piano.

***Yes, the standardisation thing would be a dream but if someone comes to the accordion from already having played the piano for example then it's almost inevitable that they would start on a piano accordion because it's a natural transition.***

Yes, and we never had button accordion in my country. Lithuania had one student, now maybe two on buttons, it would be good to bring it there and if I was a kid now or I were teaching my child I would probably start them on buttons. Not because of discrimination but we really do know...

***... They suffer less...***

... They suffer less and you want the best for your kids. Then there's another question. Would you want them to be a musician? (She laughs)

***Good point. With you as a role model probably yes! Sometimes we have to make compromised with repertoire, with stretches etc. but now there is so much repertoire now not like before, and while some composer may like to exploit the ease with which***

***these stretches are possible on buttons other composers are maybe less concerned with this aspect.***

I work with a lot of composers nowadays and I always mention to them that there is another type of accordion with buttons and if they like we could do it in two ways. A reduction for piano where it's possible to cover the range with registers but by no means make it easier...

***Yes, they just need to write what they feel they need to write...***

Also we want future generations of accordionists to be better than us. It's like being a parent to a child. You always want your child to be more successful than you. It's the same with players, we need to wish that they will be better than us and take on more complicated pieces earlier, just as it is in sport.

***You competed in many competitions. How important are accordion-only competitions in the grander scheme of things? And what about competitions against other instrumentalists?***

I think the grander scheme of things would not come without accordion-only competitions because you need to establish yourself in this accordion family even though it's a very small world. You go there not only to play or win or lose or whatever, but also to pick up the repertoire, exchange, meet other people which is very important to see how they live because you need to be in this field and see what everyone else is doing. Then also when you are a child there are not many performance opportunities where you can go and play say, fifteen minutes of music, or half an hour or a one hour programme which gives you a lot of experience immediately.

Then you can go and do other competitions against other instruments, already knowing your strengths and weaknesses, of course accentuating your strengths in order to win but it does help and I'm glad I did what I did before and I did go to accordion championships, Castelfidardo competition but then I was very happy to take part in all-instrument competitions where nobody has this... sometimes you can say there is this closed mind about systems and stuff like this. If I had the chance I would like to expand the jury a little bit in accordion competitions.

They could really do more with other instrumentalists and conductors because sometimes they judge too much on those systems rather than musicality. Sometimes you somebody really musical being misjudged. We have great players out there when I see what is happening now, kids getting younger and playing more difficult stuff...

***... And also with a varied jury in instrumental competitions you are exposing your instrument to great conductors, instrumentalists, composers...***

... Exactly and this is when you get invited and this is when your career begins and this is when you start rotating in a bigger world. You want some conductors to notice you and maybe they won't offer you anything immediately but they will remember you and somebody might say, "Oh actually I remember seeing an accordionist there", and then you know it's your friend because it's a small world.

***In the UK we have recently formed UKAAT (United Kingdom Association of Accordion Teachers) to try to raise the standard of teaching and performance in the UK. Last Sunday you rana workshop, master class and performance at the Royal Academy organised by AYM (Awards for Young Musicians). How much do you get involved with***

***teaching and do you have much time to do it at the moment?***

I remember my last years at the Academy I was really keen on teaching and I trying to find students and by the end I got to five. That was my top. I tried to travel to them, it wasn't even about earning the money because I spent much more in travelling, but it was more for experience because I know just how tough it is to teach someone to play such a complex instrument. I really appreciate people who do that. It's really tough.

I used to think I would never be able to work with a child because I would get too irritated with somebody that doesn't work out and I actually get more sensitive towards it and then when they achieve something it's such a wonderful feeling you get so... now I don't teach at all because I travel too much to do regular lesson and it matters, so I diverted them all to other people because it I think it matters that if they really want to achieve something or learn a piece, even if they don't want to do grades but they want to learn only one piece, they need to learn and work for it. If they don't do it on a regular basis nothing will happen.

It's all about discipline... so I had these opportunities to work with Outreach schemes with The Worshipful Company of Musicians or with AYM which are a little bit more serious and oriented on one instrument so I just wanted to let all the accordionists in the UK know that there is help out there for those who want to study who are under 18 who want to either buy an instrument or take up a class, because I know how difficult it is for parents especially in a country like this...

***... They will even help you buy an instrument?***

They do, they give a grant of £200 to £2000 depending on the family income and the talent level. The income would need to be under £18,000 per annum. They are expanding and doing more and more work so now they are supporting over 300 children across the country and this is now why these master classes and outreaches are happening – they want to let people know that there is a charitable organisation there to help young students and this is a very rare thing. It's a rare thing because some of them, maybe most of them won't be musicians but they will know how much music helps in a person, it will help with their thinking and they will learn how to listen to classical music or any type of music because they are working with accordionists from folk music, classical and other instruments are in jazz too. They cover a huge range. For me it's a really great thing to also experience this extra part of my life. I'm going to do more with AYM later in the year in Wales and elsewhere.

***Well this is something that for accordionists will be a good thing because even a good starter instrument is expensive and then when you have to move up to something bigger it gets into thousands and thousands.***

I think we need to start talks with accordion manufacturers because the price of something like a Peter Pan is unaffordable when someone can go and buy a £50 violin so why go and buy an accordion. Something has to be done in that field.

***It's very difficult. With one of my students I got her mother to buy a cheap Chinese accordion and even that is £500 plus and compared to other starter instruments even that is a lot of money and one just hopes that the student go on and work hard...***

... And all parents can do is support at the time and I have plenty of times when I play somewhere and a kid comes up to me and says I want to play the thing but the parents cannot afford it so there is help there and if the kid is musical and they don't even have to be great or prove they have done something. There is an adjudication panel to see your work

and how to play. So this is a great start.

Some of these students have even taken part in BBC Young Musician of the Year, so they have reached even this high level as a result. It's great that they support the accordion. It's the first time AYM have done an accordion event. I think I've been a patron now for about half a year, officially and to be amongst people like Sir Simon Rattle, Evelyn Glennie, Nicholas Daniel really great UK musicians is a privilege.

***So, accordionists take note!! So to my last question really which is What is next for Ksenija Sidorova?***

I mentioned earlier I have a long-standing close collaboration with Avi Avital, the mandolin player, a person who I've learned a lot from, we have a tour from his latest recording playing music by Bartok, De Falla, Monti, Bach, Villa-Lobos; very, varied repertoire which we do as a duo or a trio set with a fantastic drummer, Itamar Doari who is coming more from a folk and pop industry and Avi and I are classically trained so altogether it's a World Music project and were doing lots of gigs in Europe: Germany, Italy, France we are coming to Latvia too for three concerts and we're doing Surrey Hills Festival here in the UK on May 1st and Bristol Old Vic on August 1st.

Future events also include a few concerts with Gidon Kremer and Kremrta Baltica over the summer so those are the bigger things that I am now preparing for. Of course there are lots of solo things. I'm now doing two premieres, one with violinist Alexander Sitkovetsky by a Latvian composer, one of the biggest composer at the moment and he's written a big scale piece for us so it's something to learn still. Another is a piece by an accordionist and teacher Artem Nyzhnyk and he's written a fantastic piece as a present really and I saw the score and I knew it would be something good. It's still work in progress. I first heard him on YouTube playing Rachmaninov's Barcarolle and I fell in love with the arrangement and transcription that he did so I just wrote to him.

I'm also working on a project which has been a dream and I haven't managed to realise yet in two years which started off with Stefan Ciric when we did some arrangements of Piazzolla, then we added a violinist and we wanted to do it with some kind of contemporary choreography and we couldn't make it work because there was too much money involved but now, eventually, it is taking place in Riga in the Latvian National Opera with Kirils Burlovs and there will be three dancers and three musicians and will be a big project with animation too, for two nights and this is just the beginning because we want to take this project on the road.

These are some of the interesting bits from busy life at the moment and recently I did a great concert with Eric Pettifer who is a famous composer of choral music so I had the chance to perform with a choir, Primavera Portena by Piazzolla, can you imagine that with a choir. I couldn't imagine how they could sing that. It was great.

***Well thank you Ksenija for taking time out of your gruelling schedule to give Strumenti&Musica this Interview. It's been so interesting. You are a leading light in the accordion world especially for young people and I hope your career continues to attract the attention globally that your wonderful playing rightly deserves.***

Thank you Romano and Strumenti & Musica.