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# Daniel Kidane

## Selected Reviews

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***Aloud* (World premiere, performed by Julia Fischer, the LPO & conducted by Edward Gardner)  
Royal Festival Hall (March 2024)**

"The Russian invasion of Ukraine has been the subject, or at least the subtext, of quite a lot of music already, but what I've heard has been mostly eulogies to Ukrainian resolve. Daniel Kidane's new work for violin and orchestra, *Aloud*, is different. With a Russian mother and Ukrainian in-laws, he doesn't adopt an overtly partisan stance. Instead the 25-minute piece, which draws from a Cossack folksong about an injured warrior, is (as the composer says) a reflection on ordinary people suffering "the scourge of war".

Its first section suggests how much life is fragmented by conflict. The violin soloist may occasionally have lyrical moments, but only against a background of disconcerting, dislocated staccato rhythms and the dull intermittent thud of basses and drums. There's a change halfway through when the violins soars into a rhapsody above much less sour harmonies. It's a temporary respite; soon the turmoil builds up again. ... The textures are striking and I admired the work's integrity."

– **Richard Morrison, The Times** \*\*\*\*

"[Kidane's] concerto, subtitled *Aloud*, is a cry of protest against armed conflict, particularly the Russo-Ukrainian War. ... There were many striking inventions ... in the orchestral music, which under the conductor Edward Gardner's balletic direction danced and parried in strikingly beautiful sounds of marimba, pizzicato strings and seductively liquid clarinets."

– **Ivan Hewett, The Telegraph**

"At the Southbank Centre, a new work for violin and orchestra by Daniel Kidane similarly set out to make a statement. Entitled *Aloud*, it is of potentially concerto length at 25 minutes, but not a concerto, Kidane says, because its tone and structure determine otherwise. A list of Kidane's concerns lie in the background, from the war between Russia and Ukraine, two countries with which he has close connections, to discontent with UK policies towards music. He likens the work to a "scream of frustration", and a tense, uneasy tone rarely feels far from the surface. As though to soften the gritty message, the orchestra makes some seductive sounds and includes – again like the MacMillan – a glimmering line-up of percussion, with xylophone, tubular bells and tam-tam, but neither mood seems able to impose itself. Julia Fischer was the high-profile soloist, and the London Philharmonic Orchestra under music director Edward Gardner made sure the music constantly bubbled with detail, alive with interesting ideas." – **Richard Fairman, Financial Times**

"As a one time violinist with the Bruch and Mendelssohn concertos under his fingers, Daniel Kidane knows how to write for violin and orchestra from the inside. On the strength of this assured first performance, *Aloud* is that rare event among new violin concertos, staging an often violent and unpredictable battle between soloist and ensemble, in which neither side is cowed by the other.

The ostensible melodic premise is a Cossack folk song, reflecting Kidane's Russian and Ukrainian heritage on his father's side. A low-key, atmospheric opening, contracting and relaxing into violin recitatives, earns the right to the turmoil that occupies much of the opening movement.

... A second movement ... delivered nervy Bartókian tension and left Fischer alone for a substantial cadenza. With the slightest hint of an up-beat, the music vanished, leaving behind an imaginary finale, like the Cheshire Cat's smile or the ghost of a hollow laugh, and the welcome sense that a second listening would shed light on its satisfyingly elusive form." – **Peter**

**Quantrill, The Strad**

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### *Sun Poem*

**LSO & Sir Simon Rattle at the Sydney Opera House (May 2023)**

"But the highlight of the half was a new work by Daniel Kidane, *Sun Poem*, a beautiful piece written as a tribute to fatherhood, the young British composer having recently lost his father as well as welcoming his own newborn son. Muted trumpets, marimbas and percussion establish a complex set of rhythms with sudden bright pinpoints of sound and shimmering strings – quite an orchestral feast which Rattle and the band have been playing regularly." – **Steve Moffatt, *Limelight* ★★★★★**

### *Sun Poem* (London premiere, performed by the LSO & Sir Simon Rattle) **The Barbican (September 2022)**

"Inspired by two emotional family milestones (the death of Kidane's father and the arrival of his first child), *Sun Poem* tickled the ears right from its first tentative trumpet notes, quickly building in momentum and cohesion until the whole orchestra, glinting and frenetic, raced onwards, glued together by tiny phrases with contours resembling bell chimes. (...) *Sun Poem* was taut, terrific and excellently played." – **Mark Allan, *The Times* ★★★★★**

"Rattle has made a point, each season, of including a brand new work in his opening concert, too, and here it was Daniel Kidane's *Sun Poem*. Kidane describes it as a lullaby for his infant son; it's certainly vividly coloured, with spiky brass writing that sometimes recalls Janáček; it's an effective opener (...)" – **Andrew Clements, *The Guardian* ★★★★★**

"The new work this season comes courtesy of Daniel Kidane, whose *Sun Poem* provides an attractive, taut start to the concert."  
– **Mark Pullinger, *Gramophone***

### *Sun Poem* (world premiere, performed by the LSO & Sir Simon Rattle) **Edinburgh International Festival, The Usher Hall (August 2022)**

"Under Rattle's direction, the LSO did full justice to British composer Kidane's marvellous new piece *Sun Poem*, and plenty more besides. The piece takes its cue and its title from *Sun Poem* by the Barbadian writer Kamau Braithwaite. This explores ideas of heritage and patrilineal descent, themes that resonated deeply with Kidane, who's just become a father himself. Rather than expressing these ideas through a rosy nostalgia, Kidane found vivid and very precisely judged musical metaphors for them.

(...) his musical passions from Russian chant to Messiaen have been absorbed into a distinctive musical language. A single muted trumpet note sounded hesitantly, which gave birth to another note in the flutes, then another in the brass. Suddenly the whole orchestra seemed to be capering madly, suggesting an enticing future ahead of the new-born. This soon gave way to more reflective music, with glowing tendrils of clarinet and marimba, suggesting the awareness of the past that helps us make sense of the future. That idea might sound ponderous in words, but it wasn't at all so when expressed in this beautifully made, engaging piece." – **Ivan Hewitt, *The Daily Telegraph* ★★★★★**

"We also had the premiere of Daniel Kidane's *Sun Poem*, a piece he wrote about the journey of fatherhood. The music moves from the uneasy nervous energy of its opening through to something warmer and more beautiful, perhaps reflecting the emotions that a new father feels. Over ten minutes Kidane uses his orchestral canvas with great skill, the tintinnabulating winds and percussion twinkling against beautifully smooth string writing." – **Simon Thompson, *The Times* ★★★★★**

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### ***Movements for Harpsichord and Strings (world premiere)***

**New World Centre, New World Symphony & Mahan Esfahani (harpsichord), Florida (December 2021)**

"The audience gave the work an enthusiastic response (...) an intriguing composer whose other works should be programmed."

- Lawrence Budmen, ***South Florida Classical Review***

### ***Revel (world premiere)***

**The Kanneh-Masons, BBC Proms – Royal Albert Hall (August 2021)**

"Kidane's score is one that hums with possibility. Dawn breaks with shimmers of glass harmonica, bowed cymbal, and flute; a spiky dance breaks out full of Stravinskian cross-rhythms and stabs of clarinet. (...) *Revel* is bright and tonal, energetic and clean – nothing to frighten the horses, but likeable, warm, and inviting all the same."

- Ben Poore, ***musicomh.com*** ★★★★★

### ***Be Still***

**San Francisco Symphony (June 2021)**

"Mr. Kidane's piece, receiving its American premiere, could hardly have been replaced, for as Mr. Salonen explained from the stage, "*Be Still*" was written in response to the pandemic, its first performance having occurred in January via live stream from Manchester, England. Scored almost completely for strings, the work is meditative but not inert. It tenses and relaxes repeatedly, until a twisted version of its theme asserts itself (a manifestation of our collective anxiety perhaps). A crescendo further destabilizes things. The coda comes as the first violinist enters into something of a duet with a nearby percussionist using a bow against crotales to summon the faintest tintinnabulations, until an abrupt silence brings the nine-minute work to a close. It may sound like a dig to say the music seemed to last longer on this occasion, but the observation is meant as a compliment."

- David Mermelstein, ***Wall Street Journal***

### ***Towards Resolution***

**Royal Northern Sinfonia at Sage Gateshead (May 2021)**

"Daniel Kidane's *Towards Resolution* left me wanting more. In a mere three minutes he re-imagined a Purcell fantasia in clusters of descending notes, essentially static but with glissandos and tremolos disturbing the surface."

- Bernard Hughes, ***Arts Desk*** ★★★★★

### ***Be Still***

**Manchester Camerata at Stoller Hall (February 2021)**

"One of the best I've heard from this British composer: an exercise in atmospheric string tremolando chords, spookily embellished by bowed crotales, in which the harmonies gradually became more intense and dissonant. It had shape and substance."

- Richard Morrison, ***The Times***

"Daniel Kidane's *Be Still*, for string orchestra and bowed crotales, is quite definitely the music of 2020, reflecting (as he says) on the experience of lockdown and losing the everyday markers of passing time: but it's also intended to create inner stillness and calm. Beginning with high tremolo strings, almost pulse-less, it extends their sound through the orchestra's compass, as a rhythm begins and chords form fleetingly, building to a crescendo and ending with a lofty solo violin over a sustained sound carpet."

- Robert Beale, ***The Arts Desk***

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### **Woke**

**BBC Symphony Orchestra, Last Night of the Proms at the Royal Albert Hall, London (September 2019)**

"Daniel Kidane's *Woke* raised the curtain with a ceremonial blast. Its rhythmic and textural permutations at times sounded like a 1950s film score, at others suggesting a sinister, quasi-militaristic atmosphere." – **Nick Kimberly, *Evening Standard***

"[*Woke*] launched off in dancing rhythms, the string chords rising and falling in waves under the chirruping winds were not so far from Steve Reich's minimalism, but the harmonies were darkly suggestive of struggle. Towards the end the music retreated to a lonely place, but revived to end if not in a blaze of glory, at least of hope." – **Ivan Hewett, *The Telegraph***

"*Woke* is a dynamic concert opener, energised by driving percussion rhythms. The large orchestra is skilfully deployed for diverse colours while always retaining a clarity of texture. The music eventually settles into lush, sonorous harmonies."

– **Gavin Dixon, *The Arts Desk***

"Composer Daniel Kidane says he wants to channel his optimism for the future through music, and the result is a brightly coloured tone-poem which the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Sakari Oramo's genial direction that turns into an agreeable aperitif for what is to come." – **Michael Church, *The Independent***

"The evening began with a new piece, *Woke*, by Daniel Kidane, commissioned by the BBC and performed for the very first time. It is a short, vigorous work with a rousing finale but it is not a 'comfortable' piece that one can listen to and relax with at the end of a working day. Kidane says himself in the programme notes that behind his urge to create an energetic piece was the wish for a subtle message – for us all to be more 'woke', concerning awareness of social and racial justice. He fully achieved his goal and started the Last Night with a bang." – **Margarida Mota-Bull, *Seen-and-Heard International***

"But I end at the beginning, with Daniel Kidane's *Woke*, the title reminding us to be constantly aware of racism, but the music is inherently interesting in itself, kick-started by a wood-block (like a woodpecker) and teeming into life with long-held strings and chattering parts underneath, eventually coming to a unanimous halt before more rat-a-tat-tat pulses reigniting the music, before eventually building to a ringing climax, though not before the modern plastic equivalent of the ancient bullroarer made air. Electrifying and energising." – **Nick Breckenfield, *Classical Source***

"Uplifting and energising, [*Woke*] was also designed to leave one thinking about social and racial injustice in the world. This it certainly did, although the overriding sense one was left with was simply that of an immensely skillful composition."

– **Sam Smith, *MusicOMH***

### **Dream Song**

**Chineke!, Queen Elizabeth Hall, London (April 2018)**

"It is to Kidane's credit that his piece, *Dream Song*, didn't provide a facile mood of optimism and celebration. Rather the reverse, in fact. The words, sung with powerful conviction by Roderick Williams and echoed by the Chineke! choir, seemed trapped in a realm of dreamlike oppression, the tense string lines shot through with threatening brass. Just as one felt a sense of light dawning, the piece came to an end. It felt like a powerful but enigmatic sketch for something that ought to be much bigger-boned." – **Ivan Hewett, *The Telegraph***

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"Dream Song is an ambitious, densely scored setting, for baritone (Roderick Williams), choir (the Chineke! Chorus) and orchestra, of fragments from Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream' speech, which underpins a declamatory vocal line with insistent brass riffs and choral tone clusters, though the textures brighten as we reach the final assertion of "Let freedom ring."

– **Tim Ashley** *The Guardian*

"If we expected Gospel-flavoured pastiche, Kidane delivered a shock. This turned out to be a sombre, shadowed piece, the hum and stab of anxiety and trepidation carried by the strings as Roderick Williams forcefully phrased King's words of hope."

– **Boyd Tonkin**, *theartsdesk.com*

### **Zulu**

**Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Glasgow Royal Concert Hall (November 2017)**

"Kidane's sound world is inevitably Western, of course, but I liked the way he refracted it through something "other" so as to give it a different colour, with contrasting sound textures and energy patterns giving it its momentum."

– **Simon Thompson**, *bachtrack.com*

### **Six Etudes**

**Mahan Esfahani, Recital, Wigmore Hall, London (July 2016)**

"The *Six Etudes* of 30-year-old Daniel Kidane brought us right up to the present, offering textures of great finesse and shards of Ligetian playfulness (even adding an intentionally jarring hotel reception bell to the sixth)." – **Harriet Smith**, *Financial Times*

### **Sirens**

**Sounds of Shakespeare, BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, Bridgewater Hall, Manchester (April 2016)**

"Daniel Kidane's *Sirens* plunged from sonnets 153 to 154 to a pulsating, foot-tapping Mancunian nocturne, topped off with a quesying morning-after." – **Geoff Brown**, *The Times*

"...well-attuned to the homoeroticism of Shakespeare's poems; creating a febrile sense of a heady cruise through Manchester's gay village. Daniel Kidane's propulsive, eclectic piece, *Sirens*, soaked up influences of jungle, dubstep and R&B sampled from a trawl through the city after dark." – **Alfred Hickling**, *The Guardian*

"Grit, certainly, in a score infused with animal energy and visceral drive, but despite the frenetic ride through that myriad landscape of club scene *hommages*, it was mapped and navigated with meticulous control; the orchestration, characterised by a transparency of instrumental texture, was handled not just with rhythmic wit but also a searing clarity of purpose."

– **Pamela Nash**, *bachtrack.com*



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### **Tourbillon**

**UK-DK, Michala Petri and Mahan Esfahani, OUR 6.220611 (SACD: 66:27) (February 2015)**

"Kidane, who was born in 1986, has composed an interesting work not based on a whirlwind, as the title might suggest, but on a watch mechanism that bears that same name. In horology, a tourbillon counteracts the effects of gravity on a watch's escapement. Kidane writes, "Both instruments take on the idea of breaking away from gravity but at the same time are restrained by moments of tranquility." The recorder and the harpsichord are equals in this work, which, while lacking the rhythms of jazz, has something of modern jazz's spontaneity and jaggedness. I'm glad that it was included on this disc because, among all the sweets, it gives listeners something meaty on which to chew." – **Raymond Tuttle, *Fanfare***

"Tourbillon, the contribution of the youngest composer on the disc, British shooting star Daniel Kidane, born in 1986, was written for Michala and Mahan's CD – a work partly disturbingly mono-maniac and circling around itself, partly highly virtuosic, but with lyric moments." – **Heinz Braun, *Klassik Heute***

### **Flux and Stasis**

**Fournier Piano Trio, Park Lane Group New Year Concert Series (November 2011)**

"The fine Fournier Piano Trio introduced the 24-year-old composer Daniel Kidane. They gave the world premiere of his *Flux and Stasis*, nine compelling minutes of tautly constructed, vibrantly imagined movement and colour, inspired by a mirage that Kidane experienced in Eritrea. No mere piece of impressionistic indulgence, this self-energising music would fire the imagination even without its hidden "programme". It made me keen to hear more both of Kidane and of the Fournier Piano Trio themselves."

– **Hilary Finch, *The Times***

"Much more of a stretch for them was Flux and Stasis by Daniel Kidane, the result of the young composer's travels in East Africa in 2009 and his experience of and musical reaction to a mirage, <sup>[SEP]</sup>an easily explained natural phenomenon and one with just as easily understandable visionary <sup>[SEP]</sup>implications. In terms of the music's resources of string harmonics and tremolos, and chordal <sup>[SEP]</sup>mightiness for the piano, Kidane has perhaps drunk deep at the Messiaen oasis, but the 10-minute <sup>[SEP]</sup>piece did speak of stridently lit mysteries, and did so with rigour and assurance. In short, it worked, and the Fournier players were keenly alive to its glittering soundworld." – **Peter Reed, *Classical Source***

### **Metamorphosis**

**Pei-Jee Ng, Royal Northern College of Music**

"Later that night, your intrepid correspondent braved a recorder quintet in order to hear in the same programme the Australian cellist Pei-Jee Ng premiere *Metamorphosis* by the Royal Northern College of Music student Daniel Kidane. It proved a splendid piece, in free variation form, and was superbly played. The composer told me that he is a violinist but has not yet written for solo violin. I hope he will. *Journeying Songs* by David Matthews (also present) uses variation form in a different but equally interesting way. Again Ng played with fine command and control..." – **Tully Potter, *The Strad***

"With Ng we finally got the real thing – an artist whose age is irrelevant to his musical maturity...To Daniel Kidane's quietly impressive new *Metamorphosis* he brought stature, concentration and a beguiling range of sonorities."

– **Andrew Clark, *Financial Times***

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"Cellist Pei-Jee Ng's performance of...Daniel Kidane's *Metamorphosis* [was] strong and expressive."

– **Anna Picard, *The Independent***

## LSO Soundhub Scheme

"Daniel Kidane's works are packed with incident and expression, braiding together sounds and entwining groups of instruments to create a meta-instrument that deftly weaves through novel timbres."

– **London Philharmonic Orchestra**