

# Press Release for immediate release

## Dulcimer's For The Bolshoi

After five years, five dulcimers and four runs of The Royal Ballet's 'The Winters Tale', percussionist Greg Knowles knows the ballet well. This is important because the Bolshoi Ballet in Moscow are due to perform 'The Winters Tale' next February and they have commissioned two performance specific instruments matching Knowles's. In 2014 Knowles was set a task to develop an unusual Dulcimer type instrument. "Little did I know that the email I received from composer Joby Talbot would lead me down a Rabbit Hole called Dulcimer Technology. He sent me some fragments of music that could never be played by a dulcimer! "Oh and by the way you have to carry it around on stage while playing it " he told me". The requirement for the piece was a 3 1/3 octave chromatic Dulcimer. Such an instrument did not exist. Knowles had a small Hungarian Cimbalom with the right compass and set about finding an instrument maker who could create a new instrument and make it portable and turned to Hammered Dulcimer maker Tim Manning. According to Manning "The small Cimbalom was an extremely heavy instrument, the bottom was massive and the tension of the strings was greater even than a Dulcimer. Completing the task became a project of iterations and evaluation over a relatively short period. I think we crammed a couple hundred years of natural development into 5!"

An unusual feature of this Ballet is the stage band that features a number of other instruments as well as the Dulcimer, giving the central scene of the ballet a lively folk feel and at other times lending a darker edge. A Hammered Dulcimer, for the uninitiated is a Folk instrument with strings that are hit with beaters (the hammers). It is fairly small, generally diatonic and one of the ancestors of the Piano. Manning has a lot of experience making Dulcimers and had an existing instrument he called the Skeleton that became the starting point. He explained "One thing often unappreciated about Dulcimers is the massive tension they are supporting. A standard UK Dulcimer is under about 1 Tonne of pressure across the instrument." The instruments for the Ballet needed to withstand greater tension and yet be significantly lighter. Knowles explains "He made two instruments before we figured that the small Cimbalom I asked him to copy was the wrong shape. A third was made and played in the first run of performances with the Royal Ballet at Covent Garden. By the time the second run came around it was obvious that a particular section of the music was

practically impossible to play on a Dulcimer with a Cimbalom pattern of strings. As luck would have it the ballet was performed in Toronto the following year on a Bavarian Hackbrett, a Dulcimer with a completely different and more logical pattern of strings. I asked Tim to buy one of these and customise it for the correct range of notes and its portability. This worked fine but I still had problems with the first Cimbalom shaped instrument, so come the third run in Brisbane I asked Tim to build a fifth instrument with a modified shape” Finally Knowles had the instrument much closer to the one he envisaged at the beginning of the process. These instruments are one of a kind who knows if the design process is entirely complete.

The Bolshoi Ballet are to perform ‘The Winters Tale’, created in 2014 by Christopher Wheeldon - Choreographer and Joby Talbot - Composer in February 2019.



Tim Manning with the completed pair



Knowles and Manning at the Royal Opera House - Covent Garden



Greg Knowles's portable instrument

## Contact information

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