



WASHINGTON
PERFORMING ARTS

2023-24 SEASON



Photo by Zohar Ron



Photo courtesy of Young Concert Artists

AVI AVITAL mandolin
HANZHI WANG
accordion

SATURDAY, October 21, 2023 / 7:30 p.m.

Sixth & I

PROGRAM NOTES

Praeludium and Allegro in the Style of Pugnani

Fritz Kreisler (1875-1962)

Fritz Kreisler is remembered today for a number of ingratiating short pieces he wrote for violin and piano—*Schon Rosmarin*, *Caprice Viennois*, *Tambourin Chinois*—but he also performed a number of violin pieces composed in what he called the “olden style,” the style of eighteenth-century composers, which he claimed to have discovered among old manuscripts. In 1935, after many years of performing these pieces, Kreisler admitted that he had actually composed them himself, much to the outrage of certain critics and the amusement of those who had sensed the truth all along.

One of the most famous of these is the *Praeludium and Allegro*, published in 1910. Kreisler tried to lead the suspicious off his trail by subtitling the piece “in the style of Pugnani.” Gaetano Pugnani (1731-1798) was one of the great violinists of the eighteenth century and an able composer for that instrument, but he had nothing at all to do with the *Praeludium and Allegro*—this music is pure Kreisler. The noble *Praeludium*, marked *Allegro*, is built on a steady quarter-note pulse that eventually soars high above its beginning. The concluding *Allegro* is full of technical hurdles for the performer, including a florid cadenza.

“Suite Italienne” from *Pulcinella*

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)

In the years after World War I, Serge Diaghilev suggested that Stravinsky write a ballet based on themes by the Italian composer Giovanni Pergolesi (1710-1736) and showed him some of Pergolesi’s music. Stravinsky was entranced. Over the next year he composed a ballet based on themes from Pergolesi’s operas and instrumental music (though subsequent research has shown that not all these themes were written by Pergolesi). Stravinsky kept Pergolesi’s melodic and bass lines but supplied his own harmony and brought to this music his incredible rhythmic vitality. First produced in Paris on May 15, 1920, with sets by Picasso and choreography by Massine, *Pulcinella* was a great success.

Over the next few years Stravinsky made several arrangements for instrumental duos of excerpts from *Pulcinella*, and the music is heard at this concert in an arrangement for mandolin and accordion. It opens with a jaunty *Introduzione* (the ballet’s *Overture*), followed by a lyric *Serenata*, based on an aria from Pergolesi’s opera *Il Flaminio*. The blistering *Tarantella* rushes to a surprising and sudden ending. The concluding section is in two parts: a slow *Minuetto* leads without pause to the exciting *Finale*.

“Chaconne” from the *Partita No. 2 in D Minor*, BWV 1004

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

This *Chaconne* is of course THE *Chaconne*, one of the most famous and difficult pieces ever written for the violin. Bach composed it around 1720 as the final movement of his *Partita No. 2 in D Minor for Unaccompanied Violin*. The *Chaconne* offers some of the most intense music Bach ever wrote, and it has worked its spell on musicians everywhere for the last three centuries. Beyond the countless recordings for violin, it is currently available in performances by guitar, cello, lute, and viola, as well as in piano transcriptions by Brahms, Busoni, and Raff.

A chaconne is one of the most disciplined forms in music. It is built on a repeating ground bass in triple meter over which a melodic line is varied, but the wonder is that this music manages to be so expressive at the same time. The four-bar ground bass repeats 64 times during the quarter-hour span of the *Chaconne*, and over it Bach spins out gloriously varied music, all the while keeping these variations firmly anchored on the ground bass. At the center section, Bach moves into D major, and here the music relaxes a little, content to sing happily for awhile; after the calm nobility of this interlude, the quiet return to D minor sounds almost disconsolate. Bach drives the *Chaconne* to a great climax and a restatement of the ground bass at the close.

Goldberg Variations, BWV 988

Aria and Variations 1, 7, 14, 18, and 29
Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

In 1742 Bach published a set of thirty variations on an original theme. It took the name *Goldberg Variations* (somewhat haphazardly) from the name of the fourteen-year-old Johann Gottlieb Goldberg, one of Bach’s former harpsichord students, and over the last nearly 300 years it has become perhaps the most famous set of variations ever written. For his theme—which he calls *Aria*—Bach uses a sarabande melody that he had written as part of *Anna Magdalena Bach’s Notebook*. It is 32 measures long and already ornately embellished on its first appearance, though it is not this melody that will furnish the basis for the variations that follow but the bassline beneath it. This lengthy harmonic progression will become the backbone of the *Goldberg Variations*, functioning much like the ground bass of a passacaglia. On this recital, Hanzhi Wang performs the *Aria* and five its variations.

Romanian Folk Dances, Sz. 56

Béla Bartók (1881-1945)

Bartók loved folk music passionately and made a number of trips throughout rural Europe, collecting folk tunes and dances. Between 1909 and 1915 he systematically collected songs and fiddle tunes of Romania, finally gathering over 3500 melodies from that region. His *Romanian Folk Dances* (1915), concise arrangements and harmonizations of six of these, have become his most popular composition.

The six brief movements (the final dance, in two sections, is sometimes

counted as two movements) come from quite specific parts of Romania, but they share some general features. There is often a steady and powerful chordal accompaniment over which the melodic line, full of syncopations and surprising turns and harmonies, unfolds in long themes. *Jocul cu bâta* (Dance with Sticks) features a strongly accented main theme and pungent harmonies. The very brief *Brâul* (Waistband Dance), from a region now in Yugoslavia, takes its name from the cloth belt worn by the dancers. *Pe Loc* (which translates In One Spot) is a stamping dance in which the dancers do not move from one spot. *Buciumeana* (Hornpipe Dance) is built on a soaring, rhapsodic melody which is stated and then repeated; there is more than a hint of gypsy fiddling in this movement. The lively *Poarca Românească* (Romanian Polka), a children's dance, jumps back and forth between 2/4 and 3/4 throughout, while the concluding *Măruntel* is a swirling fast dance. In the score, Bartók notes that such a dance uses "very small steps and movements," given the blistering pace of this music, the dancers would need to use very small steps indeed.

"Romanza Andaluza" from *Spanish Dances*, op. 22, no. 1

Pablo De Sarasate (1844-1908)

In Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Red-Headed League*, Sherlock Holmes suggests to Watson that they take the afternoon off: "'Sarasate plays at St. James's Hall this afternoon,' he remarked. 'What do you think, Watson? Could your patients spare you for a few hours?'" Watson reports that Holmes, himself a fine violinist,

very much enjoyed Sarasate's playing: "All the afternoon he sat in the stalls wrapped in the most perfect happiness, gently waving his long, thin fingers in time to the music." Holmes, like all of Europe, was captivated by the Spanish virtuoso-composer Pablo de Sarasate, who toured not only Europe but also North and South America, playing his own compositions and the music of others. Those interested in Sarasate the violinist should know that in 1904 he made some of the earliest commercial recordings, and these are now available on compact disc.

As composer, Sarasate was famous for his many compositions of a specifically Spanish character. Principal among these were his four sets of *Spanish Dances*, published between 1878 and 1882. This program offers one of these dances, the *Romanza Andaluza* from Sarasate's Opus 22. This is music that evokes the atmosphere of Andalusia, that region in southern Spain famous for its wine, citrus, and Moorish and gypsy influences. One is certainly aware of that last influence here, as the *Romanza* moves from its sultry beginning to a quiet, haunting close.

Danse Espagnole No. 1 from *La Vida Breve*

Manuel De Falla (1876-1846)

Falla wrote his two-act opera *La Vida Breve* ("The Brief Life") in 1904-05, and it was first performed in Nice in 1913. Set in Granada, the opera tells the *verismo*-like tale of Salud's betrayal by her lover Paco and her sudden death at the moment she accosts him

at his wedding. The opera is seldom performed today, but its atmospheric music, tinged with Andalusian themes, has become popular in performances outside the opera.

The *Danse Espagnole No. 1* takes place during Paco's wedding in Act II. Falla sets it in the form of a *jota*, a lively dance in triple time. The opening section is a sinuous dance in 3/8, full of chromatic writing and swirling triplets and spiced with the sound of castanets and other percussion. This is set off by the heavy-footed central section, which pounds along menacingly before the return to the opening theme and the rush to the sizzling close.

Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso, op. 28

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921)

The *Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso* dates from 1870, when Saint-Saëns was 35. That title is a mouthful, but it describes the music accurately: a brief introduction gives way to a spirited rondo much influenced by Spanish melodies and rhythms (hence, capricious). The accompaniment's pizzicato chords at the very beginning suggest the sound of the strummed guitar, and over them the soloist enters with a melody that Saint-Saëns marks "melancholy." This poised beginning gradually rushes ahead, and a series of trills and arabesques leads directly into the rondo section. The entire rondo is built on this theme, though Saint-Saëns provides some nicely contrasted interludes along the way. One of these, marked *con morbidezza* ("with softness or gentleness"), is a lilting, dark melody, and then Saint-Saëns rushes the piece to a dazzling close.

Program notes by Eric Bromberger