

Li Shan Tan  
*harp*

Recital in partial fulfillment of the  
Doctor of Musical Arts degree, 2025  
Student of Jessica Zhou

Monday, December 4, 2023  
8:00 p.m.  
Pierce Hall

## PROGRAM

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**Luciano Berio**  
(1925–2003)

*Sequenza II* (1963)

**Jean-Michel Damase**  
(1928–2013)

*Sicilienne Variée* (1966)

*Intermission*

**Raymond Murray Schafer**  
(1933–2021)

*The Crown of Ariadne* (1979)

Ariadne Awakens

Ariadne's Dance

Dance of the Bull

Dance of the Night Insects

Ariadne's Dream (*added 1995*)

Sun Dance

Labyrinth Dance (Theseus and Ariadne)

**Guillaume Connesson**  
(b. 1970)

**Toccata** (2003)

*My journey as a harpist (and human) has been enriched  
by so many beautiful people in my life.*

*My hugest thank you goes to Jessica -  
for being the best mentor I could ever have.  
The constant support and encouragement is more than what I could ask for.*

*Of course, I'm sending all my love to my family in Singapore  
for being the best cheerleaders and giving me this life <3*

*And finally, thank you to my support circle -  
lengthy calls, whining and dining, surprise pastries and pure chaos.  
All my love to you all, I'm truly blessed.*

### **Berio** *Sequenza II* (1963)

"In my *Sequenzas* I have tried to develop a musical commentary between the virtuoso and his instrument and I have often explored specific technical aspects in depth, challenging the conventional notion of the instrument. French "impressionism" has left us with a rather limited vision of the harp, as if its most characteristic feature were that it could only be played by half-naked girls with long, blond hair, who confine themselves to drawing seductive glissandi from it. But the harp has another harder, louder and aggressive side to it. *Sequenza II* aims to bring out some of these characteristics, and to make them appear simultaneously: at certain moments it must sound like a forest with the wind blowing through it." – *Luciano Berio on Sequenza II*

Between 1958-2002, Berio wrote 14 *Sequenzas* for various solo instruments. With each of them, Berio pushes these instruments and the instrumentalists to their limits, reassessing traditional techniques and challenging traditional stereotypes. Written in 1963 for French harpist Francis Pierre, this second *Sequenza* for the harp distorts a specific one—an instrument for demure women from high society, perhaps thought to be weak or submissive, with little to no power or virtuosity possible.

With *Sequenza II*, Berio found new ways for the harp to sound. The harpist has to explore unconventional techniques such as the slapping of strings, gritty fingernail plucking, beating up the soundboard and producing obnoxious buzzes (all rather unlady-like, if you will). Atypical harp timbres are heard through a series of gestures. Jagged rhythms, hushed *bisbigliandos*, registral extremities and a polyphony of processes are uncovered as one discovers the harp's multiple dimensions. Beginning in the middle of the harp, Berio coaxes the harpist to step outside the box and prove that the harp is a force to be reckoned with.

### **Damase** *Sicilienne Variée* (1966)

A pianist by training, Jean-Michel Damase was an exceptional one. Having won the Premier Prix in piano in 1943, he was also engaged in multiple recordings, tours and soloist appearances in his career. As a composer, he attained both the Premier Prix for composition and Prix de Rome in 1947. His oeuvre ranges widely, spanning from operas to chamber music and solo instrumental works, with a particular contribution to the harp repertoire. It comes as no surprise that this was because the accomplished harpist Micheline Kahn, was his mother.

Micheline Kahn was professor of harp at École Normale de Musique de Paris. She herself earned her Premier Prix in harp at the young age of 14 and is the dedicatee of well loved 19th century harp works such as Andre Caplet's *Deux Divertissements* and *Conte Fantastique*. Kahn also premiered many other now standard harp repertoire like Gabriel Faure's *Impromptu* and Maurice Ravel's *Introduction and Allegro*.

*Sicilienne Variée* was written in 1966. *Sicilienne* is a type of dance which features long-short-long rhythms and as the title suggests, this piece of music is a set of variations with these dance-like qualities. One is taken through a series of events, entering irregular metres (4.5 eighths at one point!), a pastorale canon and jazz

reharmonization, all filled with highly lyrical and rhythmic energies. However, these dance features are later challenged and removed to make way for a showy and rhapsodic-like ending.

*Sicilienne Variée* shows how skilled Damase was at writing for the harp and showcasing both the instrument and instrumentalist. It is extremely idiomatic while demanding a high level of technical facility and virtuosity. It also highlights the simple and accessible characteristics of Damase's music, which he attributes to staying true to French tradition and creating "music that is cheerful and singing, but also enriched with a certain nostalgia and a little depth."

### **Schafer** *The Crown of Ariadne* (1979)

Composer, writer, pedagogue, theorist and environmentalist were just one of the few things attributed to Raymond Murray Schafer. Born in Ontario, Canada, Schafer's contributions have reached both national and international acclaim, with awards including the Glenn Gould Prize (1987), two JUNO awards (2004 and 2011) and in 2005, the Walter Carsten Prize for Canada Council for the Arts—one of the top honors for lifetime achievements by a Canadian artist.

Premiered in 1979, *The Crown of Ariadne* was written for Canadian harpist Judy Loman. Loman is a trailblazer herself—one of the last students of harpist Carlos Salzedo—, a JUNO award recipient, visiting professor at Curtis Institute of Music and currently harp professor at The Royal Conservatory in Toronto. Loman has worked with many composers to commission new innovative works for the harp, featuring the instrument in a new light and inviting harpists to explore new techniques.

The story goes that Loman mentioned to Schafer about being in discussions with Japanese composer Tōru Takemitsu about a possible new work where the harpist had to wear bracelets with bells. Schafer showed up at Loman's house soon after with his six-movement work *The Crown of Ariadne* and never stopped working with her since. A seventh movement, *Ariadne's Dream*, was added in 1995 upon Loman's request.

Written for solo harp with percussion, *The Crown of Ariadne* is the fifth work in Schafer's *Patria 5* cycle which retells the myth of Princess Ariadne, Theseus and the Minotaur. Under Ariadne's king, youths are sent into a labyrinth as sacrifices for the Minotaur, and Theseus was one of these unfortunate youths. However, having fallen in love with him at first sight, Ariadne sought to rescue Theseus out of the maze. She gives Theseus a ball of thread which he unwinds upon entering, slays the Minotaur and successfully follows the thread out to escape the maze. Theseus and Ariadne eloped, but eventually Theseus leaves Ariadne to die on a deserted island. Myths diverge at this point, and it is uncertain if Ariadne lived or died.

Through a series of dances, *The Crown of Ariadne* depicts the part where Ariadne and Theseus journey into the labyrinth. Here, the harp represents Ariadne and the harpist has to also play a variety of percussion instruments—from crotales to bongos, cymbals to woodblocks. It is a complex piece where one must also sing into the harp, tune the harp in quarter tones and pre-record tracks. According to Schafer, everything is to be "done with ceremony." While the music is dancing, the harpist "is

also a dancer” and should be “indulging in various elaborate gestures” to convey the story. Technically demanding, theatrical and transformative, *The Crown of Ariadne* is a visual and aural feast for the senses.

### **Connesson** *Toccata* (2003)

French composer Guillaume Connesson’s accolades are plenty: Premier Prix in choral conducting, music history, analysis and orchestration, works premiered by distinguished musicians such as pianist Jean Yves Thibaudet and flutist Emmanuel Pahud, and orchestra commissions from Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra and The Philadelphia Orchestra to name just a few. Connesson was a product of the French Conservatory system and is currently the professor of orchestration at Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris.

Connesson’s works are often known for their highly rhythmic elements and dance-like qualities with titles such as *Disco-Toccata* and *Techno Parade*. His *Toccata* for harp is no different. A constant eighth note pulse pervades the piece while featuring vibrant cross rhythms and a hint of jazz. Connesson’s use of repeated notes on the harp creates a percussive effect, and his use of syncopation, mixed meters and accents destabilizes all sense of metrical regularity. Although short, *Toccata* is demanding with its fast tempo and intense energy, never stopping to let the harpist (or the listener) catch a breath until the very end.

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