

Li Shan Tan
harp

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

Wednesday, March 5, 2025
8:00 p.m.
Keller Room

PROGRAM

Domenico Scarlatti
(1685–1757)

Sonata in F Minor, K. 466

Sonata in E Minor, K. 198

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685–1750)

Toccatà and Fugue in D Minor, BWC 565

Mikhail Mchedelov
(1903–1974)

Variations on a Theme of Paganini

Maurice Ravel
(1875–1937)
arr. Marcel Grandjany
(1891–1975)

Menuet from *Le Tombeau de Couperin*

Manuel de Falla
(1876–1946)
arr. Marcel Grandjany

Spanish Dance No. 1 from *La Vida Breve*

*My time at NEC is almost done
and this doctoral adventure has been sprinkled with so many fond memories.*

*To my harp teacher Jessica,
your mentorship has been priceless and I will always hold your lessons close to my heart <3*

*To the DMA faculty and committee,
thank you for continuously pushing me to grow whilst supporting me in every endeavor.
I am blessed to have worked with such wonderful faculty along this incredible journey!*

*Finally, to my friends and family
who have been my pillars of support and most ardent cheer squad,
thank you for all the lengthy calls, coffee runs, chaotic laughter and whiny times.
This journey has been invaluable and I am very blessed.*

Scarlatti Sonata in F Minor, K. 466; Sonata in E Minor, K. 198

A contemporary of J.S. Bach and G.F. Handel, Italian composer Domenico Scarlatti's generous output of over 550 sonatas have become a major contribution to the keyboard repertory. These sonatas appear to date from his stay on the Iberian peninsula, and the influences from Spanish folk tradition and its spirited rhythms can be heard throughout many of these pieces. Scarlatti's beautiful *bel canto* style is also prevalent, perhaps from the influences of his father Alessandro Scarlatti, a leading composer of Neapolitan opera. These sonatas largely feature simple two or three part writing that exude clarity in texture, balanced phrase structures and the harmonic simplicity of the Classical era that was to come.

K. 466 in F Minor illustrates a study in cadences. Scarlatti weaved and manipulated tension and resolutions to create a poignant atmosphere. The cadences are relentless, and Scarlatti's modulations situates listeners between multiple harmonic worlds. In some instances, Scarlatti chooses to repeat the same material multiple times in succession, as if ruminating over something, and creates a sense of unease until the music resolves for the final time.

In a completely contrasting style, K.198 in E minor is in *perpetuum mobile*. It is a toccata in binary form and features continuous passagework, incessant pedal points and unyielding repetitions of motivic material that will keep listeners on their toes until the very end.

Bach Toccata and Fugue in D Minor, BWV 565

As the man of many talents and titles, little needs to be said about J.S. Bach. An accomplished composer, distinguished improviser and a father of twenty children, Bach was even an organ instrument tester. As one of the greatest virtuoso organists of his time, Bach's stamp of approval was incredibly valuable, and many organ builders sought him out to test drive their instruments. To determine if the organ has a "good lung", Bach would pull out all the organ stops to produce the largest sound possible, sometimes causing the organ builder to turn pale with fright.

It is no wonder then that one of Bach's most famous works is his Toccata and Fugue in D Minor. This organ work shot to fame with Disney's animated film *Fantasia*, where Leopold Stokowski's orchestration of the work can be heard. Subsequently, the work was utilized in countless films such as *Sunset Boulevard* and *The Phantom of the Opera*, and it has continuously been re-orchestrated and adapted for many other instruments.

The work opens with a dramatic Toccata. Its free form structure and improvisatory nature serves as a prelude for what's to come. The fugue states the subject, and layers upon layers of lines start to build. Bach takes the subject through twists and turns, dissecting it into fragments and skillfully manipulating the material. After a series of modulations interspersed with episodes and countersubjects, the texture of the earlier Toccata returns and closes out the work with a final *Molto Adagio*.

Like in many adaptations for other instruments, certain compromises have to be made in the arrangements. Considerations for chromaticism and facility have been made here, and the harpist's feet must be as skilled as an organist's to truly pull out all the stops for this Toccata and Fugue.

Mchedelov *Variations on a Theme by Paganini*

Touted to have superhuman techniques and extraordinary performing skills, Niccolò Paganini was the rockstar violinist of his day. His performances were a dazzling showcase of virtuosity, boasting feats of 12 notes per second and performing completely by memory—skills that were unheard of at that time. It is no wonder that many accused him of making a deal with the devil to gain these supernatural performing skills, and some even speculated that Paganini was the devil himself. However, many historians now believe that his abilities could have been due to Marfan syndrome or Ehlers Danlos syndrome, which caused him to have longer limbs and extremely flexible joints.

In any case, the Paganini obsession did not end and his Caprice No. 24 in A minor has become an inspiration for many compositions. Composers such as Brahms, Liszt, Rachmaninoff and Lutoslawski have composed works based on its tune and Russian harpist Mikhail Pavlovich Mchedelov was no different.

Despite being a prominent harpist in the 20th century, little is known about Mchedelov and his legacy outside of Russia. He was born in Batumi, Georgia and worked as a harpist in several ensembles such as the State Symphony Orchestra of the USSR, Moscow Philharmonic and Opera. He also taught at the Moscow Conservatory and the Gnessin Academy of Music. Most of his memoirs and original writings survive only in fragments and have, unfortunately, not yet been translated from the Russian language.

As a result, most harpists remember Mchedelov mainly for his *Variations on a Theme of Paganini*. It follows the form of Paganini's original caprice by presenting the theme with 11 variations. Each variation makes full use of the harp's resources, showcasing various techniques of octaves, trills and harmonics. Unlike the original, however, Mchedelov closes the work with an extended and rhapsodic finale. He knew exactly how to exploit the harp to its fullest extent, perhaps even to the point of cheesiness, and create a work for harpists to flaunt their virtuosity with a tune well known and loved by many.

Ravel *Menuet from Le Tombeau de Couperin, arranged by Marcel Grandjany*

After the outbreak of World War 1, Maurice Ravel was adamant about serving his country. He was proudly patriotic and had tried to enlist when he was younger, but his heart problems and small stature exempted him from military service. He could not serve in any combative capacity, but this little man of steel was determined to help the war efforts. As a result, he was hired as a lorry driver in 1916 to transport petrol and military supplies at the front lines in Verdun.

In his letters, Ravel referred to himself as *Chauffeur Ravel* and shared about his driving adventures with his truck named *Adelaide*. Ravel was eventually dismissed

due to illness and recuperated at the home of his close friend and the dedicatee of this Menuet, Jean Dreyfus.

Le Tombeau de Couperin was originally a piano suite in six movements, written to celebrate Baroque composer François Couperin while also memorializing six of Ravel's friends who died during the war. Four movements of the work were later orchestrated in 1919 at the request of Ravel's publisher. Littered with ornaments and contrapuntal complexities, the suite is based on Baroque models. Yet, Ravel finds a way to maintain his tonal language throughout the work and amalgamates the two worlds together.

The Menuet is based on a simple melody that is harmonised and developed in a myriad of ways. It embraces the stateliness of a minuet while encapsulating the charm of this French composer's writing style. Having suffered the loss of his close friends and his mother during the war, Ravel's Menuet is underscored with melancholy and bittersweetness. He produces a multitude of colors and emotions in this seemingly simple work, preserving the nuances of the 18th century while celebrating the beautiful lives and memories of his friends.

Falla **Spanish Dance No. 1 from *La Vida Breve*; arranged by Marcel Grandjany**

Often considered to be one of Spain's most important musicians in the early 20th century, Manuel de Falla began his musical training with piano lessons from his mother. He continued his studies in Madrid Conservatory, excelled in both piano and composition, and ultimately won prizes for each field. Falla's compositional output might be modest, but many of his works such as *El Amor brujo*, *El sombrero de tres picos* and *La Vida Breve* are often performed around the world today.

Written in 1905, *La Vida Breve* or "Life is Short" is a two-act opera that follows the story of a young gypsy girl, Salud. She falls in love with the wealthy Paco and although they vow eternal love for each other, little did she know that Paco was already engaged to another woman from his social class. Salud eventually finds out this truth and crashes the wedding to confront him. Unfortunately, Paco denies knowing Salud in front of everyone, and Salud dies heartbroken at his feet.

In the opera, this Spanish Dance is heard before the wedding commences and everyone is dancing to celebrate the festivities. Like much of Falla's music, this work is overflowing with Andalusian flavour, and his inspiration from the rich traditions of flamenco can be heard. The fiery introduction reveals the tone for the entire piece—highly energetic and intense, yet rhythmically vibrant with relentless momentum.

The original arrangement by harpist Marcel Grandjany has been a staple of the harp repertoire and captures the spirit of the original work. It is a dance of exuberance, and some edits have been made to highlight additional flamenco aspects of this Spanish Dance.

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Thomas Hung, *cello* (GD)

Student of Lluís Claret

Friday, March 7, 2025, at 8:30 p.m., Williams Hall

Ga-Young Park, *collaborative piano* (DMA)

Student of Cameron Stowe

Friday, March 7, 2025, at 8:30 p.m., Burnes Hall

Macintyre Taback, *cello* (DMA '28)

Student of Laurence Lesser

Friday, March 7, 2025, at 8:30 p.m., Brown Hall

Xiaoran Xu, *French horn* (BM)

Student of Eli Epstein

Friday, March 7, 2025, at 8:30 p.m., Keller Room

Alexander Davis-Pegis, *cello* (MM)

Student of Yeesun Kim

Saturday, March 8, 2025, at 8:00 p.m., Williams Hall

Jake Walters, *jazz piano* (BM)

Student of Cecil McBee and Billy Hart

Saturday, March 8, 2025, at 8:00 p.m., Brown Hall

Hannah Park, *violin* (GD)

Student of Nicholas Kitchen

Saturday, March 8, 2025, at 8:00 p.m., Burnes Hall

Gustavo Barreda, *percussion* (MM)

Student of Will Hudgins, and Daniel Bauch

Sunday, March 9, 2025, at 12:00 p.m., Brown Hall

Abigail Heyrich, *bassoon* (MM)

Student of Richard Svoboda

Sunday, March 9, 2025, at 12:00 p.m., Williams Hall

David Paligora, *bass trombone* (MM)

Student of James Markey

Sunday, March 9, 2025, at 12:00 p.m., Pierce Hall

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