

FOUR STRINGS AROUND THE WORLD

European Music

- George Enescu** (1881- 1955)
(Romania) - Four Airs in Romanian Folk Style
- Dave Flynn** (b. 1977)
(Ireland) - Tar Eis an Caoineadh
- Niccolo Paganini** (1782-1840)
(Italy) - Caprice no. 24
- Fritz Kreisler** (1875-1962)
(Austria) - Recitativo and Scherzo, op. 6
- J. S. Bach**(1685-1750)
(Germany) - Ciaccona in D minor

Music of the Middle and Far East, South and North America

- Reza Vali** (b. 1952)
(Iran) -Calligraphy no. 5
- Shirish Korde** (b. 1945)
(India) - Vak
(with electronic tempura drone)
- Bright Sheng** (b. 1955)
(China) - The Stream Flows
- Astor Piazzolla** (1921-1992)
(Argentina) - Tango Caprice no. 3
- Jerode Impichchaachaaha' Tate** (b. 1968) - Oshta – Four
(Chickasaw Nation tribe)
- Mark O'Connor** (b. 1961)
(United States) - Cricket Dance

About Four Strings Around the World in Concert

Four Strings Around the World is a tour through works of solo violin from four continents, conceived as a celebration of diverse musical cultures through the unifying voice of a single medium: the violin. A program of global resonance, “Four Strings” features music from four continents, a theatrical presentation, optional multimedia to immerse audiences in the cultures of the music, and two commissions written for the project.

Program Notes

George Enescu – *Airs in Romanian Folk Style*

The year was 1926. Working on his great masterpiece, the Sonata for Violin and Piano no. 3, op. 25 “In Romanian Folk Style”, George Enescu sketched four “*Airs*” for solo violin (also specified “In Romanian Folk Style”), as a preparatory exercise. These short pieces are a perfect example of Enescu’s mastery to write glove-fitting violin music inspired by Romanian folk tunes. He was an extraordinary violinist, pianist, conductor and composer. Enescu grew up listening to the village musicians; from them, he absorbed the invaluable knowledge of folk music, which he later incorporated in many of his works. I am very proud to present its American recording premiere.

For some unknown reason, the “*Airs in Romanian Folk Style*” remained in manuscript form till their publication in 2006. I was awestruck on my discovery of this piece and quickly realized that it offered the perfect opening for this program.

The first Air, written in a slow rubato style embodies the bitter-sweet ethos of Romanian folk music. It segues into a dance full of humor and teasing, followed by a sad song, sung in a trembling voice reminiscent of the Pan flute. The final Air is a spectacular and challenging dance full of virtuosic elements imitating the cimbalom, an instrument often used in Romanian folk bands.

Dave Flynn - *Tar Éis an Caoineadh*

While not identical, Romanian and Irish dance music share many similarities: strong rhythms, buoyant melodic patterns and an upbeat character. It therefore made sense to dart across Europe in search of a piece inspired by such music. Finding Dave Flynn was not easy, but really worth the effort: he is an award-winning composer born in Dublin, whose music has been acclaimed internationally for the way it has “*incorporated traditional Irish music without Hollywood pastiche...* (The Times) “*with the kind of power and grittiness you hear from Celtic fiddlers at their most raucous*” (New York Times).

Tar Éis an Caoineadh (meaning “After the Keening”) was written as an homage to famous Irish fiddle players. The various sections of the piece reflect specific techniques and artifices employed by these players: from the droning double-stopping of Caoimhin O’Raghallaigh, to the quiet *sul ponticello* sound of the late Con Cassidy, to the wild

dynamic playing of Danny Meehan and finally the strong hypnotic playing of James Bryne.. This piece was written as a companion piece to the String Quartet No. 3 “The Keening/An Caoineadh”. The string quartet was inspired by the mournful sounds of the keening songs once common at Irish funerals, while this work is much lighter in character, being a reflection of the celebratory part of the wake.

Niccolò Paganini – *Caprice no. 24*

Modern violin playing as we know it would have not been the same without Niccolò Paganini. Paganini’s virtuosic abilities on the violin mystified audiences at large to the point where he was believed to have supernatural powers. It only makes sense that this legendary figure emerged out of Italy, the country of the *bel canto* and genius violin makers such as Antonio Stradivari and Guarneri del Gesù. Paganini left us, violinists, an inexhaustible treasure in his “24 Caprices” for solo violin. The last one of these caprices - number 24 - is a theme and variations intended to showcase the performer’s mastery of the instrument. Its catchy tune inspired numerous composers (such as Liszt, Brahms, Rachmaninov, Szymanowski) to write their own sets of variations. Each of the eleven variations and a coda highlight various violin techniques (rapid string crossings, staccato, double-stops, quick shifting, high positions, left hand pizzicato).

Fritz Kreisler – *Recitativo and Scherzo*, op. 6

One of the most stylish and beloved musicians of the 20th century, Fritz Kreisler belongs to a lost era of performers that were also composers, like Paganini, Wieniawski, Sarasate and Ysaye. Kreisler excelled in the “miniature” genre and his stylish and graceful music embodies his Viennese background.

Recitativo and Scherzo is the only solo violin piece Kreisler wrote and a musical “thank-you” note to his friend, the Belgian violin virtuoso Eugene Ysaye, as the latter had dedicated his fourth solo violin sonata to Kreisler. The rich introduction abundant in Impressionist harmonies (Kreisler’s own homage to Ysaye) is followed by a lively Scherzo full of vigor and aristocratic elegance, tinged with a hint of melancholy, “a la Kreisler”. *Recitativo and Scherzo* has been one of my all-time favorite encores. The ineffable Viennese spirit it is infused with made it a “must” for this recording.

Johann Sebastian Bach - Ciaccona in D minor from the Partita BWV 1004

The Chaconne in D minor is the fifth and the final movement of the Partita no. 2 in D minor, BWV 1004, written sometime between 1717-1723, when Bach was under the service of Prince Leopold in Cothen. Structurally speaking, the piece consists of a set of 27 variations built over a repetitive bass figuration. But the Chaconne is a rich work with multifarious relationships, which was much scrutinized by performers and musicologists alike over the years. Research of the work has explored the Chaconne’s proportions in relationship with the Golden Ratio and coded references hidden in the music (Bach

inserted his own name as the B-A-C-H pitches in multiple compositions). Most recently, the musicologist Helga Thoene came up with the interesting theory that the Chaconne was written as an “epitaph in music” for Bach’s wife Maria Barbara. She suggested the piece is based on chorale quotations concealed all over the piece. Whatever secrets the piece may hold, one thing is clear as the light: the Chaconne is a towering monument representing the power of the human spirit, which transcends the physical limitations of the violin.

Reza Vali - *Calligraphy No. 5*

One of the oldest ancestors of the violin is the rebab, or the “spike-fiddle,” commonly featured in the Arab music of Central Asia. I therefore gravitated towards *Calligraphy No. 5*, a piece whose musical material is derived from Persian traditional music. The modal characteristics of the piece, as well as the tuning, rhythm, and form, relate to the Iranian modal system, the *Dástgâh*. The pitch structure of the composition is based on the Persian *Dástgâh* of *Návâ*. *Návâ* (pronounced nahVoh) is one of the oldest modes of the Persian modal system. The scale of *Návâ* used for the piece is: D-Ep-F-G-A-Bb-C-D. The 'Ep' means that the pitch is a quarter-tone higher than E-flat. For “Western ears” this “bending” of the pitch, gives the feeling of the slightly “out-of-tune”, meandering quality of Arab music.

Called an “Iranian Bartok” by the 20th Century Music Magazine, Reza Vali is a composer adept at merging the richness of his native folk music with Western classical techniques. Born in Iran, he studied composition at the Academy of Music in Vienna and Pittsburgh University. He is currently an Associate Professor of Composition at Carnegie Mellon University.

Shirish Korde – *Vak* (for solo violin and electronic drone)

When I hear Shirish Korde’s Violin Concerto “Svara –Yantra”, I knew that no one else but him could write a piece inspired by Indian Ragas. Shirish Korde is a composer of Indian descent who spent his early years in East Africa. He arrived in the United States in 1965, already well versed in the traditions of Indian and African music. He studied jazz at Berklee College of Music, composition and analysis with Robert Cogan at New England Conservatory, and Ethnomusicology at Brown University. Mr. Korde is currently a Professor of Music at the College of the Holy Cross.

Vak is modeled after a classical North Indian Raga performance which consists of three sections: Alap, Jor and Jhalla. *Vak* is a sanskrit word which literally translates into “speech”. But *Vak* (also spelled as *Vac*), commonly refers to the "goddess of speech". Her many attributes include "one who enters into inspired poets, visionaries and who is a friend of musicians." She is also the mother of all emotions, mother of the sacred scriptures called the Vedas, and is identified with the goddess Saraswati- the goddess of music and learning.

Vak is based on the North Indian Raga "Lalit"-which is among only a handful of Ragas that exclude the the 5th scale degree. The pitches go Raga Lalit are: E, F, G#, A, Bb, C, D#, E. Most theoretical writings classify Lalit as an early morning raga-to be played at

daybreak. In the first section, Alap - each note of the Raga and characteristic figures of the Raga are unfolded gradually and without any sense of pulsation. The arch like Alap transitions into the second section, Jor without break and almost imperceptibly. In this section there is a background pulse without a fixed meter. The third section – Jhalla - also grows out of the Jor without a break, but the underlying pulse is faster and accelerates throughout the Jhalla with the melodic statements becoming more and more virtuosic and culminating in the extremely fast melodies played against a fast pulse.

Bright Sheng – *The Stream Flows*

Bright Sheng is a Chinese-American composer, conductor and pianist. He was born in China, and has lived in the United States since 1982, where he has become a household name. He is on the composition faculty of University of Michigan and was named composer in residence for the New York City Ballet. In 2001 he received a MacArthur Genius Grant.

The Stream Flows was dedicated to Sheng's teacher, Hugo Weisgall and it written in two parts. The movement presented on this recording (2nd movement) is a fast country dance based on a three-note motive. This movement alternates between rhythmic sections of gong and cymbals -like sounds. The more lilting sections are reminiscent of the sonority of an erhu, the Chinese traditional instrument related to the violin.

Astor Piazzolla – *Tango Étude* No. 3

Perhaps the most famous musician associated with the tango, Astor Piazzolla did not start out with the intention to write this kind of music. It was his teacher, Nadia Boulanger who (after hearing his unsuccessful attempts to copy the style of various classical composers) encouraged him to become his true-self by composing the music he knew best and was dear to his heart.

Piazzolla's "nuevo tango" style served as a basis for much of his vast catalog of compositions, including the set of Six Tango Études written in 1987 (originally for flute). The *Tango Étude* no. 3 features fiery dance rhythms and the illusion of more than one voice created by the fast shifts between the upper and lower voices. The slow middle section takes on a reflective, but sensuous tone. The "fire under ice" poise of the tango and its ever-appealing style made it imperative to be featured on this program.

Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate – *Oshta* (Four)

Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate is praised and honored for "his ability to effectively infuse classical music with American Indian nationalism" (Washington Post). Born in Norman, Oklahoma, he is a citizen of the Chickasaw Nation and is dedicated to the development of American Indian classical composition. Mr. Tate was recently selected as one of five composer-orchestra pairs, selected through a peer review panel process, to participate in Music Alive, a national three-year composer-orchestra residency program of the League of American Orchestras and New Music USA.

Oshita is the Chickasaw word for the number Four and became the title of this work in the spirit of the *Four Strings Around the World* project. The work is closely based upon a Choctaw church hymn that was composed in the 1800's. One very unique artistic development that grew out of European contact is the modern American Indian church hymn. As missionaries fanned out across Indian Country they became the first to document our Native languages and create translations of The Bible and other Christian texts, including church hymns. This almost immediately led to a new series of hybrid music, composed by tribal citizens. For Southeast Indians (Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Creek and Seminole) this hybrid style of music is now 300 years old and contains a vast repertoire. The music is unmistakably Native and added a third type of traditional music alongside stomp dancing music and our old folk songs.

Oshita presents the Choctaw Hymn 53 as the centerpiece and is embedded within the abstractions of the melody. It is a very unique, eerie piece that reflects Tate's feelings of the ancient time in which it was composed. At the premiere this piece, I felt it had to be performed in the dark, in order to allow the listeners to focus only on its haunting sounds.

Mark O'Connor – *Cricket Dance*

Since his debut at the age of 13, as the winner of Grand Master Fiddler Championship, Mark O'Connor has reached the stature of an international performer and composer. He has collaborated with the most famous artists from the classical music, jazz and blue grass field and his Sony recording "Appalachian Journey" has won a Grammy Award in 2001. O'Connor is an inspiring example, as he is extremely dedicated to the educational work of the younger generations, through his violin book methods and string camps.

Cricket Dance, a short but intensely rousing piece, belongs to the set of works written by Mark O'Connor for his "Midnight on the Water" album. The piece specifically requires foot-tapping, a skill distinctive of bluegrass musicians, which took me quite a while to acquire, since this habit is frowned upon for classical musicians!