GREAT PERFORMERS IN RECITAL FROM TANGLEWOOD, Program I
Streaming from July 3, 2020

GIL SHAHAM, violin

Scott WHEELER Isolation Rag

Max RAIMI Anger Management

J.S. BACH Partita No. 3 in E for solo violin, BWV 1006
  Preludio
  Loure
  Gavotte en Rondeau
  Minuet I; Minuet II
  Bourée
  Gigue

William BOLCOM Suite No. 2 for solo violin:
  Dancing in Place
  Lenny in Spats

PROKOFIEV Sonata in D for solo violin, Opus 115
  Moderato
  Andante dolce
  Con brio

GIL SHAHAM
Gil Shaham is one of the foremost violinists of our time: his flawless technique combined with his inimitable warmth and generosity of spirit has solidified his renown as an American master. He is sought after throughout the world for concerto appearances with leading orchestras and conductors, and regularly gives recitals and appears with ensembles on the world’s great concert stages and at the most prestigious festivals. Highlights of recent years include a recording and performances of J.S. Bach’s complete sonatas and partitas for solo violin and recitals with his long time duo partner pianist, Akira Eguchi. He regularly appears with the Berlin Philharmonic, Boston, Chicago, and San Francisco symphony orchestras, the Israel Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic, Orchestre de Paris, and in multi-year residencies with the Orchestras of Montreal, Stuttgart, and Singapore. Mr. Shaham has more than two dozen concerto and solo CDs to his name, earning multiple Grammys, a Grand Prix du Disque, Diapason d’Or, and Gramophone Editor’s Choice. His most recent recording in the series “1930s Violin Concertos Vol. 2” was nominated for a Grammy Award. He releases a new recording of Beethoven and Brahms concertos with The Knights in 2020. Mr. Shaham was awarded an Avery Fisher Career Grant in 1990, and in 2008, received the coveted Avery Fisher Prize. In 2012, he was named “Instrumentalist of the Year” by Musical America. He plays the 1699 “Countess Polignac” Stradivarius, and lives in New York City with his wife, violinist Adele Anthony, and their three children.

Notes on the Program

The repertoire for solo violin is surprisingly large for such a small instrument, particularly one we think of as being at its best in long, singing, single-line melodies. Violinists, though, know its capabilities as a self-accompanying instrument capable of intricate contrapuntal, or multi-voice, textures. This program devised and played by Gil Shaham is a model of what the solo violin recital can be, demonstrating a wide emotional range as well as dazzling with its technical demands.

Three of these works were premiered by Gil Shaham. American composer/conductor/pianist SCOTT WHEELER’s Isolation Rag is the most recent, a timely reaction to the self-quarantining and social distancing brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Wheeler writes,
The last concert I attended before the lockdown was in March 2020 in Los Alamos, where Gil and pianist Akira Eguchi played a wonderful recital including my sonata *The Singing Turk*. Gil and Akira played an encore for that recital—William Bolcom’s *Graceful Ghost Rag*. Thinking of that wonderful piece and Gil’s beautiful reading of it, I wrote my *Isolation Rag* for unaccompanied violin. It includes a brief quote from the first movement of the Mendelssohn concerto, then a snippet of the last movement of that concerto, followed by a bit of the last movement of the Brahms concerto. Gil reacted that it gave the piece the feeling that the soloist was at home thinking of and missing his orchestra.

The piece was written as a gift and was presented as a surprise in April 2020. Gil then surprised me by quickly premiering it at the Dresden Music Festival in their online program Music Never Sleeps, in May.

The Boston-based Scott Wheeler (b.1952) was a Fellow of the Tanglewood Music Center and is an alumnus of the New England Conservatory and Brandeis University. He composes for a variety of contexts but has concentrated on opera and other dramatic forms. Commissions include those from the Metropolitan Opera, National Opera, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, and the Koussevitzky and Marilyn Horne foundations, among many others, and he was a co-founder of Boston’s Dinosaur Annex Music Ensemble.

Since 1984, violist and composer MAX RAIMI (b.1956) has been a member of the viola section of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, which has also performed his music on several occasions. His viola-centric arrangements of the *Star-Spangled Banner* have preceded White Sox and Chicago Bulls games and he has been commissioned by organizations around the country. Raimi originally wrote his short, hectic *Anger Management* for solo viola. Having made an arrangement of the piece for solo violin, he presented it to Gil Shaham when the violinist arrived for performances of the Mendelssohn concerto with the CSO in December 2018. “This was on Thursday night,” Raimi recalled in an interview. “To my astonishment, he learned it and was able to perform it [as an encore] brilliantly by Saturday. Some of these guys are just a different species than I am.”

A Pulitzer Prize-winner in 1988 for his 12 New Etudes for solo piano, WILLIAM BOLCOM (b.1938) commands a deep knowledge of musical styles from Mozart to cabaret to ragtime. Vocal music and theatrical works have been a mainstay since his early professional years; along with composing dozens of cabaret and art songs, as a pianist he has performed both genres with his wife, the singer Joan Morris, for decades. Among his largest projects is a setting of William Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, which he embarked upon as a teenager and completed only in 1982. He returned to Blake for his Boston Symphony Orchestra-commissioned Eighth Symphony in 2008. Further BSO commissions have included his *MCMXC Tanglewood*, for the Tanglewood Music Center’s 50th anniversary in 1990, and his *Circus Overture*, written for the 70th birthday of conductor Leonard Slatkin, who led the premiere with the BSO at Tanglewood in 2014. He has also written for the Boston Pops: his *Ragomania* was premiered by the Pops under John Williams’s direction in 1982. Other major pieces include three operas for Lyric Opera of Chicago: *McTeague, A View from the Bridge*, based on Arthur Miller’s play, and *The Wedding*, based on Robert Altman’s film.

Bolcom wrote his nine-movement *Suite No. 2* for solo violin in 2012 for Gil Shaham, whose repertoire includes the composer’s Violin Concerto as well as the *Graceful Ghost Rag*. The two brief movements from the suite performed in this concert are characteristicly evocative. “Dancing in Place” requires Shaham to add his own percussion by tapping the violin’s fingerboard with his left hand. “Lenny in Spats”—a reference to Leonard Bernstein—begins its jazzy swing with high, whistle-like harmonics.

Known from his youth as a formidable pianist, SERGEI PROKOFIEV (1891-1953) wrote five concertos for his own instrument as well as a large body of solo works, including nine sonatas. Many a listener has been introduced to classical music via his perennially delightful introduction to orchestral instruments, *Peter and the Wolf*, and many of his symphonies, operas including *War and Peace*, and ballets including *Romeo and Juliet*, are major repertoire pieces. Prokofiev also added significant works to the literature for violin with two concertos with orchestra, two sonatas for violin and piano, and a sonata for two violins, along with his *Sonata in D for solo violin*.

Actually, Prokofiev wrote the sonata to succeed as either a solo piece or as a piece for a group of violinists to play in unison. Composed in 1947, it was commissioned by the Soviet Union’s Commission for Arts Affairs for the purpose of educating young violinists. Although not as virtuosic as the composer’s other violin music, the ten-minute, three-movement Sonata is by no means a beginner’s work. Prokofiev makes sure to require techniques native to the violin, such as arpeggios that cross all four strings, rapid alternations of the bow between strings, sharp double-stop chords. The first and last movements of the sonata are quick and sprightly; the “sweet Andante” second movement spins variations from the simple, lyrical melody stated at the beginning. The sonata wasn’t performed until some twelve years later—six years after the composer’s death.

At the center of this program is one of the six multi-movement works for solo violin composed by JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750) between about 1715 and 1720. Bach wasn’t first composer to write
significant pieces for unaccompanied violin, but his three sonatas and three partitas (suites of movements based mostly on dance genres) are the acknowledged pinnacle of the genre. The six-movement **Partita No 3 in E, BWV**, begins with the famous Preludio, Bach at his most brilliant. He liked this movement well enough to reuse it in a few later works, including the wonderful organ concertos found in the cantatas nos. 29, *Wir danken dir, Gott, wir danken dir*, and 120a, *Herr Gott, Beherrscher aller Dinge*. The second-movement Loure (AABB) is a French dance also known as a “slow gigue,” in this case written in 6/4 time. Bach rarely uses this dance, this being the only instance among the violin partitas. The four-beat Gavotte heavily emphasizes each beat of the measure and has a rustic feel. “Rondeau” means the first phrase returns as a refrain. The first of the two three-beat minuets is the more outgoing, but the sonority of the second is interesting in its use of a drone-like held B in its first two measures, evoking a hurdy-gurdy. The Bourée is an energetic four-beat dance making use of repeating phrases. The finale (AABB) is a quick three-beat Gigue with running sixteenth-notes.

Robert Kirzinger

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