

Spring 2021

## Around the World in 50(ish) Minutes

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Around the World in 50(ish) Minutes

Senior Project Submitted to

The Division of the Arts

of Bard College

by Narain Darakananda

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York May, 2021

## Artist's Statement

During these past four years, I have worked towards achieving greater integration of technique and musical intention. To this end, I have worked on improving my technical control of the violin while also developing more specificity in my interpretations. This recital represents my current stage of development in this regard. In conceptualizing this recital, I wanted a program that would demonstrate my abilities as a violinist, but more importantly tell some kind of narrative. The theme I ultimately settled upon was “Around the world in 50(ish) minutes” in which I would play one piece from each of the six populated continents. Academically speaking, I thought that this theme would demonstrate my versatility as a violinist and my ability to incorporate several different styles into my playing. Furthermore, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has forced me, and most other people around the world, to limit my traveling and stay in more or less the same place for over a year now. Through my music, I wanted to recapture some of the beauty of travel and, in a limited way, experience parts of other cultures from the government-sanctioned safety of Red Hook.

The events of the past year have also brought my attention to issues of race and colonialism in the United States. From the killing of Breonna Taylor, to the murder of George Floyd, to the forceful suppression of peaceful protests across the country, to the spike in hate crimes against Asian Americans, to the capital insurrection of January 6, and to the killing of 6 Asian women in Georgia, this year more than any other has forced my to reevaluate my future as an Asian American performing an art rooted in white European traditions. I wanted my music to be more than a celebration of white European male exceptionalism. In playing music from around the world from composers not as well known in the classical canon, I hoped this recital

would be a good first step on my journey to develop a less Euro-centric approach to my instrument.

To this end, I hoped that my recital would feature a healthy mix of more well known pieces such as Inverno from Piazzola's Cuatro Estaciones Porteñas, Zhanhao and Chang's Butterfly lover's concerto, and Tarrega's Recuerdos del Alhambra, as well as the works of lesser known composers such as Margaret Sutherland, and Youssef Griess, and Jessie Montgomery. The eclectic nature of my program challenged me to develop more variety in my sound as well as explore different ways of approaching musical expression. This recital is not meant to be a show of technical virtuosity, but an expression of my relationship with music and the violin in the current moment.

# Around the World in 50(ish) minutes



# Introduction

Dear Friends

Thank you for attending my senior recital! I know that on a Saturday evening at the end of May, there are several fun and exciting places you could be, and I deeply appreciate you deciding to be here. I hope I make it worth your while.

My last year of Bard has not looked anything like what I envisioned when I first arrived. I never imagined I would take online classes, be socially distanced from my friends, and wear a mask everywhere I went. At the same time, my freshman self also never imagined I would have made such good friends, learned so much, and come so far. As the conclusion of not only this crazy year, but also of my four-year journey at Bard, I didn't want my recital to be a technical *tour de force*, but a reflection of where I am now in my musical education.

In this program, I will play one piece from each of the six populated continents. With the travel restrictions imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, I wanted to find some way to explore even a small part of other cultures through my music. Furthermore, the events of the past year have also brought my attention to issues of race and colonialism in the United States. From the killing of Breonna Taylor, to the murder of George Floyd, to the forceful suppression of peaceful protests across the country, to the spike in hate crimes against Asian Americans, to the capital insurrection of January 6, and to the killing of 6 Asian women in Georgia, this year more than any other has forced me to reevaluate my future as an Asian American performing an art rooted in white European traditions. I wanted my music to be more than a celebration of white European male exceptionalism. In playing music from around the world from composers not as well known in the classical canon, I hoped this recital would be a good first step on my journey to develop a less Euro-centric approach to my instrument.

I hope you enjoy the concert,

Thank you so much!

Narain

## Program

Recuerdos de la Alhambra.....Francisco Tarrega (arr. Ruggiero Ricci)

Rhapsody No 1.....Jessie Montgomery (1981 – )

Paysage Egyptien..... Youssef Greiss (1899 – 1961)

*Narain Darakananda, Violin*

## Intermission

Inverno Porteño..... Astor Piazzolla (arr. Leonid Desyatnikov)

Sonatina for oboe (or violin) and piano..... Margaret Sutherland

Butterfly Lovers' Concerto (selections).....Chen Gang & He Zhanhao

*Narain Darakananda, Violin*

*David Stykowski, Piano*

## Recuerdos De la Alhambra

Known as the “Sarasate of the guitar,” Francisco Tarrega (1852 – 1909) was a Spanish composer and virtuoso guitar player. During a time when the guitar was being outshone by the piano, Tarrega played a key role in expanding the guitar repertoire, composing 78 original works and writing 120 transcriptions. The *Recuerdos de la Alhambra* is one such original work. Tarrega wrote this solo guitar piece as a birthday gift for a friend, commemorating the time they spent together visiting the Alhambra de Granada. Tarrega writes that “Since I cannot offer you a present of any worth on your birthday, accept this humble poetic impression, made on my soul by the grandiose marvel of the Alhambra of Granada we both admire.” As the letter suggests, this piece seems to be a reflection of Tarrega’s inner feelings and memories of the experience, rather than a representation of the Alhambra itself. The gentle song-like quality of the piece seems to contrast the massive red-stone citadel that is the Alhambra. Furthermore, Tarrega’s blindness would have prevented him from seeing the Alhambra in the first place. The dichotomy between the light tremolo in the upper voice and the slow melody in the lower voice seems to convey a kind of quiet reflection, and perhaps even nostalgia



## Butterfly Lovers' Concerto

Written in 1959 by two students of the Shanghai Conservatory, Gang Chen and Zhanhao He, the *Butterfly Lovers'* concerto is one of the most enduring examples of the blend between Chinese and European musical traditions. The concerto is a programmatic work based on the ancient legend, the *Butterfly Lovers*. The first part of the concerto represents the budding love between Zhu Yingtai, the daughter of a wealthy daughter who goes to school disguised as a man, and Liang Zhu, her classmate. The following section depicts the struggle between Zhu Yingtai and her father who pressures her into an arranged marriage she does not want. Liang finds out that Zhu is indeed a girl and proposes marriage, only to be rejected by the family on account of the previously arranged marriage. Liang dies of grief, followed by Yingtai who commits suicide at Liang's grave. The last part of the concerto represents Zhu and Liang's reincarnation as butterflies who will spend the rest of their lives together





## Sonatina No. 1

Margaret Sutherland (1897–1984) had a career as a composer spanning over 55 years with over 90 original works. She was an instrumental figure in raising awareness and recognition for the arts in Australia. At the age of 17, she won a scholarship to study piano with Edward Goll and Composition with Fritz Hart at the Marshall Hall Conservatorium. In 1923 her career took her to London and Vienna where she became deeply influenced with European music. She would remain in Europe for two years before returning to Australia in 1925

Sutherland was passionate about developing the musical and artistic culture of Australia. During World War II she held midday chamber concerts for the Red Cross and became a member of the Council for Education, Music and the Arts (CEMA). She was associated with the Australian Advisory Committee for UNESCO, a Council Member of the National Gallery Society of Victoria, and was a major proponent for the plan to build the current Victorian Arts Centre.

Her Sonatina no. 1 for oboe (or violin) and piano was one of her many chamber works. Though quite short, the sonatina manages to express several different characters, from the playfulness of the first movement, to the lyricism of the second movement, to the jauntiness of the third movement.



## Rhapsody No. 1

Born in Manhattan's lower east side to a musician father and theater artist mother, the seeds of Jessie Montgomery's (1981 – ) musical talent were planted early. Attending several rallies, performances and parties with her parents, Montgomery developed a fascination with music and community engagement at a young age. An accomplished violinist and composer, Montgomery received her education at Juilliard, NYU, and is currently a Graduate Fellow in Music Composition at Princeton. Her teachers include, but are not limited to, Sally Thomas, Ann Setzer, Alice Kanack, Laura Kaminsky, and Joan Tower. As a violinist, she maintains an active performance career. She is a founding member of PUBLIQuartet and currently a member of the Catalyst Quartet. She is also performed regularly with the Silkroad Ensemble and Sphinx Virtuosi.

Montgomery's Rhapsody no. 1 for solo violin pays homage to the solo works of Bach and Ysaye. Eventually, Montgomery hopes to incorporate this rhapsody into a cycle of solo rhapsodies written for solo violin, solo viola, solo flute, solo bassoon, solo bass, and a quintet containing all five instruments.



## Paysage Egyptien

Youssef Griess (1899–1961) was among the first generations of Egyptian classical composers. Though he remains quite obscure today, he played an important role in developing the orchestral repertoire of Egypt. His composition for orchestra *Masr* (1932) is considered the first orchestral piece written by an Egyptian composer. His musical style is quite clearly influenced by both European classical styles and more traditional Egyptian music.

The piece being performed today is one of Griess' several works for solo violin. The title *Paysage Egyptien* translates to the "Egyptian Landscape." The work combines large, repetitive sweeping gestures with smaller details such as left hand pizzicato to create a sense of expansiveness as well as variety. Though the melodic structure and use of what in European music theory would be considered harmonic minor gives the piece a distinctly Arabic quality, Griess' will occasionally break into more European sounding diatonic harmonies, paying homage to both his cultural and professional heritages.



## Inverno Porteño

Piazzola (1921–1992) is perhaps the most well known South American Composer. Born in Argentina, he moved to New York city at the age of 4, only returning to Argentina at the age of 15. He would go on to study with legendary music teacher Nadia Boulanger in Paris in 1954. Though he began his compositional studies writing more traditionally European music, with the encouragement of Ms. Boulanger, he returned to his cultural roots by writing Tango music. Blending together his experiences with Argentinian Tango, American Jazz, and European classical music, he developed what would later become known as *Nuevo Tango* (new tango). This new style of Tango had mixed reception in Argentina but was particularly well received in the US and Europe.

The piece on today's program was originally composed for Piazzola's own ensemble, the Quinteto Tango Nuevo. The *Inverno Porteño* (winter) is one in a set of four pieces, each representing a different season in Buenos Aires. These pieces were later arranged for violin and string orchestra by Leonid Desyatnikov, who made the works a kind of Argentinian counterpoint to Vivaldi's four seasons

