

---

Senior Projects Spring 2024

Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects

---

Spring 2024

## Senior Project

Niall Edward Ransford  
*Bard College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj\\_s2024](https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2024)



Part of the [Composition Commons](#), and the [Music Performance Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

---

### Recommended Citation

Ransford, Niall Edward, "Senior Project" (2024). *Senior Projects Spring 2024*. 242.  
[https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj\\_s2024/242](https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2024/242)

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects at Bard Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Projects Spring 2024 by an authorized administrator of Bard Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@bard.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@bard.edu).

Senior Project

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of the Arts of Bard College

by  
Niall Ransford

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2024



## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Renée Anne Louprette for her consistent and dedicated help as Senior Project advisor. I'm extremely grateful for her support throughout this process. I would like to thank my composition teacher George Tsontakis for his helpful advice on a number of pieces for this concert, as well as Peter Laki for his assistance and support throughout my time at Bard. I also wish to thank all of the performers who agreed to be a part of this project and for the artistry and talent which they've brought. Special thanks to Tina Kinsbourne for the fantastic art on the poster. Finally, I'd like to acknowledge my family and friends for their support and encouragement.

## **Artist's Statement**

From the outset of my time at Bard, I have been interested in being both a composer and performer. In this spirit, I created two concerts for my senior project. One, focused on performance, and the other focused on composition. My first senior concert featured a range of solo guitar repertoire from Spain, Central America and South America. I decided to present both standard and non-standard repertoire stretching back from the 16th century up to the 20th century. This concert included many disparate compositional elements that I aspired to integrate into my own writing: the dissonant modernism of Manuel Ponce, the romanticism of Augustín Barrios and the excitement and drama of Heitor Villa-Lobos. While preparing this first concert I began to entertain the idea of improvising in the style of each of the composers, and therefore blending composition with performance for myself. While this did not make it into my first senior concert, I had tried improvising (although somewhat haphazardly) over these various pieces in composition lessons. Many of the pieces I composed in the first semester of my senior year, such as “A Turtle’s Flight” written for the Da Capo ensemble, were a direct result of these short improvisations.

For my second senior concert, I decided to more practically focus on ways that I could begin integrating improvisation into a classical idiom. I took two approaches to this: one was learning the historical practice of baroque improvisation on the theorbo with a group of musicians, the second was to make a baroque jazz fusion piece with improvisation. In my second senior concert I also included three traditionally composed pieces of mine, each of which represents a compositional style or tool which I hope to be able to improvise with in the future.

One challenge of this second concert was that it involved the organization of many moving parts. There were three ensembles that had to be recruited and rehearsed as well as two solo pieces. From this experience I have learned the importance of early and prompt communication. These two Senior concerts have allowed me to solidify what I have learned at Bard, and begin to synthesize these experiences in pursuit of new musical directions.

December 8th 4pm Blum Hall

# Senior Project I

Niall Ransford

*PROGRAM*

Las Abejas	Augustín Barrios (1885-1944)
Vals Op. 8 No.4	Barrios
Julia Florida Barcarola	Barrios
Pavana No. 3	Luys Milán (c. 1500-1561)
12 Preludes (1882-1948) I. Tranquillo II. Vivo VI. Moderato espressivo	Manuel Ponce
Sacrificio	Sainz de la Maza (1896 - 1981)
Diferencias on "Guardame las vacas"	Luis de Narvaez (c. 1500 - 1550)

*INTERVAL*

Cinq Preludes I. Andantino espressivo II. Andantino III. Andante IV. Lento V. Poco animato	Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887 - 1959)
---	-------------------------------------



## Notes on the Program

Agustín Pío Barrios (1885-1994) was a classical guitarist and composer from Paraguay. Over 300 of his compositions survive, although there are likely more that do not. He in his time he was known as “el Gran Mangoré” (the great Mangoré) or simply Agustín Mangoré, which comes from a persona he developed while performing in Brazil in which he adopted the traditional dress of native Paraguayans, developed a backstory for himself, and went by the name Nitsuga Mangoré.

Barrios was famed throughout South and Central America for his virtuosic and musical recordings. Critics of the time compared him to Frédéric Chopin, a Polish pianist and composer, for his idiomatic use of the guitar, and to Nicolò Paganini for his virtuosity and stage presence. One witness said that he was in fact “superior to Segovia,” (the most accomplished classical guitarist of the time). In fact after hearing Barrios play, Segovia requested a copy of the music from Barrios. Segovia claims he never received the music, however many believe that it is more likely that the piece which Barrios was performing at the time was simply too difficult for Segovia.

Each of the pieces I have chosen represents different periods of Barrios’s writing as well as different styles. Op. 8 No. 4 is an early work which demonstrates his ability to meld romantic music with Paraguayan folk music. Las abejas is a virtuosic study in arpeggios, and Julia Florida is a lyrical barcarolle written for one of his students, Julia Martínez de Rodríguez.

Luis Milán (also spelled Luis de Milán)(c. 1500-1561) was born in Valencia in the medieval kingdom of Aragon (in what is modern day Spain). Milan played the vihuela, a type of Spanish lute or guitar. Luis Milán was the first to publish a book of vihuela music and within this publication is also the first-known tempo indication supplied by a

composer. One modern musicologist remarks that in this publication he “highlights his singularity of language and his modernity with regards to concepts.” The vihuela was, at the time, associated with the aristocracy, in contrast to the early guitar. In fact Luys Milán was a courtier and published a manual of courtly behavior in 1561 as well as a book titled “El Cortesano” or the courtesan. These books are important as historical documents of the Venetian medieval court and are also an early critique of European gender expectations.

Manuel Ponce(1882-1948) is a Mexican organist, pianist and composer from the early 20th century. He is best remembered for his compositions for the guitar which were heavily influenced by folk music. He is credited as the father of musical nationalism in Mexico. Of Ponce and two of his friends (who were visual artists) a historian remarks “These three people helped to give shape and more weight to nationalist art in México; each one was a strong advocate of Mexican folklore in his respective artistic area: poetry, painting, and mural, and especially in music.” One composition of particular note is his opera *Cira*, which details the arrival of Hernán Cortés to the American continent. Ponce is said to have had a great facility with imitation. He apparently jokingly wrote a fugue in the style of Bach on a restaurant napkin and then handed it to his friend to play. Ponce, however, did not seem to have interest in being derivative of music from other countries. He said “great composers like Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Liszt, Chopin, etc. used folk forms in their musical creations, all of them dressing those simple harmonic melodies with appropriate clothing, keeping the original melodic line born from the heart of the people itself; they created high musical forms.” The three preludes I am playing are from a set of 12 preludes that Ponce wrote for the guitarist Andrés Segovia. In fact Ponce had originally written 24 preludes for Segovia, however until very recently only the 12 of them which Segovia had selected were widely available.

Luis de Narváez (c.1500-1550) was a vihuelist who served as a Secretary of State and commentator for the kingdom of Castile. He also held many positions as a musical performer for various courts and chapels; Including the court of Philip II of Spain. *Diferencias on "Guardame las Vacas"* comes from Narváez's *"El Delfín de Música."* This was the second set of vihuela music ever published as well as the first published themes and variation. During the late Renaissance and Baroque periods, the Spanish vihuelists were especially known for their improvisation and created many improvisatory progressions and ground basses. The progression that this piece is based upon is a *romanesca* which is a variation of the Italian *passamezzo antico*. Narváez was an extremely capable improviser and composer. Allegedly he was able to improvise four-part counterpoint over a written four parts at sight, creating 8 part counterpoint.

Regino Sainz de la Maza(1896-1981) was born in Burgos, Spain. While improvisation had become much less common for classical musicians in the 20th century, in a recital of Sanz de la Maza, he played the piece, *"Diferencias on guardame las vacas"* but interjections his own improvisations. His improvisations are striking; melding renaissance music with 20th century harmony. Perhaps some part of the improvisatory tradition from Narvaez's time had carried over into the early 20th century. He toured Europe giving concerts in France, Germany, and Great Britain. Joaquín Rodrigo, a famous Spanish composer, dedicated the now famous *Concierto de Aranjuez* to Sainz de la Maza which he premiered on Nov. 6 1940 in Madrid.

*Sacrificio* comes from a movie, titled *"La Frontera de Dios,"* or God's frontier, which Sainz de La Maza was commissioned to compose for. While the movie itself seems to have garnered unfavorable reviews, the music Sainz de La Maza wrote is stunning. Heitor Villa-Lobos is a Brazilian composer. Villa-Lobos began studying music from a young age under his father. He studied multiple instruments including piano, cello and clarinet. He describes his early

childhood as rigorous, and perhaps harsh. His father would ask him to identify the pitch of random noises, "such as the screech of a streetcar... and woe unto me if I gave a wrong answer!" As a young composer Villa-Lobos was particularly interested in the folk music of Brazil and joined a *chorões* (a type of brazilian dance) group in college. This taught him to improvise and left a strong impression on him. *Cinq Preludes* by Villa-Lobos is his last work for solo guitar. They preludes demonstrate an impressive range both emotionally and technically. The first is romantic in both character and style. In contrast the fifth demonstrates a signature technique of Villa Lobos, which is to mix parallel voicings of chords with open strings to create an almost suspended feel to the music.

## Performer Biographies

**Niall Ransford** is a Senior music major at Bard College. Niall is interested in classical guitar performance and composition, although he continues to have many branching but related interests such as psychology, teaching, and jazz guitar and Improvisation. He currently studies classical guitar with Scott Kritzer, Theorbo with Richard Kolb and composition with George Tsontakis. He is also a current member of the Bard Baroque Ensemble where he works as a theorbo player.

May 3rd at 6:00 pm | Chapel of Holy Innocents

# Senior Project II

Niall Ransford

*PROGRAM*

Barazz: Three Dances

Niall Ransford

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio
- III. Vivace

Guitar - Jahdiel Gómez  
Flute - Clemens Henning  
Saxophone - Steve Bonacci  
Harpichord - Mary Douglas

Throwing up in someone else's car

Niall Ransford

Violin - Manar Hashmi

Night Clown's Jig

Niall Ransford

Piano - Chris Oldfather

Three Improvisations

- I. Passamezzo-Saltarello
- II. Españolaletas
- III. Folia

Violin - Manar Hashmi  
Cello - Emily Ta  
Theorbo - Niall Ransford

Wind Trio

Niall Ransford

Flute - Eliza Karpiak  
Cello - Sarah Martin  
Clarinet - Russell Urban-Mead

## Notes on the Program

### Barazz: Three Dances

This piece came out of my desire to experiment with combining two distinct styles, Jazz and Baroque music, both of which have significantly influenced the way I compose and more broadly think about music. It was also my desire to use this piece as a test for how one might go about morphing two idioms together and through that create something new altogether. Much of the credit for this unique piece lies with the three improvisers who generously agreed to work with me on this project.

### Three Improvisations

From the start of my interest in music, it has been my desire to be an improviser. Almost all of the composers I was taught to look up to, Bach, Mozart, Sor, were all improvisers themselves. This being my last concert at Bard, I decided to take a risk and try my hand at Baroque improvisation. The **three** improvisations **Presented** are based on three ground bases or progressions. A **Passamezzo** is an Italian Dance that was popular in the renaissance and baroque periods. The etymology of the term comes from “passo e mezzo” (a step and a half). The passamezzo was frequently followed by a dance in three, in this case a saltarello, often based on the same or related progression. **Españoletas** is a dance of Italian origin (perhaps written in a stereotyped spanish style), from the 16th century. The theme and progression were varied endlessly by different composers. Girolamo Frescobaldi even wrote a **5-part** fugue on the progression. Fragments of the **Españoletas** melody were frequently quoted by early composers.

The earliest mentions of the **Folia** come from 15th-century Portugal and predate written music in Europe. It is mentioned being danced at both courtly and popular festivals at the time. Despite this, little is known of what this early dance may have looked like because the dance was not described until almost 200 years later. At this later time, the **Folia** was described as extremely fast and noisy, often performed by men in drag. The dance was supposedly played so fast that it made the dancers seem crazy, which is where its name comes from. Further complicating the origins of this dance is that most of the famous **Folia** variations that are well known today have a very different character from that described above. It is unclear what connection the **Folia** progression bears to this early dance. The **Folia** arranged for this concert is based on the variations set by Vivaldi, which are marked with a slow tempo. For this performance we have tried to rekindle some of the chaos that may have been an inseparable element of the early **Folia** dance. I am **extremely** grateful to Manar Hashmi and Emily Ta for their support and work on this project.

### Night Clown's Jig

I began writing this piece with the intent of making a Mozart imitation in my second year. I was interested in imitating Mozart because of his quick and striking changes of texture that seemed smooth and seamless. After writing the first 20 measures or so, I decided to add a twist and make it dissonant. Yet still I was not super pleased with the results, and abandoned the piece. Skip forward a few years, and I returned to working on the piece this semester. With the help of my teacher George Tsontakis, I was able to **craft** it into the piece you are about to hear.

### Throwing up in someone's car

I wrote this piece after I threw up in someone's car. Manar was there. Saw it all.

### Wind Trio

This piece started as an exercise for the class 20th century composition techniques, in which I was tasked with moving between whole tone and pentatonic scales within a piece. I decided to add the dissonant accompaniment early on in this piece's development because I thought it sounded more interesting. The piece is in essence a Debussy imitation with a dissonant twist.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Renée Anne Louprette for her consistent and dedicated help as Senior Project advisor. I'm extremely grateful for her support throughout this process. I would like to thank my composition teacher George Tsontakis for his helpful advice on a number of pieces for this concert, as well as Peter Laki for his assistance and support throughout my time at Bard. I also wish to thank all of the performers who agreed to be a part of this project and for the artistry and talent which they've brought. Special thanks to Tina Kinsbourne for the fantastic art on the poster. Finally, I'd like to acknowledge my family and friends for their support and encouragement.