

COMPOSITIONAL TRADITIONS AND INNOVATIONS IN VIOLIN LITERATURE:  
THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AND BEYOND

by  
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## **ABSTRACT**

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The twentieth century is an age that saw striking innovations in music composition while cultural and societal changes, including the dramatic evolution of recording and broadcast techniques, revolutionized the economic and social relationships inherent in music. A global and permeable audience may now hear a most diverse range of musical styles through live performance or by means of high quality recorded or broadcast media.

During this time, and also in the twenty-first century, many composers for violin have continued to write in a way that is clearly traditional in both form and content. Other composers have made significant advances in style and technique while still employing a melodic, harmonic, structural, and textural language grounded in the nineteenth century and quite accessible to most listeners. Still others have made

contributions that incorporate new conventions of harmony, rhythm and tonality such as free dissonance, bitonality, atonality, and complicated rhythmical constructs.

Meanwhile, musical opportunities and tastes have broadened throughout the world to assimilate and appreciate works incorporating musical languages that were once unfamiliar. Western musicians have become increasingly interested in music from other cultures. Non-Western ideas have enriched Western styles and have been accepted enthusiastically. A new “world music” is starting to emerge. These works may freely mix elements from multiple cultures, independent of the composer’s own origins.

For this dissertation project I have performed and recorded—at the University of Maryland School of Music in College Park—three recitals of works for violin selected from three time periods: early in first part of the twentieth century (1900–1950); the middle of the second part of the twentieth century (1950–2000); and the very beginning of the twenty-first century (beyond 2000). These time frames have allowed me to choose contrasting works demonstrating diverse cultural and compositional elements. A benefit of this project was the opportunity to work with two living composers in a collaborative process. Of special interest are two Chinese compositions selected for comparison, one composed with and one without Western influences. Finally, given the importance of the genre in modern popular culture, I have selected one piece from a film score.

My recital programs are as follows:

First Recital (1900-1950)

*Deuxieme Sonate* (1919), Arthur Honegger

*Second Sonata* (1914-17), Charles Ives

*First Rumanian Rhapsody* (1901), Georges Enesco

Second Recital (1950-2000)

*Duo for Violin and Piano* (1978), Aaron Copland

*Partita for Violin and Piano* (1984), Witold Lutoslawski

*Violin Concerto, "Butterfly Lovers"* (1958), Zhen Hao Ho and Gang Chen

Third Recital (beyond 2000)

*Romance and Dance for Violin and Piano* (2001), Chen Yi

*Partita for Solo Violin* (2000), Guy E. Garnett

*Twelve Poems* (2004), Robert Gibson

*The Red Violin Caprices* (2001), John Corigliano

## **Program Notes**

### **Charles Edward Ives: The Sonatas for Violin and Piano**

Nearly forty years after his death the music of Charles Ives continues to arouse controversy. He created his own idiom, deliberately turning his back on the German academicism prevalent in New England musical circles at the turn of the century. This was as original and brash as the composer himself. Ives studied music as a child with his father, who had been a bandmaster during the Civil War. Charles reported that George Ives delighted in sonic experiments; polytonality, quarter tones, unresolved dissonances, and tones clusters. These were a part of the young Charles' early education.

Charles Ives studied with Horatio Parker while attending Yale University. He could not conform to the conservative, traditional musical style that Parker expected. The young man gradually came to the realization that to be dependent upon music as a livelihood would effectively stifle his creativity. Consequently, upon his graduation from Yale in 1898 Ives moved to the New York City and entered the insurance business. By 1909 Ives and a friend had founded Ives and Myrick, which grew to be one of the largest insurance companies in America, and he continued to compose in his spare time.

Ives was a disciple of New England Transcendentalism as espoused by Ralph Waldo Emerson. In addition, he was a firm believer in the Progressive Movement which was active in the U.S during the first quarter of the twentieth century. World War I destroyed Ives' idealism and faith in the goodness of man, and he suffered a massive heart attack in 1918. From that point on his creative urge began to wane; by 1927 he had ceased composing. When Ives retired from business in 1930 he was an exceedingly purchase recognition for his music, he promoted the efforts of others by underwriting publication and performances of the works of other composers.

Of six completed violin sonatas, only four have survived. The earliest one, written while he was at Yale, has been lost. The next attempt, the "Pre-First" sonata yielded four of its five movements to the later sonatas. This borrowed material is what holds the sonatas together. Each one contains music originally intended for other compositions, as well as displays Ives' most easily discernible musical characteristic: incorporation of popular American songs and Protestant hymns. These served as grist for his compositional mill. Melodies are fragmented, developed, and juxtaposed in some movements, while others are free fantasies on a single hymn tune. Ives chose a different tempo scheme for each work. All of these sonatas were conceived around 1903 and reached their final form between 1908 and 1915. However they were not

published until shortly before Ives' death in 1954. Only the Fourth Sonata went to press under the scrutiny of Ives, so many significant discrepancies exist between the manuscripts and the available published editions.

### **Georges Enesco**

#### **Rumanian Rhapsody in A, Opus 11, No. 1**

Far too frequently the general public knows a gifted composer by a single work. The inevitable result is to underrate his achievement, particularly if the single work happens to fall into a relatively popular mold. George Enescu, who adopted the spelling Georges Enesco during his years in Paris, is a case in point. Certainly his first Rumanian Rhapsody has been world famous almost from the moment of its first performance. Unfortunately it remains almost the only work by Enesco that most people know. Few have heard the three symphonies or the orchestral suites, and hardly anyone knows his opera based on Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, regarded by many authorities as one of the greatest operas of the 20th century. Seventy years after his death, few people recall his work as a brilliant violinist and teacher (particularly of Yehudi Menuhin, whose autobiography speaks most warmly of him). Enesco's career as a composer was complicated by the conflicting demands made on him as a teacher and organizer. Many of his larger compositions took years to finish, so difficult was it to find the time to work on them.

Enesco attained success early with the first Rumanian Rhapsody, and it came to haunt him. He was only twenty when he wrote it and not quite twenty two when he led the first performance, yet audiences demanded it constantly for the rest of his life.

Nonetheless, though the rhapsody is frankly modeled after the Hungarian rhapsodies of Franz Liszt, bringing together native songs and dances in a colorful potpourri, it is nonetheless effective, from the simplicity of the opening clarinet phrase to the fiery flash of the closing section. For a short time, at least, it makes us all Rumanian.

### **Witold Lutoslawski, Partita for Violin and Orchestra (Piano)**

The partita for violin and orchestra, with obligato piano, dedicated to Anne-Sophie Mutter, was written in 1988, from the version for violin and piano written in 1984 to a commission from the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra of Minnesota, for Pinchas Zukerman and Marc Neikrug. The three movements, pillars that support the work, *Allegro giusto*, *Largo* and *Presto*, are separated by two short movements *Ad libitum*, which fulfill the function of linking passages, remain as in the version for violin and piano; a short interlude in the fifth movement reduces the instrumentation similarly to

a duo of soloists. In these fragments *Ad libitum* where there is an aleatoric synchronization of the parts of the two instruments, the notation offers an outline: these, like the *Gry weneckie* (Venetian Games) and the String quartet, conceived by Lutoslawski in the 1960s, are written in separate boxes.

### **Aaron Copland, Duo for Violin and Piano**

Originally scored for flute and piano, Copland's Duo was re-scored by the composer in 1977 at the request of Robert Mann, the violinist for the Julliard Quartet and Copland enthusiast. The "all-but" sonata was therefore transcribed into this version, which took a good deal less time than the composition-Copland worked for three years on the Duo, commissioned by William Kinkaid. The famous flautist wanted something that would work "...like a sonata," and Copland certainly delivered the goods, offering a tightly formed work in three movements. The second movement in particular, the composition of which took most of the three years, evokes, in the composer's own words "a certain mood that I connect with myself- a rather sad and wistful one, I suppose. "

### **Chen Gang, Butterfly Lovers**

Story of "the Butterfly Lovers"

The story of *Liangshan Bo and Zhu Yingtai* (Butterfly Lovers) is based upon a historical legend known to every Chinese.

It was in the feudal China hundreds of years ago, when love as young people's own choice was considered to be devious from the norm of the society. However, two young people fell in love, and in a very dramatic way. Having been close friends at school, the young man, Liangshan Bo would never imagine that his pal Zhu Yingtai should turn out to be a fair lady when they were back home after finishing their school. As a matter of fact, in those days, the sphere of activity of women was none other than their homes. In order to receive education as man did, the aspiring and rebellious girl had disguised herself as a boy.

But their love plunged them into fatal tragedy. As family feud prevented Juliet and Romeo from coming together, the social prejudice of the day set Liangshan Bo and Zhu Yingtai apart. The girl's family, seeing that the boy's not as affluent as theirs, decided to marry her to a wealthy man she did not love and in fact had never met before. What was worse, they lied to her poor lover that she had died of a serious illness, upon which he pined and killed himself. To protest the injustice she decided to join her lover in another world. She pretended to agree to the arranged marriage but on condition that the wedding procession must bypass her lover's graveyard. They

were coming along when she all of a sudden jumped out of the sedan chair and threw herself into the tomb that had just timely opened up of itself as if to receive her. What people saw next was a pair of beautiful butterflies flew out of the opening, dancing happily here and there in the free air. Unto this day people still believe that the two butterflies were the undaunted spirits of the young lovers. Hence the legend of "the Story of Butterfly Lovers".

**The Butterfly Lovers Concerto** was composed in the year 1958 by Chen Gang and He Zhanhao, who were then studying at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. The pair was exploring the feasibility of setting Chinese music in a (Western) symphonic medium, incorporating borrowed devices from Chinese folk theatrical music as well as vocal techniques of Zhe Jiang's *Yu Theatre*. The end result is a free-form concerto for the violin in one movement. Applying closely the storyline that I have described, the concerto may be divided into three sections as follows.

Part I describes Shanbo and Yingtai's meeting (Liang is represented on the cello and Zhu on the violin), their joining hands in brotherhood, the blossoming of love; their study and play and their sad separation when Zhu returns home.

Part II portrays their resistance to the arranged marriage; their meeting at the tower and the eventual death and suicide of the lovers. The violin's free rhapsodic play involving many syncopated chords (Zhu and her resistance to marriage) is pitted against the orchestra (Zhu's father forcing the marriage) in a dramatic play. The meeting at the tower is exemplified by the interplay between the cello solo (Liang) and the violin solo (Zhu). The following section employs borrowed theatrical devices to bring across the sickness and death of Liang and further the dramatic suicide of Zhu (Chinese gong and reprise) Interested listeners can hear these devices to great effect if one imagines them as sung, as it were, from the violin.

Part III wraps up the saga as the flute and harps signify the mysteriousness of the imminent metamorphosis. The play of the butterflies is heard following a recapitulation of the love theme and their happiness is echoed by mortals.

### **Chen Yi, Romance and Dance**

Romance and Dance was originally created for Two Violins and String Orchestra, and premiered by Maestro Dennis Russell Davies conducting the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra on December 12, 1998, with Benjamin Hudson and Wolfgang Kussmaul as soloists. Responding to many requests, I created this version for Violin and Piano in 1999. The first movement, ROMANCE OF HSIAO AND CH'IN was originally



composed in 1995 for Two Violins and String Orchestra, dedicated to Maestro Yehudi Menuhin and Edna Muchell. It was premiered by Shlomo Mintz and Elmar Oliveria with the Orchestra of St. Luke's conducted by Maestro Menuhin at "A Benefit Tribute to Yehudi Menuhin" at Lincoln Center, August 11, 1996. ROMANCE OF HSIAO AND CH'IN is written for Western musical instruments reproducing the style and sound of the Hsiao and Ch'in, traditional Chinese instruments. The Hsiao is a vertical bamboo flute that carries lyrical melodies through delicate lines, grace notes, and silence. The Ch'in is a 2000-year-old Chinese 7-string zither, with a rich repertoire in the history of Chinese music and literature. In performance, the Ch'in produces various articulations through different fingerings of plucking and vibrato, played with both hands. These two instruments are often played together and produce a good balance for sonority and timbre. In this version of the ROMANCE, the solo Violin transmits the lyrical sense of the Hsiao, expressing my love for humanities, while the piano accompaniment, sounding like an enlarged Ch'in, symbolizes nature. The second movement, DANCE, is adapted from Movement III ("Dancing") of my FIDDLE SUITE (from 1997) commissioned by the Fromm Music Foundation for the Kronos Quartet and Chinese fiddles (huqin). In DANCE, the solo violin plays very fast moving lines while the accompaniment plays the supporting dissonant harmonic progressions. This image came from the dancing ink on paper in Chinese calligraphy and the fiery moving gestures of the Chinese ancient women dancers. The pitch material is drawn from Beijing Opera tunes.

### **Guy Garnett, Partita**

This Partita is dedicated to all the wonderful violinists I have known. It is a collection of short works that differ rhythmically and in character, but, similar to the case of a Baroque partita, each of the movements shares a certain harmonic world with the others. In some cases, motives from one movement reappear in different contexts in other movement.

### **Robert Gibson, Twelve Poems**

The initial inspiration for my Twelve Poems was Paul Muldoon's poem "The Briefcase," in which he reflects, while waiting for a bus, on the possibility of "the first inkling" of this poem (inside his briefcase) being swept from his side on a city street in Manhattan by the rushing water of a sudden cloudburst: "I knew I daren't/set the briefcase down/ to slap my pocket for an obol—/ for fear it might slink into a culvert and strike out along the East River/ for the sea. By which I mean the 'open' sea."

In writing these short movements, I was seeking an analogue for the ability of the poet

to capture a particular moment and, further, an idea—more or less abstract— about the materials of the art and its forms. As with poetry, the focus is on sound as much as structure: “Cloudburst” is after Muldoon’s wonderful poem; both contemplation and the physical image of a mirror are implied in “Reflection,” which is a palindrome. The harmonic relationship of the perfect fifth in the overtone series is 2:3, a relationship that can also be expressed rhythmically. “Hommage” is my miniature tribute to Debussy, the composer who has most influenced my conception of musical form. His last work, the sonata for violin and piano, is, for me, music that approaches perfection, and a suggestion of the piece appears in this movement.

The preferred, although perhaps less known definition of “shoal” refers to a school of fish. This word always reminds me of my favorite lines from Edouard Roditi’s translation of Alain Bosquet’s poem “Regrets”: “Luxury, impulse! I draft a phrase/ and believe it protects me from this icy world,/ that goes through my body like a shoal of sardines.” Quatrain and octave, poetic terms for the number of lines in a stanza or poem, relate to the number of phrases (four and eight respectively) in these movements. In addition, the harmonic interval of the octave is ubiquitous in the concluding movement.

*Twelve Poems* was written for James Stern and Audrey Andrist, to whom the work is affectionately dedicated.

### **John Corigliano, the Red Violin**

John Corigliano is internationally celebrated as one of the leading composers of his generation. In orchestral, chamber, opera and film work, he has won global acclaim for his highly expressive and compelling compositions and his kaleidoscopic, ever-expanding technique

*The Red Violin* is a beautiful new award-winning film of great drama and emotion, with a stunning soundtrack from major contemporary composer John Corigliano that features a brilliant performance from violinist Joshua Bell. The film was released by Lion's Gate Films on June 11, 1999 in New York and Los Angeles, and opened in wide release in the following weeks. A tale filled with passion, pageantry, tragedy, romance, adventure and intrigue, *The Red Violin* centers around a contemporary auction in which a priceless violin with an infamous past is placed on the block. As the bidding mounts, the story flashes back to signature chapters in the violin's history and the inevitable impact it had on all those who possessed it. From its creation in 17th-century Italy, to the court of imperial Vienna in the 1790s, to Victorian England in the late 1800s, to the People's Republic of China in the mid-1960s, the dramatic

story spans continents and sweeps centuries. At the center of the story is a dark secret that is only revealed at the film's suspenseful and sensational finale.