

I FOLLOW MY MUSE!

THE ART OF THE SOLO VIOLIN

A RECITAL BY STEPHANIE CHASE

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2009 AT 4 P.M.

FREDERICK LOEWE THEATRE

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

“One of the violin greats of our era” (*Newhouse Newspapers*), Stephanie Chase will perform a recital of virtuoso works on Sunday, December 6 at 4 p.m. at Frederick Loewe Theatre.

Her concert is presented by New York University as part of its Distinguished Faculty series. The Frederick Loewe Theatre is located at 35 West 4th Street in New York City. Admission to this event is free.

The program features diverse works for solo violin composed between 1720 and 1980, with a focus on the inspirations provided to Béla Bartók, Eugène Ysaÿe and Earl Kim by the music of Johann Sebastian Bach and Nicolò Paganini.

The concert is dedicated to the memories of Arthur Grumiaux, Felix Galimir, Earl Kim, and Josef Gingold, with whom Ms. Chase studied this music.

PROGRAM

Sonata in C Major for violin solo, BWV 1005 (ca. 1720) – Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Sonata for solo violin (1944) – Béla Bartók (1881-1945)

Sonata, Opus 27, No. 5 (ca. 1924) – Eugène Ysaÿe (1858-1931)

Five Caprices (1980) – Earl Kim (1920-2000)

Caprice, Opus 1, No. 24 (ca. 1809) – Nicolò Paganini (1782-1840)

Notes on this program by Stephanie Chase:

Johann Sebastian Bach helped to rescue the violin from the rather poor reputation that it had developed, brought on in part by its association with dance and other pursuits deemed sinful by reform movements in the Protestant and Catholic churches. His *Sonata in C Major, BWV 1005* is one of six *Sonatas* and *Partitas* that he composed around 1720 while living in Cöthen. In both technical and musical terms, these works represent the pinnacle for the unaccompanied violinist in that they defy the inherent limitations of playing four-part music with four fingers, on four strings, with one bow. (Most composers, even today, primarily use the violin as a melodic instrument – quite like the human voice - although it is capable of producing four-note chords.)

The *Sonata in C Major* has characteristics of the *style galant* and opens with an *Adagio* that Bach also transcribed for the harpsichord (BWV 968). Its *Fuga* has a subject based on the Lutheran chorale hymn, *Komm Heiliger Geist, Herre Gott* (“Come, Holy Spirit, Lord God”), and - at 354 measures in length - may be the longest known fugue ever composed by Bach. The third movement, *Largo*, is remarkably tender in affect and is followed by a brilliant *Allegro assai*.

My teacher and mentor, the Belgian violinist Arthur Grumiaux, was an astonishing musician who excelled in a great variety of musical styles that included those of Bach, Berg, Mozart, Walton, Paganini and Beethoven, as well as “salon” music. His interpretation of Bach’s solo *Sonatas* and *Partitas*, as heard on his famed recording made in 1960-1961, is still considered by many to be unsurpassed. Grumiaux himself studied fugue and counterpoint in Paris with the Rumanian violinist and composer, George Enesco, who also taught Yehudi Menuhin. In his teaching, Grumiaux always emphasized the need to observe the integrity of a composition’s form and to serve the composer, not oneself. In Bach’s music, he demanded a great awareness of its underlying dance forms and harmonic structures and a purity of musical line.

The *Sonata for Solo Violin* by **Béla Bartók** is clearly inspired by the music of J.S. Bach. The first movement is a stately but passionate *Chaconne* – like the famed *Chaconne* from Bach’s *Partita in D Minor* for violin solo – followed by a fugue, as in all of Bach’s *Sonatas* for violin solo. The third movement, entitled *Melodia*, moves tenderly and atmospherically like music of the night, twice interrupted by the calls of a night bird. The last movement is a *Presto*, which is a tempo also often used for final sonata movements by Bach. It opens with mysterious music featuring quarter-tone tuning – which sounds like something unknown flying through the night air - before turning to a hearty folksong, quite “gypsy” in style and probably Hungarian in origin. The earthy tune is interrupted by the mysterious music before it takes a dramatic direction that nearly fades away before a final triumphant climbing scale concludes the sonata with a strong G Major cadence.

Bartók’s mature music, while sounding quite atonal, is derived from an ancient idea: the pentatonic scale. This scale (C, D, E, G, A) may be constructed using the circle of fifths or Pythagorean intervals of the fifth and fourth, expressed as the ratios of 2:3 and 3:4. It is used as a musical foundation in many diverse settings that include Celtic folk music, Hungarian folk music, the Great Highland bagpipe, West African and Afro-Caribbean music, African-American spirituals, jazz, American blues music and rock music, traditional Greek music, the Ethiopian *krar* and Indonesian *gamelan*, melodies of Asia and Southeast Asia, music of the Polish highlands, and Western Classical composers such as French composer Claude Debussy.

The *Sonata for Solo Violin* was composed for violinist Yehudi Menuhin, who commissioned and then premiered it in late 1944. Bartók’s subsequent works were not finished due to his illness and ensuing death; therefore, this is his last completed composition.

While at the Marlboro Festival in the early 1980’s, I studied four of Bartók’s String Quartets with Felix Galimir, who was a noted specialist in his music and had also personally known many of the “Second Viennese School” composers. Felix was a passionate, demanding, meticulous, and inspiring coach who revealed the expressive beauty in the atonalities and rhythms of this music while acknowledging the clarity of its foundations. Bartók’s characteristic use of the falling half-step, for example, explores dissonance and consonance in a manner similar to that of Mozart.

Dedicated to his student, violinist Mathieu Crickboom, the *Sonata in G Major* by **Eugène Ysaÿe** is one of six that he composed within a short period around 1924, purportedly following his hearing an inspirational performance by Josef Szigeti of Bach’s works for solo violin. Although Ysaÿe had little formal training in composition, all of these works are well structured, notably virtuosic and quite avant-garde in their tonalities and special effects.

The *Sonata No. 5* consists of two movements, *L’Aube* (“Dawn”) and *Danse rustique* (“Rustic Dance”). Remarkably impressionistic in manner, *L’Aube* begins quietly but ultimately transforms its simple opening theme into a rapturous series of cascading arpeggios. The *Danse rustique* is full of rhythmic

character, with multi-stopped chords, which gives way to a more ruminative middle section that briefly recalls material from the previous movement. The dance returns and gains in urgency and energy before ending in a dazzling flourish. In addition to the evident inspirations of Bach's music, Ysaÿe specifically references "*effets Paganiniens*" ("Paganini effects") in the left-hand pizzicato section of the *Danse rustique*.

I had the privilege of being coached in some of these sonatas by Josef Gingold - who was a student of Ysaÿe and offered substantial insights into "the old man's" intentions and style - and Arthur Grumiaux, who was a notable proponent of the Franco-Belgian violin school.

In 1980, the Korean-American composer **Earl Kim** wrote a set of *12 Caprices for solo violin* that were inspired by the music of Nicolò Paganini and Robert Schumann, and his own daughter Eva, who was about three years old at the time. Although he is regarded as a minimalist, Earl's music is like the man himself - "spare, elegant, refined, elusive, beautiful and profound" (memorial tribute in *Harvard Gazette*) - and he stated that his goal as a composer was to "reduce everything to its maximum."

It was my great honor to know Earl and his family, and I studied and first performed these works with his coaching. For this concert I have selected *Caprices* that have especially notable inspirations: the *Caprice No. 3* depicts the toddler Eva exploring the yard behind their house, *Caprice No. 4* represents her having a temper tantrum, and *Caprice No. 6* is an illustration of her sitting very still and watching autumn leaves drop from trees. *Caprice No. 7* is a tender, almost hypnotic episode that changes meter in nearly every measure and ends on a wistful note. The final *Caprice, No. 12*, is Earl's portrayal of a music box given to Eva, which gradually slows as it unwinds and then stops.

The name of **Nicolò Paganini** conjures the height of violinistic virtuosity. His renown was comparable with that of the 21st century's most celebrated individuals; such was his fame in Vienna in 1828 that Paganini's likeness was used on portraits, silhouettes, the heads of walking sticks, cigar boxes, medallions, and other artifacts of the era. As with modern day celebrities, however, he was also subjected to tabloid conjecture and harassment: for example, he wrote a letter of protest after discovering that a Parisian vendor was selling lithographs depicting him in jail. The rationale behind this maligning characterization was that absences between concert tours were attributable to his having been jailed for murdering a mistress or a rival!

Paganini's appearance alone was mesmerizing: a narrow face framed by longish dark hair, a prominent nose, oddly flexible and elongated hands, and a thin body clad dramatically in black. His evidently astonishing technical mastery of the violin was perhaps aided by an affliction with Marfan's syndrome, a disease of the connective tissue characterized by disproportionately long limbs and an inordinate suppleness of the joints.

The violinist's fertile imagination and extraordinary physical capabilities led him to invent musical sounds previously unexplored, using a variety of new techniques that, even today, represent the pinnacle of difficulty. Harmonics in double stops, arpeggios spanning four octaves, prolonged *staccato* bowing, triple-stopped chords, and passagework played at breakneck speed - all of these devices that are employed throughout his compositions including the *24 Caprices* for violin solo. Of these works, the 24th *Caprice* offers perhaps the greatest variety of challenges, presented as a theme and variations. Many musicians have been inspired to write their own variations of this *Caprice* and its famous theme - including my own arrangement for string (double bass) quintet - and even my telephone offers it as a ringtone!

His compositions are not merely technical vehicles, however, for Paganini's music is often characterized by an immense confidence that is combined with an acerbic wit and, frequently, the sweet sounds of his native Genoa.

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About Stephanie Chase:

Stephanie Chase's playing is characterized by "virtuosity galore" (*Gramophone*), with "great intensity and a huge tone, the epitome of the modern violinist" (*The Baroque Cello Revival*, Paul Laird) and she is "renowned for her impeccable intonation" (*Temperament*, Stuart Isacoff). Her triumphant performances at the Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow have led to concerts throughout the world and the award of the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant.

As soloist, Ms. Chase has performed in twenty-five countries with the New York Philharmonic, the London Symphony Orchestra, the Chicago Symphony, the Hong Kong Philharmonic, the San Francisco Symphony, the American Classical Orchestra, and the Atlanta Symphony, to name but a few orchestras. She offers an active repertoire of over 50 concertos and has soloed in collaboration with conductors that include Zubin Mehta, Leonard Slatkin, Leon Barzin, Herbert Blomstedt, Frans Brüggen, Marin Alsop, Roy Goodman, Hugh Wolff and Stanislaw Skrowaczewski. Her discography encompasses major concerti, chamber works, and collections of salon pieces by diverse composers, and she has premiered music by composers that include Earl Kim, Edward Applebaum, Eleanor Hovda, Yehudi Wyner and Taavo Virkhaus.

Ms. Chase is also a specialist in period instrument practice and actively performs on both types of violins. Her recording of Beethoven's *Violin Concerto* and *Romances*, the first ever on period instruments, has been declared "one of the twenty most outstanding performances in the work's recording history" (*Beethoven: Violin Concerto*, Cambridge University Press) and honored with the highest possible ratings by *BBC Music Magazine* and *Classic CD*. She has composed her own cadenzas for Beethoven's *Concerto* as well as for concerti by Haydn and Mozart. During the 2009-2010 season her solo appearances include a concert with the American Classical Orchestra, playing Beethoven on her Classical-period violin.

Born in Illinois to musician parents, Stephanie Chase gave her first public performance at age two and made her debut with the Chicago Symphony at eight as the youngest winner ever of the orchestra's Youth Competition. Her early teachers were her mother, Fannie Chase, and Sally Thomas, and she studied chamber music with Josef Gingold, himself a student of Ysaye. After her Carnegie Hall debut at age eighteen, she became a pupil of the legendary Belgian violinist, Arthur Grumiaux.

In addition to her solo and chamber music appearances, Ms. Chase gives master classes throughout the United States and teaches violin at New York University's Steinhardt School, and she is a co-founder and Artistic Director of the Music of the Spheres Society.

Stephanie Chase has recorded for Koch International Classics, Harmonia Mundi and Cala Records, and plays a violin made by Petrus Guarnerius in Venice in 1742.

For more information about Stephanie Chase, please visit www.stephaniechase.com

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