

NUS CENTRE FOR THE ARTS

NUS Arts Festival 2022  
SHADES OF Light(ness)

# TOUCH 2022

By NUS Piano Ensemble

A member of NUS Centre For the Arts



Featuring piano duo works by  
Rzewski, Poulenc, Bizet, and more

24 MARCH 2022, 7.30pm | Thursday

Esplanade Recital Studio

# ABOUT NUS CENTRE FOR THE ARTS



Established in 1993, NUS Centre For the Arts (CFA) is Singapore's only full-fledged arts centre within a university setting. CFA offers many opportunities for participation in and exposure to the arts in NUS, with purpose-built arts facilities such as the University Cultural Centre (UCC) and the NUS Museum, to hosting and nurturing 20 student arts excellence groups. CFA engages NUS students year-round through a range of performances, workshops, talks and even integrating arts into the curriculum, through collaborations with NUS faculty for various NUS modules.





CFA aims to be a vibrant space for NUS students to experience the arts, and to nurture creative minds and inquiring spirits. CFA is focused on integrating the arts into university life, offering opportunities for discovery, exchange, and action.

For more information, visit [cfa.nus.edu.sg](http://cfa.nus.edu.sg), and follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Telegram - @nuscf

# ABOUT NUS PIANO ENSEMBLE



The NUS Piano Ensemble (NUSPE) focuses uniquely on piano ensemble repertoire and takes pride in exploring obscure works in Singapore's vibrant Arts Scene. NUSPE allows its members to continue pursuing their passion in piano while developing their skills beyond solo performance.

Founded in 1987 by a handful of undergraduates with a passion for piano performance and ensembles, the objectives of NUS Piano Ensemble (NUSPE) have been largely fulfilled since its inception. Under the management of NUS Centre for the Arts (CFA), NUSPE seeks to promote the appreciation of piano ensemble music, provide opportunities for aspiring pianists to perform, and give its members the novel experience of playing in collaboration with different people.

In its beginnings, the group concentrated on works for solo piano, but gradually explored piano works for duet and duo, which form the core of its repertoire today. NUSPE has grown into a dynamic and semi-professional classical music group, staging creative and well-received recitals and concerts throughout the year, with the main concerts being the Freshman Concert in October, and the flagship concert, Touch, held every March.

# MUSIC DIRECTOR



**Timothy Ku** studied the piano under Lam Kim Lian and Ong Lip Tat. Upon winning a prize in the 1989 National Music Competition, Timothy left to study music in New York City. Over there, he also acted as chamber pianist, academic tutor and teaching assistant and received several scholarship offers. Timothy has worked with a number of prominent pianists and pedagogues, including Adam Wodnicki, Marc Silverman, Nina Svetianova, Michael Rogers and Agustin Anievas. He also studied the harpsichord under the renowned Louis Bagger, and conducted with Glen Cortese and Bruce Macintyre.

Back home in Singapore, Timothy has evolved into an insightful performer as well as an inspiration educator. In the past, he has worked as resident pianist for the Singapore Symphony Chorus under Bart Folse. Presently, he is a Principal-Study-Teacher-Lecturer at School of the Arts. His concurrent duties include music directorship of NUS Piano Ensemble and tutorship with VJC Piano Ensemble.

On the performance scene, Timothy is a highly adventurous and versatile soloist, ensemble pianist and accompanist, whose repertoire includes Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue, Hindesmith's 'The Four Temperaments', Brahms' Horn Trio, Rebecca Clarke's Viola Sonata, Barber's Piano Sonata, and solo works by Mompou. His solo and chamber concerts at Victoria Concert Hall and Esplanade Recital Studio have mostly been sell-out successes. Concert appearances in the region also won him rave reviews and return engagements.

Timothy appears regularly in concert with pianist wife Soon Liok Kee, his violist sister Marietta Ku, and the chamber group, Spritze. In May 2006, he appeared in a chamber concert at the Esplanade, offering works such as Vieuxtemps' Viola Sonata and Brahms' Clarinet Trio amongst others. With his piano duo partner Soon Liok Kee, Timothy had given the Singapore premiere of Grainger's 'The Warriors' (2005), Poulenc's Capriccio D'après Le Bal Masqué (2006) and Bolcom's 'The Serpent's Kiss': Rag Fantasy (2007). In 2009, the duo gave a successful two-piano recital featured in the Artiste Series of SMU's inaugural piano festival, Klaviesta!

# FOREWORD

A very good evening to you, and welcome to *Touch 2022!* Since its first performance at the Victoria Concert Hall in 1998, NUS Piano Ensemble's flagship concert, *Touch* has been an annual affair, showcasing the pinnacle of the ensemble's musicianship and ensembleship, through a colourful and challenging programme of piano duo music. This year, we are pleased to have you join us once again at the Esplanade Recital Studio for our first in-person concert since 2019.

The concert namesake, 'Touch', is apt in many ways. It may refer to the manner in which pianists employ sensitivity in touch at the piano to create different shades of tone colour; to make the piano truly 'sing', achieving desired emotional outcomes in the music. Perhaps, it could also refer to the way in which duo partners communicate with each other, achieving balance, cohesion and understanding; to stay 'in touch' with each other while making music. It also symbolises our commitment to create emotional connections with our audience through music-making; to be aware and sensitive of our listeners, and to touch the hearts of our audience.

As with previous iterations of *Touch*, tonight's programme will mainly feature works composed during the 20th century. The 20th century saw many composers breaking free of musical conventions, exploring radical new approaches towards sound and harmony. Arnold Schoenberg for instance, invented a new system known as the 12-tone technique, giving all twelve notes of a chromatic scale equal importance in a piece and creating an atonal quality in music. Folk and jazz music played an influential role in this era, and were frequently incorporated as musical themes. Nationalistic sentiments and political undertones were also often present in compositions from this period.

The highlights of today's exciting programme includes three movements from Stravinsky's *The Firebird*. The commission of this ballet's music was a breakthrough in Stravinsky's musical career. Frederic Rzewski's *Winnsboro Cotton Blue Mills* presents a unique twist to the piano duo genre through its use

of innovative compositional techniques and dissonant harmonies to vividly portray the poor working conditions of a textile mill. Hear the colourful and exotic sounds of Gamelan music in the first movement of Francis Poulenc's Concerto for two pianos in D minor, such as the pelog-like harmonies in the opening section, as well as the gong pedals at the end of the movement. In this year's iteration of *Touch*, we also feature a few pieces from the Classical and Romantic period. One of these is a playful and virtuosic arrangement of various themes from Georges Bizet's *Carmen* by the piano duo Anderson and Roe, and we believe that this piece, which also opens this concert, will put a smile on your face.

We are glad to have you here spend this evening here with us, and we can't wait to share our music with you. Thank you for being here tonight, and we hope that you will enjoy *Touch 2022*!

**-Fei Dong, Publicity Manager, on behalf of NUS Piano Ensemble**

# PROGRAMME

Carmen Fantasy

**G. Bizet (1838-1875),  
arr. Anderson and Roe**

7 Pieces from Mikrokosmos

1. Bulgarian Rhythm
3. Perpetuum Mobile
5. New Hungarian Folk Song
7. Ostinato

**B. Bartók (1881-1945)**

The Banjo

**L. M. Gottschalk (1829-1869),  
arr. J. Moross (1913-1983)**

Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues

**F. Rzewski (1938-2021)**

Tres Romances

II: Muchacho Jujeño

**C. Guastavino (1912-2000)**

Partita, Op. 5b

III. Andante un poco

**H. Ferguson (1908-1999)**

Concerto for Two Pianos in D minor, FP 61

I. Allegro ma non troppo

**F. Poulenc (1899-1963)**



Cuban Overture

**G. Gershwin (1898-1937),  
arr. G. Stone**

The Garden of Eden  
IV. Through Eden's Gate (Cakewalk)

**W. E. Bolcom (1938-)**

Tango

**A. Rosenblatt (1956-)**

Fantasy in F minor, K. 608

**W. A. Mozart (1756-1791)  
arr. F. Busoni**

Caprice melancolique

**R. Hahn (1875-1947)**

L'Oiseau de feu (The Firebird Suite) (1919 version)  
Danse infernale du roi Kastcheï  
Berceuse  
Finale

**I. Stravinsky (1882-1971)  
arr. Archilleas Wastor**

Suite No. 2  
IV. Tarantella

**S. Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)**

*This page is intentionally left blank.*

## **G. Bizet (1838-1875), arr. Anderson and Roe**

### *Carmen Fantasy*

Performed by Ma Yuchen and Hans Neddyanto Tandjung



*Carmen Fantasy* is a fantasy that consists of arrangements of various themes from Georges Bizet's *Carmen*, which is an opera in four acts. The opera depicts the themes of proletarian life, immorality and lawlessness, which shocked the audience during its first performances. As a result, the opera was condemned by many critics in the immediate years following its premiere. Despite that, the work received critical acclaim following Bizet's death.

This arrangement of *Carmen Fantasy for two pianos* by Anderson and Roe is likely inspired by Plabo de Sarasate's work of the same name for solo violin and orchestral accompaniment, as it imitates the virtuosic nature of Sarasate's work. Released as part of Anderson and Roe's 2011 album *When Worlds Fade*, this highly passionate arrangement upholds and complements the spirited nature of the opera.

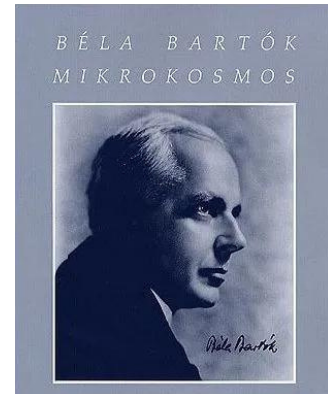
In this concert, we present the second half of this arrangement, which includes three themes from *Carmen*. The piece opens on an ominous tone with the *En vain pour éviter (Card Aria)* from Act III, which is sung by Carmen when she reads her fortune from a deck of cards and realises that the cards predict death for her. The music then cuts to a short snippet from the *Flower Song*, where Don José swears his love to Carmen in Act II. After a short transition, a virtuosic arrangement of *Chanson bohème: "Les tringles des sistres tintaient"* (more commonly known as *The Gypsy Song*) is presented. This song is featured in the opening of Act II, when Carmen and her friends, Frasquita and Mercédès, sing and dance to entertain soldiers in Lilas Pasta's tavern. A variant of the same theme then concludes the entire work in an exciting manner.

## **B. Bartók (1881-1945)**

### *7 Pieces from Mikrokosmos*

1. *Bulgarian Rhythm*
3. *Perpetuum Mobile*
5. *New Hungarian Folk Song*
7. *Ostinato*

Performed by Hazel Pak and Wang Yuchen



Béla Bartók was a Hungarian composer and a virtuoso pianist. His early works revealed the influence of Liszt, Brahms and Strauss, but most of his compositional inspiration came from exploring Hungarian and Romanian folk music. Bartók's *Mikrokosmos*, Sz. 107, BB 105, is a collection of 153 progressive solo piano pieces written between 1926 and 1939 ranging in difficulty from beginner to advanced levels. It is published in six volumes, and is considered to be an important work in the pedagogic piano repertoire. In 1940, before emigrating to the United States, Bartók decided to arrange seven pieces from *Mikrokosmos* for two pianos so that he could perform the pieces with his concert-pianist wife, Ditta Pásztory. He retained the original form and substance of these seven pieces, but enriched their textures and contrapuntal interplay.

*No. 1, Bulgarian Rhythm*, is inspired by the bracing, uneven dance meters in Balkan folk dance. It is a lively piece with an ostinato (repetitive) bass that underpins a Hungarian folk tune with an exotic character.

This is followed by *no. 3, Perpetuum Mobile (Perpetual Motion)*, which features a driving rhythm. The music has a rather nervous and percussive character. The piece is written loosely in rondo form, and the music grows slightly more intense towards the middle sections.

*No. 5, New Hungarian Folksong*, is an arrangement of a native song from the Southwestern Somogy region, on the Croatian border. This moderately paced work features a two-verse pentatonic melody. It opens with a simple melody with chordal accompaniment. As the music progresses, the rhythm and texture becomes more complex, and thus the music becomes more intense and exciting towards the end.



The finale to this set of 7 is titled *Ostinato*. As the title suggests, it opens with a series of repeated chords which provides the rhythmic drive that underpins an oriental melody. This piece is written loosely in cyclic form, whereby variations of essential motifs featured in the opening are later presented at different registers of the piano throughout the piece. As a rhythmic and thrilling work, *Ostinato* gives a flamboyant finish to this set of *Seven Pieces from Mikrokosmos*.

**L. M. Gottschalk (1829-1869), arr. J. Moross (1913-1983)**

*The Banjo*

Performed by Fei Dong and Ng Jing Ting



Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829-1869) was an American composer and pianist born in New Orleans. During his childhood, he was exposed to Louisiana Creole folk music, which influenced many of his compositions. Gottschalk went to Paris at 13 with the intention of pursuing Classical training at the Paris Conservatoire to fulfil his musical ambitions. Unfortunately, his application to the Conservatoire was rejected. Thus, he studied piano privately under Karl Hallé and Camille-Marie Stamaty, and composition privately under Pierre Malendin. He subsequently returned to America in 1853 and mostly toured around the region for the rest of his life.

Gottschalk composed *The Banjo* in 1853, the same year he returned to America. *The Banjo* is originally a solo piano work with a folk-like and flashy character that imitates mid-nineteenth-century African-American banjo playing techniques such as strumming, up-picking, and downstroking. It is a comprehensive documentation of nineteenth-century African-American banjo tradition, and is commonly featured as an encore by many piano virtuosi, such as Cyprien Katsaris. In *The Banjo*, the cyclic form is used, whereby a basic repeating phrase is presented in different variants throughout the work. The piece opens with a fanfare, before the opening variants, which feature an accompaniment that resembles simple up-picking and downstroking. This is occasionally punctuated by simple broken chords. Throughout the piece, repeated notes mimic the successive plucking of a single string, whereas thick chords and accents mirror strumming. The piece then ends excitingly with a variant that is evocative of quick virtuosic strumming of chords.

Tonight, we present an arrangement of *The Banjo* for piano duo by American film composer Jerome Moross (1913-1983).

## **F. Rzewski (1938-2021)**

### *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues*

Performed by Phua Guan Wei and Tan Chong Ren



Frederic Rzewski (1938 - 2021) is considered to be one of the most important American composer-pianists of his time. He was known for co-founding the *Musica Elettronica Viva*, a improvisational electronic music group, which achieved notoriety in Italy for its ability to generate riots during performances. Rzewski was very interested in new music, and frequently incorporated social and political themes in his pieces.

*Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues* is based on a protest song of the same name. The original song is believed to originate after the 1934 General Strike, and depicts the poor working conditions of a textile mill. The tune is initially quoted as a fragment and extended with each occurrence, until it is revealed in its entirety at the end. *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues* begins by imitating the churning of the textile machines, and retains this machine-like effect for the first half of the piece. Rzewski highlights the churning of the textile machines by intentionally drowning the melodic material in an incessant bass ostinato. The second half of the piece features a more human and expressive section written in the style of American blues. This creates a beautiful contrast from the fixed and machine-like section, and evokes an image of the workers relaxing after a long day at the textile mill. The piece ends with the fading away of the machine-like ostinato, drawing a parallel to the machines being switched off one by one at the end of the work day.

## **C. Guastavino (1912-2000)**

*Tres Romances*

*II: Muchacho Jujeño*

Performed by Elizabeth Lee and Ryan Jansen



Carlos Guastavino (1912-2000) was an Argentine composer and pianist. As a young boy, a distinct talent for music and the piano led him to study the instrument locally in Santa Fe, then later in Buenos Aires. During the late 1940s, he travelled to Britain on a British Council scholarship and broadcast several times for the BBC, during which time his orchestral version of *Tres Romances Argentinos* was premiered. Guastavino wrote over 500 works, most of them songs for piano and voice. As a result, he was dubbed “The Schubert of the Pampas”. He was deeply influenced by Argentine Folk music, as this may be seen in the richly romantic tone and nationalist content of his works. Hailed as one of the most preeminent composers in Argentina, he clinched many awards throughout his life.

Published in 1951 as the second of his *Tres Romances for two pianos*, *Muchacho Jujeño (Jujeño Boy)*, was dedicated to his two sisters. *Muchacho Jujeño* evokes Latin American music through the extensive use of folk rhythms throughout the piece. Late European Romanticism influences are also evident in its harmonic language, including the frequent use of chromaticism and extended harmonies.



## H. Ferguson (1908-1999)

*Partita, Op. 5b*

*III. Andante un poco*

Performed by Samantha Kuek and Joyce Qiao



Howard Ferguson (1908-1999) was an Irish composer, performer and musicologist. At the age of 13, his talent was discovered by pianist Harold Samuel while he was playing at the Belfast Musical Competitions, and thus he later took lessons from Harold Samuel privately. In 1924, he enrolled in the Royal College of London, where he studied composition under Reginald Owen Morris and Ralph Vaughan Williams, and conducting under Malcolm Sargent.

Ferguson composed his *Partita Op. 5* concurrently for both orchestra and two pianos from 1935-36. While its title refers to dance suites popular in the Baroque period, the music interestingly incorporates elements from the classical and romantic eras.

The third of a set of five movements, *Andante un poco* showcases the tonal capabilities and compass of the piano through its exploration of texture and melodic phrases heard across different octaves, all while conveying to listeners a sense of somberness and enigma, interspersed with moments of tranquility. The movement starts off quietly, introducing a distinctive, glitter-like motif, which is heard throughout much of the piece. It is not long before the main theme is established, as the piece shifts towards a darker mood characterized by its minor tonality and use of lower registers. A more ethereal character subsequently emerges as the melody ventures into the extreme upper registers of the piano, before a return to the main theme reestablishes a melancholic atmosphere. However, the piece makes a surprising modulation to a major key as it comes to a close, ending the movement on a gentle note.

## **F. Poulenc (1899-1963)**

*Concerto for Two Pianos in D minor, FP 61*

*I. Allegro ma non troppo*

Performed by Tan Yee Jian and Wendy Ma



Francis Jean Marcel Poulenc was born in France in 1899, as the only son to a successful manufacturer. His father disallowed him to attend a music college. Hence, apart from lessons from his piano teacher and mentor, the Spanish pianist-composer Ricardo Vines, whom he revered greatly, Poulenc was mostly self-taught. After his parents passed away in his teenage years, Vines took on the role of a “spiritual mentor”, by encouraging the young composer, as well as publicising and even premiering Poulenc’s works. The *Concerto for Two Pianos in D minor, FP 61* was written in the summer of 1932, and the work was clearly inspired by Poulenc’s encounter with the Balinese Gamelan during the Paris Colonial Exposition in 1931.

In Poulenc’s own words, this first movement of the concerto is “gay and direct”. It has four main sections that alternates between fast and slow tempo. The piece opens with two exclamatory chords, followed by a theme which is reminiscent of a duet of gongs with interlocking rhythms and exotic harmonies. This is followed unexpectedly by two playful and almost Mozartian themes. The slow middle section then features melancholic and lyrical tunes that eventually dissipates to trills. In the third section, the playful theme from the end of first section reprises. The music then cuts to a slow and introspective section. Here, the gamelan theme heard in the opening returns in a slower tempo. Dissonant harmonics with offbeat gong pedals slowly brings the first movement of the concerto to a tranquil end.

## **G. Gershwin (1898-1937), arr. G. Stone**

### *Cuban Overture*

Performed by Rachelle Toh and Jusuf Nathanael



Born in 1898 and of Russian-Jewish ancestry, George Gershwin was an American composer whose compositions ranged across a wide variety of music genres - from Classical, to Popular Music, and to Jazz. Having started his musical journey relatively late at the age of 13, Gershwin had a brief stint as a song plugger for a music publisher. It was then that he began to compose, having been influenced by French composers of the early 20th century and Jazz. Some of his works became famous worldwide, such as *Rhapsody in Blue*, *Summertime*, *An American in Paris*, and the *Concerto in F for piano*.

In February 1932, after spending a two-week holiday in Havana, Cuba, Gershwin was inspired to write the *Cuban Overture*. Imbuing traditional Cuban rhythms and orchestration into his writing, this piece was originally scored for a full orchestra and Latin American percussion instruments such as bongo, claves, gourd, and maracas. With these in mind, the two-piano arrangement of the piece by Gregory Stone features a wide gamut of textures and colours, capturing the fanfare and grandiosity of its orchestral counterpart. The piece meanders through a myriad of moods - from a light-hearted, jaunty beginning to a more mellow, sombre middle section, before the merry, buoyant recapitulation. The coda then ascends and culminates into a burst of brilliant, percussive chords, concluding the piece on an exuberant note.

**W. E. Bolcom (1938-)**

*The Garden of Eden*

*IV. Through Eden's Gate (Cakewalk)*

Performed by Liew Xin Yi and Brandon Lim



William Bolcom is an American composer known for his ragtime compositions, among other works such as orchestral, operatic, and cabaret music. A recipient of the National Medal of Arts in 2006, Bolcom studied under renowned musicians such as Darius Milhaud and Oliver Messiaen, and was a part of the University of Michigan's School of Music's composition faculty from 1973 to 2008. Other works by Bolcom include the Pulitzer Prize winning *12 Etudes for Piano*, and more recently, a musical setting of William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, the recording of which won 4 Grammy Awards in 2005.

*Through Eden's Gates (Cakewalk)*, which depicts Adam and Eve's departure from the Garden of Eden, conveys a tranquil, yet wistful mood. A brief introduction leads right into the piece's main theme – a distinctive, simple ragtime melody. Complemented by rich chords and a steady accompaniment, the main theme gives rise to the piece's laid back yet elegant character. As the melody develops, it transitions into a call-and-response between the two parts, which finally come together as the section concludes. The piece then modulates to a new key as it introduces different melodic ideas, sometimes venturing into the upper registers of the piano through the use of fleeting, sparkling four-note motifs, but never once veering away from its distinctively nostalgic character established from the start. The main theme is then heard once more before the piece comes to a close, ending off as gently as it began, and with a tinge of longing.



## **A. Rosenblatt (1956-)**

### *Tango*

Performed by Claribel Lim and Zheng Zongde



Alexander Rosenblatt (1956 - ) is a composer and pianist of Russian descent. Born in Moscow, Rosenblatt grew up in a musically-inclined family. An alumnus of the renowned Moscow Conservatory since 1982, Rosenblatt studied the piano with Pavel Messner and composition with Karen Khachaturian there. He also taught at the Gnessin Institute in Moscow for seven years, till 1990. He composed over 40 works in various genres, including jazz and classical music. Rosenblatt's works have also garnered the attention of esteemed musicians, such as Marc-Andre Hamelin and Yo-Yo Ma, both of whom have performed his works.

The tango is a social dance that originated in Argentina around the 1880s. Rosenblatt's *Tango* is loosely written in ternary (ABA') form. It opens with an introductory theme infused with features of Spanish music, such as the mimicking of guitar plucking and modal inflections. Rosenblatt incorporates a dancelike rhythm in the *Tango* with the use of cross rhythms ("2-against-3") and polyrhythms. This exciting dance piece, integrated with Rosenblatt's hints of contemporary music with Spanish influences, encapsulates Rosenblatt's compositional style with much grandeur.

**W. A. Mozart (1756-1791), arr. F. Busoni**

*Fantasy in F minor, K. 608*

Performed by Zhao Yushan and Valerie Chang



*Fantasy in F minor, K. 608* was originally composed by the Austrian composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) in 1791 for mechanical organ, where the work was initially titled *Ein Orgel Stück für eine Uhr* (an organ piece for a clock). In this concert, we perform an arrangement of the work for two pianos by Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924), an Italian composer and pianist who also made arrangements and editions of various works by Bach, Mozart and Schubert.

Interestingly, it was not until 1922, when re-arranged by Busoni for piano duet, that the piece gained its title of “Fantasia”: a fitting name for the piece, which features intricate, interlocking voices in its fugal passages, which parallel the interlocking gears of the mechanical organ for which it was composed.

Listeners are introduced to the lyrical *Andante* (moderately slow) section, which features gentle, flowing melodies littered with chromatic elements. The section then cadences on a major chord that would mark the start of the next section (*Allegro ritenuto*), characterised by its quick tempo, scalar phrases, and a distinctive dotted-rhythm motif. The piece's distinctive fugal section soon follows, as the section builds up in intensity with a series of thick chords and undulating passages as the piece comes to a grand close.

Nestled within the piece's complexities is then a dialogue not merely between its two performers, but between its composer and arranger across time and space - a tribute to musical progress.

## W. R. Hahn (1875-1947)

### *Caprice mélancolique*

Performed by Wu Ziyi and Gwendolyn Heng



Reynaldo Hahn (1874 –1947) was a Venezuelan-born French composer, conductor, music critic, and singer. Best known for his songs *mélodie*, he was a prolific composer, with works ranging from songs, operas, orchestral music, chamber music, and piano works. Most of Hahn's piano works were written in the first half of his career, before the start of World War I. He wrote five works for piano four hands and four for two-piano duet, among which is *Caprice mélancolique*.

Published in 1897, *Caprice mélancolique's* character can be seen from its name: 'Caprice' meaning a piece of music, free in form and of a lively character, and 'Mélancolique' meaning melancholic in French. The work is written in cyclic form whereby key melodic and rhythmic motifs (musical fragments) appear in different variations and are developed throughout the piece. It presents expressive yet melancholic tunes, involving intertwining and conversational melodic lines and themes between the two pianos.

## **I. Stravinsky (1882-1971)**

*L'Oiseau de feu (The Firebird) (1919 version)*

*Danse Infernale du roi Kastcheï*

*Berceuse*

*Finale*

Performed by Benjamin Cheah and Lai Yan Jean



The Russian composer Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) studied piano from the age of nine. Following his parents' wishes, Stravinsky studied law at the University of Saint Petersburg, but took private composition lessons with renowned composer Rimsky-Korsakov until the latter's death in 1908. Some of Stravinsky's first compositions were performed in Saint Petersburg in 1909, where his talent was discovered by Sergei Diaghilev, who was a ballet impresario.

Towards the end of the Belle Époque in the early 1910s, Russian music became very popular in Paris. Thus, Sergei Diaghilev desired to create a massive work that combines music, theatre, and visual design. This ballet, later known as *The Firebird*, would be a spectacle that showcases Russian folklore and tradition. Diaghilev initially approached many prominent Russian composers to write the music, but was turned down by them. Thus, Diaghilev eventually approached Stravinsky, who was a young and untested composer at that time, to compose the music for *The Firebird*. This ballet, together with subsequent ones such as *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring*, transformed the musical landscape in France, brought Stravinsky to international fame.

*The Firebird* draws on famous characters from several Russian fairy tales, and Stravinsky similarly incorporated numerous Russian folk melodies in the music. The most famous movement, *Infernal Dance (Danse Infernal du Roi Kastcheï)* depicts the evil wizard Kastcheï ("the Deathless") and his minions dancing viciously under a spell by the Firebird. Syncopated rhythms and grotesque accents drive the music forward with seething energy, culminating in an astounding climax.



Exhausted from the dance, Kastchei and his minions fall into a deep slumber, with the Firebird's haunting Berceuse (French for "lullaby") soaring over the eerie stillness. With the Firebird's help, the Prince destroys the egg holding Kastchei's soul, undoing his evil magic.

Then, the Finale begins with a heartfelt melody that slowly builds up into a triumphant climax, with the Firebird soaring above all its majesty. Chromatic chords symbolizing the Firebird's presence brings the work to a magical conclusion.

## **S. Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)**

### *Suite No. 2*

#### *IV. Tarantella*

Performed by Zhao Zijie and Hoang Manh Duc



Sergei Vasilyevich Rachmaninoff (1 April 1873 – 28 March 1943) was a Russian composer, virtuoso pianist, and conductor. Rachmaninoff is widely considered one of the greatest pianists and composers of his day and one of the last great representatives of Romanticism in Russian classical music.

*Suite No. 2, Op. 17*, is a composition for two pianos by Sergei Rachmaninoff, and it was written in Italy in the first few months of 1901. Alongside his Second Piano Concerto, Op. 18, the work reflects a return of the composer's creativity after four years of depression triggered by the negative critical reception of his *Symphony No. 1*. The Suite was premiered in November 1901 by Rachmaninoff and his cousin Alexander Siloti.

The fourth movement of *Suite No. 2* is titled *Tarantella*. A Tarantella is a traditional folk-dance style of Italian origin, usually characterised by fast and upbeat tempo and triple meter. Its frenzied movements were believed to cure the bite of a tarantula. The *Tarantella* from *Suite No. 2* has a virtuosic character - bold, intense, and rapid. The dance is written in rondo form. The opening section, which is a grand introduction to the dance, presents the main (A) theme of the piece. This is followed by a (B) theme that features a lyrical melody, decorated by "fluttering" motifs derived from the opening section. After a few key modulations (changes), a variant of the opening (A) theme is heard. Another reprise of the second (B) theme in the home key then occurs. After a transitory section, *Tarantella* ends with a short coda that concludes the entire suite brilliantly by reiterating the theme introduced in the first section.

# **NUS Piano Ensemble 34th EXCO**

**President**  
Valerie Chang

**Vice-President**  
Gwendolyn Heng

**Secretary**  
Verrin Bo

**Treasurer**  
Hazel Pak

**Publicity Manager**  
Fei Dong

**Marketing Manager**  
Phua Guan Wei

**Productions Manager**  
Liew Xin Yi

**Student Music Directors**  
Benjamin Cheah  
Claribel Lim

## **Acknowledgements**

NUS Piano Ensemble would like to convey our appreciation and gratitude to the following people for their invaluable support:

Our Music Director, Mr. Timothy Ku, for his invaluable guidance  
Our Group Manager, Liyana Asyiqin, for her assistance on many fronts  
Our stage crew, for running the show

Our family and friends for their support  
And you, the audience, for listening to us tonight.

NUSPE  
*No One Plays Alone*

NUS  
- CENTRE  
FOR THE -  
ARTS  
|

