

## Prairie Debut 2017/18 Season Presentation



### Henderson Kolk Guitar Duo Program Notes

Franz Schubert exemplifies the tragic artist stereotype of the Romantic era; living in poverty and poor health for much of his short life (he died at age 31), he nevertheless produced a wealth of beautiful music. The *Impromptu* presented here is one of a set of four, composed in 1827, a year before the composer's death. It displays Schubert's brilliant melodic gift, and features a stormy middle section that modulates through various keys, before returning to the initial theme.

*Le Tombeau de Couperin* was composed between 1914 and 1917, a particularly tumultuous time in Maurice Ravel's life. During these years, Ravel served as an ambulance driver in the war (after his repeated attempts to enlist in the air force were refused on the grounds of his age and poor health), suffered a bout of dysentery which left him hospitalized, and endured the death of his mother. It is one of the few pieces completed during this trying period of the composer's life, and one of his most popular. Originally a six movement suite for solo piano, each movement bears a dedication to one of Ravel's friends lost in the war. While undoubtedly an innovative composer, Ravel placed great importance on studying and incorporating the music of his predecessors into his own compositions. In preparation for composing the present suite, he transcribed a *forlane* from Francois Couperin's *Concerts royaux*. Ravel's *Tombeau* borrows the forms, cadences, and ornamentation of the conventional 18<sup>th</sup> century French keyboard suite employed by its namesake, but the harmonic language, containing an abundance of major 7ths and parallel chords, is clearly impressionistic in nature.

The Italian pianist and composer Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco was born in Florence in 1895. The increasingly anti-Semitic climate of his homeland forced him to immigrate to the United States in 1939, where he settled in California and found work as a film composer. Castelnuovo-Tedesco's compositions for the guitar were instigated by a meeting with Andres Segovia in 1932, but it was the French duo of Ida Presti and Alexandre Lagoya who inspired Castelnuovo-Tedesco to compose for two guitars, and his *Well Tempered Guitars Op. 199* is dedicated to them. Written in 1962, this set of 24 Preludes and Fugues overtly shows the influence of Bach, but Castelnuovo-Tedesco's compositional style is also characterized by a very personal brand of neo-classicism: colourful, witty, highly expressive, and sometimes programmatic in its evocativeness.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart undoubtedly deserves his reputation as a musical genius - like Schubert, he died very young (age 35), and yet managed to leave us with a huge oeuvre of exceptional quality. Mozart's super-human work ethic is evident by the fact that he completed not only his 40th symphony, but also the 39th and 41st, in the period of only a few weeks. The *Symphony No. 40 in G minor* is one of only two that he wrote in a minor key, and features an intensity and passion that has made it one of his most loved works. Our arrangement has gone through numerous revisions and reworkings over the span of many years, as we try our very best to do this great music justice on two guitars.

The earliest surviving manuscript of Alessandro Marcello's *Concerto for Oboe in D minor* is actually an arrangement for keyboard by J.S. Bach. Our current arrangement for two guitars is based mostly on Bach's version, although we also incorporated elements of Marcello's original. The piece follows a typical Italian Baroque concerto structure: Three movements in a fast - slow - fast alignment, with the middle movement featuring a beautiful, lyrical melody. The ornamentation here is Bach's - a written out example of what performers of the time would usually improvise.

In December of 1813 Beethoven's seventh symphony was premiered in a star-studded concert by an orchestra featuring many of the greatest musicians of the day. Included in this group was the Italian guitar virtuoso and composer Mauro Giuliani, who played cello. Reports indicate that the second movement *Allegretto* was so well received that the audience demanded an encore immediately. Ever since, it has been frequently performed on its own, and has been one of the great composer's most popular works. Like the famous first movement from the fifth symphony, this piece is an excellent example of Beethoven's ability to create so much from very simple materials. The march rhythm is the basis of the entire movement, and the music builds up in waves, reaching a stirring climax before subsiding, ending quietly, as it began. In contrast to our arrangement of Mozart's Symphony 40, this arrangement came together very quickly, and has yet to undergo significant revisions since its first version.

Patrick Roux is a guitarist and composer based in Ottawa. His musical style is very influenced by the nuevo tango style of Astor Piazzolla, although we feel Patrick's pieces still display a very French aesthetic, as well as his own personal stamp. *Hier, aujourd'hui, plus jamais (Yesterday, today, never again)* is an homage to the composer's grandfather Aimè Gaudin, and his varied and exciting life. The title is a whimsical reference to the time before Patrick was born, his time spent with his grandfather, and the time after his death. The piece is comprised of many contrasting sections, which represent the different periods of Aimè's life, and ends with the gradual slowing of a heartbeat.

The guitar is often associated with Spanish culture, and while it certainly was popular in many parts of the world, it did hold a special place in Spain. Spanish composers who wrote in a nationalistic style, incorporating the moods and flavours of folk music, such as Albeniz and Granados, often imitated the sound of the guitar on other instruments, rather than writing for the instrument itself. (The classical guitar presents a challenge to any composer who does not play the instrument, as its particular idiosyncrasies result in both limitations and possibilities not found on other instruments.) Manuel de Falla was clearly not enthusiastic about tackling this challenge; he was persuaded by the guitarist Miguel Llobet to write one solo piece for guitar, but that's all he managed. Much of de Falla's music has, however, been transcribed for guitar, and it works very well. *Serenata Andaluza* is a lyrical piece for solo piano that we arranged years ago, and the *Spanish Dance No. 1* from the opera *La Vida Breve* is a guitar duo standard, arranged by Emilio Pujol.

-Program notes written by Henderson Kolk Duo, [www.hkguitarduo.com](http://www.hkguitarduo.com)

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