

MUSICAL PRAYER

MARK HILLIARD WILSON

St. James Cathedral Guitarist

Cuentos de la juventud (Scenes from Childhood), Op. 1, No. 1
Dedicatoria

Enrique Granados
1867–1916

Notes by Mark Hilliard Wilson

I dedicate this program to the teachers; to those who inspire. An icon of the classical guitar world left us last month. The English guitarist Julian Bream redefined the role of the classical guitarist with his championing of great composers, both obscure and well known and his passionate and inimitable interpretations. I open tonight's musical prayer with one of my favorite pieces Bream recorded. I never got the chance to take a master class with Bream, but I feel the thousands of hours I spent in front of the speaker devouring his musicianship gave me a lot on how I approach music: with passion, careful to observe the important details and a sense of overall structure. This piece does not afford the opportunity to exhibit one's virtuosity and yet, to me, it reveals very clearly what a person has to say. Classical music is an unforgiving mistress, you must reproduce the notes and rhythms precisely and yet, you must have your own voice in your interpretation—this can seem an impossible task. I feel Bream taught me, and I work each day to improve upon the lesson. (Side note here, I have to give my Mom some credit for this lesson in individuality too).

24 Exercices très faciles, Op. 35
Studio 9, Andante allegro in D minor

Fernando Sor
1778–1839

It's the time of year many go back to school, and I thought I would return to some of my favorite lessons of my youth. No. 9 is a brooding and moody counterpoint to the innocent and understated joy of the opening piece by fellow Catalan composer Enrique Granados.

24 Leçons Progressives, Op. 31
Leçon XI, Moderato in F major

F. Sor

Leçon 11 brightens the mood with a transition to the relative major along with a meter shift to the playful 6/8.

Leçon X, Cantabile in D major

This delightful piece features some lovely appoggiaturas, or “wrong bass notes that then resolve to the right ones in the next beat.” The word appoggiatura is derived from the Italian word *appoggiare* which means “to lean upon.” Initially this was an ornament, commonly found in harpsichord music of the mid- to late 1700s, but can still be found only written out as late as the 1820s.

24 *Petites pièces progressives*, Op. 44

F. Sor

No. 16, Andante in D major

No. 17, Cantabile in D minor

No. 18, Marche in D major

This set of three short pieces begins with a chromatic Andante in 2/4. The Cantabile that follows features a similar chromaticism, but with the change to a minor key and a 3/4 meter, the mood delights in suspensions and little modulations to the dark corners of harmony before we quickly return home with a series of applied dominants. The spell cast in the minor key is dispersed with no. 18's move to the parallel major and the use of the march rhythm, but most delightfully with the use of harmonics.

24 *Exercices très faciles*, Op. 35

F. Sor

No. 17, Moderato in D major

No. 18, Andantino in E minor

No. 19, Moderato in C major

While playing no. 17, a playful quality is created with the use of the rests directly under the notes played above that reminds me of the iconic *Dance of the Hours* by Amilcare Ponchielli, otherwise known as the "Hello mudda, Hello fadda" tune sung by children at summer camps in the United States in the 60s and 70s. I hear a certain playful bounce that feels regal, yet not wont to tease a little. This will sound familiar to those that have records of or saw Andres Segovia play in the 60s and 70s. Bream and John Williams recorded it too, but these days you generally hear your students play this delightful essay in two voices.

No. 18 in E minor features some lovely opportunities to voice chords in ranges of the guitar that sing with the most warm of colors.

No. 19 is where we enter the home stretch of this set with a slow crescendo over a triplet ostinato that then goes directly into the next piece, Leçon XIII of Op. 31.

24 *Leçons Progressives*, Op. 31

F. Sor

Leçon XIII, Andante in C major

I was attracted to the modest start of this piece, with its repeated chord in 3/4 time. The motion occurs in the inner voices and develops to have one very nice harmonies at the end with a neat feature of a repeated note and shifting harmonies under it. This feature is used by Sor in Leçon 17 just a few studies later.

12 *Etudes*, Op. 29

F. Sor

Studio 18, Andante in E minor

The set of Sor concludes with a seldom heard study that is, in my opinion, one of his greatest studies. Everything that I wrote about before, from the playful use of meter in 6/8 to the tasteful exploration of harmonies and then the pacing, can be found in this 4-minute gem of the classical guitar repertoire. The first two composers, Enrique Granados and Fernando Sor were born in the northeastern province of Catalonia, in Spain.

The Well Tempered Clavier, BWV 846
Prelude 1 in C Major

Johann Sebastian Bach
1685–1750

Suite No. 6 from *London Manuscript*
Ciaccona

Sylvius Leopold Weiss
1687–1750

I conclude the musical prayer with two German composers, one iconic, with one of the most familiar pieces in classical music, and one whose star eclipsed Herr Bach's in their lifetime, but is now known primarily to lutenists. Herr Sylvius Leopold Weiss was the highest paid musician in the Dresden court, earning 1400 thalers in 1744. Johann Sebastian Bach was employed in Leipzig in the 1740s earning 700 thalers and room and board for his job teaching Latin in a school. He is thought to have earned some extra money with some composing and playing the organ. In the end, we well know, it is not what you earn but what you do and who you love that makes life rich with meaning. I hope that tonight's musical prayer offers solace, and inspires joy. I am grateful to share my music at St. James Cathedral.

MARK HILLIARD WILSON brings joy and technical finesse to the listener while integrating music from diverse backgrounds and different ages with a compelling story and a wry sense of humor. Performing regularly at festivals and concert series, Wilson has distinguished himself as a unique voice with programs that feature his own transcriptions of both the well known and the obscure. Wilson's compositions for the guitar have been appearing on stages throughout the Northwest US and Canada for over 15 years. He works in is the relatively unexplored genre of an ensemble of multiple guitars as the conductor, composer, arranger, and music director to the Guitar Orchestra of Seattle. Wilson has taught at Whatcom Community College and Bellevue College.

Wilson's CD *El Sueno del Camino* is the product of a series of concerts he played along the Camino de Santiago de Compostela in northern Spain. Wilson has been busy promoting his latest CD, a Guitar Orchestra recording that features compositions for 10 guitars, inspired by the pilgrimage to Spain as well as pilgrimages closer to home: Chuckanut Drive and the Edmund Pettis Bridge. Since the start of 2019 he has produced concerts for the Guitar Orchestra of Seattle in fun and unusual venues for the classical guitar, such as the restored bar The Rendezvous in The Jewelbox Theater (built in 1932 as a movie theater); the experimental cafe theater Cafe Nordo; and the former Elliot Bay Book Company location in Pioneer Square. Solo engagements have taken him to numerous living rooms and gardens across Seattle through the organization Groupmuse. The summer of 2019, Wilson was engaged in 10 concerts over an 8-week spread, where he played solo concerts, a concerto written for him and the Octava orchestra, and a series of concerts in Portland with the soprano Jessica Israels and baritone Erik Hundtoft. Shortly after this, Wilson was the guest guitarist with the Sun Valley Symphony.

Wilson's work on a CD of Argentinian music featuring solo work and duo work with Stuart Zobel has been affected by the Covid-19 quarantine, and the same can be said of his work to release a CD of Good Friday music written by Nathan Jensen for the Guitar Orchestra of Seattle. The quarantine has not brought any of his work to a stop, but reoriented it: progress is still occurring and new skills are being acquired along the way!