

MUSICAL PRAYER

MARK HILLIARD WILSON

St. James Cathedral Guitarist

Notes by Mark Hilliard Wilson

Renewal and Redemption, Part 2

We are now at the one-year anniversary of the weekly Musical Prayer at Saint James Cathedral and I am so incredibly grateful for the opportunity to share my thoughts and music here at St. James.

It's been a very tough year in so many ways. Last year's theme for the first musical prayer was "Renewal," and tonight, I play an updated program with the added theme of redemption.

More and more people are getting vaccinated which means we are getting closer and closer to a chance to actually meet in person. Longer days, occasionally even warm ones, and a sense of a more predictable course of action with our government feels like a collective lowering of the blood pressure.

My program is a celebration of our ability to navigate hard times. It's been a tough year and I've chosen music that reflects vehicles of renewal, whether found in prayer (*Oracion de la Mañana*), or nature (*Wild Mountain Thyme*), in reflection (*Charme de la nuit*), or even dance! (*Thoor Ballylee*, it's like a jig, but is actually a celebration of the castle the poet Yeats lived in for a few years with his family).

Oracion de la Mañana, Op. 39, No. 1 "Morning Prayer"

Pyotr Tchaikovsky

1840–1893

transcribed by María Luisa Anido

A prayer for tomorrow speaks for itself. Keep Praying! It seems like it's worked!

Prelude No. 1 in D minor

Francisco Tárrega

1852–1909

Endecha "Lament"

Oremus "Let us pray"

The first of this small set of three preludes features a lovely descending line that seemed the right answer to the previous piece's ascending line that ended in a way that feels too soon and a bit like a question.

The next prelude, *Endecha*, is a subgenre of a lament found in Spanish music from the Middle Ages. There is some evidence that this lament came from the original people of the Canary Islands.

Oremus is Latin for "let us pray." This was the last piece written by the "father of Spanish guitar" Francisco Tárrega. Recently it has come to light that this is actually the B-section of Robert Schumann's *Phantasietanz*, Op. 124, No. 5. As Tárrega was unable to send notes about this, it could have been the publisher that assigned the tempo of *lento*, instead of what Schumann assigned, which was *presto*, or very fast. Given the title and the circumstances of Tárrega knowing of his departure and his very ill health, a slower tempo seems more appropriate.

Wild Mountain Thyme

Traditional Scottish
arranged Scott Tennant (b. 1962)

Wild Mountain Thyme appears to be based on the song *The Braes of Balquhither* by Scottish poet Robert Tannahill (1774–1810) and Scottish composer Robert Archibald Smith (1780–1829), which was first published in Robert Archibald Smith's *Scottish Minstrel* (1821–24). The Belfast musician Francis McPeak (1885–1971) adapted *The Braes of Balquhither* and performed it with his family for a recording for the BBC in 1957.

Les Barricades Mystérieuses “Mysterious barricades”

François Couperin
1668–1733
transcribed by Richard Yates

There are a lot of joyful pieces on this program, and this may be the most well-known and the second most joyful one after *Thoor Ballylee*. Couperin wrote six books of harpsichord music with oblique titles that are understood to have had meaning to the inner circle of the court at Versailles, but have not been deciphered by contemporary scholars. In *Mysterious Barricades* some scholars have observed the way the piece is written with ties that go over the bar lines, thus blurring the barricades or measure of the music; others have noted the multitude of chambers that courtiers would have to navigate to gain an audience with Louis XIV, the Sun King. Perhaps it is more fun to wonder than to know?

Barcarole

María Luisa Anido
1907–1996

María Luisa Anido is one of the great guitarists from the early 20th century, and she may well be the second guitarist to ever be recorded. She was born January 26th, 1907 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Her father took a great interest in her study of the guitar. She studied with the Catalan guitarist Domingo Prat (1886–1944) and eventually with the great Catalan guitarist Miguel Llobet (1878–1938). She started lessons with Llobet in 1923, and by 1925 Anido was concertizing with Llobet playing duos and some solo concerts across the Americas. She played her Wigmore debut in 1953 at the age of 46. In the 1960s she concertized and taught in Russia, and eventually returned to Argentina to become Professor of Guitar at the conservatory in Buenos Aires.

Her compositions for the guitar were widely admired, and her composing style drew deeply from the folk music of Argentina. Though there are many examples of music from the Baroque with the alternation of 6/8 and 3/4 time signatures, these were not as well known to the public in the early 20th century. This rhythmic feature is also so much a part of the folk music of Argentina, and her writing could have been some of the first music where audiences of the time could hear it. With the majority of her compositions reflecting her Argentinian roots, this Barcarole is unique in its influences being more from Europe, or Italy, the origin of the Barcarole.

Sinfonia (Adagio) from *Ich steh mit einem Fuß im Grabe*, BWV 156

Johann Sebastian Bach
1685–1750
transcribed by Jodacil Damaceno

J. S. Bach composed the cantata *Ich steh mit einem Fuß im Grabe* (“I am standing with one foot in the grave”) while living in Leipzig, and first performed it on January 23, 1729 for the Third Sunday of Epiphany. The melody from this Sinfonia, the first movement of the cantata, was used by Bach again as a middle movement in the harpsichord Concerto No. 5 in F minor, BWV 1056. This Sinfonia from the cantata is quite different from the harpsichord version in that the harpsichord version is highly ornamented.

Charme de la nuit (Nocturne), Op. 36 “Charm of the night”

José Ferrer
1835–1916

José Ferrer was born in Girona, Catalonia, Spain on March 13, 1835. He was a deeply religious man who wrote mainly for the guitar. Until the last 15 years, he has been a rather obscure figure, but some of the over 100 compositions published during his lifetime are starting to be republished. Incidentally, I have had the privilege to visit both the town in which he was born (and stood outside of the address recorded as his birthplace, across the street from Girona Cathedral) and the town he made his home, Torroella de Montgrí.

Miami

Gérard Montreuil
1927–1991

Canadian composer, conductor and multi-instrumentalist Gérard Montreuil had a thriving career working in radio and television. He studied at the Berklee College of Music and also with Richard Benda at the Institute of Tonal Engineering of New York.

Thoor Ballylee

Maria Linnemann
b. 1947

This piece comes from a collection of 22 short pieces, with some charmingly-named titles (such as *Satie's Umbrellas*). Tonight's offering is named for *Thoor Ballylee*, the 15th-century Irish castle where poet William Butler Yeats lived for eight years, between 1921 and 1929. Linnemann's writing is accessible both technically and lyrically, and very engaging to the ear.

Coumbite from *Haitian Dances*, Suite No. 1

Frantz Casséus
1915–1993

Frantz Casséus was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti in 1915. He moved to New York City in 1946, where he thrived as a respected guitarist. He eventually became the teacher of the noted guitarist Marc Ribot, a collaborator with Tom Waits.

The *coumbite* (or *combite*) is a community of organized labor in Haiti, where people come together to help other community members with projects in exchange for a meal. Singing is an important part of this cooperative effort, and the songs are also known as *coumbites*.

A closed world of fine feelings and grand design (1997)

Graeme Koehne
b. 1956

It's been a long year (a long four years), and I think we are at the moment of transitioning back to seeing our friends and family on something other than a screen or at a distance. It's a big deal and there has been a fairly high price of enduring the sustained anxiety and hope for what we have, I am sure, taken for granted: the ability to hug, laugh with no masks, or sing or make music in public and actually feel joy or sorrow of those in the room with you.

I can think of no other piece than this final one by Australian composer Graeme Koehne that captures the conflicting emotions of our muted joy at getting to the “beginning of the end” of this, while looking soberly at what we have ahead of us in the future. Over the last year we have done so much work with acknowledging racial injustice and sexism and worked to learn more and understand more. I am hopeful that we can work together to make our world better for all, and to me, *A closed world of fine feelings and grand design* epitomizes the feelings of incredible gratitude for the gifts we have received and the understanding that they are so fleeting. Peace be with you.



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.

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