

GIL SHAHAM

VIOLIN

& AKIRA EGUCHI

PIANO

FRIDAY, APRIL 5, 8 PM
BEASLEY-CURTIS AUDITORIUM,
MEMORIAL HALL



PRESENTING SPONSOR

The William R. Kenan, Jr. Charitable Trust

PERFORMANCE BENEFACTOR

Betsy L. Battle

STUDENT TICKET ANGEL FUND BENEFACTORS

Martha Hsu, in honor of John Hsu

CAMPUS PARTNER

Carolina Asia Center

PROGRAM

KREISLER *Preludium and Allegro*
(1875-1962) (In the Style of Pugnani)

SCOTT WHEELER *The Singing Turk Sonata No. 2*
(b. 1952) for Violin and Piano
I. *Sù la sponda*
II. *O vous, que Mars rend invincible*
III. *In Italia*

AVNER DORNAN *Nigunim Sonata No. 3*
(b. 1975) for Violin and Piano
I. *Adagio religioso*
II. *Scherzo*
III. *Adagio*
IV. *Presto*

INTERMISSION

J.S. BACH *Partita No. 3 in E Major for Solo Violin,*
(1685-1750) *BWV 1006*
I. *Preludio*
II. *Loure*
III. *Gavotte en Rondeau*
IV. *Menuett I, Menuett II*
V. *Bourrée*
VI. *Gigue*

FRANCK *Sonata in A Major for Violin and Piano*
(1822-1890)
I. *Allegretto ben moderato*
II. *Allegro*
III. *Recitativo-Fantasia: Ben moderato*
IV. *Allegretto poco mosso*

"GIL SHAHAM'S FLAWLESS
TECHNIQUE HAS COMBINED
WITH HIS INIMITABLE WARMTH
AND GENEROSITY OF SPIRIT TO
SOLIDIFY HIS RENOWN AS AN
AMERICAN MASTER."

FOR HIS FIFTH performance at Carolina Performing Arts since 2011, Gil Shaham returns with his frequent collaborator, pianist Akira Eguchi. This recital combines many of Shaham's recent interests: violin music of the 1930s, Bach's masterful Sonatas and Partitas, and music of the Jewish diaspora.

Gil Shaham is one of the foremost violinists of our time: his flawless technique has combined with his inimitable warmth and generosity of spirit to solidify his renown as an American master. The American-Israeli violinist has won multiple Grammy Awards and was named "Instrumentalist of the Year" by *Musical America* in 2012. Shaham continues to be highly sought after by leading orchestras and conductors throughout the world. His recent seasons have centered on his "Violin Concertos of the 1930s" project, an exploration of the works of Barber, Bartok, Berg, Korngold, Prokofiev, among many others. He regularly performs on the world's great concert stages and at the most prestigious festivals as a soloist and in ensembles. He plays on a 1699 Stradivarius violin nicknamed "Countess Polignac" and lives in New York City with his wife, violinist Adele Anthony, and their three children.

Since making his highly acclaimed New York recital debut at Alice Tully Hall in 1992, **Akira Eguchi** has performed in the foremost music centers of the United States, Europe, and the Far East. Distinguished for his performances for heads of State, he has played for President Clinton with Isaac Stern at the White House and for the Emperor and Empress of Japan at Hamarikyū Ashahi Hall in Tokyo. In addition to his work as a pianist, Eguchi is also an active composer. Currently, he lives in New York and Tokyo, serving as an Associate Professor at Tokyo University of the Arts. He also teaches at Senzoku-Gakuen Music College in Japan as a guest professor.

PROGRAM NOTES

FRITZ KREISLER

Preludium and Allegro (In the Style of Pugnani)

Fritz Kreisler was something of a joker. He made his name as an immensely talented violinist whose expansive tone was unmatched, touring around Europe and North America through the first half of the twentieth century. Starting in the 1910s, he began “discovering” lost pieces by a dozen obscure eighteenth-century composers including Louis Couperin, Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf, Luigi Boccherini, and Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, all of which he claimed to have found in a monastery in Avignon. They became regular parts of Kreisler’s recital programs, and he always insisted he had merely uncovered the works. Then, in 1935, he declared that he had been the composer all along. What’s unclear is how much anyone had believed his initial story. Each of the works passes well enough as an imitation if you don’t look too closely, but they all contain telltale signs—a harmonic turn here, a melodic contour there—that point to the early twentieth century. Regardless, nobody had bothered to check Kreisler’s work, and a few critics were actually mildly perturbed when the truth came out—though most seemed amused more than anything.

Here, Kreisler puts on the mask of violinist and composer Gaetano Pugnani, who lived and worked in Turin through most of the eighteenth century. Within moments of the opening of the piece, it’s clear that the style couldn’t be further from the musical universe Pugnani occupied. The chiming piano chords and leaping violin theme in the *Preludium* have more in common with Mendelssohn or Sibelius, and the *Allegro*, with its flowing sequences and tumbling arpeggios, seems to update Bach with some contemporary flair. Ultimately, this is a charming and engaging piece that shows off Kreisler’s comfort and ease with the violin.

SCOTT WHEELER

The Singing Turk Sonata No. 2 for Violin and Piano

Historian Larry Wolff’s 2016 book *The Singing Turk* describes how composers and audiences in eighteenth-century Europe came to be obsessed with operatic representations of the Ottoman Empire, despite the fact that European countries and the Ottoman Empire

were engaged in intermittent warfare throughout. Wolff consulted composer Scott Wheeler during the writing, and Wheeler was so taken by the music in the book that he used it as the inspiration for this, his second violin sonata. Each of the piece’s three movements draws on a different operatic “singing Turk”: Georg Friedrich Handel’s 1724 opera *Tamerlano*; Paul-César Gibert’s *The Three Sultans*, from 1761; and Gioachino Rossini’s *Il Turco in Italia* from 1814. Wheeler takes many approaches to his source material, sometimes quoting it directly, and at other times preferring to depict an aspect of a character or scene. “Each of the three movements is very, very different in character,” Gil Shaham says of the work. “It’s kind of a tour de force for the composer, because he writes in many different styles. I find that it really connects with an audience.” Commissioned by violinist Sharan Leventhal, Wheeler wrote the piece in 2017.

AVNER DORMAN

Nigunim Sonata No. 3 for Violin and Piano

Born in 1975, Avner Dorman is an Israeli-American composer whose works draw on a variety of cultural and historical influences in composing, resulting in music that delivers an emotional impact while exploring new territories. He writes this about *Nigunim* (Hebrew for “melodies”), his third violin sonata, written in 2011 for Shaham and his sister, pianist Orli Shaham:

“The Nigun is a fundamental musical concept of traditional Jewish music. According to Habbad literature, the Nigun serves as a universal language; it ascends beyond words and conveys a deeper spiritual message than words can; a Nigun sung in Yiddish will reach and affect someone who only speaks Arabic and vice versa. The Nigun may be short but since it begins and ends with the same pitch, it may be repeated over and over. In this sense, the Nigun has no beginning or end and is eternal. Nigunim (the plural of Nigun) may be secular or religious, fast or slow, and may be sung and played in a variety of social events and circumstances.

“When I was approached to write a new piece for Orli and Gil Shaham’s Jewish Melodies program, my first thought was to write a piece that would explore the music of the ten lost tribes (the Hebrew tribes that were exiled after the first temple was destroyed). Since we know very little about the whereabouts of these tribes, I decided to explore the music of various Jewish traditions from

different parts of the world and how they relate to larger local musical traditions.

“To my surprise, after researching Jewish music from different parts of the world, I found that there are some common elements to North African Jewish cantillation, Central Asian Jewish wedding songs, Klezmer music, and Ashkenazy prayers. Though I did not use any existing Jewish melodies for *Nigunim*, the main melodies and melodic gestures of the piece are drawn from these common elements. Moreover, different sections of the piece draw upon local non-Jewish musical traditions from each of these regions: for example, the second movement uses principles found in Georgian folk rhythms and harmonies, and the fourth is inspired by Macedonian dances.”

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Partita No. 3 in E Major for Solo Violin, BWV 1006

There is something truly magical about the twelve pieces for solo strings Johann Sebastian Bach wrote around 1720. Each of the sonatas and partitas for violin and the suites for cello start with the same basic DNA: a desire to create polyphony in a single line (and occasional chordal writing) by way of various dance forms. From that principal, Bach wrote some of the most luminous, beguiling music ever put to paper, crafting stunning, deceptive labyrinths of counterpoint that always reveal something new to performer and listener alike. Part of the challenge comes from the clarity of Bach’s vision; there is nowhere for the performer to hide, even when notes pass in a flurry. The pieces always demand more, but do so in a way that is joyous rather than Sisyphean. Gil Shaham recounts a common refrain, “When I go to my practice room and I’ve set aside an hour to practice Bach, I find myself still going at it two hours later, working at it and loving it.”

Bach’s third partita feels more akin to the cello suites than the other violin partitas, opening with a rhapsodic Prelude before settling into the assorted dance movements. Bach makes intense demands of the violinist in the Prelude, using complicated string crossings to propel endless sheets of sixteenth notes. His choice of dances is also idiosyncratic. He places the slow movement immediately after the opening prelude, replacing the normal Sarabande with a Loure, a kind of slow Gigue from Normandy characterized by a snappy triple-meter rhythm. In the third movement, Bach turns the Gavotte into a tightly

rambling rondeau, alternating an upright main theme with increasingly strange countermelodies. The final four movements—two Minuets, a Bourrée, and a Gigue—gradually pick up speed so that the final movement is nearly as fleet as the opening.

CÉSAR FRANCK

Sonata in A Major for Violin and Piano

Eugène Ysaÿe was a towering violinist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, whose virtuosity set the standard for pretty much every violinist to follow. By the time of his marriage to Louise Bourdeau de Courtrai in September 1886, the thirty-one-year-old Belgian was already famous and a performer in demand across Europe. To celebrate the occasion of Ysaÿe’s wedding, composer (and fellow Belgian) César Franck wrote this violin sonata as a gift to him. The score was delivered on the morning of the wedding by a mutual friend. Excited, Ysaÿe quickly rehearsed it with pianist Marie-Léontine Bordes-Pène and played it for guests at the wedding breakfast. A few months later, Ysaÿe would give it a proper premiere in Brussels, with Franck in the audience. It became a treasured part of his repertoire for the rest of his career.

There is, though, something profoundly strange about Franck’s violin sonata. For a piece written for the premier virtuoso of the day, the violin part is surprisingly simple. In fact, the difficulty of the piano part outstrips the violin by an order of magnitude (Franck was, after all, a noted piano and organ virtuoso in his own right). The sonata’s four movements are abound with lavish melodies, each more beautiful than the last. But most of the time, the violinist is cast in a role akin to that of a singer, coaxing out long, glittering lines from the instrument’s upper register, blissfully unaware of the pianist’s vast exertion underneath. Franck never has the soloist play chords or double stops and only occasionally calls on the violinist to play anything faster than an eighth note. But that seeming simplicity belies a different kind of challenge: one of tone, color, and the ability to sustain extended lines that show off a different, yet no less important, aspect of violin technique. That Ysaÿe was so taken by the work shows that he recognized the importance of that subtler type of virtuosity. ■

Dan Ruccia is a Durham-based composer, writer, and graphic designer.