

The Ph.D./D.M.A. Programs in Music

February 15, 2022 1:00 p.m.

Baisley Powell Elebash Recital Hall



Johnna Wu, violin
Fifi Zhang, piano

Sonata for Violin Solo, BB 124 (1944)

Tempo di ciaccona

Fuga

Béla Bartók
(1881–1945)

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra (1989–93)

I. *Praeludium: Vivacissimo Luminoso*

II. *Aria, Hoquetus, Choral: Andante con moto*

III. *Intermezzo: Presto fluido*

IV. *Passacaglia: Lento intenso*

V. *Appassionato: Agitato molto*

György Ligeti
(1923–2006)

Notes on the Program

I started putting this program together during the pandemic when I spent a lot of time with the violin to cope with the isolated days. The long stretch of time at home allowed me to finally learn these two works that I had been dying to play for a long time.

These two works, the Bartók's *Sonata for Solo Violin* and Ligeti's *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, are written a half-century apart and come from a lineage of avant-garde Hungarian composers who simultaneously upend archaic traditions in music and overtly display their reverence for them.

Béla Bartók's *Sonata for Solo Violin* begins with the first movement, *Tempo di ciaccona*, an unmistakable reference to Bach's *Chaconne in D minor* from *Partita No. 2* for solo violin. Other associations with Bach's *Chaconne*, however, end there. The movement certainly does not follow a repeating bass line with variations. In fact, it would even be hard to imagine applying the tempo of Bach's *Chaconne* to Bartók's opening movement, which would prove disastrous for any violinist attempting such a feat. Maybe his intention in stating that the opening to his *Sonata for Solo Violin* is to mark his own place in the history of music and to declare how he will change it. After all, it comes as no surprise that a composer who wrote most prolifically for the violin and shaped its 20th century repertoire would write a solo work for the violin as one of his last pieces.

The result is a primarily polyphonic movement in which motifs reminiscent of folk dances are layered on top of one another, twirling and twisting towards each other in chromatic steps, and collecting them into sweeping, rhapsodic gestures.

The second movement *Fuga*, proclaims its entrance with a C to E-flat. This ominous declaration does not question and does not seek a response. It quickly proliferates into two, then three, and then finally to four voices, all the while insisting on the original statement, with its return each time looming larger, shaping its cataclysm.

The *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra* by **György Ligeti** is considered a work from his late period, in which he reexamines tonality and harks back the archaic in music. Ligeti even draws upon the history of his own work—the prominent theme in the second movement returns from his *Bagatelles*, written nearly a half-century earlier. The *Concerto* embodies extremes: from the spiritual quietude of this theme, to the blood-curling cries in the *Appassionato*; the breakneck opening to the implacable and sheer terror expressed in the *Passacaglia*. Ligeti breaks all expectations of how music can sound, using ocarinas that wail, wooden lotus whistles that herald the solo violin's cadenza, and last but not the least of which is suddenly cut off by the orchestra in an ending that teeters between exultation and nihilism.

This will be a rare performance of the *Concerto* with a piano reduction, for which I pay my greatest respect and gratitude to the inimitable pianist and my friend Fifi Zhang for her gargantuan undertaking in making this performance possible.

About the Artists

Johnna Wu, violinist, is a performer and improviser active in North America, Europe, and Asia. She is the founder and artistic director of the electro-acoustic chamber ensemble PinkNoise. Johnna obtained her Bachelor of Arts in Biology and Music History and Theory at Columbia University, Masters of Music at the Juilliard School, and was a Fulbright Scholar in Berlin. She is currently a doctorate student at the Graduate Center in the City University of New York, where she studied with Mark Steinberg.

Fifi Zhang, pianist, is originally from the Washington DC area. She began piano lessons at age six and made her debut with the Washington Metropolitan Philharmonic playing the Saint-Saens G minor concerto at age eleven, as the Grand Prize winner of their national concerto competition. She is one of a handful of musicians to have won both the Junior (2008) and Senior (2010) divisions of the national MTNA (Music Teachers National Association) high school competition.

Fifi has participated in the Maj Lind Piano Competition in Finland, Maria Canals International Piano Competition in Spain, Seoul International Music Competition in South Korea, and the International Paderewski Piano Competition in Poland. She has spent summers at the Banff Centre's Piano Master Classes, Sarasota Music Festival, Chautauqua Institute Piano Program, and New Paltz Piano Summer, as well as performed in Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall and New York's Steinway Hall.

An alumnus of the Columbia-Juilliard Exchange, Fifi holds a BA in History from Columbia University and an MM in Piano Performance from Juilliard. She also received a Professional Studies Diploma from Mannes School of Music. Former teachers include Marjorie Lee, Julian Martin, Matti Raekallio, and Pavlina Dokovska. Fifi is currently pursuing her doctorate at the City University of New York (CUNY) Graduate Center, as a student of Ursula Oppens. She also maintains her own private teaching studio in NYC, providing in-home and online piano lessons to students of all ages.