

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

April 3, 2023 6:00 p.m.

Baisley Powell Elebash Recital Hall



Martine Thomas, viola
Jiarong Li, piano

Märchenbilder for Piano and Viola, Op. 113 (1851)

Nicht schnell

Lebhaft

Rasch

Langsam, mit melancholischem Ausdruck

Robert Schumann
(1810–56)

Violin Solo Sonata No. 3 in C Major, BWV 1005 (1720)

Adagio

Fuga

J. S. Bach
(1685–1750)

INTERMISSION

Peace and Love (2021)

Joy Guidry
(b. 1995)

Lachrymae: Reflections on a song of Dowland, Op. 48 (1950) Benjamin Britten
(1913–76)

This recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the D.M.A. degree.
Please switch off your cell phones and refrain from taking flash pictures.

Notes on the Program

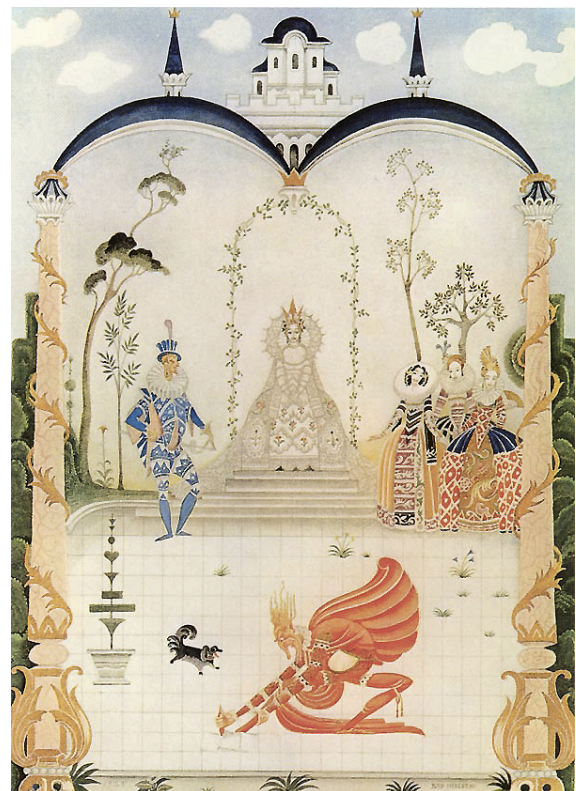
Robert Schumann, *Märchenbilder*

Schumann wrote these four short pieces in a period of just a few days as light, delightful music for entertainment. He dedicated them to a violinist friend, who premiered them at a family gathering at the Schumann house. Schumann's journal from this period shows that he played around with calling the pieces "viola stories," "fairy tale stories," and "fairy tales," before settling on "fairy tale pictures." It is hard to know exactly what Schumann had in mind by specifying "*bilder*" (pictures, or paintings) in the title of the piece, but I like to imagine that he could have been thinking of Grimms' *Fairy Tales*. Although the iconic fairy tales by the "Brothers Grimm" were not published with illustrations in Schumann's lifetime, it is very likely that he was familiar with their popular stories, especially given that he had six young children at the time that he was writing *Märchenbilder*.

Below are some of my favorite illustrations for Grimms' *Fairy Tales*, which were created by Danish illustrator Kay Nielsen in 1925. Although they are not historically accurate to any fairy tale pictures that Schumann might have known, I think these illustrations pair well with the music. Reading Grimms' *Fairy Tales* and looking at illustrations like these have been meaningful to me while working on the piece, and I like to associate certain fairy tales and their illustrations with each movement: "Snowdrop" with the first movement (*Nicht schnell*, "Not fast"), "Rumpelstiltskin" with the second movement (*Lebhaft*, "Lively"), "The Six Swans" with the third movement (*Rasch*, "Quickly"), and "Sleeping Beauty" with the fourth movement (*Langsam mit melancholischem Ausdruck*, "Slowly with a melancholic expression").



"Snowdrop"



"Rumpelstiltskin"



"The Six Swans"



"Sleeping Beauty"

J.S. Bach, *Adagio and Fuga* from Violin Solo Sonata No. 3 in C Major, BWV 1005

This solo sonata for violin, which I am playing two movements from today, is part of a set of six sonatas and partitas for solo violin by **Bach**. These sonatas and partitas are famous pieces for violin, but are not often played on the viola. This **third sonata** is one of my favorites and I decided to learn a transposed version of it, thinking that the first and third movements in particular would work beautifully in the viola register. The *Adagio* and *Fugue* on today's program are special and ambitious music for the number of musical voices they feature with just a single instrument. The *Fugue* especially is one of the most complex examples of multiple voices on a single string instrument. The fugue theme develops from the very first phrase into a statement that appears over and over again, highlighting the many layers of musical voices that are woven through the movement. Even though this *Adagio* and *Fugue* create the illusion of many voices, Bach's title for the sonatas and partitas points out the alone-ness of the single violinist (or violist) playing this music. His title, "*Sei Solo*," means "You are alone." This could be a spelling mistake for a title that would make more logical sense, "*Sei Soli*" ("Six Solos," for the six solo sonatas and partitas). However, the Canadian violinist Julia Wedman makes a beautiful argument for the first title, explaining how these sonatas and partitas were written at a time when Bach had just unexpectedly lost his wife. She had been completely healthy when he left on a two-month trip but when he returned home, he discovered that she had died and already been buried. There is no hard evidence that the sonatas and partitas were a response to his feelings of shock and grief, but perhaps we don't need hard evidence to imagine how alone he must have felt at this time.

Joy Guidry, *Peace and Love*

In their own words, “Radical self-love, compassion, laughter, and the drive to amplify Black artmakers and noisemakers comprise the core of bassoonist and composer **Joy Guidry**’s work. ...A versatile improviser and a composer of experimental, daring new works that embody a deep love of storytelling, Joy’s own music channels their inner child, in honor of their ancestors and predecessors.” I knew Joy first as a kind, funny, and sensitive bassoonist when we met at the Banff Centre in 2018. Since then, it has been astounding to watch them grow into their own as a fearless composer.

The score for “**Peace and Love**” appeared in my text inbox as a message from Joy on Christmas Eve in 2021. I was in the middle of celebrating the holiday with my family and was completely surprised and moved to receive this score dedicated to me and the violist Katie Brown. The graphic score, in pastels and red, reminds me of a galaxy and is accompanied by meditative electronics. Joy writes in the instructions, “In this work find your favorite string on the viola and float on the harmonic series of that string. Improvise in conversation with the peaceful electronics playing with you. Let the graphic guide you from a quiet place to a larger conversation back to a quiet place. Please use the deep beautiful sounds of the viola and let time float away from you.”

Learn more about Joy and listen to more of their music at their website, guidrybassoon.com!

Benjamin Britten, *Lachrymae: Reflections on a song of Dowland, Op. 48*

Britten wrote *Lachrymae* in 1950 for the legendary violist William Primrose to premiere at Britten’s new festival, Aldeburgh. It is a strange and fragmented piece of music, originally for string orchestra and viola soloist. I had heard it many times and even worked on it briefly without being able to fully understand the music, but I was inspired to return to it after seeing Britten’s opera *Peter Grimes* this past fall at the Metropolitan Opera. *Peter Grimes* is a dark and mysterious opera, set in a small British seaside village, where the fisherman Peter Grimes is suspected by the villagers of being responsible for the deaths of his young apprentices. The production I saw emphasized the psychological drama of the story and left the questions of blame up in the air, which made the opera even more compelling to me. After seeing the opera, instead of being confused by the fragments of music that make up *Lachrymae*, imagining them as scenes in an opera like *Peter Grimes* transformed my interpretation.

There is no direct connection between *Lachrymae* and *Peter Grimes* except my own, although they were written only five years apart so there are similar stylistic elements that they share. *Lachrymae* does explicitly draw inspiration from vocal music, from a song written by John Dowland around 1597 called “If My Complaints Could Passions Move” (text below). Britten describes *Lachrymae* as “Reflections on a song by John Dowland,” but the influence of the Dowland song is difficult to identify for most of the piece. Britten explores various textures on the viola – from bow techniques like tremolo and sul ponticello to extensive pizzicato, muted sound, big chordal passages, and harmonics – before finally arriving at the Dowland song as the closing of the piece. The version of the song that occurs in *Lachrymae* is without words, but the original words of the song are about despair and faith in love. Whether or not Britten related to all the words of the song, despair and faith were certainly part of his love life, as someone in a relationship with a man in a time and place when queerness was criminalized. The tenor Peter Pears was Britten’s partner of 37 years and the two were artistic collaborators, shared a home, and were buried next to one another. They were lucky to avoid criminal punishment, although

in 1953 they were investigated by the police, including a visit to their home. This was during the same period when Alan Turing (in 1952) and other high-profile men were convicted of “gross indecency” due to the government and the police actively enforcing Victorian-era laws. It was only towards the very end of Britten’s life that homosexuality was officially decriminalized in Britain, in 1967.

If My Complaints Could Passions Move

(Text anonymous)

If my complaints could passions move,
Or make Love see wherein I suffer wrong:
My passions were enough to prove,
That my despairs had govern'd me too long.
O Love, I live and die in thee,
Thy grief in my deep sighs still speaks:
Thy wounds do freshly bleed in me,
My heart for thy unkindness breaks:
Yet thou dost hope when I despair,
And when I hope, thou mak'st me hope in vain.
Thou say'st thou canst my harms repair,
Yet for redress, thou let'st me still complain.

Can Love be rich, and yet I want?
Is Love my judge, and yet am I condemn'd?
Thou plenty hast, yet me dost scant:
Thou made a god, and yet thy pow'r contemn'd.
That I do live, it is thy pow'r:
That I desire it is thy worth:
If Love doth make men's lives too sour,
Let me not love, nor live henceforth.
Die shall my hopes, but not my faith,
That you that of my fall may hearers be
May here despair, which truly saith,
I was more true to Love than Love to me.

About the Artists

Martine Thomas is a violist, performing internationally as a soloist, chamber musician, improviser, and composer collaborator. She has appeared at the Berliner Philharmonie, Carnegie Hall, Kennedy Center, Mariinsky Theatre, Disney Hall, the KKL Lucerne, the Beijing National Centre for the Performing Arts, and at the BBC Proms, Mariinsky White Nights Festival, Donaueschingen Festival, and Lucerne Festival. She has performed as a soloist and chamber musician with Yo-Yo Ma and the Silk Road Ensemble, the International Contemporary Ensemble, JACK Quartet, Tyshawn Sorey, Kim Kashkashian, and Ghost Ensemble. Martine loves presenting solo recitals, and is looking forward to recitals this year in New York City, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and upstate New York. She is also passionate about recitals and concerts in community-oriented settings, including as a Music for Food artist fellow, through Meristem Artists, at the Biophony Festival, and in Celebrity Series Concert for One. Martine has a special interest in contemporary music and working with composers, which has led to recent collaborations and premieres with Tyshawn Sorey, Rebecca Saunders, George Lewis, Catherine Lamb, Miya Masaoka, and Joy Guidry as well as extensive workshops and performances at the Banff Centre and Lucerne Festival. Martine received her Bachelor of Arts from Harvard and her Master of Music from New England Conservatory, where she studied in the Harvard-NEC Dual Degree program. Her mentors include Paul Neubauer, Martha Katz, Mark Steinberg, Paul Biss, and Vijay Iyer. She is currently working on her doctorate in viola performance at CUNY Graduate Center and is on the string faculty at Brooklyn College Conservatory and Point CounterPoint. For more of her music and writing, please visit martinethomas.com.

Chinese Pianist **Jiarong Li** is known for her sensitive and passionate collaborations with instrumentalists. Jiarong was a collaborative piano fellow at Bowdoin Music Festival and Music Academy of the West and is the staff accompanist for the Puerto Piano & Strings International Music Festival this coming summer. She has been featured as a pianist for the production of the contemporary opera Oedipus in the District at the Tank, the opening concert of Modern Art Meet Chamber Music series at Stride Arts Gallery, Si-Yo Musical Phone Pal and Distant But Connected projects, Metropolis Ensemble, CelloBello Masterclasses, and the Rhode Island Chamber Players. She regularly appears recitals at Sacred Music at Columbia University and Music at the Farm at Grace Note Farm Music.

She is currently pursuing her doctorate in collaborative piano with an assistantship at Manhattan School of Music, where she studies with John Forconi. Jiarong is a Si-Yo Artist and Artist in Residence at Grace Note Farm.