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### Demiana Ibrahim's Senior Recital: Music across Continents and Centuries

Demiana Ibrahim

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**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** (1756-1791), who needs no introduction, wrote five violin concerti between 1773 and 1775 for his personal use as concertmaster of the Archbishop of Salzburg's orchestra. The fifth and final, composed in 1775, displays his true mastery of the form, while pushing into innovative territories. Although its nickname as the "Turkish" Concerto is due to rhythms and melodic patterns present in the final movement, this concerto breaks expectations from the start.

The orchestra or piano begins the piece in *Allegro Aperto*, a typical tempo marking for the first movement of a concerto. However, the entrance of the violin initiates a short but impactful *Adagio* section, creating gravity with a slow lyrical statement, rather than the expected explosive start which occurs some measures later. This entrance slowly breathes life into the concerto, and keeps listeners curious.

Almost as if letting out a long held breath, the violin suddenly launches into a crisp, playful melody, now once again in the *Allegro aperto* tempo that characterizes the rest of the movement. This movement epitomizes the crystal clear, mischievous and operatic quality that so defines Mozart's music. Opera was a central musical form of the time, and the form can certainly be found buried within this composition. It offers us distinct "voices" in conversation with each other, at times dancing around each other.

Near the end of this movement is a cadenza by Hungarian violinist Joseph Joachim (1831-1907). A cadenza is an unaccompanied section that plays with the melodic material of a movement, often with many key signature modulations. Violinists can improvise or compose their own cadenzas, but some, like the one performed tonight, are so frequently reproduced and beloved that they become ingrained into the repertoire.

**Camille Saint-Saëns** (1835-1921) was a French composer, organist and pianist, who contributed whimsy and melodic genius to the Romantic period of music. He was a child prodigy on the piano, and this early recognition led to attendance at the Paris Conservatory, the first and crucial step on his journey to becoming the beloved composer he was and remains today. Some of his more famous works include: *Carnival of the Animals*, *Danse Macabre*, *Piano Concerto No. 2*, *Cello Concerto No. 1*, and the *Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso* originally written for solo violin and orchestra.

*Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso* was composed in 1863 and was originally intended as the final movement to his first violin concerto. The immediate success of the work, which was warmly received, led to Saint-Saëns publishing it as a stand alone composition. It premiered in 1867, performed by the renowned violinist Pablo de Sarasate, to whom the composition was dedicated. Saint-Saëns was a great admirer of the Spanish violinist, and stated; "If my violin

music was so successful, I owe it to Sarasate, because he was for a time the most prominent violinist in the world and he played my works, which were still unknown, everywhere.”

Besides being beloved by fans of violin music worldwide, *Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso* has found its way to a broader audience on the big screen. It appeared, played by violin superstar Jascha Heifetz in the film *They Shall have Music* (1939), and even more recently was performed by characters in the anime *Your Lie in April* (2016).

After a relatively slow and lyrical opening that gradually increases in intensity, the famous Rondo theme begins. This recurring theme can only be characterized as playful, dancing, yet at the same time, of a masterly lyricism. Potentially in part due to the piece's dedication to Sarasate, the Rondo theme is syncopated in an almost hemiola-esque manner—a technique characteristic of Spanish-origin music. The resulting effect is a playful tension between violin and piano that plays pleasantly with listeners' expectations of rhythm. Many pairs of grace notes are interspersed amidst this section, adding an airiness and giving the piece a distinctly French quality. As with most virtuosic violin pieces, the *Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso* showcases a wide range of technical skill, including upbow staccato, long sections of double stops, and no shortage of arpeggiated runs. It truly represents the intersection of lyricism and technical ability that is quintessential to Romantic era violin music.

It has been a dream of mine for many years to play this piece, and I am so honored to share it with you today.

**Johann Sebastian Bach** (1685-1750), the foremost composer of the Baroque era, is most typically associated with the polyphonic choral music that so defined Germany's religious practices during this time. The set of six unaccompanied sonatas and partitas written for solo violin during Bach's time as kapellmeister in the court of Prince Leopold at Cöthen, were initially largely ignored. Having been completed in 1720, the works were not published until fifty years after the composer's death, in 1802, and were not popularized until even later, when the violinist Joseph Joachim began to perform them in the mid-19th century.

Bach's unaccompanied violin pieces test the limits of what a single melody instrument can do. Within this single-instrument part, soprano, alto, tenor, and bass lines can be found—not always appearing all at the same time but traceable nonetheless. This mimicry of SATB choral music is particularly noticeable in the Fugue. As opposed to the quick runs that typically daunt the virtuosic violinist, the task of smoothly producing multiple simultaneous lines of music poses an entirely different kind of challenge.

Despite—or perhaps even because of—the extreme precision and formulaic construction of these movements, I often experience both listening to and performing Bach’s unaccompanied works as an act of prayer or meditation. The process of learning this music is at once humbling and awe inspiring: an eternal return to the work-bench in which each cycle reveals a deeper level of beauty and genius contained within seemingly simple melodies. I find this experience to be analogous to the cycles and process of life itself, therefore containing an inherently spiritual quality.

The first sonata of the set, in G minor, opens with an *Adagio*. The slow, stunning movement grounds the entire sonata with the tonic chord sounding out first. In contrast to the coming Fugue movement, the *Adagio* has an almost improvised sound to it—it is highly ornamented, and adherence to pulse is less important than the expression of melodic shape. In contrast to the standard practice of a Baroque slow movement, each ornamentation is explicitly notated by Bach, rather than being entirely up to the performer.

The *Fugue* has presented one of the greatest challenges I have faced as a violinist yet. Its straightforward structure does not give away the difficulty of balancing so many lines of harmony within strictly defined parameters. Listeners will hear the fugue subject presented immediately, which will reappear in different forms throughout the movement, interspersed with various episodes of sixteenth notes. The fugue subject compounds upon itself each time it is presented—starting as a single line and by the end of the movement, carrying all four harmonic layers.

### ***From the Egyptian Canon...***

The following are excerpts from two of the most popular songs of 20th Century Egypt. They will be performed inspired by the Arabic taqasim style, a technique in which a solo instrumentalist—often on violin or oud—improvises live within a certain mode. However, what you will hear today was transcribed by myself from voice or various orchestral instruments in an attempt to capture the essential melodic material of each respective song. As I am trained in the Western Classical style, the pieces might not have every nuance of ornamentation as the original, but this is the music that my ears have been attuned to since early childhood. I hope you enjoy, and even experience through this music tarab, the ecstasy that is the goal of musical practice in Arabic cultures.

### **Alf Leila Wa Leila (One thousand and one nights)**

*Alf Leila Wa Leila*, composed by Baligh Hamdi and originally recorded by the legend Umm Kulthum, is possibly the most famous mid-20th century Egyptian song. Her fame across the SWANA region was unprecedented and to this day remains unmatched. Umm Kulthum’s original recording stands at fifty minutes, but I have condensed the iconic instrumental

introduction into a four minute excerpt that contains some of its most memorable moments. The circular musical structure and lyrics, written by Morsi Gamil Aziz, capture the mysticism central to many spiritual traditions of the region.

### **Ahwak (I adore you)**

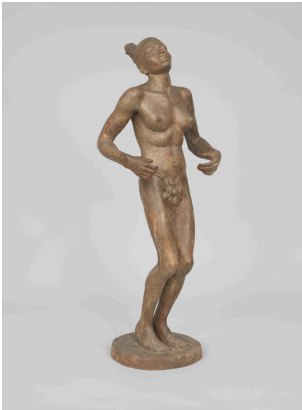
Abdel Halim Hafez is another of the “Big Three” Egyptian singers coming out of the 20th Century. I present for you today an interpretation of his most beloved song *Ahwak* (I adore you). This piece is much closer in sound and structure to something that might be popular in the Western Canon, but retains certain distinctly Egyptian characteristics, such as the emphasis on slides, and a reverence of expressivity over precision.

**William Grant Still** (1895-1978) was a major trailblazer for African American composers in the classical world, and an important figure of the Harlem Renaissance (1920s/30s). Nicknamed the “Dean of Afro-American Composers,” he was the first Black American to have a symphonic composition performed by a major American orchestra: his Afro-American Symphony No.1 was premiered by the Rochester Symphony Orchestra in 1931. His musical education was of the elite from both the classical and jazz music worlds. Still attended both Oberlin and the New England Conservatory, and studied under composers such as George Chadwick and Edgard Varese, the “father of electronic music.” On the Jazz side, he learned from Paul Whiteman and W. C. Handy, two of the most iconic Jazz practitioners.

The influence of American jazz and blues traditions is unmistakable in the syncopated rhythms, diminished scales, and dynamically free-flowing arrangements of Still’s compositions. Composing to mimic a style traditionally improvised is no small feat, and presents a unique challenge in marrying the rhythms and chords of the distinct violin and piano parts.

His *Suite for Violin and Piano*, containing three movements, can be viewed as a modernized presentation of the typical fast-slow-fast Concerto formula. Each movement is named after and inspired by a different sculpture created by three African American artists also associated with the Harlem Renaissance.

### 1. *African Dancer*



Inspired by Richmond Barthé's sculpture depicting the "ecstasy of dance," this lively and grand movement certainly plays with a variety of dance rhythms and syncopations. This movement is the grandest statement of the three and shows the most range of character. While mostly upbeat, it is interspersed with a couple of slower sections that still have a traditionally bluesy sound. Beyond rhythms, this movement is practically overflowing with diminished chords and unexpected intervals, which not only keep the listener on their toes but also hearkens to Still's jazz inspiration.

### 2. *Mother and Child*



This movement, inspired by many artworks under the same title by Sargent Johnson, was the piece that introduced me to the entire Suite. It has a quintessential lullaby quality, and also contains an air of yearning. This could be due to the fact that the artist was orphaned at fifteen, and his sculptures and paintings are an attempt to hearken back to this essential relationship he could no longer experience. Near the end of the movement, the main theme reappears with a double-stop interpretation. I experience this as Mother and Child speaking in harmony.

### 3. *Gamin*



The final movement of Still's suite hearkens to Augusta Savage's sculpture of a young African American boy. Although some interpretations of the sculpture see the boy as being wizened beyond his years, a more common consensus is his carrying an air of mischievousness. As is common in the final movement of many violin concerti, *Gamin* is quick, syncopated and playful. It is a psychological turning point and respite after the emotional depth of the previous movement, and truly captures the spirit of youthfulness.

**Special thanks to** Professor Rachel Huang, who has been the best mentor I could possibly have asked for. Thank you for guiding me through this intense but beautiful journey, believing in me, and helping me deepen my roots into my “whys” of being a musician. I have learned so much from you beyond the music I’ve played. I am also deeply indebted to Dr. Moss, who has braved countless lessons, rehearsals, and performances by my side. Thank you to Professor YouYoung Kang for advising me throughout my time at Scripps, and every other Professor from the Music department I have come in contact with and learned from!

Additionally, I would like to thank any and everyone who has materially, emotionally and spiritually supported me through these transformative past few years, none more than Chigozie Obiegbu. I am eternally grateful for and inspired by all of my friends—it is a great pleasure to mutually wonder at each other. Thank you for deepening my humanity and making me feel endlessly loved. You all are truly my family!