

Where *the* Light Breaks

CANADIAN
CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

TRACK LISTING

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George Walker

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WHERE THE LIGHT BREAKS

We didn't set out to make an album around a particular theme. In fact, we didn't really plan to make an album at all. It began with a pitch to the IMAGINE program at the Isabel Bader Centre for the Performing Arts in Kingston, ON to record *something* in their beautiful hall. Once we received the good news that they had accepted our application, we got to work. The repertoire came together somewhat chaotically: pieces we loved, composers we wanted to work with, ideas that stuck with us. One piece led to another, and along the way we started to notice unexpected connections between them.

It's difficult to say if there is one single centrepiece of the album, but we knew a few things for sure: we wanted to showcase our incredible musicians as an ensemble, to feature some members as soloists, and we wanted to work with an extraordinary composer whose piano concerto had recently come across our radar and was gaining traction with audiences everywhere. Once Dinuk Wijeratne and the Rolston String Quartet both agreed to take part, the whole picture started coming together.

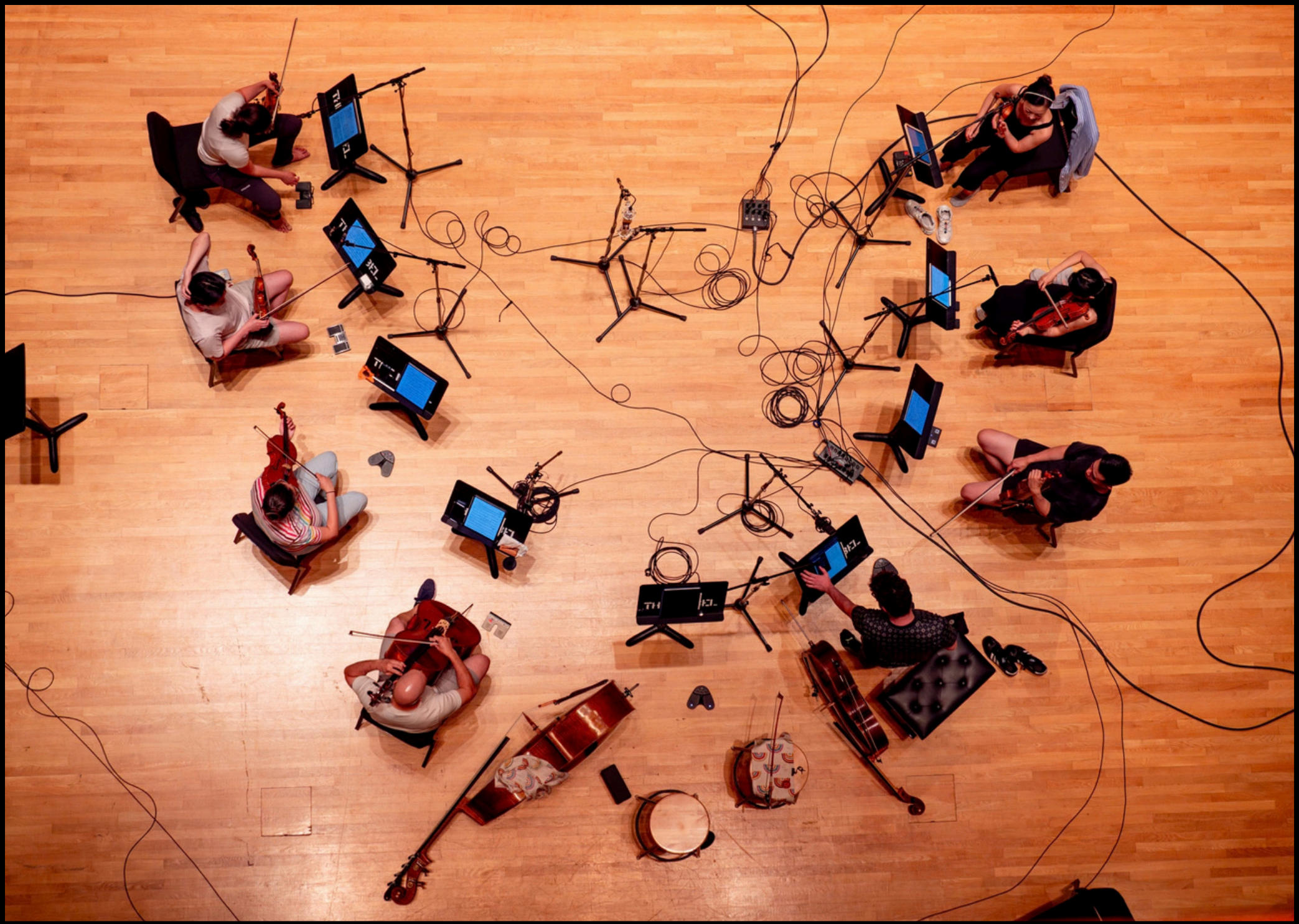
The idea of window panes started to emerge as we thought about our collection of repertoire. Each piece seemed to offer a different view into a particular emotional world, just as the way light transforms through interaction with stained glass. Grief and memory in George Walker's *Lyric for Strings*, cultural identity and transformation in Dinuk Wijeratne's *Gajaga Vannama*, consolation in Jocelyn Morlock's *Solace*, joy and melancholy in Kevin Lau's *Joy*, fight, loss, and celebration in Osvaldo Golijov's *Last Round,* and the sheer energy and possibility of music in Edward Elgar's *Introduction and Allegro*.

We invite you to listen to this album as you would look at a stained glass window: as the light breaks through the differing sections of coloured glass, you see and feel the different emotional worlds each contains, and then move to the next pane. That process feels very much like the Canadian Chamber Orchestra itself: We are drawn to music that feels immediate, personal, and alive, and to the unexpected things that happen when very different musical voices share the same space.

Where the Light Breaks is ultimately a collection of those views.
We hope you enjoy looking through them as much as we have.



Andrew Ascenzo & Drew Comstock
Co-Executive Directors, Canadian Chamber Orchestra



Recorded at the Isabel Bader Centre for the Performing Arts at Queens University in Kingston, Ontario, Canada | July 8 - 10, 2025

CANADIAN CHAMBER ORCHESTRA MUSICIANS

VIOLIN

Sienna Cho

Heemin Choi

Patrick Goodwin

Sarah Kim

Douglas Kwon

Luri Lee

Noa Sarid

Kun Yan

VIOLA

Carolyn Blackwell

Hezekiah Leung

Laurence Schaufele

CELLO

Andrew Ascenzo

Drew Comstock

BASS

Tony Flynt



SOLOISTS

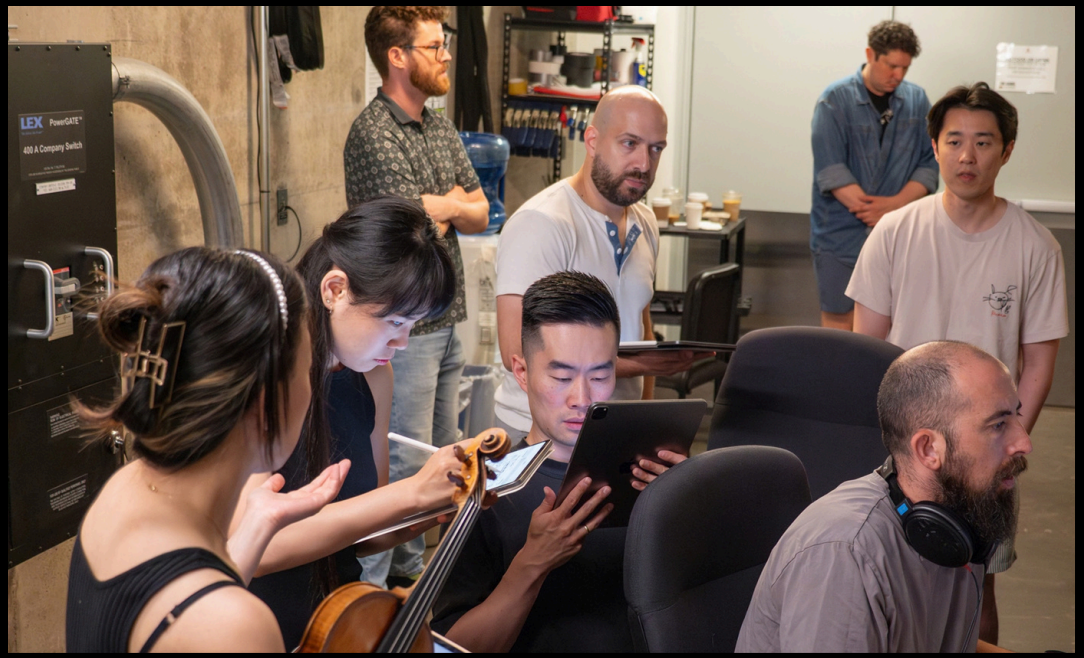
Dinuk Wijeratne, *piano*
Track 2-9: Gajaga Vannama, Dinuk Wijeratne

Noa Sarid, *violin;* Drew Comstock, *cello*
Track 10: Solace, Jocelyn Morlock

Luri Lee, *violin*
Track 11: Joy, Kevin Lau

Rolston String Quartet
Luri Lee & Jason Issokson, *violins*; Hezekiah Leung, *viola;* Peter Eom, *cello*
Track 14: Introduction & Allegro, Edward Elgar

LAST ROUND, Osvaldo Glijov (Tracks 12 & 13) features the following musicians:
String Quartet 1: Luri Lee, Kun Yan, Hezekiah Leung, Drew Comstock;
String Quartet 2: Noa Sarid, Heemin Choi, Carolyn Blackwell, Andrew Ascenzo;
Bass: Tony Flynt









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JOY ZHENG



When I first listened to the album, I pictured a stained glass window as a way to bring all the pieces together in a unified way while still capturing each individual track. A stained glass window is made of separate fragments that only become complete when assembled together, much like the six songs on the album. Each frame stands on its own, but together they create one cohesive image.

The idea of light became a central part of the concept as I kept imagining different qualities of light while listening from soft and radiant to fractured and intense. The stained glass idea allows light to become symbolic. Additionally, I thought of ways to use colour as a reflection of the range of emotional tones and thought the fragmented colours of a stained glass window fit the narrative.

Each of the six panels represents one track, translated into an image based on the scenes that came to mind while listening:

Walker - Energy, emotional build-up, cosmic force
Wijeratne - Footsteps approaching, jungle, elephant, movement
Morlock - A bird trapped in a cage, flowers on the outside, sorrowful
Lau - A ship sailing towards light, a beam breaking through, hope
Golijov - Intense, sharp, dramatic, a chase, opposing forces
Elgar - Magical, ethereal, wings

-Joy Zheng, *artist / album artwork*







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LYRIC FOR STRINGS
George Walker

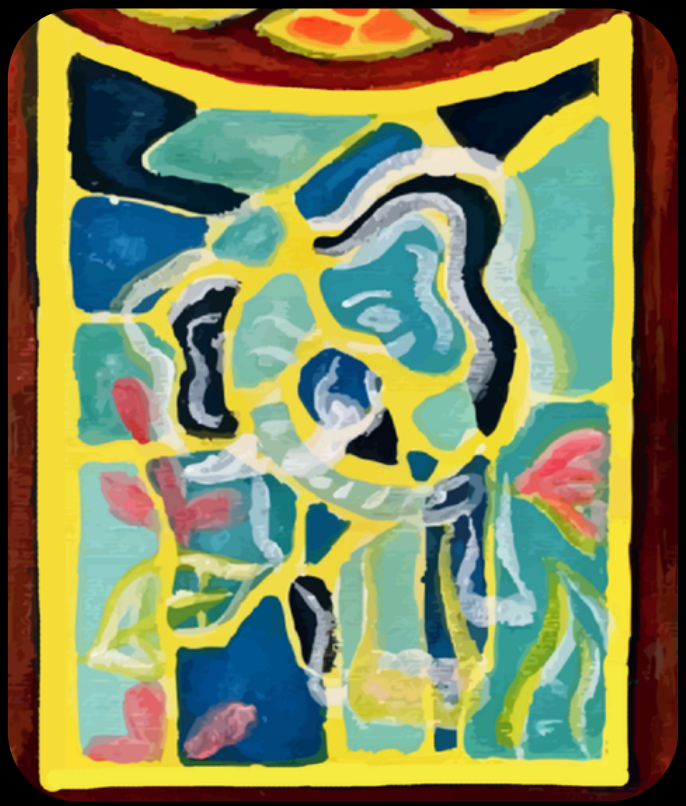
George Walker's *Lyric for Strings* is a work of extraordinary tenderness and of complicated history. Originally titled Lament, this work began as the slow movement of Walker's first String Quartet, written while he was still a student at the Curtis Institute of Music, in response to the death of his grandmother who was born into slavery and escaped to freedom during the American Civil War.

Walker described the structure simply: a principal theme emerges in the first violins, is imitated throughout the ensemble, builds toward an intense climax, and ultimately returns to the quiet atmosphere with which the work began. Phrases return altered and affected by everything that has happened in between. There is something remarkable about that return. The music does not resolve grief by overcoming it, but instead, learns how to live alongside it.

Walker later arranged the piece for string orchestra and gave it the name *Lyric for Strings.* Walker would go on to become one of the most important American composers of the twentieth century, and in 1996 he became the first Black composer to receive the Pulitzer Prize for Music. *Lyric for Strings* remains his most frequently performed orchestral work.



GAJAGA VANNAMA STRINGS
Variations on a Traditional Sri Lankan Theme
Dinuk Wijeratne



The two most prominent ethnic groups of Sri Lanka – the island country of my birth – are the Sinhalese and the Tamils. I happen to be a product of both. This piece is a highly personal musical interpretation and realization of a traditional melody and classical 'Vannam' dance-form that dates back to the early 1700s. In the royal courts of the city of Kandy, the last capital of the era of the ancient kings, the vannamas evolved from short sung melodies into longer, substantial dance pieces. In 'Dance and the Nation', cultural anthropologist Susan A. Reed captures the cultural context of the vannamas:

"The staple of most Kandyan dance performances, whether in processions or on stage, are the vannam dances. Originally the vannamas were a group of songs of both Sinhala and Tamil influence composed during the Kandyan period and sung in the courts of the Kandyan kings. The expressive arts of the court that developed during this time can be viewed as a blend of South Indian and Lankan elements. There are 18 traditional vannam dances, of which the most popular is the Gajaga Vannama. It depicts the majestic gait of the celestial elephant of the great god Sakra. The song of the Gajaga Vannama describes the sacred elephant with 8 trunks and 16 tusks bathing and frolicking in one of the 700 lotus ponds of the abode of the gods. The vannamas are often danced in processions, from small wedding processions with a few dancers to large ritual processions with dozens."

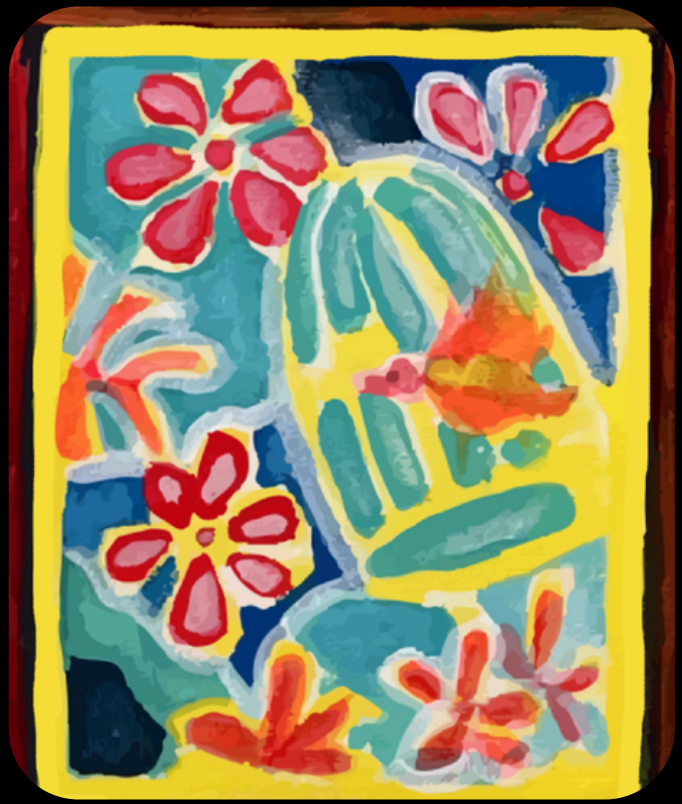
We tend to perceive many artforms as being unchanging, 'vertical' creations that are fixed in time. Yet when we look closer, or dig into their histories, they reveal aspects of tradition and innovation in proportions that are delicate, subjective, and often hotly contested. My 'imagining' of the Gajaga Vannama is scored for strings and piano (my instrument), and set in a single-movement 15-minute span. After a short, slow introduction of 7 beats to the bar, the main section of the piece begins. It gradually increases in tempo and urgency over time. Towards the end is a 2-part vocal recitation. The first part is a direct quotation of the kastirama (drum composition) from a classic recording of the vannamas by Piyasara and Chandrakanthi Shilpadhipathi. The second part is a variation on the kastirama of my own composing. The further increase of tempo in the coda (concluding section) imagines the dancers entering a state of trance.

-Dinuk Wijeratne

SOLACE
Jocelyn Morlock

Jocelyn Morlock's *Solace* asks a simple question: what does it mean to find comfort in music from another time?

Written in 2001 and revised in 2005, *Solace* is scored for chamber strings, with solo violin and cello. Morlock divides the ensemble into three distinct groups, creating a kind of musical architecture within the orchestra. One group plays music partially derived from the Agnus Dei of Josquin des Prez's Missa L'homme armé. Another group consists of violins playing long, ethereal harmonics that appear as if they are floating in another world. Finally, a solo violin and solo cello respond to the early-music material with bird calls and low lyrical songs.



The inspiration for Morlock came during her first year at university, when she encountered Josquin's music for the first time. The result is less a quotation of the past than a conversation with it. Josquin's Renaissance polyphony is not presented as something preserved behind glass. Instead, it becomes a distant presence: a musical memory floating beneath the surface of Morlock's contemporary language. Against it, the sustained harmonics create an almost weightless atmosphere, while the solo violin and cello seem to inhabit a more immediate and present human world.

The three groups can feel like different kinds of time existing simultaneously: the ancient, the suspended and the present. Morlock was one of Canada's leading composers, known for music that could be lyrical, strange, intimate, playful and deeply emotional. *Solace* reveals her most contemplative side.

There is no grand declaration of consolation here. Instead, comfort arrives gradually, through listening itself, through the sensation of hearing something distant and discovering that somehow, it still speaks to us.

JOY
Kevin Lau



Joy was originally conceived as the second movement of a suite for string quartet, commissioned originally as a wedding gift for a couple I did not know. Late in 2008 I had the opportunity to rework this particular movement as a concert piece for solo violin and string orchestra, and in doing so revised the composition itself to reflect aspects beyond a state of pure celebration. Primarily through-composed, *Joy* is in essence a 'song without words' whose central, meditative melody is expressed by the violin in sweeping vocal lines across the span of the work.

Far too often it is only in the absence of something dear to us that we are able to see with utter clarity its value in our lives. The experience of loss is an awakening, and it is no surprise that joy and grief — both painfully acute experiences of overwhelming love — are expressed in such similar ways. *Joy* is a tribute to these sentiments, and a plea to cherish the precious things in our lives, while they remain.

-Kevin Lau

LAST ROUND
Osvaldo Golijov



Astor Piazzolla, the last great Tango composer, was at the peak of his creativity when a stroke killed him in 1992. He left us, in the words of the old tango, "without saying good bye", and that day the musical face of Buenos Aires was abruptly frozen. The creation of that face had started a hundred years earlier from the unlikely combination of African rhythms underlying gauchos' couplets, sung in the style of Sicilian canzonettas over an accompanying Andalucian guitar. As the years passed all converged towards the bandoneon: a small accordion-like instrument without keyboard that was invented in Germany in the 19th century to serve as a portable church organ and which, after finding its true home in the bordellos of Buenos Aires' slums in the 1920s, went back to Europe to conquer Paris' high society in the 1930s. Since then it reigned as the essential instrument for any Tango ensemble.

Piazzolla's bandoneon was able to condense all the symbols of tango. The eroticism of legs and torsos in the dance was reduced to the intricate patterns of his virtuoso fingers (a simple C major scale in the bandoneon zigzags so much as to leave an inexperienced player's fingers tangled). The melancholy of the singer's voice was transposed to the breathing of the bandoneon's continuous opening and closing. The macho attitude of the tangueros was reflected in his pose on stage: standing upright, chest forward, right leg on a stool, the bandoneon on top of it, being by turns raised, battered, caressed.

I composed Last Round in 1996, prompted by Geoff Nuttall and Barry Shiffman. They heard a sketch of the second movement, which I had written in 1991 upon hearing the news of Piazzolla's stroke, and encouraged me to finish it and write another movement to complement it. The title is borrowed from a short story on boxing by Julio Cortázar, the metaphor for an imaginary chance for Piazzolla's spirit to fight one more time (he used to get into fistfights throughout his life). The piece is conceived as an idealized bandoneon. The first movement represents the act of a violent compression of the instrument and the second a final, seemingly endless opening sigh (it is actually a fantasy over the refrain of the song My Beloved Buenos Aires, composed by the legendary Carlos Gardel in the 1930s). But Last Round is also a sublimated tango dance. Two quartets confront each other, separated by the focal bass, with violins and violas standing up as in the traditional tango orchestras. The bows fly in the air as inverted legs in crisscrossed choreography, always attracting and repelling each other, always in danger of clashing, always avoiding it with the immutability that can only be acquired by transforming hot passion into pure pattern.

-Osvaldo Golijov

INTRODUCTION & ALLEGRO, OP. 47
Edward Elgar



By 1905, Sir Edward Elgar was recognized as the foremost British composer of his era. Following the massive success of the Enigma Variations, his publisher and close friend August Jaeger suggested that Elgar compose a brilliant, rapid showpiece to showcase the string section of the newly formed London Symphony Orchestra.

Elgar responded with a masterpiece that looked both backward and forward. Structurally, it revived the Baroque concerto grosso format, pitting a small group of soloists (a string quartet) against a larger ensemble (the full string orchestra). Stylistically, however, it remains intensely Romantic, pushing the technical boundaries of 20th-century string virtuosity.

The emotional heart of the piece relies on what Elgar called his "Welsh tune." While vacationing along the coast of Cardiganshire, Wales, in 1901, Elgar recalled hearing a distant choir singing, the sound carrying across the hills. He jotted down a melody inspired by the memory, originally intending it for a "Welsh Overture" that never came to fruition. He instead wove it into this piece, creating a tribute to what Elgar called the "sweet borderland."

The work opens with a powerful, declamatory descending fanfare by the full orchestra, answered by a wistful response from the solo string quartet. Soon, the solo viola introduces the haunting, lyrical Welsh melody. This gives way to the Allegro, initiated by a sudden burst of rapid, shimmering notes. Rather than adhering to a traditional development, Elgar launches into an intricate, fast-paced G-minor fugue. This contrapuntal storm builds immense tension, which finally breaks when the Welsh tune returns in a blazing, triumphant G-major statement, bringing the work to an exhilarating and deeply satisfying finish.

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THE ISABEL
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