



# PAROLE IN MUSICA

Music for Guitar Trio

BERNSTEIN  
GRIEG  
HADJIDAKIS  
ISOLANI  
RAVEL

THE  
VOLTERRA  
PROJECT  
TRIO

Antigoni Goni, Luca Isolani,  
Maarten Vandenbemden



# Parole in Musica

**Leonard Bernstein** (1918–1990)

**Scenes from West Side Story** (1957)

(arr. Maarten Vandenbemden [b. 1994] for three guitars, 2020)

**14:30**

- |   |             |      |
|---|-------------|------|
| 1 | I. Prologue | 1:51 |
| 2 | II. Mambo   | 2:39 |
| 3 | III. Maria  | 2:48 |
| 4 | IV. Tonight | 3:58 |
| 5 | V. America  | 3:14 |

**Luca Isolani** (b. 1987)

6 **Note fuori campo ‘Omaggio a Nino Rota’** (2015)

**5:38**

**Maurice Ravel** (1875–1937)

**Ma Mère l’Oye (‘Mother Goose’) – Suite** (1908–10)

(arr. M. Vandenbemden for three guitars, 2016)

**13:57**

- |    |  |      |
|----|--|------|
| 7  | I. Pavane de la Belle au bois dormant (‘Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty’)                    | 1:27 |
| 8  | II. Petit Poucet (‘Tom Thumb’)   | 2:40 |
| 9  | III. Laideronnette, Impératrice des Pagodes (‘Laideronnette, Empress of the Pagodas’)      | 3:08 |
| 10 | IV. Les Entretiens de la Belle et de la Bête (‘Conversation between Beauty and the Beast’) | 3:47 |
| 11 | V. Le Jardin féérique (‘The Fairy Garden’)   | 2:55 |

**Manos Hadjidakis** (1925–1994)

**Songs from Pornographia, Op. 43** (1982–83)

(arr. L. Isolani and M. Vandenbemden for voice and three guitars, 2019)

**8:08**

Text: Nikos Gatsos (1911–1992)

- |    |  |      |
|----|--|------|
| 12 | Pornographia                                   | 2:41 |
| 13 | I Panagia ton Patision (‘Our Lady of Patisia’) | 5:27 |

**Edvard Grieg** (1843–1907)

**Scenes from Peer Gynt, Op. 23** (1874–75)

(arr. M. Vandenbemden for three guitars, 2024)

**15:44**

- |    |   |      |
|----|---|------|
| 14 | I. Act I: Prelude: I Bryllupsgården (‘At the Wedding’)                            | 4:59 |
| 15 | II. Act IV: Arabisk dans (‘Arabian Dance’)  | 5:04 |
| 16 | III. Act IV: Anitras dans (‘Anitra’s Dance’)                                      | 3:38 |
| 17 | IV. Act II: Dans av Dovregubbens datter (‘Dance of the Mountain King’s Daughter’) | 2:03 |

*I Panagia ton Patision* by Nikos Gatsos and Manos Hadjidakis

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## Parole in Musica

### Bernstein • Grieg • Hadjidakis • Isolani • Ravel

The Volterra Project Trio here presents a diverse programme bound by a common thread. All the music is inspired by stories from literature, stage or screen, and the aim is to show how eloquently three guitars can together reach to the heart of those stories. The guitar, of course, excels at intimacy of expression, but it's equally good at incisive dance rhythms. It also has a vibrant palette of tone colours, and remarkably wide dynamics – as the unwary listener might learn the hard way, by turning up the volume too high in the quiet opening of *West Side Story* which begins the programme. That said, a somewhat larger-than-life level might enhance the impression of the guitar trio as a miniature orchestra, including a passable simulation of the Empress of the Pagodas' tam-tam!

As early as 1949, the choreographer Jerome Robbins had proposed a contemporary musical setting of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* story on the streets of New York, but it wasn't until 1955 that Leonard Bernstein and the script writer Arthur Laurents hit on the formula for a show which – two film adaptations later – has never lost its freshness and relevance. The idea of locating the action on Manhattan's Upper West Side (where there were at the time many new arrivals from Puerto Rico, and tensions were running high) opened up exciting possibilities for all three collaborators. For Bernstein, a composer equally at home in opera, jazz and Latin music, it was an absolute gift.

Though *West Side Story* is a tragedy, and a plea for peaceful coexistence instead of division and violence, there is no shortage of exuberance in the music, and sharp humour in the dialogue and in the song lyrics by the young Stephen Sondheim, a late addition to the team. The five scenes selected here belong mostly to that upbeat side, though the unsettling interval of the tritone keeps recurring throughout the score, to remind us that all is not well. It's there in the melodic figure at the start of the *Prologue*, where the white Jets and the Puerto Rican Sharks taunt each other in the streets; in the syncopated chords of the irresistible *Mambo*, that hormone-laden dance in the gym where the teenagers from both camps are encouraged to mix but end up having to be kept apart by the cops – all except for Tony and Maria, the star-crossed lovers who first meet there; in the *habanera* theme of the newly smitten Tony's solo *Maria*; and in that song's final chords, which prefigure the death-knell that ends the whole musical.

The *Tonight* quintet is a marvellous counterpoint of music and contrasting moods to rival anything in opera. It's the night of a rumble between the Jets and the Sharks, each of the two gangs working up their excitement as they head towards the agreed spot for the fight. Meanwhile, Tony and Maria can't wait to be in one another's arms, and wish the night could last forever, whereas Maria's friend Anita is simply looking forward to a steamy time with the Sharks' leader Bernardo after the rumble ('No matter if he's tired, as long as he's hot'), little knowing that he will soon be lying dead at Tony's hands. *America*, by contrast, is pure entertainment. It's a quick-fire verbal duel between the Sharks' girls (in the original stage version), the fans of the United States pouring scorn on those who pine for Puerto Rico – and vice versa.

Next we hear a colourful piece composed for the trio by its member Luca Isolani. *Note fuori campo* is a homage to the versatile Italian composer Nino Rota, known mainly for his film scores, but also for a wide-ranging body of concert works. In keeping with the *Parole in Musica* theme, the title means 'offscreen notes', a play on the words for 'offscreen speech'. Without quoting any of his actual music, Isolani sets out to evoke the enchanting melodies and atmospherics of Rota's soundtracks, which often feature traditional Italian instruments, and perfectly reflect the eclecticism and surrealism of Federico Fellini's films in particular. The piece begins with a brooding, fragmentary dialogue between the three guitars, and an improvisatory solo which soon gives way to episodes in the style of popular songs, punctuated by ironic asides using contrasting sonorities and percussive effects. After a moment of dreamlike suspension, with a tremolo melody in mandolin style, the mood abruptly changes to farce, echoing the most eccentric and explosive musical scenes from such Fellini films as *La strada*, *Juliet of the Spirits*, *La dolce vita* and *8½*.

Maurice Ravel, that most sophisticated composer, never lost the ability to see the world through the eyes of a child. He loved the old Mother Goose fairy stories, as recounted by Charles Perrault in his 1697 collection *Contes de ma Mère l'Oye*, and others from the same era. Mimie, the young daughter of Ravel's friends the Godebskis, later recalled: 'Ravel was my favourite because he used to tell me marvellous stories. I would sit on his knee and indefatigably he would begin "Once upon a time..." And it was Laideronnette, Beauty and the Beast and above all the adventures of a poor mouse that he had made up for me.' One day in 1908, Ravel presented Mimie and her brother Jean with a set of five children's piano duets that he had composed for them to play – an honour that they were a little too young to appreciate, these musical marvels seeming to them too much like hard work.

Of *Ma Mère l'Oye* Ravel wrote: 'The idea of evoking in these pieces the poetry of childhood naturally led me to simplify my style and to refine my means of expression'. The opening *Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty* – 20 bars of distilled loveliness – shows how artfully he achieved that aim. There follows the tale of Tom

Thumb, meandering through the forest and hoping to find his way back by leaving a trail of breadcrumbs, only to discover that the birds had come and eaten them all. Next comes an oriental interlude, reminiscent of the mechanical toys that so fascinated Ravel, and based on a pentatonic scale that uses only the black keys of the piano. Laideronnette, an ugly little princess, becomes the empress of the island of the 'pagodes' (Chinese figurines popular in 18th-century France). While she bathes, the animated figurines begin to sing and to play, on instruments commensurate with their size: theorboes made from walnut shells and almond-shell viols. The fourth piece begins with Beauty dancing a graceful waltz, before the hideous Beast (whose growling theme is played on the contrabassoon in Ravel's masterly orchestration) appears, and a tender conversation ensues. Beauty, seeing that he has a good heart, offers to marry him, at which point the Beast transmutes into a handsome prince, and the music dissolves into ecstatic unity. Finally, Ravel adds a scene of his own: Sleeping Beauty is awakened by Prince Charming, and the two walk in a noble procession through the fairy garden, ending with a triumphant peal of wedding bells.

Manos Hadjidakis, in common with Nino Rota, first shot to international fame with a film score, winning an Oscar for the title song from the 1960 Greek romantic comedy *Never on Sunday*; but in Greece itself he became a major cultural figure, not only through his many songs, but also through his writings, stage productions, and tireless promotion of innovative Greek artists of all kinds. The English composer John Tavener went as far as to say: 'He had the talent of Leonard Bernstein, but his vision went even further and his music went straight to the hearts of the Greek people'.

Hadjidakis described himself as a 'Magnus Eroticus', which is not as crudely boastful as it sounds. For him, Eros meant the platonic ideal of love for all that's beautiful and good, as well as symbolising youth, energy, desire, and freedom from conformity. The title chorus of his satirical show *Pornographia* (which had a disastrously brief run in Athens in 1982, but spawned a treasured album of songs), depicts pornography as the opposite of Eros – all that's debased and corrupt in the world – while boisterously affirming its rejection. By contrast, *I Panagia ton Patision* ('Our Lady of Patisia'), a setting of a poem by Nikos Gatsos, is a wistful ballad spiced with humour. A woman recalls her impoverished childhood among the gypsies; though uneducated, she gradually discovered hidden talents. Her 'luscious curves' made her irresistible to young men, who groaned when they took her: 'Baby, you're so fit you could win the Champions League!' (The Greek words are sung/spoken here, and in the last verse, by Antigoni Goni). Her beautiful singing voice also won her many fans, but now she has settled down to an orderly married life, and has become such a star cook that her friends say 'You're surely going to be the Virgin Mary of Patisia!'

The programme ends, as it began, with music inspired by the work of a great dramatist. *Peer Gynt* is among Henrik Ibsen's earliest plays, and the last that he wrote in verse. In many ways it was boldly innovative, its 40 scenes mixing realism and fantasy, autobiography and social satire. On the surface, though, it's a traditional Norse folk-tale, and when Edvard Grieg was persuaded to write the incidental music for its first production of 1876, he seems to have treated it as such: the music is direct, heartfelt and as colourful as any film score. The play itself is also cinematic in scope, making it a challenge to stage, and indeed to summarise in a few words. So let's settle for a brief description of the four numbers in this trio arrangement, only two of which (*Arabian Dance* and *Anitra's Dance*) are included in the famous orchestral suites that Grieg compiled for concert performance.

The *Prelude* is set in a wedding garden, where our antihero Peer Gynt, a charming but arrogant young braggart, first sets eyes on Solveig – the girl who will be the one true love of his life. (Her plaintive theme alternates with a lively *halling* played on the fiddle.) He also manages to abscond with the bride, an outrage that results in him running for his life to the mountains. There he encounters a mysterious woman in green: she turns out to be the Mountain King's daughter, whose burlesque troll dance we hear at the end of the set. When her father the troll king receives him in his great hall, Peer is granted permission to marry her, but only on conditions so terrifying that he flees, and sets off to travel the world. Many years later, he arrives in north Africa, where we first hear an exotically flavoured *Arabian Dance*, and then the suavely seductive dance of Anitra, a Bedouin chief's daughter who first leads him on, then steals all his possessions and rides off on his horse. And what of the ever-faithful Solveig? The reader will need to see the rest of the play, preferably with Grieg's heart-rending music, to find out.

John Taylor

13 **I Panagia ton Patision** (*recited excerpts*)

-εσύ κερδίζεις μανα μου και κύπελλο ΟΥΕΦΑ  
-εσύ θα γίνεις Παναγία μια μέρα στα πατησια.

*Baby, you're so fit you could win the Champions League!  
You're surely going to be the Virgin Mary of Patisia!*

*Nikos Gatsos (1911–1992)  
English translation: Antigoni Goni, John Taylor*

*I PANAGIA TON PATISION  
by Nikos Gatsos and Manos Hadjidakis  
Warner Chappell Music Italiana Srl (SIAE)/  
Seed Point Music Publishing*

## The Volterra Project Trio



Photo: Pepa Niebla

The Volterra Project Trio redefines classical guitar trio music, drawing inspiration from European Impressionism, Mediterranean folk traditions and cinematic scores. Formed in 2017 at the Volterra Project Summer Guitar Institute, the trio emerged from a deep friendship and shared artistic vision. Luca Isolani and Maarten Vandenbemden, teaching assistants at the Institute since 2016, joined forces with Antigoni Goni to create a vibrant ensemble uniting their creativity and talents as performers, composers and improvisers. Blending the diverse influences and expertise of these artists, the trio brings a fresh perspective to classical guitar ensemble playing. Antigoni Goni (Greece), internationally acclaimed for her exquisite tone and distinguished career in both solo and chamber music, contributes artistic inspiration and direction to the ensemble; Luca Isolani (Italy), a versatile performer and researcher, bridges classical, jazz, and contemporary influences with a deep connection to folk traditions; and Maarten Vandenbemden (Belgium), who crafts the trio's arrangements, brings his dynamic creativity to both the stage and his teaching. Together, they transform the guitar into a miniature orchestra, exploring its full range of sounds, colours and expressive possibilities. The trio's debut multimedia project, *Medio Siglo*, released in 2022 as a tribute to renowned luthier José Luis Romanillos, received widespread acclaim. The Volterra Project Trio made its United States debut at the 50th Guitar Foundation of America Convention in 2023, and continues to captivate audiences worldwide.

[www.volterraprojecttrio.com](http://www.volterraprojecttrio.com)



This diverse programme of works for guitar trio is bound by the common thread of music inspired by stories from literature, stage or screen. With its rhythmic exuberance and tragic beauty, Bernstein's *West Side Story* has never lost its freshness and relevance. Ensemble member Luca Isolani's *Note fuori campo* is a homage to the versatile Italian composer Nino Rota, who, like Manos Hadjidakis, first shot to international fame with an Oscar-winning film score. Ravel's *Ma Mère l'Oye* evokes the poetry of childhood with a refined expressiveness that makes it as popular and unforgettable as Grieg's music for *Peer Gynt*.

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### Music for Guitar Trio

- |              |  |              |
|--------------|--|--------------|
| <b>1–5</b>   | <b>Leonard Bernstein</b> (1918–1990)<br><b>Scenes from West Side Story</b> (1957)<br>(arr. Maarten Vandenbemden for three guitars)                           | <b>14:30</b> |
|              | <b>Luca Isolani</b> (b. 1987)  |              |
| <b>6</b>     | <b>Note fuori campo 'Omaggio a Nino Rota'</b> (2015)   | <b>5:38</b>  |
| <b>7–11</b>  | <b>Maurice Ravel</b> (1875–1937)<br><b>Ma Mère l'Oye ('Mother Goose') – Suite</b> (1908–10)<br>(arr. M. Vandenbemden for three guitars)                      | <b>13:57</b> |
| <b>12–13</b> | <b>Manos Hadjidakis</b> (1925–1994)<br><b>Songs from Pornographia, Op. 43</b> (1982–83)<br>(arr. L. Isolani and M. Vandenbemden for voice and three guitars) | <b>8:08</b>  |
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### The Volterra Project Trio

**Antigoni Goni, Luca Isolani, Maarten Vandenbemden, Guitar**

A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet

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