



CARTE BLANCHE CONCERT III:

# Violin Universe

Yura Lee, *violin*

## JULY 26

Wednesday, July 26

7:30 p.m., Stent Family Hall, Menlo School

### SPECIAL THANKS

*Music@Menlo dedicates this performance to Leslie Hsu and Rick Lenon with gratitude for their generous support.*

### PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Violinist Yura Lee performs an astounding array of works for solo violin, ranging from the adventurous musical experiments of the pre-Baroque era to examples of the most infectiously appealing folk styles of violin playing heard today. Concluding with Bach's monumental Chaconne, this program is a one-of-a-kind celebration of the violin's endless potential and timeless popularity.

#### HEINRICH IGNAZ FRANZ VON BIBER (1644–1704)

Passacaglia in g minor for Solo Violin, *The Guardian Angel*, from *The Mystery Sonatas* (ca. 1674–1676)

#### BLUEGRASS FIDDLELING (To be announced from the stage)

#### EUGÈNE YSAÏE (1858–1931)

Sonata in G Major for Solo Violin, op. 27, no. 5 (1924)  
*L'aurore*  
*Danse rustique*

#### GEORGE ENESCU (1881–1955)

*Ménétrier (Fiddler)* from *Impressions d'enfance*, op. 28 (1940)

#### HEINRICH WILHELM ERNST (1814–1865)

Grand Caprice on Schubert's *Der Erlkönig* for Solo Violin, op. 26 (1854)

#### NORWEGIAN FIDDLELING (To be announced from the stage)

#### JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685–1750)

Chaconne from Partita no. 2 in d minor for Solo Violin, BWV 1004  
(before 1720)  
Yura Lee, *violin*

# Program Notes: Violin Universe

Notes on the program by Dr. Richard E. Rodda

## HEINRICH IGNAZ FRANZ VON BIBER

(Born August 12, 1644, Wartenberg, Bohemia; died May 3, 1704, Salzburg)

**Passacaglia in g minor for Solo Violin, *The Guardian Angel, from The Mystery Sonatas***

**Composed:** ca. 1674–1676

**Published:** 1905

**Dedication:** Archbishop Maximilian Gandolph

**Other works from this period:** Two Arias for Violin, Two Violas, Violone, and Harpsichord (1673); *Missa Christi resurgentis* (mass) (ca. 1674); *Vespers* (sacred vocal work) (1674); *Laetatus sum* (sacred vocal work) (1676)

**Approximate duration:** 11 minutes

Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber, one of old Germany's most brilliant musical lights, was born into the family of a forester at Wartenberg, Bohemia, on August 12, 1644. Little is known of his musical training, but he had made a name for himself as a composer and violinist by 1668 sufficient enough for him to be appointed to the staff of the country estate at Kroměříž of Count Karl Liechtenstein-Kastelkorn, Prince-Bishop of Olmütz. Biber bolted from the count's service for unknown reasons in the autumn of 1670, closely followed by a warrant for his arrest. He holed up at Absam, near Innsbruck, with the violin maker Jacob Stainer and found a new position at the Salzburg court of Archbishop Maximilian Gandolph in 1672. He married there and rose steadily through the ranks of the archiepiscopal music establishment—Cathedral Choir Director in 1677, Vice-Kapellmeister in 1679, and Kapellmeister and Dean of the choir school in 1684; he was ennobled by Emperor Leopold in 1690. During this ascendancy, Biber patched up relations with Count Karl in Kroměříž to the extent that he sent him copies of all of his works. When Biber died, in Salzburg on May 3, 1704, he was acknowledged throughout the German-speaking lands as the greatest violinist of his time and one of the day's most distinctive and original composers.

The veneration of the Virgin Mary traces back almost to the establishment of Christianity itself, and devotion to the mother of Jesus found a strong advocate in Archbishop Maximilian Gandolph, Biber's employer at Salzburg. Maximilian gave special prominence to the annual services during October observing the "Rosary Mysteries"—pivotal events in Mary's life from the Annunciation, through the birth, life, and death of her son, to her coronation as Queen of Heaven. He joined and promoted the Marian Confraternity in Salzburg, one of the many groups of pious individuals who gathered regularly to pray, meditate, and discuss the Mysteries, and he was the principal backer of the construction of the pilgrimage church dedicated to Mary at Maria Plain, just north of Salzburg. (Mozart wrote his *Coronation Mass* for the Easter service there in 1779.)

Biber apparently began his *Rosenkranz* [*Rosary or Mystery*] *Sonatas* soon after arriving in Salzburg in 1672, probably with the intent of performing them at the services in October that the Marian Confraternity held in the Aula Academica (Academic Hall) of Salzburg University. There are fifteen *Mystery Sonatas* for violin and continuo and a concluding passacaglia (variations on a repeating chord pattern) for unaccompanied violin. In the sumptuous manuscript dedicated to Maximilian in which the works have been preserved, each is preceded by an engraving that reproduces one of the frescoes decorating the walls of the Aula Academica. The sonatas, according to the manuscript, are collections that have been arranged in liturgical groupings: the Joyful Mysteries (The Annunciation, Mary's Visit to Elizabeth, The Birth of Christ—The Adoration of the Shepherds, Jesus's Presentation in the Temple, The Twelve-Year-Old Jesus in the Temple); the Sorrowful Mysteries (Christ's Agony in the Garden, The Scourging of Jesus, The Crowning with Thorns, The Carrying of the Cross, The Crucifixion of Christ); the Glorious Mysteries (The Resurrection of Christ, Christ's Ascension into Heaven, The Descent

of the Holy Spirit, The Assumption of Mary into Heaven, Mary's Coronation as Queen of Heaven); and the concluding passacaglia, accompanied by an image of a Guardian Angel holding the hand of a child.

The passacaglia, one of music's most elemental formal types, here is built on sixty-five repetitions of a four-note descending phrase. The movement's somber mood recalls the crucifixion that is the culmination of the Sorrowful Mysteries at the heart of the cycle, but its steadfast structural solidity suggests the eternal trust that the believer, represented by the child in the Salzburg fresco, has in the Guardian Angel leading him by the hand.

## EUGÈNE YSAÏE

(Born July 16, 1858, Liège, Belgium; died May 12, 1931, Brussels)

**Sonata in G Major for Solo Violin, op. 27, no. 5**

**Composed:** 1924

**Published:** 1924

**Dedication:** Mathieu Crickboom

**Other works from this period:** Sonata for Solo Cello, op. 28 (1924); Ten Preludes for Solo Violin (1928); String Trio, *Le Chimay* (1927)

**Approximate duration:** 10 minutes

Eugène Ysaÿe (ee-za-ee) was one of the most beloved musicians in the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century, a violinist revered by his peers and lionized by audiences, a teacher of immense influence, a conductor of international repute, and a composer of excellent skill. Ysaÿe began studying violin when he was four, and three years later he was admitted to the Liège Conservatory, where he won a prize for his playing and a scholarship to study with Henryk Wieniawski at the Brussels Conservatory from 1874 to 1876. He learned in 1876 that Henri Vieuxtemps had recovered sufficiently from a recent stroke to accept a few students, so he moved to Paris to receive that virtuoso's instruction for the next three years. After serving as Concertmaster of Benjamin Bilse's orchestra (the predecessor of the Berlin Philharmonic) and touring Germany, Scandinavia, and Russia, Ysaÿe settled from 1883 to 1886 in Paris, where he formed close ties with many of the city's leading musicians: Franck, Chausson, Debussy, and others composed works for him. From 1886 to 1898, he was professor of violin at the Brussels Conservatory, where he also established the Ysaÿe String Quartet (for which Saint-Saëns wrote his Quartet no. 1) and founded the orchestral Concerts Ysaÿe, both of which were principally dedicated to promoting new French and Belgian music. Increasing commitments for tours as violinist and conductor required him to leave the conservatory in 1898, though he continued to live in Brussels until the outbreak of World War I in 1914. Following his debut in the United States in 1894, Ysaÿe's American prestige equaled that which he enjoyed in Europe, and he was named Music Director of the Cincinnati Symphony in 1918. He returned to Europe in 1922 to revive the Concerts Ysaÿe and resume his tours. Declining health caused by diabetes and an affliction of his bowing arm began to limit his activities in his later years, however, and in 1929 he was forced to have a foot amputated. He died in Brussels in May 1931. In 1937, Queen Elisabeth of Belgium, a longtime violin student of his, inaugurated an annual violin competition in Brussels—the Prix International Eugène Ysaÿe (renamed the Queen Elisabeth Competition after World War II)—in his honor.

Though he was famed internationally as a supreme master of the violin, Ysaÿe also composed a sizeable number of original works, most of them for his own instrument. His smaller pieces for violin and piano are regular recital items, but his most admired compositions are the Six Sonatas for Unaccompanied Violin (op. 27), which he was inspired to compose after hearing Joseph Szigeti play a Bach solo sonata in 1924. These sonatas are in an advanced stylistic idiom influenced by the modern music of France and call for feats of

\*Bolded terms are defined in the glossary, which begins on page 92.

technical mastery that rival those required by the Solo Caprices of Paganini. The Sonata no. 5—dedicated to the Belgian virtuoso Mathieu Crickboom, Ysaÿe’s student, a member of his string quartet, and later a founder of his own ensemble and a distinguished teacher—comprises two complementary character pieces. The first is titled *L’aurore* (*The Dawn*) and evokes its subject from the quiet of night and the morning stirrings of the earth to the brilliant arpeggios of sunlight that sweep across the instrument’s full compass. The *Danse rustique* begins with a vigorous but rhythmically asymmetrical strain which is nicely balanced by a central section of regular motion and quieter sentiment. The opening dance returns in an exhilarating variation that becomes more flamboyantly virtuosic as the movement nears its close.

## GEORGE ENESCU

(Born August 19, 1881, Liveni-Virnav, Romania; died May 4, 1955, Paris)

**Ménétrier (Fiddler) from *Impressions d’enfance*, op. 28**

**Composed:** 1940

**Published:** 1952

**Dedication:** in memory of Eduard Caudella

**Other works from this period:** Cello Sonata no. 2 in C Major, op. 26 (1935); Orchestral Suite no. 3 in D Major, op. 27, *Villageoise* (1938); Piano Quintet in a minor, op. 29 (1940)

**Approximate duration:** 4 minutes

George Enescu, Romania’s greatest composer, was one of the most prodigiously gifted musicians of the twentieth century. He began playing violin at age four, wrote his first compositions a year later, and was admitted to the Vienna Conservatory when he was seven. He was already an accomplished violinist and composer by the time he moved to Paris to continue his studies with Massenet and Fauré when he was fourteen. The first concert of his works was given in Paris in 1897; the next year he introduced the *Poème roumain*, which he counted as his Opus 1. During the years before the First World War, Enescu’s career as violin soloist and chamber ensemble player flourished, he was much in demand as a conductor, and his compositions, especially the two *Romanian Rhapsodies* of 1901, carried his name into the world’s concert halls. Though he regarded himself as a cosmopolitan musician rather than a strictly national one (he actually spent more time in Paris than in his homeland), Enescu had a decisive influence on the music of Romania. In his native country, he encouraged performances, wrote articles, lectured, conducted, taught, undertook research, and also fostered interest in a national tradition of concert music by instituting the Romanian Composers’ Society and founding the Enescu Prize for original compositions. His work not only enhanced the world’s awareness of Romanian music, but he also gave that country’s composers and performers an unprecedented model and inspiration.

Enescu’s compositions show a broad range of influences, from Bach, Vienna, and Fauré to Strauss, Debussy, Bartók, and Stravinsky, but it is the indigenous music of Romania that dominates his 1940 *Impressions d’enfance* (*Impressions from Childhood*), a suite of ten continuous movements evoking the sights and sounds of the composer’s early years. He dedicated the score to the memory of his first violin teacher, the noted composer, violinist, and pedagogue Eduard Caudella (1841–1924), whose Violin Concerto no. 1 Enescu had premiered in 1915. Romania stands at the crossroads between the familiar cultures of Europe and the intoxicating milieus of the Middle East—its capital, Bucharest, is closer to Istanbul than to Vienna and closer to Cairo than to Paris. The country’s folk music is based largely upon the traditions of the Gypsies, those peoples whose ancient ancestors were brought from the distant lands of Egypt and India centuries ago as servants to the Roman conquerors. This cultural heritage infused native Romanian music with a unique Oriental aura that lends it a very different character from the unaffected simplicity of the folk tunes of Britain, France, and Germany—the different movement of melodic tones, the flying virtuosity and deep melancholy of the Gypsy fiddler, and a vibrant rhythmic vitality all recall its exotic origins. The style and spirit

of Gypsy fiddling with which Enescu was imbued from childhood find concert analogues in the flamboyantly virtuosic opening section of the *Impressions d’enfance*: *Ménétrier* (*Lautarul*, in Romanian)—*Fiddler*.

## HEINRICH WILHELM ERNST

(Born May 6, 1814, Brno, Moravia; died October 8, 1865, Nice, France)

**Grand Caprice on Schubert’s *Der Erlkönig* for Solo Violin, op. 26**

**Composed:** 1854

**Published:** 1854, Hamburg

**Other works from this period:** *Hungarian Melodies* in A Major for Violin and Orchestra, op. 22 (ca. 1850); Violin Concerto in f-sharp minor, op. 23, *Pathétique* (1851); Fantasy on Meyerbeer’s *Le prophète* for Violin and Orchestra, op. 24 (1851)

**Approximate duration:** 4 minutes

“He was the greatest violinist I have ever heard; he towered above all others” (Joseph Joachim). “One of the artists whom I love the most” (Hector Berlioz). “He is able to win over all parties whenever he pleases” (Robert Schumann). Felix Mendelssohn eagerly accompanied him at the piano on numerous occasions. Joachim, Brahms, and Wieniawski gave benefit concerts for him when he was terminally ill and in financial distress, and after a joint concert in 1837 with Niccolò Paganini in Marseilles, the virtuoso himself wrote, “The consensus of opinion was that I play with more sentiment, while he conquers more difficulties.” Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst was one of the foremost musicians of the early nineteenth century, widely regarded during his day as the only violinist to seriously rival Paganini.

Ernst was born in Brno, Moravia, in 1814, began concertizing at age nine, entered the Vienna Conservatory a year later, and found the inspiration for his life’s work when he heard Paganini perform in Vienna in 1828. He followed Paganini on his tours, memorizing his compositions at his recitals, secretly renting hotel rooms next to Paganini’s to listen to him rehearse, and amazing the composer by playing the pieces for him virtually note-perfect. (Paganini did not publish any of his violin music during his lifetime in an attempt to conceal the secrets of his technique.) Ernst withdrew from concert life for three years to perfect his playing after making his debut in Paris in 1831, but he then toured throughout Europe for the next quarter-century to unanimous praise, the first Jewish violinist to receive such acclaim. He visited London regularly and settled there permanently in 1855, devoting much time to chamber music, most notably in helping to establish Beethoven’s quartets at the core of the repertory. Ernst’s health failed in 1862 from what was described as gout or neuralgia (or, perhaps, nerve damage from carpal tunnel syndrome from the muscle overuse with which modern musicians are only too familiar) and he moved to Nice, where he died three years later.

Ernst’s compositions, all for his own instrument, include a *Concerto Pathétique*, numerous solo works with orchestra or piano accompaniment, and several fiendishly difficult pieces for unaccompanied violin. In 1854, he made an astoundingly virtuosic transcription of Schubert’s famous song *Der Erlkönig* (*Erl King*, D. 328, October 1815)—a dramatic realization, virtually a mini-opera for voice and piano, of Goethe’s gripping ballad (i.e., a narrative poem) about the specter of death luring an ailing child to the afterlife while his father gallops on horseback for help with the boy in his arms, ultimately in vain. Ernst’s arrangement encompasses the furious triplet accompaniment of the horse’s pounding hooves as well as the vocal lines of the tragedy’s four characters: narrator, father, child, and deadly shade—the Erlkönig himself.

## JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

(Born March 21, 1685, Eisenach, Germany; died July 28, 1750, Leipzig)

### Chaconne from Partita no. 2 in d minor for Solo Violin, BWV 1004

**Composed:** Before 1720

**Other works from this period:** *Die Zeit, die Tag und Jahre macht*, BWV 134a (secular cantata) (1719); *Six English Suites* for Solo Keyboard (before 1720); *Six Suites* for Solo Cello (ca. 1720); *Fifteen Inventions* for Solo Keyboard (ca. 1720, rev. 1723); *Prelude and Fugue in d minor for Organ*, BWV 539 (after 1720)

**Approximate duration:** 14 minutes

Bach composed the set of three sonatas and three partitas for unaccompanied violin before 1720, during his six-year tenure as Director of Music at the court of Anhalt-Cöthen, north of Leipzig. Though there is not a letter, preface, contemporary account, or shred of any other documentary evidence extant to shed light on the genesis and purpose of these pieces, the technical demands that they impose upon the player indicate that they were intended for a virtuoso performer: Johann Georg Pisendel, a student of Vivaldi's, Jean-Baptiste Volumier, leader of the Dresden court orchestra, and Joseph Spiess, Concertmaster of the Cöthen orchestra, have been advanced as possible candidates. After the introduction of the basso continuo early in the seventeenth century, it had been the seldom-broken custom to supply a work for solo instrument with keyboard accompaniment, so the tradition behind Bach's solo violin sonatas and partitas is slight. Johann Paul von Westhoff, a violinist at Weimar when Bach played in the orchestra there in 1703, published a set of six unaccompanied partitas in 1696, and Heinrich Biber, Johann Jakob Walther, and Pisendel all composed similar works. All of these composers were active in and around Dresden. Bach visited Dresden shortly before assuming his post at Cöthen, and he may well have become familiar with some of this music at that time. Though Bach may have found models and inspiration in the music of his predecessors, his works for unaccompanied violin far surpass any others in technique and musical quality.

The wondrous chaconne that closes the Partita no. 2 in d minor is one of the most sublime pieces Bach ever created. The chaconne is an ancient variations form in which a short, repeated chord pattern is decorated with changing figurations and elaborations. Bach subjected his eight-measure theme to sixty-four continuous variations, beginning and ending in d minor but modulating in the center section to the luminous key of D major. Of the chaconne, the nineteenth-century German Bach authority Philipp Spitta wrote:

From the grave majesty of the beginning to the thirty-second notes which rush up and down like the very demons; from the tremulous arpeggios that hang almost motionless, like veiling clouds above a dark ravine...to the devotional beauty of the D major section, where the evening sun sets in a peaceful valley: the spirit of the master urges the instrument to incredible utterances. At the end of the D major section it sounds like an organ, and sometimes a whole band of violins seems to be playing. This chaconne is a triumph of spirit over matter such as even Bach never repeated in a more brilliant manner.

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