FACULTY RECITAL

Jeffrey Heisler, saxophone
and
I-Chen Yeh, piano

Tuesday, September 6, 2022 at 7:30 p.m.
University Presbyterian Church
Italian Concerto (BWV 971)  
J.S. Bach  
(1685-1750)

I. Allegro animato  
II. Andante molto espressivo  
III. Presto Giocoso

Incantation and Dance  
William Grant Still  
(1895-1978)

Sonatina in G minor, op. 100  
Antonín Dvořák  
(1841-1904)

I. Allegro risoluto  
II. Larghetto  
III. Molto vivace  
IV. Allegro

Scaramouche  
Darius Milhaud  
(1892-1974)

I. Vif  
II. Modéré  
III. Brazileira

Oblivion  
Astor Piazzolla  
(1921-1992)

All works arranged and adapted for saxophone and piano by Jeffrey Heisler
Bach: Italian Concerto, BWV 971

Baroque music was all about national styles and Bach learned the Italian style by copying out and transcribing the works of composers such as Vivaldi, Albinoni and Torelli during his early years of employment in Weimar (1708-1717). It was this knowledge that he applied in composing his Concerto nach Italienischem Gusto (Concerto after the Italian Taste) included in the second part of his Clavierübung published in 1735.

To compose a ‘concerto’ for a solo instrument meant reproducing in some way the textural contrast between solo instrument and orchestral tutti on which the ritornello form of the Italian concerto relied for its forward progress. It was for this reason that Clavierübung II was written exclusively for the two-manual harpsichord, with its possibility of creating dynamic contrasts by means of hopping up and down between keyboards—with both hands at once, or one hand at a time, allowing for a wide range of effects to be achieved.

The two protagonists in Bach’s Italian Concerto are clearly audible in the first movement, in which the ‘orchestra’ which opens the movement is given a fuller more resonant texture by dint of block chords and a wider range in the bass while the part of the ‘soloist’ is written in a smaller range, higher up, peppered with smaller note values and occasional ornamentation.

The distinction is even clearer still in the slow movement in which the role of the orchestra is given entirely to the left hand, its ostinato pattern of repeated thirds and long pedal notes a strangely austere accompaniment to a right-hand soloist spinning out long strands of highly ornamented melody.

The Presto finale returns to the ritornello form of alternation between the louder, fuller texture of the orchestra, obsessed with a theme comprised of a dramatic leap and swift follow-up run, in continual dialogue with a more nimble soloist more occupied with broken chord passagework and harmonic sequences.

Incantation and Dance – William Grant Still

William Grant Still was born in Mississippi and is commonly referred to as the “Dean of African-American Composers”. Born into a family of musicians and teachers, he moved to Arkansas as an infant and later studied violin. While earning a bachelor of science degree at Wilberforce University, he conducted the band and began to orchestrate and compose. He later completed his formal studies at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music.

Still entered the world of popular music before beginning his compositional career in New York and eventually moving to Los Angeles. His accolades include awards and honorary degrees from symphonic and educational institutions. Heavily inspired by black spirituals, he wrote over 150 musical works including operas, ballets, symphonies, chamber works, and arrangements of folk themes before his death in 1978.

Incantation and Dance, begins with the Incantation, a melancholy depiction of a far-off place, complete with lyrical vocal melodies. The piece then proceeds directly into the Dance, a joyful lilting exuberant display. We then return back to the opening materials for a short time before ending again with the exciting materials of the dance.

Sonatina – Antonín Dvořák

Many composers of the 19th centuries traveled widely, seeking fame and fortune outside their native lands. Few, however, ventured across the Atlantic as Antonín Dvořák did, in 1892, for a three-year stay in New York as the director of that city’s National Conservatory. Dvořák, a dyed-in-the-wool Czech who had long since become a thoroughly Bohemian composer — that is, he had turned to his country’s folk music for inspiration and imbued his works with its spirit — warmed to his role as a visiting celebrity, and loudly championed America’s native music (African-American and Native American melodies).

The “New World” Symphony (No. 9) is the best-known example of Dvořák’s warmhearted response to the music that he considered our folk heritage, but his “American” works also include this Sonatina. In all of these, we find music by a genial visitor who, inevitably, was seeing America through Czech-colored glasses. The Sonatina, a piece he dedicated to his six children “to commemorate the completion of my 100th work,” and which, theoretically, he meant to be within the technical reach of young people, uses a melody he had heard in Spillville, “a completely Czech place in the state of Iowa, 1300 miles from New York...” In the first movement, Dvořák does indeed imbue the music with a kind of Stephen Foster-like spirit that strikes close to his concept of our folklore.

The Larghetto second movement is even more strikingly American in its idealization of Native American music, though Dvořák’s Czech nature is hardly ever completely obscured. The Scherzo third movement dances gaily and energetically, and the Finale cavorts with vigor and sings tenderly.
Scaramouche – Darius Milhaud
In the years 1917-1918, diplomat, poet and dramatist Paul Claudel served as French minister to Brazil and engaged Darius Milhaud, then a promising young composer, as his secretary. While in Brazil, Milhaud spent a good part of his time soaking up the native music. Those two years and the visit to New York in 1922 – specifically to Harlem – influenced his music for the rest of his life.

In 1937, two pianist friends of Milhaud requested him to write for them a work for two pianos. Milhaud put together the three-movement suite Scaramouche from some incidental music he composed for a children's play (first and third movements) and from his overture to the play Bolivar (second movement). The title comes from one of the stock characters – a clown – of the commedia dell’arte, Italy’s version of sixteenth-century slapstick. Milhaud did not think much of the work and tried to urge his publisher not to publish it – luckily to no avail. It was premiered in the fall of 1937 at the Paris World Fair and, to Milhaud's surprise, was an instant success. It is one of the most popular two-piano works in the repertoire. Two years later he transcribed it for saxophone and orchestra and in 1941, at the request of Benny Goodman, for clarinet and orchestra. Since then it has been transcribed for innumerable orchestral and instrumental combinations.

Scaramouche is strongly influenced by Brazilian musical language, especially the outer movements. The rambunctious first movement, marked Vif, involves a lot of noodling, followed by a tune that either is, or closely imitates a French folksong. The second, Modéré, is an attenuated slow march, whose middle section is more like a cradle song. Milhaud's Brazilian voice comes out in Brazileira, in the style of a Samba.

Oblivion – Astor Piazzolla
Astor Piazzolla was one of the great composers of tango music. Piazzolla spent his formative years in New York City, and was a bandoneon prodigy (the bandoneon is the relative of the accordion that is used in tango music.) He studied classical music composition as well as tango. In 1952, he won the composition prize in France, for which the French government honored him with a scholarship to study in Paris with Nadia Boulanger. "She was to me like my second mother. Nadia made me discover the musical world that I was waiting for such a long time." She encouraged him to pursue his own music as it was clear where his musical roots lay. Piazzolla's "Nuevo Tango" revolutionized tango as an art form; his treatment of tango as a concert form (instead of a dance form,) although not always welcomed by the establishment, redefined how composers, performers, and dancers heard tango music.

Piazzolla lived in Italy periodically during the Argentine dictatorship of the 1970's and 1980's, and in 1984 composed Oblivion as music for a film by Mario Bellochio entitled Enrico IV. Oblivion is written in the style of a milonga, a song form that predates the tango. It has become one of Piazzolla's most popular works, and has been adapted for performance by a variety of solo instruments.

Jeffrey Heisler, saxophone
Award-winning concert saxophonist, pedagogue and soprano chair of the acclaimed Assembly Quartet, Jeffrey Heisler serves on the faculty of Oakland University as Associate Professor of Saxophone. Dr. Heisler holds degrees in Saxophone Performance and Music Education from Bowling Green State University (DMA, MM) and Central Michigan University (BME). Prior to his appointment at Oakland University, Heisler served on the faculties of Kent State University and Wayne State University.

Among Heisler's significant accomplishments are a Fischoff National Chamber Music Competition Gold Medal, prizewinner in the Music Teachers National Association (MTNA) Chamber Music and Young Artist Competitions, and honors as “Outstanding Classical Soloist” in Downbeat Magazine. Heisler has concertized throughout North America, Asia, and Europe performing with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Michigan Opera Theatre, Jimmy Dorsey Orchestra, Benny Goodman Orchestra, John Philip Sousa Band, Toledo Symphony Orchestra, and Stuttgart Ballet Orchestra. In demand as a guest soloist and recitalist, he has appeared at the BGSU New Music Festival, Michigan Music Conference, CBDNA Conferences, North American Saxophone Alliance (NASA) Conferences, World Saxophone Congresses and many more.

An advocate of contemporary music, Heisler promotes the creation of new repertoire for the saxophone by commissioning and premiering works by composers such as David R. Gillingham, Jennifer Higdon, David Lang, John Mackey, Marc Mellits, Steve Reich, Marilyn Shrude, and Chen Yi. In addition, he has worked with the Pulitzer-Prize winning composer Ellen Taaffe Zwilich on a transcription of her violin work Episodes for soprano saxophone and piano, as well as collaborated with electronic music pioneer Morton Subotnick in creating a new version of his In Two Worlds for alto saxophone and interactive computer (MAX/MSP). Heisler has also performed the American premieres of Recit (Chemin VII) by Luciano Berio, RASCH II by Franco Donatoni, and Entführung (Abduction) by Karlheinz Stockhausen.
Heisler's acclaimed debut solo album Gradient and the Assembly Quartet’s in search of stillness are released on the AMP Recordings label. Additionally, Heisler can also be heard on Centaur Records, White Pine Music, and Navona Records. Heisler’s research interests include arranging existing works from prominent composers for the saxophone. His adaptations for the saxophone are published by the Theodore Presser Co., Schirmer Music Co., SMP Press, and Edizioni Berben.

Heisler is a Selmer Paris and Legère Reeds Performing Artist-Clinician.

I-Chen Yeh, piano
A native of Kaohsiung, Taiwan, award-winning pianist I-Chen Yeh enjoys an international career as a solo and collaborative performer. Among her significant accomplishments include competition prizes throughout Taiwan, Japan, and the United States. A performer devoted to contemporary music, Yeh’s solo and collaborative performances strive to highlight a new and exciting repertory. Her passion for new music has led to collaborations with notable composers such as Pulitzer Prize winners Steven Stucky and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich. In addition she has commissioned and premiered works for solo piano and other chamber music by David Rakowski, Marc Mellits, Greg Sandow, Andres Carrizo, Timothy Stulman, David Gillingham, Andrea Reinkemeyer, Anthony Donofrio, and Jeff Weston.

Yeh has appeared at many world renowned music festivals, including the Aspen Music Festival, theBowdoin Music Festival, Bowling Green State University’s New Music and Art Festivals, Eastern Music Festival, the Internationale Wiener Musik Seminar, Threshold Electroacoustic Festival, and the Ball State University New Music Festival. Recent concert appearances include performances at (le)poisson rouge (NYC), the Interlochen Center for the Arts, the Yamaha Performing Artist Center (Taipei, Taiwan), the Taiwan National Concert Hall, and many Universities and Conservatories throughout the United States.

Yeh holds degrees from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music (BM), the Eastman School of Music (MM), and Bowling Green State University (DMA). Her primary teachers include Laura Melton, Angela Cheng, and Thomas Schumacher. She has also performed in master-classes led by internationally renowned pianists such as Stephen Hough, Nelita True, Robert Levin, John Perry, and James Giles. Yeh is an active member of Music Teachers National Association (MTNA), where she served as coordinator of the Ohio junior and senior division piano competitions. In addition, she is a member of several professional chamber music ensembles, including the Heisler/Yeh Duo with saxophonist, Jeffrey Heisler, the Primary Colors Trio (saxophone, piano, and percussion), and an exciting new piano duo with pianist Jiung Yoon. Currently, Dr. Yeh serves on the faculty of Oakland University (MI) as Instructor of Applied Piano and Coordinator of Instrumental Collaborative Piano.