Yo-Yo Ma, cello & Kathryn Stott, piano
THU, MAR 13 / 7 PM / GRANADA THEATRE

Igor Stravinsky: Suite italienne
Introduzione
Serenata
Aria
Tarantella
Minuetto e finale

Three Pieces:
Heitor Villa-Lobos: Alma brasileira (arr. Jorge Calandrelli)
Astor Piazzolla: Oblivion (arr. Kyoko Yamamoto)
Camargo Guarnieri: Dansa negra (arr. Jorge Calandrelli)

Manuel de Falla: 7 canciones populares españolas, G. 40
El paño moruno
Seguidilla murciana
Asturiana
Jota
Nana
Canción
Polo

Intermission

Olivier Messiaen: “Louange à l’éternité de Jésus” from Quatuor pour la fin du temps

Johannes Brahms: Violin Sonata No. 3 in D Minor, op. 108 (originally written for violin)
Allegro
Adagio
Un poco presto e con sentimento
Finale: Presto agitato

About the Program

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971): Suite italienne

In the years after World War I, Stravinsky found himself at an impasse as a composer, unwilling to return to the grand manner of the “Russian” ballets that had made him famous, but unsure how to proceed. Serge Diaghilev, impresario of the Ballets Russes, suggested a ballet based on themes by the Italian composer Giovanni Pergolesi (1710-1736) and showed him some of Pergolesi’s music. Stravinsky was entranced. Over the next year he composed a ballet with song in 18 parts, based on themes from Pergolesi’s operas and instrumental music. Stravinsky kept
Pergolesi’s melodic and bass lines, but supplied his own harmony and brought to this music his incredible rhythmic vitality.

Stravinsky made several arrangements for instrumental duos of excerpts from *Pulcinella*. The arrangement of excerpts for cello and piano, made in 1932 by the composer and Gregor Piatigorsky, opens with a jaunty *Introduzione* (the ballet’s *Overture*), followed by a lyric *Serenata*, based on an aria from Pergolesi’s opera *Il Flaminio*. The *Aria* is a transcription of the bass aria “Con questo parolina” from *Pulcinella*, while the blistering *Tarantella* rushes to a surprising and sudden ending. The concluding section is in two parts: a slow *Minuetto* full of complex double-stops leads without pause to the exciting *Finale*.


As a young man, Heitor Villa-Lobos spent much of his free time playing with groups of streets musicians in Rio de Janeiro. In the process he learned a great deal about Brazilian popular music, and he fell in love with a particular form of it, the *choro*. This was a body of dances and serenades, often of European origin, that were performed by groups of street musicians. The *choro* became popular in Rio after 1870 and developed a distinctly Brazilian accent, taking on local rhythms and the sound of street instruments.

In 1923, Villa-Lobos moved to Paris, and there – far from home – he returned to this form of his youth and wrote a series of 14 *choros*. Villa-Lobos described his method in detail: “The Chôros represent a new form of musical composition in which different modalities of Brazilian Indian and popular music are synthesized, having as its principal elements rhythm and some typical melody of a popular nature, which appears in the work every now and then, always modified according to the personality of the composer. The harmonic procedures, too, are almost a complete stylization of the original. The word ‘serenade’ can give an approximate idea of what ‘choros’ means.”

Villa-Lobos gave the *Choros No. 5* the nickname *Alma brasileira*: “Brazilian Soul.” Originally for solo piano, this music is heard on this program in an arrangement for cello and piano by the Argentinian composer Jorge Calandrelli.


Very early Astor Piazzolla became a virtuoso on the bandoneón, the Argentinian accordion-like instrument that uses buttons rather than a keyboard. On this instrument Piazzolla gradually evolved his own style, one that combines the tango, jazz and classical music. In his hands, the tango – which had deteriorated into a soft, popular form – was transformed into music capable of a variety of expression and fusing sharply contrasted moods: His tangos are by turn fiery, melancholy, passionate, tense, violent, lyric and always driven by an endless supply of rhythmic energy.

*Oblivion* comes from the sultry side of the tango. Over the melting rhythms of the opening, the haunting main theme sings its sad song, and this will return in a number of guises. Piazzolla
varies the accompaniment beneath this tune, and the tango stays firmly within its somber and expressive opening mood.

**Camargo Guarnieri (1907-1993): Dansa negra (arr. Jorge Calandrelli)**

Camargo Guarnieri has been called “the Brazilian Copland,” and there are a number of similarities between those two composers, who were exact contemporaries and good friends. Both studied piano and composition as young men; both went to Paris for further study; both returned to their native countries and made use of folk materials in their compositions; and both became conductors and educators during the final decades of their careers.

Originally for piano, the *Dansa negra* is heard on this program in Calandrelli’s arrangement for cello and piano. Inspired by the rhythms of the folk music of Brazil’s black population, the sultry *Dansa negra* swings along its 2/2 meter (Guarnieri’s marking is *soturno*: “gloomy”). The music rises to a climax, then falls away to conclude quietly on fragments of its fundamental rocking rhythm.

**Manuel de Falla (1876-1946): 7 canciones populares españolas, G. 40**

Falla composed his *Seven Popular Spanish Songs* in 1914 by taking the melodic line of seven Spanish popular or folk songs and harmonizing them himself, occasionally rewriting or expanding the original melodic line to suit his own purposes. Several years later, the Polish violinist Paul Kochanski arranged the songs – with the approval of the composer – for violin and piano and published them as *Suite populaire espagnole*. The music is heard at this concert in an arrangement for cello and piano.

*El paño moruno* or “The Moorish Cloth” (*Allegretto vivace*) is based exactly on the famous song, while the *Seguidilla murciana* is a dance in triple time originally from Murcia, a city in southeastern Spain. *Asturiana* (*Andante tranquillo*) is a tune from Asturia, a province in the northwest part of Spain. *Jota* (*Allegro vivo*) is the best-known part of the suite. A *jota* is a dance in triple time from northern Spain, sometimes accompanied by castanets. Slow sections alternate with fast here, and the extensive use of chorded pizzicatos may be intended to imitate the sound of castanets.

*Nana* (*Calmo e sostenuto*) is an arrangement of an old Andalusian cradle song, and de Falla said that hearing this melody sung to him by his mother was his earliest memory. *Canción* (*Allegretto*) repeats a dance theme continuously: The entire middle section is performed on artificial harmonics. A *polo* is a specific form: an Andalusian folk song or dance in 3/8 time, sometimes with coloratura outbursts. Though this particular *Polo*, marked *Vivo*, is based on Andalusian elements, it is largely de Falla’s own composition.

**Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992): “Louange à l’éternité de Jésus” from Quatuor pour la fin du temps**

Called up during World War II, Olivier Messiaen was serving as a medical auxiliary when the Germans overran France in the spring of 1940. He was taken prisoner and sent to a POW camp
east of Dresden, where he discovered among his fellow prisoners a violinist, a clarinetist and a cellist. A sympathetic German camp commander supplied Messiaen with manuscript paper and arranged to have an old upright piano brought in for his use. That fall, Messiaen wrote an extended work called *Quartet for the End of Time* for the four musicians, who gave the premiere performance at that prison camp – Stalag VIII A – on Jan. 15, 1941. Their audience consisted of 5,000 fellow POWs, who sat outside in subfreezing temperatures to hear the performance. “Never have I been listened to with such attention and understanding,” said Messiaen of that occasion.

Messiaen – a devout Catholic – took his inspiration from the Revelation of St. John the Divine in the Apocrypha, specifically from the 10th chapter: “I saw a mighty angel, descending from heaven, clothed in a cloud, having a rainbow on his head. His face was as the sun, his feet as columns of fire. He placed his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the earth, and, supporting himself on the sea and on the earth, he raised his hand towards Heaven and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, saying: There will be no more Time; but on the day of the trumpet of the seventh angel, the mystery of God will be completed.”

“Louange à l’éternité de Jésus” ("Praise to the Eternity of Jesus") is the eighth and final movement of the quartet. The composer himself provided a description of this movement that is worth quoting in full: “Expansive violin solo balancing the cello solo of the fifth movement. Why this second glorification? It addresses itself more specifically to the second aspect of Jesus – to Jesus the man, to the Word made flesh, raised up immortal from the dead so as to communicate His life to us. It is total love. Its slow rising to a supreme point is the ascension of man toward his God, of the Son of God toward his Father, of the mortal newly made divine toward paradise – And I repeat anew what I said above: All this is mere striving and childish stammering if one compares it to the overwhelming grandeur of the subject!”

**Johannes Brahms (1833-1897): Violin Sonata No. 3 in D Minor, op. 108 (originally written for violin)**

Brahms spent the summer of 1886 at Lake Thun in Switzerland. He had just completed his Fourth Symphony, and now – in a house from which he had a view of the lake and a magnificent glacier – he turned to chamber music. That summer he began the Violin Sonata in D Minor, then returned to Lake Thun and completed it in the summer of 1888.

The third sonata is brilliant music – not in the sense of being flashy but in the fusion of complex technique and passionate expression that marks Brahms’ finest music. The soaring, gypsy-like main theme at the opening of the *Allegro* is so haunting that it is easy to miss the remarkable piano accompaniment: Far below, the piano’s quiet syncopated octaves move ominously forward, generating much of the music’s tension. Its energy finally spent, this movement gradually dissolves on fragments of the violin’s (here, cello’s) opening melody.

The heartfelt *Adagio* consists of a long-spanned melody (built on short metric units – the marking is 3/8) that develops by repetition; the music rises in intensity, then falls back to end peacefully. Brahms titled the third movement *Un poco presto e con sentimento*, though the particular sentiment he had in mind remains uncertain. This shadowy, quicksilver movement is
based on echo effects as bits of theme are tossed between the two instruments. The movement comes to a shimmering close: Piano arpeggios spill downward, and the music vanishes in two quick strokes.

By contrast, the *Presto agitato* finale hammers along its pounding 6/8 meter. The movement is aptly titled: This *is* agitated music, restless and driven. Brahms marks the opening *passionato*, but he needn’t have bothered – that character is amply clear from the music itself. Even the noble second theme, first announced by the piano, does little to dispel the driven quality of this music. The very ending feels cataclysmic: The music slows, then suddenly rips forward to the cascading smash of sound that bring this sonata to its powerful close.

*Program notes by Eric Bromberger*