



Sunday, October 15, 2023, 3pm
Hertz Hall

Avi Avital, *mandolin*
Hanzhi Wang, *accordion*

PROGRAM

- Fritz KREISLER (1875–1962) *Praeludium and Allegro*
“in the Style of Pugnani” (1910)
- Igor STRAVINSKY (1882–1971) *Suite Italienne* (1920)
Introduzione (Allegro moderato)
Serenata (Larghetto)
Tarantella (Vivace)
Minuetto e Finale (Moderato – Molto vivace)
- J. S. BACH (1685–1750) Chaconne from Partita No. 2 in D minor,
BWV 1004 (1720)
(mandolin solo)

INTERMISSION

- BACH From *Goldberg Variations*:
Aria and Variations 1, 7, 14, 18 & 29 (1741)
(accordion solo)
- Béla BARTÓK (1881–1945) *Romanian Folk Dances* (1915)
Jocul cu Bătă | Brâul | Pe Loc |
Buciumeana | Poarga Românească | Mărunțel
- Pablo de SARASATE (1844–1908) Romanza Andaluza from *Spanish Dances*,
Op. 22 (1877–1882)
- Manuel de FALLA (1876–1946) Danse Espagnole No. 1 from *La vida breve*
(1904–1905)
- Camille SAINT-SAËNS (1835–1921) Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso
(1863)

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Avi Avital and Hanzhi Wang— Fresh Voices for Classical Music

Ever since its development in the Italian courts of the late 17th century, the mandolin has been an extraordinarily popular instrument, yet star mandolinist Avi Avital says it has a very small concert repertoire—a lack he, as a classical artist, is eagerly trying to remedy. “Unfortunately, the great composers—Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and so forth—never wrote one single note for the mandolin. I think it was because the mandolin was so very popular, they considered it more an amateur instrument than a classical or orchestral one” and thus perhaps not worthy of their attention.

To date, Avital has commissioned more than 100 works from contemporary composers to enlarge the mandolin’s repertoire. In addition, he has chosen to play many classical works written for other instruments, as he will do on this afternoon’s concert with Hanzhi Wang. (The Chinese accordionist has similar aspirations to develop her instrument—also long-associated with folk and popular music—as a legitimate classical voice.) As he prepares this music for performance, Avital says “I prefer to use the word ‘adaptation’ to ‘arrangement.’ I try to change the original music as little as possible to suit our instruments. For instance, with the Bach Chaconne on this program, I play it straight from Bach’s original score for violin.”

Avital says he has been watching Wang’s development for several years now. “I’ve seen her turn from a young professional into a true artist. And I love working with the accordion: mandolin and accordion are instruments that really complement each other. Most of the pieces on this program are for violin and piano, and our instruments suit those roles perfectly: the mandolin takes the violin’s part and the accordion the piano’s. The mandolin has a sound with a relatively quick decay while the accordion has a more sustaining sound.” Adds Hanzhi

Wang, “As a keyboard instrument with the approximate range of a Steinway grand, as well as the tone qualities of a wind instrument, [the accordion] also seems to be able to give the illusion of a small orchestra.”

Two Artists on the Rise

Though in America, the mandolin is mostly associated with bluegrass and the accordion with polka bands and the *Lawrence Welk Show*, Avital says that in Europe and in his native Israel they are now being regarded as classical instruments and are taught in conservatories. Growing up in Be’er Sheva in the southeastern desert of Israel, Avital began taking mandolin lessons at age eight with a remarkable teacher, the Ukrainian violinist Simcha Nathanson. “He emigrated to Israel,” says Avital, “and wanted to teach violin in Be’er Sheva’s music school. However, the school told him they already had a violin teacher, but that there were lots of mandolins in the basement—could he teach that? So he formed a mandolin orchestra, which I played in until I was 18, and taught the instrument using the violin as a model.

“Mandolin and violin actually have a lot in common: they are both soprano instruments, and they are tuned in fifths with the same open strings of E–A–D–G. The violin immediately became part of my culture. My teacher arranged classical music for our orchestra to play. So that really was my musical education. Because he taught mandolin more strictly than it was typically taught, I think I was actually receiving a deeper foundation in music than I would have had if I’d had a more conventional teacher.”

Leaving Be’er Sheva, Avital continued his training at the Jerusalem Music Academy, then did graduate work in Italy at the Conservatorio Cesare Pollini in Padua, studying with renowned Italian mandolinist Ugo Orlandi. His innovative career steadily growing, in 2007 Avital became the only mandolinist to win the top prize in Israel’s prestigious Aviv Competition. He would

later become the first mandolinist to be nominated for a classical Grammy Award.

At age five, Hanzhi Wang fell in love with the sound of the accordion while watching an Italian movie on television with her father. “I immediately asked to have one to play.” Starting with a small eight-button instrument, she advanced to being accepted by Beijing’s Central Conservatory at age 13. Later, after earning her bachelor’s degree, she moved to Copenhagen, where the Royal Danish Conservatory has a renowned accordion department, for her master’s work. In 2017, Wang became the only accordionist to win the Young Concert Artists auditions, and in 2018, *Musical America* named her as “New Artist of the Month.”

Listening in a New Way to Familiar Classics

“Paying tribute to the folk origins of our two instruments,” says Avital, “I’ve focused on works by classical composers that were derived from folk melodies that they enriched with the complex harmonies, rhythms, and formal structures of classical music. Bartók’s *Romanian Folk Dances* is the central piece here, using music Bartók collected around Romania and then scored first for solo piano, then for small orchestra.” Much the same approach was taken by the two Spanish composers, Pablo de Sarasate and Manuel de Falla; they adopted Spanish folk melodies for Sarasate’s virtuosic *Spanish Dances* for violin and piano and the “Danse Espagnole” used in Falla’s opera *La vida breva*.

Famed violinist Fritz Kreisler’s *Praeludium and Allegro “in the Style of Pugnani”* and Igor Stravinsky’s *Suite Italienne*—an arrangement of selections from his ballet *Pulcinella* for violin and piano—are hybrid works blending Baroque style with a more modern idiom. Kreisler’s piece is actually a

musical hoax: in 1905, he published it as a long-lost work by Italian Baroque composer Gaetano Pugnani, then 30 years later admitted he’d written it himself. Stravinsky’s 20th-century harmonic and rhythmic bite drastically transformed music written by Giovanni Battista Pergolesi and others in the early 18th century.

A solo piece for Avital, J.S. Bach’s Chaconne in D minor from his Partita No. 2 for unaccompanied violin is one of the monuments of musical history. Avital’s relationship with the Chaconne goes back to age 13, when he bought a book of the complete violin partitas and sonatas. “For most musicians I know, Bach is the ultimate composer. His music is so complex and perfectly constructed. Every time you come back to the Chaconne, you find more information, more elements to bring out. I can never play it the same way twice. And I found that with the mandolin I don’t miss any of the impact of Bach’s music.”

Avital plays a special mandolin made expressly for him by Israeli luthier Arik Kerman. “He shares the same ideas I do about how the mandolin needs to be developed, and he created for me an instrument that has more power and a richer, warmer sound that meets the needs of larger modern concert halls. We work together on it whenever I’m in Israel—constantly trying to further develop the capacities of this same instrument. And to give listeners a new voice, a new way to experience music they’re familiar with.”

—Janet E. Bedell © 2023

Janet E. Bedell is a program annotator and feature writer who writes for Carnegie Hall, the Metropolitan Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Caramoor Festival of the Arts, and other musical organizations.

AVI AVITAL

A pioneering artist and the first mandolin soloist to be nominated for a classical Grammy Award, Avi Avital has been compared to Andrés Segovia for his championship of his instrument and to Jascha Heifitz for his incredible virtuosity. Passionate and “explosively charismatic” (*New York Times*) in live performance, he is a driving force behind the reinvigoration of the mandolin repertory, which he has expanded not only with transcriptions of various pieces, but by commissioning more than 100 works for the mandolin.

Highlights of the 2023–24 season include performances with the Frankfurt Radio Symphony and Krzysztof Urbanski, Vancouver Symphony and Tianyi Lu, and Camerata Salzburg and Anja Bihlmaier; concerts with the Kammerakademie Potsdam; and tours with Il Giardino Armonico with Giovanni Antonini, CHAARTS, and the Venice Baroque Orchestra. In addition to his current North American tour with accordionist Hanzhi Wang, Avital will perform recitals with Anneleen Lenaerts (harp), Omer Klein (jazz piano), and Brooklyn Rider. He is Artist-in-Residence at the Schwetzingen SWR Festspiele and will return to DeSingel Antwerp, Wigmore Hall London, Philharmonie Berlin, and the Rheingau and Schleswig-Holstein music festivals.

In 2023, Avital launched his new venture, the Between Worlds Ensemble, with a three-part residency at the Pierre Boulez Saal in Berlin and concerts in Bucharest, Warsaw, Hamburg, Ludwigshafen, and Antwerp. The ensemble was formed to explore different genres, cultures, and musical worlds, focusing on different geographical regions and in its first year featured traditional, classical, and folk music from the Iberian Peninsula, the Black Sea, and South Italy.

Avital's recent engagements include the Chicago Symphony, Los Angeles Philhar-

monic, Yomiuri Nippon Symphony, Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Zürich Tonhalle, Deutsche Symphonie Orchester Berlin, Orchestre National de Lyon, Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, Israel Philharmonic, and the Norwegian Radio Orchestra.

Avital's versatility has led to engagements as “Portrait Artist” at the Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival, BOZAR in Brussels, and the Dortmund Konzerthaus (Zeitinsel), and as Artist-in-Residence at the Bodensee Festival



and La Jolla Music Society (CA). He is a regular presence at major festivals such as Aspen, Salzburg, Hollywood Bowl, Tanglewood, Ravenna, MISA Shanghai, Cheltenham, Verbier, Lucerne, Bad Kissingen, Rheingau, Gstaad, and Tsinandali.

Avital is an exclusive Deutsche Grammophon artist, and his seventh album, *Concertos*, recorded with Il Giardino Armonico and Giovanni Antonini, features mandolin concertos by Vivaldi, Hummel, Bach, Barbelli, and Paisiello. His album *The Art of the Mandolin* (2020) received outstanding international press acclaim. Previous record-

ings include *Bach* (2019), *Avital meets Avital* (2017), *Vivaldi* (2015), an album of Avital's own transcriptions of Bach concertos (2012), and *Between Worlds* (2014).

Born in Be'er Sheva in southern Israel, Avital began learning the mandolin at the age of eight and later studied at the Jerusalem Music Academy and the Conservatorio Cesare Pollini in Padua with Ugo Orlandi.

He plays a mandolin made by Israeli luthier Arik Kerman (1998); strings: Thomastik-Infeld (154, Medium).



HANZHI WANG

In 2017, Hanzhi Wang became the very first accordionist to win First Prize at the YCA Susan Wadsworth International Auditions. She has since debuted in New York in the Peter Marino Concert at Carnegie Hall's Zankel Hall and her Washington, DC debut opened the 40th Anniversary Young Concert Artists Series at the Kennedy Center, co-presented with Washington Performing

Arts. Hanzhi holds the Ruth Laredo Prize and Mortimer Levitt Career Development Award for Women Artists of YCA. She has been named *Musical America's* "New Artist of the Month" and been featured on WQXR's Young Artists Showcase. Hanzhi's solo accordion CD, *On the Path to H.C. Andersen*, was Naxos' first-ever solo accordion album and received critical acclaim including a nomination for the DR P2 Prize.

Hanzhi has performed at renowned venues and series, including UC Santa Barbara's Lively Arts, the Candlelight Concert Society, La Jolla Music Society, the Morgan Library, and the Artist Series in Sarasota. She has appeared as a soloist with the Oregon Music Festival, Victoria Symphony, Cantori, Chamber Orchestra of the Triangle, Sinfonia Gulf Coast, Iris Orchestra, Reno Chamber Orchestra, Erie Philharmonic, and the Hawaii Symphony. Upcoming and recent highlights include her Tanglewood debut, and a coast-to-coast tour with Avi Avital that includes a performance presented by the New York Philharmonic.

Hanzhi is committed to nurturing future accordionists through lectures, masterclasses, and new works that have been written for her by composers such as Martin Lohse, James Black, and Sophia Gubaidulina. She will debut a piece by YCA alum Katie Balch at Wigmore Hall as well as a new accordion concerto written for her by current YCA composer-in-residence Nina Shekhar in January 2025.

Hanzhi earned her bachelor's degree at the China Central Conservatory of Music and completed her master's degree and soloist diploma at the Royal Danish Academy of Music under accordion professor Geir Draagsvoll.

For more about mandolinist **Avi Avital** and accordionist **Hanzhi Wang**, including background articles and informative video features, please use your smartphone's camera and scan the QR code to the right.

