

Odyssey

Harp Junior Recital by Vanessa Jazzy, B.Mus3

This recital is our workout—literally for my fingers and metaphorically for our odyssey today through my pieces. My fingers and the sound of the harp will guide you through a range of experiences, from walking and running to smooth roads, riding trains, climbing stairs, trekking steep paths... Along our journey, we may make a few stops in a cathedral, a lively park, or even a funeral. Come embrace the odyssey with me that you will discover through the music, and most importantly, thank you for being here. It means so much to share this adventure with you!

PROGRAMME

NINO ROTA

Sarabanda
Toccata

PAUL HINDEMITH

Sonata for Harp
I. Mäßig schnell
II. Lebhaft
III. Lied: „Ihr Freunde, hänget“

GABRIEL FAURÉ

Impromptu pour harpe, Op. 86



NINO ROTA (1911-1979)

Sarabanda e Toccata (1945)

Who would've thought that a composer for popular movie soundtracks like "The Godfather" and "Romeo and Juliet" also composed classical music for solo harp? Nino Rota is an Italian composer and is well-known for his operas, ballets, and most importantly his film scores. "The Godfather" won an Oscar for Best Music. Not surprising, since Nino Rota came from a musical family and was a child prodigy.

While we always think of film scores as contemporary music, this Sarabanda e Toccata, written in 1945, is Nino Rota's odyssey to the past, creating a piece based on Baroque dances and pieces that were popular in the 17th and early 18th century. This idea of using a style of the past to create something in the present era is known as neoclassicism. As a starting piece, this piece will be our warm-up for today's odyssey. Sarabande, traditionally a slow and elegant dance, feels like our walking warm up. On the other hand, Toccata, which is lively and fast-paced, is when we start to run cheerfully. Though the two differ greatly in character, I find both to be musically sincere, each expressing genuine hope for a promising beginning to our journey today.

PAUL HINDEMITH (1895-1963)

Sonata for Harp (1939)

I. Mäßig schnell

II. Lebhaft

III. Lied: „Ihr Freunde, hänget“

Humankind prevails even in the darkest of times, through wars, devastating conflicts, deepest catastrophes, and even more than that, their hopes and expression also created the most heart-wrenching art and music during these times. German composer Paul Hindemith expressed himself during this dark time through this piece, written in 1939 as World War II began, as one of a series of twenty-six sonatas he composed for different instruments between 1935 and 1955. As a German during this tumultuous time, Hindemith was deeply affected by the war. He eventually fled Nazi Germany, relocated to Switzerland, and composed there. As we live in a world still shadowed by the sadness of war, I can imagine his yearning to escape its horrors through sound and its musical language.

Just like Nino Rota, Hindemith's style is also largely neoclassical, using what was popular in the past as an influence in his "contemporary" composition in the early to mid-20th century. Music in the classical era is very famous for its sonata form, which Hindemith adopted for this piece. As he was heavily influenced by Schoenberg and Strauss, he used the idea of classical sonata form in a new way by using more contemporary harmonic language to continuously shift and develop, often creating dissonance and tension as if we are navigating diverse paths

–smooth roads to riding trains, climbing stairs, and even trekking steep paths. Hindemith assigns a distinct character to each movement. The piece begins with a grand, resolute first movement, evoking a scene of a majestic cathedral in our odyssey today. Amid unstable harmonic shifts, brief moments of consonance emerge, hinting at beauty and hope even in dark times. For the second and third movements, Hindemith diverges from the typical sonata form by altering the usual character progression. Whereas most sonatas conclude with the most lively and energetic movement, Hindemith placed that energy in the second movement, presenting to us a vivid scene of children playing and shouting in chaotic exuberance, he then closes with a slow, somber third movement, symbolizing death.

This unconventional choice is unexplained, which leaves me wondering: Was it a premonition because he was uncertain of how the war would end? Was it because he believed that war, inevitably, led to loss and death, hence symbolizing eternal mourning? Or perhaps, was there another reason entirely? I find that the third movement captures the rhythm of his heartbeat, especially at the beginning and end, while the rest of the piece feels like he's building a wall against pain. Another response towards this 3rd movement, now featured in the music score, is a poem by Ludwig Christoph Heinrich Hölty, “Harpist’s Prayer for Death”, which reads:

Lied (Original German poem)

Ihr Freunde, hänget, wann ich gestorben bin,
die kleine Harfe hinter dem Altar auf,
wo an der Wand die Totenkränze
manches verstorbenen Mädchens schimmern.

Der Küster zeigt dann freundlich dem Reisenden
die kleine Harfe, rauscht mit dem roten Band,
das, an der Harfe festgeschlungen
unter den goldenen Saiten flattert.

„Oft“ sagt er staunend, tönen im Abendrot
von selbst die Saiten leise wie Bienen-ton:
die Kinder, hergeloct vom Kirchhof,
hörtens, und sahn, wie die Kränze bebten.“

Lied (English translation)

O my friends, when I am dead and gone,
Hang the little harp there behind the altar
Where on the wall the shimmering half-light catches
The funeral wreaths of many a departed maiden.

Then the good sexton will show the little harp
To visitors, stirring it to sound
As he touches the red riband that hangs from the harp
And floats beneath the golden strings.

“Often,” he says in wonder, “at sunset,
The strings unbidden murmur like humming bees:
The children, called hither from the churchyard,
Have heard it, and seen the wreaths a-quiver.”

Much like in war, not all problems find resolution, yet the intensity lessens. This piece affirms how hope is still important just like the first movement, despite the uncertainty and chaos of the second movement. Though the ending may be unclear, we persevere and make it through.

GABRIEL FAURÉ (1845-1924)

Impromptu pour harpe, op. 86 (1904)

If you think that only people who can play the harp compose harp music, think again! Fauré, a highly influential French composer who shaped French music in the late 19th and early 20th

century, and a composition teacher at the Paris Conservatoire, clearly thought otherwise. Though not a harpist himself, he ventured into harp composition with notable success. This piece has become a staple of the harp repertoire, showcasing nearly every aspect of harp technique and expression. Another harp composition of his is *Une châtelaine en sa tour*, Op. 110. But it begs the question: how does a harp piece written by a non-harpist differ from that of a harpist?

The answer lies partly in this piece, as it's believed that Alphonse Hasselmans, the harp professor at the Conservatoire, contributed to the composition process. It was suspected that, due to time constraints, Fauré was unable to finish the commissioned work on time for a Conservatoire's annual harp contest and Hasselmans stepped in, particularly in the second half. From the point where Hasselmans' influence begins, you will notice intricate arpeggios and characteristic of a harpist's touch. In contrast, Fauré's background as an organist and pianist shows in the slower passages, where single notes are more prominent than open chords or arpeggios.

Despite this, Fauré crafted a stunning harmonic progression, reflecting his famous quote, "Music exists to elevate us as far as possible above everyday life." To me, this piece truly lifts me higher and higher, sounding majestic and grand, just like how we hike mountains in this odyssey to reach the peak and enjoy the beautiful scenery there. Playing this piece makes me wonder what kind of person he was, and my hunch is that he would be a sweet, tough, and showy kind of person. If he were with us hiking the mountain, I bet he would push us to go beyond our stamina limit just with a little pause to reach the highest top. What do you think when you hear the piece?



Get to know me as a harpist!

Have you ever been given opportunities to be something bigger than you thought you could be? Just like many children who do not know their potential, I never imagined I could be a harpist until I was introduced to the harp by my first harp teacher, who was my violin teacher back then, Shienny Kurniawati. At 13, I was encouraged to pick up the harp and this eventually led me to audition at Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music (YST), after which I met my current harp teacher, Mrs. Gulnara Mashurova. Being her student has been lots of fun for me. Each person will have a different detail of learning with their mentor, but I learned things beyond playing the harp. I love how she is very detailed and it shows in her characteristics like her handwriting, the way she walks, the way she dresses up, and of course, the way she plucks the strings of the harp. To have a mentor like her is a blessing.



Additionally, being a part of YST has opened up more opportunities for me, as I became part of the Yong Siew Toh Orchestral Institute and performed significant orchestral works, including Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, *WV 90: Liebestod*, Strauss' *Four Last Songs* (2024), Rachmaninoff's *Symphonic Dances*, and the Southeast Asian Golden Age Symphony Premiere (2023) at the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory Concert Hall. I also performed Mahler's *Symphony No. 1* at Esplanade Concert Hall, Singapore (2023), and was the harpist for *The Fantasticks*, a musical production by the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music's vocal department. I shared the stage with people who share the same passion, through experiences such as being the guest star of Esplanade Concourse Popaholic 2023's program together with the Briolette Quintet — a mixed ensemble of a violinist, oboist, cellist, harpist, and percussionist from Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music. I also expanded my connections with harpists worldwide through international festivals, such as the Chofu International Music Festival Orchestra, performing Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* in Tokyo, Japan (2024), the Académie Internationale d'Été de Nice festival under Marie-Pierre Langlamet (2023), and took masterclasses with renowned harpists in the United States, including Mariko Anraku, Nancy Allen, and Jessica Zhou.

These opportunities made me love the harp even more despite the struggles of figuring out how to become a better musician and harpist. I am still so excited to practice my harp and I wish to continue this feeling forever. Someone once asked me a question: why do I play the harp? Beyond the stereotypical answers that come to mind, like the benefit of learning music and instrument or as a way to express emotions, I want to be vulnerable here saying it is simply because I think it is cool to play the harp. I wake up every day looking forward to the possibility of improving my harp playing. Seeing my small improvements and the process shows me what it means to be happy and satisfied. Little me could never have imagined that I would be able to do these things, as I once thought being a harpist was an unreachable dream. I am humbled and grateful for all of these opportunities, and I hope that I can also pave the way for the next generation, just like others have helped me pave my journey in music.