

Horn Senior Recital, May 4, 2026

Program Notes

Gao Xiaoxuan

## **Olivier Messiaen**

### **Appel interstellaire**

from *Des canyons aux étoiles...* (1971)

This recital begins in solitude.

*Appel interstellaire* is originally the sixth movement of Messiaen's large-scale work *Des canyons aux étoiles...*, written in 1971. Scored for solo horn alone, it creates a world that feels distant, suspended, and almost outside of ordinary time.

To me, it feels like a lonely figure calling out in a valley at night, with no one around. The only answer is a faint moonlight. Without accompaniment, the horn seems less like a solo instrument in the usual sense, and more like a voice sent into emptiness. As the opening work, it begins the program's backward journey through time in a modern musical language.

## **Richard Strauss**

**Andante in C Major** for Horn and Piano (1888)

After this loneliness, warmth begins to appear.

Strauss's *Andante in C Major*, composed in 1888, is a short work for horn and piano, originally connected with an unfinished sonata project. Though modest in scale, it shows the warm, singing quality that is so natural in Strauss's writing for the horn.

If Messiaen feels distant and unanswered, Strauss feels like the first true response. The long melodic lines and gentle pacing give the music a deeply vocal quality, as if the lonely figure has finally found warmth.

## **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**

### **Rondo in E-flat Major, K. 371**

As time continues to flow backward, the world becomes brighter.

Mozart's Rondo in E-flat Major, K. 371, written in 1781, remains one of the central short works in the horn repertoire. Although it is a single-movement piece, it carries the elegance, clarity, and natural balance that are so characteristic of Mozart's writing. An interesting detail is that many earlier versions of the score were missing sixty bars, which were only rediscovered in 1990.

To me, this piece feels like the opening of a ballroom. What was once private and inward gradually turns outward. The atmosphere becomes lighter, more social, and more animated.

## **Carl Maria von Weber**

### **Concertino in E minor, Op. 45, J. 188**

In Weber, the backward journey reaches its furthest point.

Originally composed in 1806 for natural horn and later revised in 1815, Weber's Concertino is one of the most brilliant and demanding works in the horn repertoire. Within one continuous movement, it contains a remarkable range of character: dramatic opening gestures, lyrical passages, ornamental variation, a recitative-like cadenza, and a brilliant final Polacca. The work also famously includes multiphonics, in which the player sings while playing, creating more than one pitch at the same time.

In this recital, Weber feels like the summit of everything that has been building before. After the solitude of Messiaen, the warmth of Strauss, and the brightness of Mozart, everything here becomes heightened: the drama, the movement, the color, and the energy. To me, it feels like the ballroom scene at its most dazzling, when the celebration reaches its peak and everything becomes almost overwhelming.

## **Kerry Turner**

### **The Casbah of Tetouan**

And then, suddenly, everything changes.

Kerry Turner's *The Casbah of Tetouan* is a modern work inspired by Tetouan in Morocco. Compared with the earlier works on this program, it sounds immediately more rhythmic, colorful, and physical. The sudden change of style breaks the backward motion of the recital and pulls everything back into the present.

This ending matters for another reason as well. Unlike the works before it, this piece closes the recital in ensemble. The program begins with a solo and ends with a horn quintet. For me, that makes the whole recital feel like a look back on my four undergraduate years: however personal the journey has felt, I have never walked it alone. After looking back, what remains is gratitude for the people who have supported me along the way, and the understanding that it is now time to move on.