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VIVA VRS!

SPRING CONCERTS 2024

Christian Li violin  
Rohan De Silva piano  
Sunday March 24 2024

# From the Artistic Director

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Dear Friends:

We are absolutely delighted to welcome young violinist, Christian Li, to Vancouver for his Canadian debut. He will be joined by the renowned collaborative pianist, Rohan De Silva, who has a busy career performing with Itzhak Perlman and teaching at the Juilliard School in New York.

The program they have chosen will highlight this young violinist's incredible gifts, and we are in for a very exciting afternoon of music making.

I would like to thank our Season Sponsor, the Peak Group of Companies, and the sponsors of today's concert, Joyce and Tony.

We are also grateful for the support of our Next Generation Concerts from the Edwina and Paul Heller Fund at the Vancouver Foundation, and the RBC Emerging Artists Fund.

And finally, I would like to acknowledge the support of the City of Vancouver and the Government of British Columbia for our concerts.

Enjoy the afternoon.

Sincerely,



Leila



## CELLPHONES

The use of cellphones and recording devices is prohibited in the concert hall. Please take this opportunity to turn off all electronic devices.

音乐厅内禁止使用手机，禁止拍照，录音，录像。请观众关闭所有电子器材，感谢您的合作。

# Program

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**Christian Li**, violin  
**Rohan De Silva**, piano

**Sunday, March 24, 2024 3:00 pm**  
**Vancouver Playhouse**

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756-1791)  
**Sonata in A major K 305**

Allegro molto  
Tema con variazioni. Andante grazioso  
(approx. 15 minutes)

MANUEL DE FALLA (1876-1946)  
**Suite Populaire Espagnole**

El Paño moruno - Nana - Canción - Polo -  
Asturiana - Jota  
(approx. 15 minutes)

GIUSEPPE TARTINI (1692-1770)  
**Sonata in G minor (“Devil’s Trill”)**

Larghetto affettuoso  
Allegro  
Andante - Allegro assai - Trillo del diavolo -  
Andante - Allegro assai - Trillo del diavolo -  
Andante - Allegro assai - Adagio  
(approx. 16 minutes)

INTERMISSION

EDVARD GRIEG (1843-1907)  
**Sonata No. 3 in C minor Op. 45**

Allegro molto ed appassionato  
Allegretto espressivo alla Romanza  
Allegro animato  
(approx. 25 minutes)

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840-1893)  
**Valse Sentimentale Op. 51 No. 6**

Tempo di valse  
(approx. 5 minutes)

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840-1893)  
**Valse Scherzo Op. 34**

Allegro  
(approx. 6 minutes)

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# Christian Li violin

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**Early Life & Education:** Born in Melbourne in 2007, Christian Li first picked up a violin at age five. He currently studies with David Takeno in London and was previously taught by Dr. Robin Wilson, Head of Violin at the Australian National Academy of Music in Melbourne.

**This Season:** In the 2023-24 season Christian is returning to the Melbourne Symphony to perform Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 3 and Paganini's Violin Concerto No 1. Christian is also making orchestral debuts this season with RTV Slovenia Radio Symphony, Aalborg Symphony, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic and Macao Orchestra, all performing Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto, and he returns to the Oslo Philharmonic to play/direct Vivaldi's Four Seasons.

**Recordings:** In 2020, Christian became the youngest artist to sign with Decca Classics. His debut album, featuring Vivaldi's Four Seasons accompanied by works for violin and piano by Bazzini, Kreisler, Massenet and Li Zili, was released in August 2021, garnering five-star reviews.

**Awards & Prizes:** Christian captured international attention in 2018 when he became the youngest-ever winner of the Menuhin Competition, winning the joint Junior 1st Prize in Geneva where he play-conducted a movement of Vivaldi's Four Seasons. Performing with the Geneva Chamber Orchestra, he also received the Audience Prize and the Composer Award.

Christian performs on the 1737 ex-Paulsen Guarneri del Gesù violin, on loan from a generous benefactor, and uses a bow by François Peccatte.



Photo credit: Albert Comper

Christian Li is represented by IMG Artists, London.

# Rohan De Silva piano

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**Early life & Education:** Rohan began his piano studies with his mother, Primrose De Silva, and with Mary Billimoria. He spent six years at the Royal Academy of Music in London studying with Hamish Milne and received many awards including the Grover Bennett Scholarship, the Christian Carpenter Prize, the Martin Music Scholarship, the Harold Craxton Award and the Chappell Gold Medal for best overall performance.

Rohan served on faculty at the Perlman Music Program from 2000 to 2007 and currently teaches at the Juilliard School, where he has served on faculty since 1991, and at Heifetz International Music Institute.

**This Season:** In the 2023-24 season, Rohan plays recitals with Itzhak Perlman across North America including in Portland, Los Angeles, Toronto and the New York Tri-State area. He also performs with Itzhak Perlman on the program “An Evening with Itzhak Perlman”, which captures highlights of Perlman’s career through narrative and multi-media elements intertwined with performance.

**Performances:** Rohan has partnered with violin virtuoso Itzhak Perlman in worldwide recitals and with every notable violinist on the concert stage today. He has performed at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, the Library of Congress, the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the Barbican and Wigmore Hall in London, Bronfman Auditorium in Tel Aviv, Suntory Hall in Tokyo and at the White House at the invitation of President Barack Obama in 2012 for Shimon Peres; at the Millennium Grammy Awards ceremony in 2000; and at a State Dinner in 2007 hosted by President George W. Bush for Queen Elizabeth. A native of Sri Lanka, Rohan De Silva was invited in 2015 by the Prime Minister of his country to perform for U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry on his historic visit to Sri Lanka.

**Recordings:** Radio and television credits include PBS’s *Live from Lincoln Center* and *The Colbert Report* with Itzhak Perlman, *The Tonight Show* with Midori, CNN’s “Showbiz Today”, NHK Television in Japan, National Public Radio, WQXR and WNYC in New York, Berlin Radio and the 2000 Millennium Grammy Awards. Rohan has recorded for Deutsche Grammophon, Universal, CBS/SONY Classical, Collins Classics in London, RCA Victor and Chandos.



Photo credit: John Beebe

# Program Notes

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## Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart Sonata in A major K 305

The Sonata in A major for violin and piano was written in Paris in 1778 when the 22-year-old Mozart was visiting the French capital on a European tour aimed at improving his career prospects. Notable features of this sonata are its uniformly cheerful mood and the heightened prominence it gives to the violin as a “duet” partner with the piano.

While it might seem strange to us today, in the late 18th century the sonata for violin and piano developed out of what was essentially a solo piano sonata “accompanied” by the violin and not the other way around. Mozart’s early violin and piano sonatas, written when he was still a child prodigy, have just this texture, with the violin playing “back-up singer” to the keyboard’s “star of the show” at centre stage.

But just as Beethoven was later to do in his Op. 5 sonatas for cello and piano, Mozart elevated the stringed instrument to become an equal partner with the keyboard, creating thereby more possibilities for textural contrasts and conversational dialogues between the instruments. This equality between the duetting partners is evident in the unison opening of Mozart’s Sonata in A major, his twenty-second sonata for violin and piano.



This fanfare outlining the notes of the A major triad evokes the horn calls of a hunting party galloping over hill and dale and gives a rousing sense of forward momentum to the movement.

The “triad” motive structures the second theme, as well, but with a twist: the triads are extended into a chain of 3rds that teasingly stretch their quadruple groupings over the triplet pulse of the prevailing metre:



And Mozart has more tricks up his sleeve in the development section when, clever lad that he is, he turns his opening fanfare theme upside-down and dips it into the minor mode, to boot.





The recapitulation brings no surprises, and the movement ends in a flurry of cadences in the same horse-riding gait with which the movement began.

The sonata concludes with a gracious theme-and-variations movement featuring an elegant initial melody comprised of short phrases with feminine endings (having the harmony resolve on the weak beat), the perfect sort of thing for mincing aristocrats in stiff courtly dress to dance to.

**TEMA con VARIAZIONI.**

*Andante grazioso.*



Mozart gives the first variation entirely to the piano, with a constant babbling stream of noodling runs in 32nds decorating the main structural nodes of the theme. This, of course, allows the violin, in turn, to “make an entrance” in the following variation to display its skill as a melodic soloist.

**VAR. II.**



The third variation shows the kind of call-and-response dialogue that is possible between the instruments when they speak to each other as equals. The fourth features the violin in a starring lyrical role but gives a tip-of-the-hat to the keyboard as well in a little mini-cadenza.

The traditional *minore* variation comes next, and a mischievous one it is, too, leading to the finale, in which Mozart changes the time signature to 3/8 to conclude his sonata with a toe-tapping waltz.

## Manuel de Falla Suite Populaire Espagnole

Manuel de Falla's most popular vocal work, his *Siete canciones populares españolas* (Seven popular Spanish songs), was composed in 1914. It features authentic regional folk songs to which the composer has added a piano part bristling with added-note chords, strumming rhythms and other effects richly suggestive of the sonorities of the Spanish guitar. The work represents a musical travelogue through the regions of Spain, each song offering a glimpse into the daily life and eternal concerns of the common people.

In 1925 De Falla and Polish violinist Paul Kochanski (1887-1934) made an arrangement for violin and piano of six of the seven songs, published under the title *Suite Populaire Espagnole*.

\* \* \*

***El Paño moruno*** (The Moorish cloth) warns that a fine cloth, if stained, sells for a lower price in the store — the implication being that young girls should avoid getting the “cloth” of their good reputation “stained” by an illicit love affair.

The sounds of Spain open the piece with an evocation of the crisp snap of the castanets and a tangy reference in mm. 2-4 to the Andalusian or Phrygian cadence (D-C-B flat-A in the bass), typical of flamenco music:

The image shows the beginning of the musical score for 'El Paño moruno'. It consists of three staves: a vocal line at the top, a piano right-hand part in the middle, and a piano left-hand part at the bottom. The tempo is marked 'Allegretto vivace' and the time signature is 3/8. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The piano part is marked 'pp' and 'sordina sola'. The vocal line starts with a 'p' dynamic. The piano part features a characteristic Phrygian cadence in the bass (D-C-B flat-A).

And the score abounds with guitar-strumming gestures in the piano part:

The image shows a section of the musical score for the piano part, featuring guitar-strumming gestures. It consists of two staves: a violin part at the top and a piano part at the bottom. The violin part is marked 'Arco' and 'mf'. The piano part is marked 'p' and 'f'. The piano part features a syncopated accompaniment over a soothing, sleepy pedal point in the bass. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

The Andalusian ***Nana*** is a lullaby, said to be the one that De Falla's mother sang to him when he was an infant. A rocking rhythm is created in the piano by a syncopated accompaniment over a soothing, sleepy pedal point in the bass.



The whimsy of lovesickness fills the *Canción*, a rollicking tune known all over Spain.

While the lyrics tell of “treacherous eyes” that it “costs dear to gaze into”, the song’s jostling rhythm and breezy melody imply that the singer is over the affair already.

*Polo* rages and wails with the dark fury of flamenco-inflected Andalusian gypsy music. The subject is sudden love, and it is not going well at all as the singer sings, “A curse on love and the one who gave me to know it!”

It features a rich build-up of guitar sonorities in the piano part.

The mood changes to one of bewildered sadness in the *Asturiana* from Northern Spain.

The hypnotic ostinato figures and open intervals in the piano evoke the numbness of unfathomable grief.

By contrast, nothing could be livelier than the Aragonese *Jota* that concludes the suite.



The words of the original song, telling of a parting at the window and the promise of another rendezvous tomorrow, inspire this whirling piece in triple time danced to the rhythmic clicking of castanets. But the parting keeps getting interrupted by lyrical sections evoking the last lingering looks of the lovers, reluctant to part.

## Giuseppe Tartini “Devil’s Trill” Sonata in G minor

Legend has it that one night in 1713 the Devil came to Tartini in a dream and performed on his violin in such an astonishing fashion that upon awaking the composer was left deeply shaken. Determined to re-capture the experience, he is said to have composed what has come down to us as his “Devil’s Trill” Sonata, a work justly renowned for its technical challenges, chief amongst them the extended trill passages in double stops of its final movement.

The work is structured in a modified form of the *sonata da chiesa*, a Baroque instrumental genre in four movements alternating between slow and fast tempi. This fits in well with the legendary narrative, portraying the soul-snatching Lord of the Underworld as seeking alternately to slowly beguile and rapidly bedazzle the mesmerized Tartini as he lay dreaming in his bed.

The beguiling begins in the opening *Larghetto affettuoso*, marked by a gentle *siciliana* pulse evoking a mood of pastoral innocence made all the more endearing by frequent *appoggiature* in the melodic line.



But a searching chromatic quality in the harmony inserts more than a touch of pathos into both halves of this movement in binary form.

Bedazzlement comes in the second movement *Allegro*, also in binary form, which opens with a series of trumpet calls before settling into a *moto perpetuo* of 16ths richly decorated with trills in a foretaste of the fireworks to come.



Intense lyricism returns at the opening of the final movement with a highly ornamented melody proceeding at a slow and deliberate pace, like the dark and moody *lassan* of a Hungarian rhapsody played by a gypsy fiddler.



But these nocturnal musings are continually interrupted by the virtuoso high jinks of the Devil's displays of virtuosity, culminating in a pair of passages in which the violinist plays a trill on an upper string while arpeggiating chords on a lower string below.



Following performance tradition, Christian Li will conclude this movement with Fritz Kreisler's even more hair-raising cadenza, featuring passages such as this:



## Edvard Grieg Sonata No. 3 in C minor Op. 45

Edvard Grieg's *Third Violin Sonata* was his last piece of chamber music, and it very quickly became one of his most popular. Grieg premiered it at the Leipzig Gewandhaus in late 1887 performing with Russian violinist Adolph Brodsky (1851-1929), who just six years before had premiered the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto in Vienna.

The first movement opens with a squirrely introduction, restlessly spinning around the notes of the C-minor scale.



The import of this introduction becomes clear when the first theme enters in the violin. It has the same up-and-down melodic outline as the spinning motives of the introduction but with the 16ths slowed down to quarter notes and 8ths. In other words, this is the introduction — in augmentation.

Despite being comprised of just arpeggiated major triads, this theme sounds unusually tense and urgent due to the piano's fretting accompaniment in tremolos.

Lyrical repose arrives, however, with the singable second theme, based once again on triadic intervals.

The development section begins by basking in the glorious string tone of this second theme's long-held notes, supported by a swirling vortex of piano arpeggios in the accompaniment.

But when things slow down the squirrely motives of the introduction begin to range freely once again, leading climactically in a great crescendo to the recapitulation.

This recapitulation not only offers up again the first and second themes, but also recalls the lyrical opening of the development section in the major mode before suddenly changing its mind and speeding rapidly to an emphatic C-minor conclusion.

The moodiness of this opening movement is banished by a slow movement, *Allegretto espressivo alla Romanza*, filled with fairy-like fantasy. It opens with a piano solo singing out its magical first theme in the high register.

The charm of this movement is only increased by its dance-like middle section with a rustic drone tone in the bass.

89 **Allegro molto**  $\text{♩} = 80$

*pp ma poco marcato*

Despite being in the minor mode, this section is full of affectionate phrases and endearing turns of melody. The return of the opening melody in the final section features the violin in the high register, like a voice from Heaven supported by pulsing chords in the piano accompaniment.

The finale is in a strange sort of sonata form — without a development section. It has the form A-B-A-B, a manner of proceeding that gives pride of place to the *character* of its two themes rather than to the manipulation of their constituent *motives*. And characterful these two themes are.

The first theme jangles with the sounds of open intervals, in both the melody and in the accompaniment.

**Allegro animato**  $\text{♩} = 104$

*pp*

This theme, tossed merrily between the instruments, is nothing if not folklike in its simple tunefulness and rugged rhythmic punchiness. It even develops an outright strut, as gleeful as a high-kicking cakewalk.

The second theme brings a radically different mood to the fore, taking the bright edge off the proceedings with a hesitant melody, full of passionate sighs, that starts off in the low register of the violin

113  $\text{♩} = 92$

*p cantabile*

and moves up gradually to reach the lyrical “sweet spot” in the instrument’s timbral range.

The recapitulation renews the contrast between these two themes, the one pulsing with animation, the other slow-paced and nostril-flaring in its open-hearted lyricism. In the end, though, it is the feverish excitement of the first theme that takes this C-minor sonata to its excited C-major conclusion.

**Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky**  
**Valse sentimentale Op. 51 No. 6**  
**Valse scherzo Op. 34**

Christian Li ends his program with a brace of waltzes by Tchaikovsky, a composer whose ever-popular ballets and dance-like concerto finales showed him to be a consummate composer of music for the dance.

Tchaikovsky's *Valse sentimentale* is the last of six small piano pieces composed in 1882 on commission from his publisher Pyotr Jurgenson (1836-1903) and issued as the composer's Opus 51.

Written in F minor, it is a classic *valse triste* in the style of Chopin, replete with rising and falling melodic lines and endless heaving sighs at phrase endings.

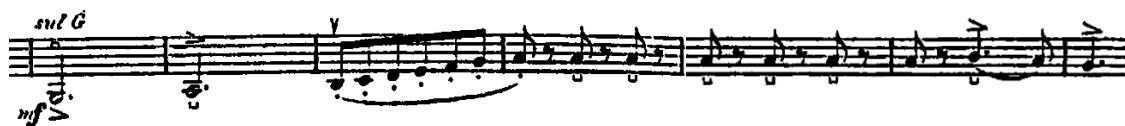


A contrasting middle section ventures briefly out of the minor mode, but the piece's dominating mood is one of wistful melancholy and a kind of Slavic, soulful introspection at which Tchaikovsky excelled.

\* \* \*

By contrast, playfulness and elegance are the dominant traits of Tchaikovsky's *Valse scherzo* Op. 34, originally written for violin and orchestra in 1877 and then transcribed for violin and piano by the composer.

Sounding very much like a piece from one of the composer's ballets, it features a lightly tripping melodic line replete with repeated notes that make the hesitations and lilt of the waltz vivid to the ear.



Its middle section strikes a more lyrical but still playful tone, with its many whimsical hemiolas in triplet figures that make the listener alternately hear triple and duple meter in turn.



This piece is renowned for its technical difficulties, especially its many passages in double stops — which is perhaps why it was a compulsory piece for violinists at the XV Tchaikovsky Competition in 2015.

There is even a cadenza at the end of the middle section with a concerto-like climax.



Elegance and poise alternate with virtuosity and bravura to make this the ideal “closer” for Christian Li's first recital in Vancouver.



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