

Janani Sridhar, soprano

with

Holly Kordahl, piano

Thursday, March 17th, 2022, 7:30 PM
Presented by LOLA

My Darling Jim	T. Cipullo
The Jolly Miller Drink to Me only with Thine Eyes Three Poor Mariners	R. Quilter
Jota	M.d. Falla
Là-bas, vers l'église Quel galant m'est comparable Tout gai!	M. Ravel
Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante	G. Bizet

~ INTERMISSION ~

Munnaeru Vaaliba Di Tanjong Katong	Arr. A. Woods
O mio babbino caro	G. Puccini
Morgen! Cäcilie	R. Strauss
Měsíčku na nebi hlubokém	A. Dvořák
There is a Balm in Gilead Everytime I Feel the Spirit	D. Sneed

A note from Janani:

Thank you so much for spending your afternoon with Holly and me. We are grateful to be able to share some music with you.

The past two years have taught us a lot: the importance of compassion and caring for one another, our intrinsic human need for community, and that no matter where we come from, we are all more alike than we are different.

As most of us have not been able to travel much during the last couple of years, Holly and I have decided to take you on a musical journey around the globe. You will hear music from our homelands, folk songs from across the pond, opera arias that you will instantly recognize, and perhaps a few pieces in languages that may be new to you.

This afternoon's repertoire spans multiple genres, languages, and time periods. You will hear music from the classical canon, jazz-influenced spirituals, experience pieces by composers of color, and be treated to contemporary pieces by living composers.

For the first part of our world tour, we will begin here in America, before visiting England. After that, we will take a trip to Spain, and then Greece, and France.

The second half of our travels invites you to my homeland, Singapore, before we head to Italy, Germany, the moon, and finally back here, to the U.S.

We start our journey in America with "My Darling Jim" from the opera *Glory Denied* by Tom Cipullo. This is one of my favourite arias from the American operatic canon. The opera is based on a book by Tom Philpott, and tells the true story of America's longest-held prisoner of war, Colonel Jim Thompson. In this scene, which occurs prior to him being taken captive, Alyce, Colonel Thompson's wife, writes him a letter about her day, and their children.

The next destination on our journey is England. Roger Quilter is an English composer that I love very much. I find his music elegant, and charming. Not much has been written about him, and the only biography about him that exists was written fairly recently by Valerie Langfield. His music is popular in England, but is hardly performed here. Quilter had quite a large musical output that resulted in over 150 songs, 30 choral works, 25 instrumental pieces, and some staged works, including a light opera called *Julia*. The songs I have selected for today are from his lesser-known cycle, *Old English Popular Songs*.

A few words about this set: Quilter was extremely fond of his nephew Arnold Vivian, and treated him like a son. Vivian had joined the army, and in April of 1944, his mother Norah received a letter from an officer sending his condolences on Vivian's death. Arnold's regiment could not confirm if Vivian had truly passed away, and Quilter and Norah kept their hopes up that he was alive, although the letter weighed heavily on them. Quilter began to work on a group of songs that

he had written a few months earlier to lift Vivian's spirits while he was deployed, so that he could sing them when he came home. There were sixteen songs in the collection, and five of them were from a previously published cycle, *Old English Popular Songs*, some of which you will hear tonight. After the war, in May of 1945, Arnold's death was confirmed.

Of all of Quilter's songs, "Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes" is my most beloved piece. It has a simple melody, but the text and lush accompaniment do not fail to show you the heart of Quilter's music. "The Jolly Miller" and "Three Poor Mariners" are jovial tunes that speak of love for one's work, country, and the king."

We now arrive in the Aragón region of Spain. "Jota" comes from one of the most frequently performed Spanish song cycles, *Siete Canciones Populares Españolas* by Manuel de Falla. A young man sings seductively to his lover, and bids her farewell till the next day. De Falla colours the piano accompaniment with rich textures of guitar strings, transporting listeners to the sunny sidewalks of Spain.

France and Greece are next on our agenda. The next three songs you will hear are by Maurice Ravel, from his song cycle, *Cinq Mélodies Populaires Grecques (Five Popular Greek Songs)*. The tonal colours you will hear are from Chios, Greece. "Là-bas, vers l'église" is a reflection on those who have passed on, and takes place at a cemetery in front of a church. "Quel galant m'est comparable" is a proclamation of love by a pompous young gentleman, and "Tout gai!" is a song of joy that has even the dishes dancing along!

We conclude the first half of our program with Micaëla's aria from Bizet's *Carmen*. Don José, Micaëla's childhood love, has joined a band of smugglers and is staying with them in the mountains. Micaëla has promised Don José's dying mother that she will bring him back to her one last time before she dies. Micaëla makes her way to find him, but is terribly frightened. She prays to the Lord for courage, and seeks to keep the promise she made to José's mother.

Welcome to my sunny island, Singapore. These two pieces that you are about to hear are folk songs from my homeland. I commissioned these arrangements, and worked on these pieces with my friend Alex Woods. Singapore is a cultural hotpot, and we have four national languages: English, Malay, Mandarin, and Tamil.

The first piece you will hear, "Munnaeru Vaaliba," is a Tamil song with lyrics by S. Jesudassan. The lyricist was a school teacher by profession, and he taught the Tamil language. The poetry of the song encourages the youths of today to keep progressing, and to lead the way, as they are the leaders of tomorrow, and countries will look to them for guidance in times of need.

"Di Tanjong Katong" is one of Singapore's most well-known folk songs. This piece is in the Malay language, and paints a picture of Singapore during its "Kampung" days as a fishing village. The

first verse tells the story of a lover pining for his beloved maiden who lives in the same village as him, and the last verse reminds us of the importance of having good character, because even when our flesh fades away, our character will always be remembered.

We are now off to Florence, Italy, with one of Puccini's most well-known pieces, "O mio babbino caro," from *Gianni Schicchi*. Lauretta sings this song to her father, begging him to let her marry her love, Rinuccio. If he does not allow her to do so, she threatens to throw herself off the Ponte Vecchio. Not to worry though, she gets to marry her love, and all turns out well for the young couple at the end of the opera.

We stay in Europe, but this time we are headed to Germany. The set of Strauss songs that are being presented tonight are some of his most famous songs. Both of these pieces, "Morgen!" and "Cäcilie," are from Opus 27 and have been orchestrated; Strauss gifted this song cycle to his wife as a wedding present, and the beautiful melody that rings in the introduction of "Morgen!" was originally written for solo violin. "Morgen!" speaks of the comfort of love that is deep, settled, and at ease, and "Cäcilie" burns with passionate love.

We now head to the Czech Republic and the moon with "Song to the Moon," an aria from Dvorák's *Rusalka*; a story that is similar to that of the Little Mermaid. We meet Rusalka, the beautiful water sprite, who has fallen in love with a human prince. She longs to become human and to live on land with him. She sings to the moon and urges it to shine on the prince and tell him that she loves him, and that she embraces him. She hopes that he will dream of her, and at the end of her aria the moon begins to disappear. Rusalka cries out to the moon, begging it to stay, but it does not.

Our world tour bring us back homeward to American soil. You will hear a couple of jazz influenced spirituals by contemporary African American composer Damien Sneed. His modern take on traditional spirituals is riveting, and I hope you enjoy listening to them as much as I enjoy singing them to you.

Thank you for again sharing your evening with Holly and me. We are honored that you came.

"Music is the universal language of mankind." Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

"Though a sea of difference may divide us, an entire world of commonality lies beneath." James Rozof