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Caprice pour violon seul / Caprice for Violin Solo (2010) – Alice Ping Yee Ho

Written by Toronto-based composer Alice Ho, this caprice is a bold and virtuosic work. Individual motifs repeat frequently, but undergo continual metamorphoses and interruptions as if the performer is rewriting them in realtime. The composer explores a wide range of articulations and timbres for the instrument throughout, reflecting her own website's statement that "colors and tonality are two attractive resources to me: they form certain mental images that connect to audiences in a very basic way."

The provenance of the work might itself be seen as somewhat capricious, having been first published by the composer for solo cello (1994), then reworked for horn and piano (1994), solo piano (1997), and solo violin or solo viola (2010), with an upcoming version for violin and piano.

Signs, Games and Messages (excerpts) (2005) – György Kurtág

Signs, Games, and Messages is a collection of pieces for solo violin composed and arranged by the Hungarian composer Gyorgy Kurtag. While the title of the collection is evocative in its own right, it refers to three separate continuing streams of compositions. These compositions exist in multiple arrangements for various string and wind instruments, and the piano collection of *Games*, in particular, has grown steadily since its genesis in 1973.

Regarding *Signs*, the composer stated "We go and leave a sign on a tree. That we have been there. The composer does exactly the same: I leave this sign for you. If you want it, use it; if you don't, discard it" (Varga, 2009). As in this quote, Kurtag's brevity, humour, and wit pervade his *Signs, Games, and Messages*.

Consider the title of each short work as a launching point for further thoughts - but certainly not the end point. It may be useful to know that *carezza* is Italian for "scarcity" or "deficiency."

Sonate pour violon n°1 en la mineur, op. 105 / Violin Sonata No. 1 in A minor, Op. 105 (1851) – Robert Schumann

Compact in form but dramatic in scope, this sonata is the most well-known of Schumann's three violin sonatas. The first movement, *Mit leidenschaftlichem Ausdruck* ("With passionate expression") smolders with a turbulent and foreboding opening theme, expansive lyrical passages, and a constant sense of forward momentum. The charming second movement,

Allegretto, cleverly combines the traditional slow and scherzo movements of a sonata into one hybrid movement, strikingly serene and almost naïve compared to the movements on either side of it. The final movement, *Lebhaft*, is devilish and capricious; it ends with ominous quotations from the first movement, before an emphatic plunge to the finish line.

Intriguingly, Schumann himself wrote that he “did not like the first Sonata for Violin and Piano,” having “[written] it right after [he] had gotten upset with a couple of people.” Perhaps contributing to this assessment, the early life of the sonata was difficult. Schuman was displeased with the sound quality of violinist Wilhelm Wasielewski at the work’s first reading, also played at by Clara Schumann. She, for her part, called the third movement “intractable.”

Robert was later satisfied by the performance of violinist Ferdinand David at the work’s public premiere – but the public was not equally satisfied, and sales of the first edition were poor, damaging Schumann’s reputation for a time. Finally, after redeeming performances by Joseph Joachim in 1853, the work obtained the esteemed position it has held in the repertoire to this day.

Sonate pour violon n°8 en sol majeur, op. 30 n°3 / Violin Sonata No. 8 in G Major, Op. 30 No. 3 (1803) – Ludwig van Beethoven

This work was composed as the third in a set of three sonatas published as Beethoven’s Op. 30, dedicated to the newly-crowned Czar Alexander I of Russia. It appears that Beethoven did this to gain political favour with the new ruler, an endeavour which succeeded in obtaining a handful of later commissions from the Czar and his family. As was typical for the period, the first edition identifies the Op. 30 works as not violin sonatas, but rather piano sonatas with violin accompaniment.

One of the most lighthearted of Beethoven’s violin sonatas, Op. 30 No. 3 is firmly classical in structure, adhering to traditional sonata forms. The rousing first movement opens robustly with striking unisons between piano and violin, before settling into an exciting dialogue between voices, with glimmers of Beethovenian *Sturm und Drang*. The second movement, as a minuet, is not quite a slow movement, but is nevertheless warm and inviting. The third movement is in rondo form, bursting with humour and with at least a few moments as suitable for a beer hall as for the concert stage.