original compositions by
Tom Smith

featured pianist
Maxwell Fritz

featured soprano
Linda Hiort

project supervised by
Dr. Kathryn Evans
TONIGHT’S PROGRAM

ACT I

Piano Sonata No. 1 (“Classical”) excerpts

1. Allegro

2. Intermezzo and Variation

featured artist
Maxwell Fritz, Pianist

ACT II

Three Songs For Soprano

1. The Reaper
   Poetry by Taras Shevchenko; translated by Ethel Lilian Voynich

2. Pestilence
   Poetry by Philip Freneau

3. Song of the Poppy Harvest
   After Traditional Ukrainian texts translated by Florence Randal Livesay

featured artists
Linda Hiort, Soprano
Maxwell Fritz, Pianist
SHOW NOTES

Composer’s Introduction

The history of the piano and the history of art music — especially that of the voice — have long been delicately intertwined, and as such, it was fitting that my senior concert features both a song cycle and a piano sonata. This program was originally conceived as a song cycle in the winter of 2020, largely acting as an outlet through which I could restart some of my musical activities lost due to the coronavirus pandemic. Nonetheless, some of my compositional ideas proved more effective for a solo instrumental idiom, and this, combined in-depth studies of Classical Era forms and piano literature over quarantine, led to the creation of a separate piano sonata. In both works, the constituent pieces adhere to a standard Classical form (sonata-allegro, rondo, and strophic forms, predominantly) and broadly comply with norms for tonal organization. However, each piece introduces deformations informed by modern theoretical principals that build timbral, harmonic, and metric variety. By presenting each work, I hope to demonstrate that Classical Era forms and compositional principals still have relevance in the modern day, as well as to showcase the unique strengths of the keyboard and vocal idioms.

About the Artists

Tom Smith
Composer
Tom Smith is a conductor, composer, and singer active in the UT Dallas musical community. He became involved with music at UT Dallas in 2017, singing in their choirs and opera productions before transitioning towards a focus on conducting. In 2019, Tom founded the Comet Opera Orchestra and Chorus, conducting their debut performance in Mozart’s La Clemenza di Tito; previously, he directed Comet Opera’s first summer production. He currently serves as Comet Opera’s President and Music Director. Outside of UT Dallas, Tom sings in the Dallas Symphony Chorus and has composed for piano, handbells, choir, voice, and orchestra. He studies conducting with Dr. Kathryn Evans.

Maxwell Fritz
Pianist
Maxwell Fritz is a pianist and alumnus of UT Dallas, having earned his Master’s in economics in 2019. He has played piano for 18 years and has extensive experience in classical and Romantic performance and composition. In addition to piano, he is an avid guitarist and drummer, and is highly interested and active in production of ambient and generative music.

Linda Hiort
Soprano
Linda Hiort is a Swedish soprano currently living in North Texas. Linda earned her Bachelor’s of Vocal Performance at Texas Woman’s University. Her roles include Micaëla in Carmen, Josephine in H.M.S. Pinafore, Valencienne in The Merry Widow and Valkyrie in Jerry Springer: The Opera.
1. The Reaper
Taras Shevchenko
tr. Ethel Lilian Voynich

Through the fields the reaper goes
Piling sheaves on sheaves in rows;
Hills, not sheaves, are these.
Where he passes howls the earth,
And howls the seas.

All the night the reaper reaps,
Never stays his hands nor sleeps,
Reaping endlessly;
Whets his blade and passes on…
Hush, and let him be.

Hush, he cares not how men writhe
With their necks against his scythe
Would you hide in field or town?
Where you are, there he will come;
He will reap thee down.

Serf or noble,
Great or small;
Friendless wandering stranger, – all,
All shall swell the sheaves
that grow to mountains;
Even the king shall go.

And me too the scythe shall find
Cowering in fear, resigned.
Scythe of iron, swift and blind,
If it strikes, we’re left behind
Yes, it strikes without reason
and leaves us stark,
And forgotten in the dark.

2. Pestilence
Philip Freneau

Hot, dry winds forever blowing,
Dead men to the graveyards going:
Constant hearses,
Funeral verses;
Oh! what plagues—there is no knowing!

Doctors raving and disputing,
Death’s pale army still recruiting—
What commotion,
All in motion,
Some a-writing, some a-shooting.

Nature’s poisons here collected,
Water, earth, and air infected—
O, what pity,
Such a City,
Was in such a place erected!

3. Song of the Poppy Harvest
Traditional tr. Florence Randal Livesay
Adapted to a single text by the composer

How like to a poppy seed is our world,
It blossoms, it blossoms, it blossoms today.
But next thing you know, a storm passes over,
And with that the flower has vanished away.

How sad it is
to think of the rose petals lost to the wind
And the forests
when a bird never sings again.
And sadder still,
the people who never could hear the bird sing,
And the war-horse
born to fight for the king,
To fight in the battle and die for the king.

O sad for the forests and willow trees
When no singing birds are there to awake
O sad for the forests and willow trees
That must find a way to endure a silent daybreak,

Be joyful, my friends, that each day that is ours,
A life such as this can last long.
One day it is us who will go like the flowers,
But some others will still come along.

Yes, be grateful my friends that each day is ours,
A life such as this can last long.
Be thankful that we’ve yet to go like the flowers
And that life has not ended our song.

How like to a poppy seed is our world,
It blossoms, it blossoms, it blossoms today.
When you least expect it, a storm passes over,
And with that the flower has vanished away.
Taras Shevchenko (1814 - 1861) was a Ukrainian poet, artist, and political figure best known today as the face of early Ukrainian nationalism and the father of the modern Ukrainian Language. Born into serfdom in Ukraine, then a part of the oppressive Russian Empire, Shevchenko shared his family’s history of distaste for their country’s low social position. Upon his admission into the St. Petersburg Academy of Art, Shevchenko was freed from serfdom; however, his poetry consistently focused on the plight of his fellow countrymen. Eventually, this output angered the Russian government, who exiled him and forbade future artistic endeavors. Nonetheless, he continued to write and paint pieces to support the independence of Ukraine.

Shevchenko was eventually freed from exile in 1857, but the Russian government prevented him from living permanently in Ukraine. Drained by this and his decade-long exile, Shevchenko was in consistently poor health, dying in St. Petersburg in 1861. Despite his untimely death, Shevchenko’s legacy has proven immense, and he can largely be credited for energizing the Ukrainian independence movement at a time where Russian domination seemed absolute. As well, his myriad works in vernacular Ukrainian formed the basis for the formalization of the language, and he is today considered Ukraine’s foremost national poet.

Ethel Lilian Voynich (1864 - 1960), though perhaps best known today for her association with the mysterious Voynich Manuscript, was a renowned Anglo-Irish novelist and composer whose work has proven especially popular in Russia. After a sickly and abusive childhood, Voynich studied musical composition at the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin, where she began a lifelong association with Russian culture. Her acquaintances in Russian revolutionary circles introduced her to Wilfrid Michael Voynich, her future husband, with whom she quickly embarked into the literature business — her writing novels and him selling antique books. In 1897, she published The Gadfly, an immediate international hit; by her death in 1960, The Gadfly was still a bestseller in the Soviet Union.

Despite her literary success, Voynich largely returned to music in her later years, composing cantatas, liturgical music, and arrangements of other works. She also increased her scholarly output, editing an edition of Chopin’s letters and occasionally writing or translating literature. However, her husband’s discovery of an enigmatic book, the Voynich Manuscript — a Medieval tome printed in an unknown language, filled with colorful psychedelic imagery — became her most famous legacy, as she became its caretaker after her husband’s death. Despite her best efforts, she was unable to get it translated (and, indeed, it is untranslated to this day), and she left it to a trusted friend upon her death in 1960.

Philip Freneau (1752-1832) was an American poet and political figure active from the American Revolution until his death. During his life, Freneau was primarily known as a newspaper publisher, with his National Gazette a bulwark of Democratic-Republican politics; through it, figures like Thomas Jefferson and James Madison had a biweekly outlet through which they could advocate policy. Freneau was also a skilled early Romantic poet, building his legacy off a well-publicized anti-British piece, The British Prison Ship, written after a nearly fatal stint on the eponymous ship during the American Revolution. By the end of his life, Freneau’s poetry was well regarded by literature scholars, but it had never been able to eclipse his political works amongst the general public. In 1832, Freneau died on a return trip to his longtime home of Matawan, New Jersey, where a small unincorporated community still bears his name today.

Florence Randal Livesay (1874-1953) was a poet, writer, and foreign literary scholar primarily known for her work in translating Ukrainian poetry into English. Prolific in the field, Livesay was adept at collecting works virtually unknown to other scholars; her research also frequently focused on folk poetry, which most major scholars had previously ignored. In addition to translations, Livesay was also an acclaimed writer of short stories, popular in the magazines of her day, as well as original poems. Though she traveled prolifically, including a year spent in South Africa serving as a teacher, Livesay based her career in her native Canada throughout her life, living in her adoptive Grimsby, Ontario until her death in 1953.
A Very Special Thanks

Without the help, guidance, and patience of many kind people, it would have never been possible for me to complete this project and concert. I would like to offer my deepest gratitude to the following people:

Max Fritz and Linda Hiort, for generously offering their time and dedication to prepare the pieces on the program tonight. Performing new music is one of the most challenging aspects of musicianship, and I am incredibly grateful for my music to have been performed by such talented artists.

Dr. Kathryn Evans, for her guidance as my voice/conducting teacher and musical advisor. Be it conducting an opera or writing a piano sonata, Dr. Evans’ advice and guidance has been instrumental to my growth in musicianship at UTD, and I’m extremely grateful for the opportunity to work with her for the past three years.

Profs. Michael McVay and Rodger Bennett, whose exemplar instruction in music theory greatly informed the composition of the pieces on the program tonight.

The casts, crews, and orchestra members of Comet Opera, whose experience and insight have profoundly improved my musicianship over the past few years.

The UT-Dallas School of Arts and Humanities, who generously provided the facilities, technology, and financial support that made tonight’s program possible.

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