



Nikki Chooi
with Stephen De Pledge

atoll



*Winning performance with
Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra,
June 2013*



Michael Hill International Violin Competition

This recording is an element of the First Prize of the Michael Hill International Violin Competition, won by Nikki Chooi in June 2013.

The Michael Hill International Violin Competition aims to recognise and encourage excellence and musical artistry, and to expand performance opportunities for young violinists from all over the world who are launching their professional careers and who aspire to establish themselves on the world stage.

Since its inauguration in 2001, the 'Michael Hill' has achieved global standing as a competition, and elevated to international recognition a succession of young violinists. It delivers wraparound New Zealand hospitality and a genuine commitment to the development of every participating artist.

George Gershwin

Born Brooklyn, New York, 26 September 1898

Died Hollywood, California, 11 July 1937

Three Preludes

Allegro ben ritmato e deciso

Andante con moto e poco rubato

Allegro ben ritmato e deciso

George Gershwin was the second son of Russian immigrant parents and grew up in the densely populated area of the Lower East Side in New York, where he was in close contact with both European immigrants and African-Americans, and where young George's well-developed street skills earned him a reputation of being rather wild.

Around 1910 the Gershwin family acquired a piano, ostensibly for the eldest child, Ira, to learn. However, George was the first to use the instrument when it arrived and his parents were amazed to discover that he had learned to play on a friend's 'player piano'. George had a variety of teachers during his youth but it wasn't until 1917 that he started to take his music studies seriously, leaving his job to study full-time. By 1920 Gershwin had decided that his aim was to write operettas and two years later he finished the one-act opera *Blue Monday Blues*. When he read the novel 'Porgy' by DuBose Heyward in 1926 he suggested to the author that it



could be adapted as an opera libretto, though it wasn't until 1933 that the two men started writing the opera we now know as *Porgy and Bess*. 1926 was also the year he composed the first of his piano preludes. He initially intended to compose a set of 24, entitled *The Melting Pot*, in reference to the diverse people immigrating to America at the time. However, he abandoned that idea and only published three.

One of Gershwin's good friends was the virtuoso violinist Jascha Heifetz who enjoyed Gershwin's music and was keen for him to

write a violin concerto. After Gershwin died at the age of 39, Heifetz consoled himself by arranging the popular *Three Preludes* for performance by violin and piano. They are typical of Gershwin's music: full of lively rhythms and syncopation, expressive bluesy melodies and sophisticated harmonies.

Maurice Ravel

Born Ciboure, 7 March 1875

Died Paris, 28 December 1937

Sonata in G for Violin and Piano

Allegretto

Blues (Moderato)

Perpetuum mobile (Allegro)

Ravel grew up in Paris, learned the piano from the age of seven, and gained entry to the Paris Conservatoire at fourteen.

He left there in 1895 but returned two years later to learn from Gabriel Fauré. Despite his obvious originality and talent Ravel was dismissed from Fauré's class, and was also passed over four times for the prestigious *Prix de Rome* with the final failure causing public outrage.

After the end of the First World War American jazz became popular throughout Europe and many composers incorporated elements such as 'blue' notes and syncopation into their works. Ravel's *Sonata in G* was the first of his pieces in which jazz idioms play a major part. He had written an earlier single-movement *Violin Sonata* in 1897 but it remained unpublished until 1975. The second *Violin Sonata* was composed between 1923 and 1927 after Ravel had moved from Paris to the



countryside. He later described it as "a sonata for piano and violin which, far from evening out their contrasts, accentuates their very incompatibility". Jazz influences are most obvious in the second movement, with its syncopated rhythms and banjo-like passages. The final *Perpetuum mobile* is a breathless display from the violin with the piano taking an accompanying role though also managing to recall themes from the first movement.

Sergei Prokofiev

Born Sontsovka, Ukraine, 27 April 1891

Died Moscow, 5 March 1953

Sonata No 1 in F minor, Op 80

Andante assai

Allegro brusco

Andante

AllegriSSimo



Sergei Prokofiev showed a precocious musical talent, beginning his studies at the St Petersburg Conservatory when he was only thirteen. The culmination of the Russian revolution occurred shortly after his graduation and in 1918 Prokofiev went into self-imposed exile, living first in New York and then Europe, and eventually establishing himself in Paris as a composer and virtuoso pianist.

During the 1920s he re-established contact with the Soviet Union and toured there several times. He returned from France to live in Moscow in 1936, declaring that he was homesick.

Unlike many at the time, Prokofiev was still allowed to travel out of the country to give concerts and he set about presenting himself as a responsible Soviet composer, saying "the search for a musical language which corresponds to socialist times is a difficult one, but it presents a noble problem". However, for the remaining two decades of his life, his music was appraised and criticised by the authorities and he had to live with the stress that such constant scrutiny brings.

Prokofiev was particularly prolific during World War II, but life was chaotic in the Soviet Union and along with other artists he was relocated from Moscow to distant states. As a result the *Violin Sonata in F minor* was started in 1938 but not completed until eight years later. Russian violinist David Oistrakh premiered it in Moscow in 1946 and it was hailed as "a work of genius". Prokofiev was awarded a lucrative Stalin Prize for the Sonata in 1947.

Maurice Ravel

'Tzigane' concert rhapsody

In April 1922 Ravel attended a Parisian concert at which the Hungarian virtuoso violinist Jelly d'Aranyi performed Bartok's *First Violin Sonata* with the composer himself playing the piano. Guests at the gathering afterwards included fellow composers Stravinsky, Poulenc and Szymanowski, in addition to Bartok and Ravel – a reflection of the central role that Paris played in the avant-garde musical scene at that time. In London later that year, after she had performed Ravel's *Duo for Violin and Cello*, Ravel asked d'Aranyi to play him some gypsy melodies, which she apparently obliged by doing until about five am the following morning. Ravel's *Violin Sonata*, which he had begun writing in 1923, was supposed to be premiered by d'Aranyi early the following year but Ravel seems to have found the work difficult to complete. However, in March 1924 he wrote to d'Aranyi saying he was writing another piece especially for her. "This *Tzigane* must be a piece of great virtuosity. Certain passages can produce brilliant effects, provided that it is possible to perform them – which I'm not always sure of."

The technical difficulties were clearly overcome because she premiered *Tzigane* in London later that year. The work is written in the form of a Hungarian rhapsody, beginning with a slow introduction for solo violin before launching into a colourful set of variations on a pseudo-gypsy theme.





Nikki Chooi

Nikki Chooi was born in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada and began his studies at age 9 at the Victoria Conservatory of Music, under the tutelage of Sydney Humphreys. He is a graduate of the Mount Royal Conservatory, received his undergraduate degree from the Curtis Institute of Music, and completed further studies at the Juilliard School with Ida Kavafian and Donald Weilerstein.

As First Prize Winner of the 2013 Michael Hill International Violin Competition, Nikki completed an extensive recital tour with Chamber Music New Zealand, performed as concerto soloist with Giordano Bellincampi and the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, and gave a recital as part of Australia's Musica Viva Series.

Passionate about Chamber Music, Nikki has performed in many international festivals including the Marlboro Music Festival, the Ravinia Festival, the Dresden Music Festival in Germany, Montreal Chamber Fest, Napa Valley's Music from the Vineyards, and Music from Angel Fire.

He gratefully acknowledges the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, CBC Radio, the Sylva Gelber Foundation, and the Victoria Foundation. Nikki uses the 1700 Taft Stradivari on generous loan from the Canada Council for the Arts Musical Instrument Bank. He chooses to use a Michael Vann Bow and a J. Voirin Bow (made possible by the Gene Witz Memorial Foundation).

Stephen De Pledge

New Zealand pianist Stephen De Pledge studied at the University of Auckland, and then with Joan Havill at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London. His career was launched after winning the Gold Medal from the Guildhall, and the NFMS Young Concert Artists' Award, and he has since maintained a diverse and wide-ranging performing schedule, as soloist, chamber musician and song accompanist, including five solo recitals in the Wigmore Hall in London, where he made his acclaimed debut in 1999.

Stephen De Pledge has also given solo performances in Hong Kong, Italy, France, Singapore, Japan, Australia and the USA. Concerto appearances include the Philharmonia (London) and Bournemouth Symphony Orchestras, and performances in the Barbican and Fairfield Halls. He has recorded solo works of Bliss, Messiaen and Arvo Pärt, for whom he made the world premiere recording of the piano sonatinas. He also made the premiere recording of Gorecki's *4 Piano Preludes*.

In 2010 Stephen became Senior Lecturer in Piano at the University of Auckland, while continuing to perform internationally.



Jack Liebeck

1-3	George Gershwin — Jascha Heifitz <i>Three Preludes</i>	6:35
	1 <i>Allegro ben ritmato e deciso</i>	1:47
	2 <i>Andante con moto e poco rubato</i>	3:23
	3 <i>Allegro ben ritmato e deciso</i>	1:18
4-6	Maurice Ravel	18:12
	<i>Sonata in G for Violin and Piano</i>	
	4 <i>Allegretto</i>	8:30
	5 <i>Blues (Moderato)</i>	5:45
	6 <i>Perpetuum mobile (Allegro)</i>	3:50
7-10	Sergei Prokofiev	27:34
	<i>Sonata No 1 in F minor, Op 80</i>	
	7 <i>Andante assai</i>	6:34
	8 <i>Allegro brusco</i>	6:45
	9 <i>Andante</i>	7:00
	10 <i>AllegriSSimo</i>	7:00
11	Maurice Ravel	10:52
	<i>'Tzigane' concert rhapsody</i>	

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