



**IRINA MURESANU**

FOUR STRINGS

AROUND THE WORLD

## MUSIC FROM WESTERN AND EASTERN EUROPE

	GEORGE ENESCU (1881-1955)	<i>Romania</i>
	<b>Airs in Romanian Folk Style**</b>	
1	<b>I. Moderato (molto rubato)</b> 2:59	
2	<b>II. Allegro giusto</b> 1:47	
3	<b>III. Andante</b> 2:12	
4	<b>IV. Allegro giocoso</b> 1:52	
	DAVE FLYNN (b. 1977)	<i>Ireland</i>
5	<b>Tar Éis an Caoineadh*</b> 8:14	
	NICCOLÒ PAGANINI (1782-1840)	<i>Italy</i>
6	<b>Caprice No. 24</b> 4:58	
	FRITZ KREISLER (1875-1962)	<i>Austria</i>
7	<b>Recitativo and Scherzo, Op. 6</b> 4:55	
	JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)	<i>Germany</i>
8	<b>Ciaccona</b> from the Partita in D minor, BWV 1004 14:08	

\* world premiere recording

\*\* American recording premiere

## MUSIC FROM THE MIDDLE EAST AND ASIA, SOUTH AND NORTH AMERICA

9	REZA VALI (b. 1952)	<i>Iran</i>
	<b>Calligraphy No. 5</b> 6:36	
	SHIRISH KORDE (b. 1945)	<i>India</i>
	<b>Vák</b> (for violin and electronic drone)*	
10	<b>I. Alap</b> 4:25	
11	<b>II. Jor</b> 2:23	
12	<b>III. Jhalla</b> 3:27	
	BRIGHT SHENG (b. 1955)	<i>China</i>
13	<b>The Stream Flows: II</b> 4:23	
	ASTOR PIAZZOLLA (1921-1992)	<i>Argentina</i>
14	<b>Tango Étude No. 3</b> 3:39	
	JEROD IMPICHCHAACHAAHA' TATE (b. 1968)	<i>Chickasaw Nation</i>
15	<b>Oshta (Four)*</b> 8:31	
	MARK O'CONNOR (b. 1961)	<i>United States</i>
16	<b>The Cricket Dance</b> 1:52	

total time 76:10

It all started when I tackled Mark O'Connor's "The Cricket Dance". It is a short, straightforward tune that requires the skills of an intermediate player, and yet it took me an absurdly long time to learn. To put things in context: if I was capable of absorbing whole violin concertos in a matter of weeks, why was the O'Connor piece so hard to get under my fingers? Had I entered a new musical territory in which I had to acquire a style and technique completely different from my classical training? And if so, how many more different "languages" existed outside of the traditional repertoire? Inspired by this question, I started my exploration of works reflecting the ways the violin is employed in musical settings worldwide.

What resulted is *Four Strings Around the World*, a celebration of diverse musical cultures through

the unifying voice of solo violin, a project which immersed me in sounds and colors I didn't even realize could be produced by my own instrument. The project encompasses works of composers from four continents, with pieces inspired by the folk music of Eastern and Western Europe, the Middle East, Asia, South and North America.

I thought it fitting to start the journey in Romania, my native country, and end it in the United States, where I now live, work and have a family. Scouting for solo violin works inspired by Persian, Irish and Chinese folklore was not an easy feat, but I was fortunate to discover eminent composers such as Reza Vali, Dave Flynn, and Bright Sheng, who draw inspiration from the music of their own nations. I was afraid I had hit a dead-end when

my research didn't turn up any pieces inspired by Indian music (inherently improvisational) or Native American music. But then it dawned on me that this was the perfect opportunity to enrich the solo violin repertoire. I am therefore forever grateful to composers Shirish Korde and Jerod Impichchachaaha' Tate, who wrote for me pieces inspired by, respectively, Indian ragas and a Native American hymn.

To stay true to my own roots, I built the program around two summits of the violin repertoire, iconic pieces that I felt could not be omitted from this recording: the Paganini 24th Caprice and the Bach "Ciaccona". Another piece that I have included is Kreisler's "Recitativo and Scherzo", which embodies the inimitable Viennese spirit and was suggested to me by my beloved teacher, Michèle

Auclair many years ago. I have been playing it ever since and it is my homage to her legacy.

Time constraints placed a limit on the variety of music I could present on this recording. I would love to play violin music from many other countries and styles: Hungarian, Klezmer, French, Turkish, Japanese, African, Australian or even Balinese. As I consider this an open-ended project, perhaps there will be a Volume 2 of *Four Strings Around the World*.

Putting this program together and bringing it to life has been a considerable challenge requiring a steep learning curve. But I have had the time of my life.

Thank you for joining me in this musical journey!

—Irina Muresanu

GEORGE ENESCU

**Airs in Romanian Folk Style**

The year was 1926. George Enescu was working on his great masterpiece, the Sonata for Violin and Piano no. 3, op. 25 "In Romanian Folk Style", and in the process he sketched four "Airs" for solo violin, as a preparatory exercise. For some unknown reason, the "Airs in Romanian Folk Style" remained in manuscript form until their publication in 2006. I was awestruck upon their discovery and quickly realized they offered the perfect opening for this program. I am very proud to offer the American recording premiere of this piece!

The "Airs" are a perfect example of the composer's ability to write glove-fitting violin music inspired by Romanian folk tunes.

Enescu was an extraordinary violinist, pianist, conductor and composer. He grew up listening to village musicians; from them he absorbed the invaluable knowledge of folk music, which he later incorporated in many of his works. The first Air, written in a slow rubato style embodies the bitter-sweet ethos of Romanian folk music. It segues into a dance full of humor and teasing, followed by a sad song, sung in a trembling voice reminiscent of the Pan flute. The final Air is a spectacular and challenging dance full of virtuosic elements imitating the *cimbalom*, an instrument often used in Romanian folk bands.

DAVE FLYNN

**Tar Éis an Caoineadh'**

Romanian and Irish folk music share many similarities: strong

rhythms, buoyant melodic patterns and an upbeat character. It therefore made sense to dart across Europe in search of a piece inspired by such music. Finding Dave Flynn was not easy, but really worth the effort: he is an award-winning composer born in Dublin, whose music has been acclaimed internationally for the way it has "incorporated traditional Irish music without Hollywood pastiche" (*The Times*) "with the kind of power and grittiness you hear from Celtic fiddlers at their most raucous" (*The New York Times*).

"Tar Éis an Caoineadh'" ("After the Keening") was written as an homage to famous Irish fiddle players. The various sections of the piece reflect specific techniques and artifices employed by these players: from

the droning double-stopping of Caoimhín Ó Raghallaigh, to the quiet *sul ponticello* sound of the late Con Cassidy, to the wild dynamic playing of Danny Meehan and finally the strong hypnotic playing of James Byrne. This piece was written as a companion piece to the String Quartet No. 3 "The Keening/An Caoineadh". The string quartet was inspired by the mournful sounds of the keening songs once common at Irish funerals, while this work is much lighter in character, being a reflection of the celebratory part of the wake.

NICCOLÒ PAGANINI  
**Caprice No. 24**

Modern violin playing as we know it would have not been the same without Niccolò Paganini. Paganini's virtuosic abilities on the violin mystified

audiences at large to the point where he was believed to have supernatural powers. It is not by mere coincidence that this legendary figure emerged out of Italy, the country of *bel canto* and extraordinary violin makers such as Antonio Stradivari and Guarneri del Gesù. Paganini left us, violinists, an inexhaustible treasure in his "24 Caprices" for solo violin. The last one of these caprices—number 24—is a theme and variations intended to showcase the performer's mastery of the instrument. Its catchy tune inspired numerous composers (such as Liszt, Brahms, Rachmaninov, Szymanowski) to write their own sets of variations. Each of the eleven variations and a coda highlight various violin techniques (rapid string crossings, staccato, double-

stops, quick shifting, high positions, left hand pizzicato) in a breathless succession.

FRITZ KREISLER  
**Recitativo and Scherzo, Op. 6**

One of the most stylish and beloved musicians of the 20th century, Fritz Kreisler belongs to a lost era of violin virtuosos that were also composers, like Paganini, Wieniawski, Sarasate and Ysaÿe. Kreisler excelled in the "miniature" genre and his stylish and graceful music embodies his Viennese background.

"Recitativo and Scherzo" is the only solo violin piece Kreisler wrote and a musical "thank-you" note to his friend, the Belgian violin virtuoso Eugene Ysaÿe, as the latter had dedicated his fourth solo violin sonata to Kreisler. The rich introduction

abundant in Impressionist harmonies (Kreisler's own homage to Ysaÿe) is followed by a lively Scherzo full of vigor and aristocratic elegance, tinged with a hint of melancholy, "à la Kreisler". "Recitativo and Scherzo" has been one of my all-time favorite encores; the ineffable Viennese spirit that infuses this piece made it a "must" for this recording.

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH  
**Ciaccona from the Partita in D minor, BWV 1004**

George Enescu referred to the Bach Solo Sonatas and Partitas as the "Himalayas of violinists", an analogy that would make the "Ciaccona" its Mount Everest.

The fifth and the final movement of the "Partita No. 2 in D minor, BWV 1004" was written

sometime between 1717-1723, when Bach was working for Prince Leopold in Cöthen. Structurally speaking, the piece consists of a set of 27 variations built over a repetitive bass figuration. A rich work with multifarious relationships, the "Ciaccona" was much scrutinized by performers and musicologists alike over the years.

Research of the work has explored the "Ciaccona"'s proportions in relationship with the Golden Ratio and coded references hidden in the music (Bach inserted his own name as the B-A-C-H pitches in multiple compositions). Most recently, the musicologist Helga Thoene came up with the interesting theory that the "Ciaccona" was written as an "epitaph in music" for Bach's wife Maria Barbara. She

suggested the piece is based on chorale quotations concealed all over the piece. Whatever secrets the piece may hold, one thing is clear as the day: the "Ciaccona" is a towering monument representing the power of the human spirit, which transcends the physical limitations of the violin.

REZA VALI

#### Calligraphy No. 5

One of the oldest ancestors of the violin is the rebab, or the "spike-fiddle," commonly featured in the Arab music of Central Asia. From it derived the *kemancheh* (a very popular Persian folk instrument) and the violin, both of which are still widely used in Arab folk music.

This close connection to the violin's ancestor made me gravitate toward "Calligraphy

No. 5", a piece whose musical material is derived from Persian traditional music. The modal characteristics of the piece, as well as the tuning, rhythm, and form, relate to the Iranian modal system, the *Dástgâh*. The pitch structure of the composition is based on the Persian *Dástgâh* of *Návâ*. *Návâ* (pronounced nahVoh)



is one of the oldest modes of the Persian modal system. The scale of *Návâ* used for the piece is: D-Ep-F-G-A-B $\flat$ -C-D. The 'Ep' means that the pitch is a quarter-tone higher than E-flat. For "Western ears" this "bending" of the pitch, gives the feeling of the slightly "out-of-tune", meandering quality of Arab music.

Called an "Iranian Bartok" by the 20th Century Music Magazine, Reza Vali is a composer adept at merging the richness of his native folk music with Western classical techniques. Born in Iran, he studied composition at the Academy of Music in Vienna and Pittsburgh University. He is currently an Associate Professor of Composition at Carnegie Mellon University.

SHIRISH KORDE

**Vák** (for violin and electronic drone)

When I heard Shirish Korde's Violin Concerto "Svara-Yantra", I knew that no one else but he could write a piece inspired by



Indian Ragas. Shirish Korde is a composer of Indian descent who spent his early years in East Africa. He arrived in the United States in 1965, already well versed in the traditions of Indian and African music. He studied jazz at Berklee College of Music, composition and analysis with Robert Cogan at New England Conservatory, and Ethnomusicology at Brown University. Mr. Korde is currently a Professor of Music at the College of the Holy Cross.

"Vák" is modeled after a classical North Indian Raga performance which consists of three sections: *Alap*, *Jor* and *Jhalla*. *Vák* is a sanskrit word which literally translates into "speech". But *Vák* (also spelled as "Vac"), commonly refers to the "goddess of speech". Her many attributes include "one

who enters into inspired poets, visionaries and who is a friend of musicians." She is also the mother of all emotions, mother of the sacred scriptures called the Vedas, and is identified with the goddess Saraswati- the goddess of music and learning.

"Vák" is based on the North Indian Raga Lalit which is among only a handful of Ragas that exclude the 5th scale degree. Most theoretical writings classify Lalit as an early morning raga-to be played at daybreak. In the first section, *Alap*, each note of the Raga and characteristic figures of the Raga are unfolded gradually and without any sense of pulsation. The arch like *Alap* transitions into the second section, *Jor* without break and almost imperceptibly. In this section there is a background

pulse without a fixed meter. The third section, *Jhalla*, also grows out of the *Jor* without a break, but the underlying pulse is faster and accelerates throughout the *Jhalla* with the melodic statements becoming more and more virtuosic and culminating in the extremely fast melodies played against a fast pulse.

#### BRIGHT SHENG **The Stream Flows: II**

Bright Sheng is a Chinese-American composer, conductor and pianist. He was born in China, and has lived in the United States since 1982, where he has become a household name. He is on the composition faculty of University of Michigan and was named composer in residence for the New York City Ballet. In 2001 he received a MacArthur Genius Grant.



"The Stream Flows" was dedicated to Sheng's teacher, Hugo Weisgall and it is written in two parts. The movement presented on this recording (second movement) is a fast country dance based on a three-note motive. This

movement alternates between rhythmic sections of gong and cymbal-like sounds. The more lilting sections are reminiscent of the sonority of an erhu, the Chinese traditional instrument related to the violin.

**ASTOR PIAZZOLLA**  
**Tango Étude No. 3**

Perhaps the most famous musician associated with the tango, Astor Piazzolla did not start out with the intention to write this kind of music. It was his teacher, Nadia Boulanger who (after hearing his unsuccessful attempts to copy the style of various classical composers) encouraged him to become his true-self by composing the music he knew best and was dear to his heart.

Piazzolla's "nuevo tango" style



served as a basis for much of his vast catalog of compositions, including the set of Six Tango Études written in 1987 (originally for flute). The "Tango Étude No. 3" features fiery dance rhythms and the illusion of more than one voice created by the fast shifts between the upper and lower voices. The slow middle section takes on a reflective, but sensuous tone. The "fire under ice" poise of the tango and its ever-appealing style made it imperative to be featured on this program.

**JEROD IMPICHCHAAACHAAHA'**  
**TATE**  
**Oshta (Four)**

Jerod Impichchaaachaaha'  
Tate is praised and honored for "his ability to effectively infuse classical music with American Indian nationalism"

(*The Washington Post*). Born in Norman, Oklahoma, he is a citizen of the Chickasaw Nation and is dedicated to the development of American Indian classical composition. Mr. Tate was recently selected as one of five composer-orchestra pairs, selected through a peer review panel process, to participate in Music Alive, a national three-year composer-orchestra residency program of the League of American Orchestras and New Music USA.

Tate writes: "Oshta is the Chickasaw word for the number 'four' and became the title of this work in the spirit of the *Four Strings Around the World* project. The work is closely based upon a Choctaw church hymn that was composed in the 1800's. One very unique artistic

development that grew out of European contact is the modern American Indian church hymn. As missionaries fanned out across Indian Country they became the first to document our Native languages and create translations of The Bible and other Christian texts, including church hymns. This almost immediately led to a new series of hybrid music, composed by tribal citizens. For Southeast Indians (Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Creek and Seminole) this hybrid style of music is now 300 years old and contains a vast repertoire. The music is unmistakably Native and added a third type of traditional music alongside stomp dancing music and our old folk songs."

"Oshta" presents the Choctaw Hymn 53 as the centerpiece and is embedded within the abstractions of the melody."

It is a very unique, eerie piece that reflects Tate's feelings of the ancient time in which it was composed. At the premiere of this piece, I performed *Oshta* in the dark, in order to allow the listeners to focus only on its haunting sounds.

**MARK O'CONNOR**  
**The Cricket Dance**

Since his debut at the age of 13,



as the winner of Grand Master Fiddler Championship, Mark O'Connor has reached the stature of an international performer and composer. He has collaborated with the most famous artists from the classical, jazz and bluegrass music fields and his Sony recording "Appalachian Journey" won a GRAMMY® Award in 2001. O'Connor is extremely dedicated to the educational work of the younger generations, through his violin book methods and string camps. "The Cricket Dance", a short but intensely rousing piece, belongs to the set of works written by Mark O'Connor for his *Midnight on the Water* album. The piece specifically requires foot-tapping, which is quite common in bluegrass music, but something frowned upon for classical musicians!

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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—Irina Muresanu



## **IRINA MURESANU**

Romanian violinist Irina Muresanu has won the hearts of audiences and critics alike with her "irresistible," (Boston Globe) exciting, elegant and heartfelt performances of the classic, romantic and modern repertoire. The Los Angeles Times has written that her "musical luster, melting lyricism and colorful conception made Irina Muresanu's performance especially admirable". Her performances have been frequently cited as among the Best of Classical Music Performances by

the Boston Globe, most recently for a 2016 recital titled "Rorem, Ravel, and Rags."

Muresanu has performed in renowned concert halls throughout North America, Europe and Asia. Her solo engagements include concerts with the Boston Pops, the Miami Symphony Orchestra, the Williamsburg Symphonia, the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande (Geneva), the Transvaal Philharmonic (Pretoria, S. Africa), the Romanian National Orchestra,

the Orchestre de la Radio Flamande (Brussels), the Boston Philharmonic, amongst others.

An active chamber musician and recitalist, Ms. Muresanu is a member of the Boston Trio. She has appeared in such festivals and venues as Bargemusic in New York, the Rockport Festival in Massachusetts, Bay Chambers concert series and Bowdoin Festival in Maine, the Strings in the Mountains and San Juan Music Festival in Colorado, Maui Chamber Music Festival in Hawaii, Reizend Music Festival in Netherlands, Festival van de Leie in Belgium, and the Rencontres des Musiciennes Festival in France and Guadeloupe islands.

In 2013, Muresanu introduced her *Four Strings Around the World* project, a solo violin recital

featuring works of composers inspired by various musical cultures around the world. Critic Keith Powers noticed the formidable virtuosic stamina and originality of this program in the *Cape Cod Times*:

*"Four Strings Around the World" not only extends the superbly talented Muresanu in new directions, but offers a glimpse into variations of violin technique and approach that would only be gleaned by attending different concerts in various country fairs, Irish pubs, campfire gatherings and parlors."*

*Four Strings Around the World* sparked an orchestral project called *Strings Across Europe*, a program in which Muresanu performs multiple roles as soloist and conductor. She premiered

this program with longtime collaborators at Symphony New Hampshire in November 2017.

Irina Muresanu is an avid performer of new music, especially by American composers. Her recent recording releases include the Thomas Oboe Lee's Violin Concerto (dedicated to Ms. Muresanu) on the BMOP label, and works of Elena Ruehr on Avie Records. Ruehr's aforementioned album *Lift* was included on Keith Powers' 13 Best Classical Music Recordings of 2016. She has also recorded the complete William Bolcom sonatas on the Centaur label with pianist Michael Lewin, funded by the Copland Recording Grant. In Europe, her recording of the Guillaume Lekeu and Alberic Magnard late Romantic Violin and Piano Sonatas with pianist Dana

Ciocarlie for the AR RE-SE French label has sparked enthusiasm.

Irina Muresanu currently serves on the faculty at the University of Maryland and has taught at Boston Conservatory and in the Harvard and MIT Music Departments. She received the prestigious Artist Diploma degree and a Doctor in Musical Arts degree from the New England Conservatory. She plays an 1849 Giuseppe Rocca violin and an Étienne Pajeot bow.

[irinamuresanu.com](http://irinamuresanu.com)



## IRINA MURESANU FOUR STRINGS AROUND THE WORLD

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