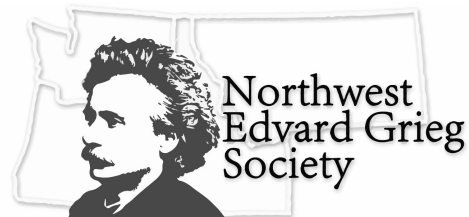


From Grieg to Gershwin
Part III: Tradition and Contemporary Visions

Friday, October 16, 2020



Program

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| Arietta, Op. 12, No. 1 | Edvard Grieg (1843-1907) |
| Improvisation on Arietta | Charlie Albright (b. 1992) |
| Prelude I Prelude II Prelude III | George Gershwin (1898-1937) |
| Improvisations on Grieg's <i>Morning Mood</i> | Rachel Nesvig & Albright (b. 1985) |
| Amazing Grace Variations | Albright |
| A Birthday Salute to Bergen | Albright |

Program Notes

Program Notes by Laura Loge

Our final program in this mini-series brings us to a melding of the traditional music from Grieg and Gershwin, yet takes us beyond it through improvisation by our performers. Super-star pianist Charlie Albright demonstrates his ability both to play traditionally classical music and to expound on it, elevating it to another plane of existence. Each of his improvisations begins with the original and develops into elaborate, stunning musical works of their own.

The opening piece, "Arietta," introduces us to Grieg's *Lyric Pieces*. In all Grieg published 66 of these miniatures for solo piano, many of which are frequently performed today by students, amateurs, and professionals alike, and outside of his grand *Piano Concerto in A Minor*, and *Peer Gynt*, are probably the most well-known of his compositions simply because almost every pianist has played at least a few of them. According to Grieg's biographers Finn Benestad and Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, "This is due to the melodic charm, the rhythmic and harmonic freshness, and the national flavor that absolutely abound in the best of these pieces." "Arietta," the very first piece of his first volume of *Lyric Pieces*, Op. 12, was published in 1867, the same year he married his musical and life partner Nina while living in Oslo. A mere twenty-three bars long, uncomplicated, and perfect for a student, yet it is quite charming in spite its briefness. It concludes with a recap of the opening measure, creating the perfect opportunity to cycle back to the beginning, allowing Charlie to elaborate and improvise on the theme, an opportunity to bring out the potential depths of emotion hiding under the surface of Grieg's original.

Returning to our American composers from the second concert, members of the Seattle-Bergen String Quartet join Charlie in Gershwin's *Preludes*. Highlighting Gershwin's recognizable style in which he merges traditionally classical sounds with jazz and folk music from the American continents, these pieces represent a style of music that, in its time, was considered quite novel. Composed in 1926, the *Preludes* were originally written for piano solo, and though Gershwin initially performed six, only the three presented here were

published. In 1942 Jascha Heifetz arranged them for piano and violin. *Prelude I* for violin and piano opens with a call and response between the instruments and expands into a syncopated Brazilian *baião* dance with each instrument taking turns leading with vibrant virtuosity. *Prelude II* expands the interactive musical conversation to include both cello and viola with the piano in a lullaby steeped in the blues. After a short pizzicato introduction *Prelude III* leaps directly into a call and response conversation between the piano and violin, waffling between minor and major, a harmonic motif Grieg was also known to utilize frequently. Virtuosity is on full display in both instruments, ending with an ever-rising flourish with major winning in the final bars.

The true folk sound is on full display in Grieg's best-known work, *Peer Gynt*, Op. 23, which he often referred to as sounding too Norwegian, especially blatant in the ubiquitous opening theme of "Morning Mood." These opening pitches are actually taken directly from the incidental strings of the Norwegian folk instrument the *hardingfela* or Hardanger Fiddle on which Rachel begins by improvising on that theme. The instrument's sounds evoke the purely folk sound, and it was played both as a dance instrument and improvised on for pleasure. She then passes the improvisation on to Charlie who takes it beyond its simple beginnings, elaborating on it to give us the sounds of what Peer Gynt himself experienced as he watched the sun rise over the desert far from his native Norwegian soil as told in Ibsen's play. Charlie's improvisation develops Peer's adventures, toils, and myriad of emotions from those experiences far beyond what the play or Grieg's original incidental music express.

Another traditionally well-known melody, "Amazing Grace" originated as an Anglican hymn composed in 1779 by John Newton. It is possibly one of the most beloved hymns sung in every Christian denomination today, bringing comfort to those who hear or sing it. While we are experiencing the uncertainty and stresses that come from life in a global pandemic, we all need some traditional comforts. Charlie's simple initial statement of the melody opens up in his improvisation to envelope us in the warmth music brings to our souls that allows us to feel every emotion we've been unable to express.

To conclude our program, we highlight our connections as a global society with a celebration of Seattle's sister city Bergen which is celebrating its 950-year anniversary this year. Charlie opens with the official "Song to Bergen" or as it is called by Bergensers, "Nystemten," which is traditionally sung as an anthem for most events and festivities in the region. From the traditional song to the modern song, he seamlessly evolves into the contemporary and universally known "Happy Birthday." We build on the traditional and historical with contemporary experiences, musically and otherwise, always connected to our past yet growing and improving for the future with art and music an indispensable part of that growth.

Artist Bios

Hailed as "among the most gifted musicians of his generation" with a "dazzling natural keyboard affinity" who "made quite an impression" by the *Washington Post*, American pianist/composer/improviser **Charlie Albright** has been praised for his "jaw-dropping technique and virtuosity meshed with a distinctive musicality" by *The New York Times*, and his "extravagance that had showmanship but never felt cheap" with his "ease and smoothness that refuses to airbrush the music, but animates it from within" by the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Recipient of the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant and Gilmore Young Artist Award, Albright won the Ruhr Klavier Festival Young Artist Award presented by Marc-André Hamelin (Germany) and the Young Concert Artists International Auditions. In addition to performing, Albright is sought after as a speaker, masterclass instructor, teacher, and competition judge. His debut commercial recording, *Vivace*, has sold thousands of copies worldwide and the first two parts of a 3-part *Schubert Series* of live, all-Schubert recordings was released in 2017 and 2020. Charlie Albright breaks the "classical" rules of music by connecting with audiences like no other. Through his music, speaking, and unique improvisations that bring music to life, he crosses all genres...and makes it fun.

Albright regularly appears at major concert halls, festivals, and with artists of all genres worldwide. In 2019, he was the guest artist at the Isaac Stern Auditorium main stage of Carnegie Hall with the American Symphony Orchestra and Maestro Leon Botstein, and made his return appearances at the 2019 Bergen International Festival in Norway, where he performed a sold-out solo recital and was given the honor of performing the festival's traditional yearly concert of the Grieg Piano Concerto at Grieg Concert Hall with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra.

He is a frequently returning guest artist with such orchestras as the BBC Concert Orchestra (14-concert tour with Maestro Keith Lockhart, chosen as one of the "Best of the BBC 2015"); the Alabama, Baltimore, Boston Pops, Buffalo, California, Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia, Edmonton (Canada), Des Moines, Fort Smith, Houston, Kymi Sinfonietta (Finland), Lansing, Mobile, National Center for the Performing Arts (Beijing, China), Omaha, Phoenix, Seattle, San Francisco, Victoria (Canada), and West Michigan Symphony Orchestras. He has performed worldwide, including at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (Washington, D.C.); Symphony Hall (Boston); the Salle Cortot (Paris, France); the Arsht Center for the Performing Arts (Miami); the Kumho Art Hall (Seoul, South Korea); the NCPA (Beijing); and Alice Tully Hall (Mostly Mozart Festival, New York).

Albright regularly collaborates with artists from all genres, including vocalist/conductor Bobby McFerrin and violinist Joshua Bell. He has collaborated five times with revered cellist Yo-Yo Ma: at the honorary degree ceremony at Harvard University for Senator Ted Kennedy; at a 10th anniversary remembrance of 9/11; at the 60th anniversary of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* with Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison; at the Aspen Institute's *Citizen Artistry* conference in New York; and with the Silk Road Project.

Albright's compositions and improvisations have been likened to "the great Romantic-era composer-pianists" by *Classical Source* and have been praised as "thrilling" by the *DC Metro Theatre Arts*. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* raved that he "brought the art of classical-music improvisation to a new level."

A firm believer in education, Albright founded the *Charlie Albright Scholarship* and *Charlie Albright Piano* in collaboration with the Centralia College Foundation in his hometown. The Scholarship provides financial aid to music students, and money was raised to purchase and maintain a new 9-foot Steinway Piano for the college's Corbet Hall.

Winner of the Louis Sudler Prize in the Arts and named one of the "15 Most Interesting Seniors," Albright was also named Artist-in-Residence for Harvard University's Leverett House, a position last filled by cellist Yo-Yo Ma. Albright's numerous awards include First Prize in both Solo and Ensemble categories at the 2006 New York National Piano Competition; First Prize and all other awards offered at the 2006 Eastman International Piano Competition; Third Prize at the 2007 Hilton Head International Piano Competition; Semi-Finalist Award and Best Performance of a Work by Liszt in Stage I at the 2008 Sydney International Piano Competition; and the Vendome Virtuoso Prize and the Elizabeth Leonskaya Special Award at the 2009 Vendome Prize International Piano Competition.

Born in Centralia, Washington, Albright began piano lessons at the age of 3. He studied with Nancy Adsit and earned an Associate of Science degree at Centralia College while still in high school. He was the first classical pianist in the Harvard College/New England Conservatory 5-Year AB/MM Joint Program, completing a Bachelor's Degree as an Economics major and Pre-Med student at Harvard, and a Master of Music Degree in Piano Performance at NEC, having studied with Wha-Kyung Byun. He graduated with the prestigious Artist Diploma (A.D.) from The Juilliard School, having studied with Yoheved Kaplinsky. Albright is an official Steinway Artist.

For the latest information, please visit CharlieAlbright.com and [Facebook.com/CharlieAlbrightPianist](https://www.facebook.com/CharlieAlbrightPianist)

Violinist **Allion Salvador's** playing has been described as "fiery, seething with passionate fervor." Since graduating with degrees in Violin Performance and Neurobiology from the University of Washington, he has taken on the role of Assistant Concertmaster of the Yakima Symphony, Concertmaster of Seattle Metropolitan Chamber Orchestra, and is a member of Symphony Tacoma and the String Orchestra of the Rockies. He has served as concertmaster of the Seattle Philharmonic, Pierre Monteux Festival Orchestra, University of Washington Symphony, and Sammamish Symphony. He has founded and worked with several vibrant chamber music projects, including the piano trio Andromeda, the modern music-focused Inverted Space Ensemble, Sound Ensemble, and the Parnassus Project. Allion's interests also extend toward the podium. He is the founding music director of the Seattle Philharmonic Strings, a community orchestra promoting string repertoire of the highest quality. Devoted to education, Allion has coached the University of Washington Symphony, Roosevelt and Issaquah high schools, the Seattle Youth Symphony, and the UW Chamber Music Club.

Rachel Nesvig is an active freelance violinist and teacher in the Seattle area. She plays with Symphony Tacoma, Seattle Rock Orchestra, NOCCO, Seattle Metropolitan Chamber Orchestra, Yakima Symphony, among others, both classical and non-classical. She also enjoys playing in the pit, having performed with 5th Ave Theater and Pacific Northwest Ballet Orchestra. Rachel's chamber music credits include Puget Sound Strings, Sonic Quartet, and Arcobaleno Strings. An active recording artist, Rachel plays for Seattle Music Inc., and records tracks for local bands, composers, international movies, and video games. Internationally she has performed classical, pop, and folk music in Norway, South Korea, China and Kenya. Rachel has built a career around her love of music, performance, teaching, and Scandinavian tradition. She has played the Hardanger Fiddle for almost 20 years, studying and performing both in Norway and the United States. She was the first St. Olaf student to receive Distinction in Hardanger Fiddle in 2007. One of her current projects is curating her YouTube Channel dedicated to Hardanger Fiddle! She also has recorded Hardanger Fiddle for video games including Minecraft Norse Mythology by Gareth Coker, PODE by Austin Wintory, and Rend by Neal Acree. Composing new fiddle pieces while fusing new and old traditions with Hardanger Fiddle continues to be one of Rachel's passions.

Violist **Aleida Gehrels** is a leading collaborator in cross-genre music, equally at home with a chamber ensemble in intimate performance as she is with a hip hop group in a sold out stadium. Her diverse musical interests stem from rigorous classical training. Aleida made her debut as a soloist at age 17 and completed her Masters in viola performance at the Chicago College of Performing Arts. After touring all seven continents with a string quartet on luxury cruise liners, she relocated permanently to Seattle in 2015. Since then, Aleida has performed live on KING FM and KEXP radio, toured with Macklemore, premiered new music with The Sound Ensemble and the Seattle Metropolitan Chamber Orchestra, composed string arrangements for Pacific Northwest singer-songwriters, and frequently appeared with the Yakima and Federal Way symphonies.

Lauren McShane, cello, is a freelance cellist and teacher in Seattle. She performs regularly with Portland Cello Project, Seattle Rock Orchestra, and Seattle Metropolitan Chamber Orchestra. In addition to performing, Lauren is passionate about teaching. She believes that each student has a unique way of learning, that music pedagogy should complement and engage the student. She also believes music should be taught in a positive atmosphere, motivated by musical, emotional, and technical growth. She teaches a full private cello studio, at Holy Names Academy, Snoqualmie Strings, and is a faculty member at Icicle Creek Summer Symphony.

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