

# APOCRYPHA

MICHAEL IBSEN

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## Introduction

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“The owl  
of Minerva  
spreads its  
wings only  
with the  
falling dusk”

HEGEL



Hegel's proclamation about the owl of Minerva is in reference to how historical events are often only understood after their effects are felt. Not to be confused with a reason for apathy or inaction, this principle is paralleled in how we understand our ideological and artistic traditions. The canons we construct for these disciplines are a clear example of how contingencies shape what we see as significant or noteworthy. 'Apocryphal' texts can be defined in a few ways, but usually reference something outside the traditional canon or considered

at least by some to be heretical. Since, in my opinion, heresy is often simply a synonym for questions that need to be asked or statements that need to be made, I thought 'Apocrypha' would be a fitting choice for this collection of pieces I chose to record. Each piece falls, in its own way, outside the usual or typical canon of 'classical guitar music' (however you define that), and is an exploration of a side perhaps missing from the usual picture people have of this 'genre'. Some of the works are new pieces that expand the repertoire or canon in new directions, some are new works which take inspiration from the language of past composers who never wrote for guitar, while others are works that are simply underplayed or underappreciated.

*Illustrated Majuscule:  
Hans Holbein the Younger, 1497/1498 - 1543,  
Letter H, Alphabet of Death (series), woodcut  
with digital alterations by Laz, 2023*



Yoko Shimomura or Nobuo Uematsu who wrote for video games. As a teenager and young adult I grew an interest in more technical and 'progressive' music through discovering prog rock/metal which led me to the conclusion that I should probably get some classical training on the guitar to improve my knowledge of technique and theory. On the surface it might seem like a strange transition, but what I quickly discovered is that while classical guitar has its more traditional canon of Western Classical music, the modern classical guitar scene also has its progressive or innovative side. This is exemplified by players expanding the repertoire through working with living composers, transcribing or resurrecting older works that are underappreciated or not written for guitar, or writing new music. This kind of innovation is of course not without precedent, as any scholar of 19th century guitar virtuoso/composers would know, or anyone who has taken a cursory look at the lives of our forebears such as Julian Bream or

My route to discovering the classical guitar and the music played within this loosely-defined genre wasn't exactly a traditional one. Setting aside the question of whether what most modern classical guitarists play is even what most people think of when they combine the concepts of classical music and guitar in their minds, the closest exposure I had to classical music as a child was either Handel or other sacred music at Christmas (which I'll take over Mariah Carey any day of December), and the nostalgia-charged music of Japanese composers such as

Andres Segovia, any of their faults notwithstanding. At the same time, it became clear to me that there was a tendency for classical guitarists to mimic one another (as humans in any discipline are wont to do) by playing the same pieces the same way, and that worse yet, many aspects of our classical guitar culture have a tendency to incentivize and encourage this kind of traditionalist preservation over encouraging young players to carve out their own artistic identities.

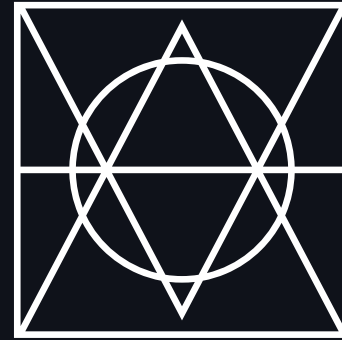
As a young idealist, I resolved to play new and old music which I thought worth bringing attention to, while also working with living composers to do my small and humble part to expand our repertoire. Of course I could not entirely avoid the allure of classics like Rodrigo's 'Junto al Generalife' or Mauro Giuliani's 'Grand Overture' which have such an iconic place in our canon for legitimate aesthetic reasons, but I was resolved not to let arbitrary contingencies of history wholly define what my repertoire would be. Perhaps this attitude is in part a consequence of my shift as a young adult from strong religious belief to agnostic atheism, and my attempt from there to free myself as much as possible from any ideological or philosophical allegiance which would require me to affirm adherence or belief in anything that is not perpetually in question. Of course, us humans need definitions and labels to communicate. While as a cynical and overeducated classical musician and a stickler for definitions, I feel reservation at identifying myself as a classical guitarist, or being politically on the left, or even an atheist-knowing that people will so often miss the mark on knowing what I mean by those things (*imagine assuming it's my job as an a-theist to disprove god when I am not the one making the claim, I simply lack the belief*)—I know I can't escape using such labels and having to identify myself with one camp or another from time to time. Perhaps the best answer to feeling restricted by your label is to show another side of that label through action. It is in that spirit that I hope this CD and my contribution to the more apocryphal side of the classical guitar canon can be received as an honest effort from someone aware of my own idealism and shortcomings, and that this is but one small part in a much larger process encompassing many guitarists and composers beyond myself.

*"The high ambition, therefore, seems to me to be this: That one should strive to combine the maximum of impatience with the maximum of skepticism, the maximum of hatred of injustice and irrationality with the maximum of ironic self-criticism. This would mean really deciding to learn from history rather than invoking or sloganising it."*

— Christopher Hitchens

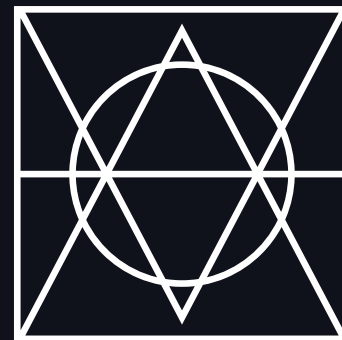


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## Repertoire and Structure

I have organized the pieces on the album as a listenable  
palindrome, with similar types of pieces organized symmetrically if you listen  
to the tracks either forwards or backwards. To give credit where it is due I got this idea  
from Xavier Jara's GFA winner Naxos CD, and his playing has been a great source of inspiration  
for me. However, within this organizational structure there are three kinds of pieces, and  
I will write here about the pieces within those three categories, not in the  
palindromic order they are presented on the CD.







# I Compositional body-snatching

*Creatively filling the gaps  
in our repertoire*



What if Shostakovich had written for guitar? The thought struck me as I walked from the bus stop to my guitar literature course on a chilly January morning in Vancouver, surrounded by the drab and aggressively dark music department buildings on the University of British Columbia campus. As if to mimic my surroundings and schedule the hectic and anguished passages of his 8th string quartet were pounding in my ears, to be followed by Between the Buried and Me's latest 15-minute operatic progressive metal track. Being a bit late to my chosen field of study, I had been trying to expand my knowledge of the wide and long canon of western classical music, and had discovered that I immediately identified with Shostakovich's music for it's more melancholic and aggressive moments, while also enjoying in equal measure the dreamy and serene textures of Debussy and Ravel. Sadly, none of these composers had written for the guitar, due probably to its lack of popularity in their given place and time as a concert instrument. As 'Silent Flight Parliament' from BTBAM came on shuffle I recalled bonding with a colleague and friend of mine over our mutual love for their soaring blend of progressive metal and rock opera, as well as our mutual love of Shostakovich. A young guitarist and very talented composer, I had collaborated with Nathan Bredeson a few times, and so began hatching my plan to ask him to write a piece in homage to Shostakovich, using material from Shostakovich's own music we both loved (adapted to Nathan's unique compositional voice) to try and address what we both saw as an unfortunate gap in our repertoire while also contributing something new to it.

*Illustrated Majuscule:  
Hans Holbein the Younger, 1497/1498 - 1543,  
Letter W, Alphabet of Death (series), woodcut  
with digital alterations by Laz, 2023*



## Sonata No. 1 in D Minor (Homage to Shostakovich)

—  
Nathan Bredeson

Early on in our collaborations together I knew Nathan Bredeson was a detail-oriented person. What I didn't yet realize is the extent to which this would infuse every inch of the composition he was crafting for me. I had given him a list of a few of my favourite Shostakovich motifs and pieces, and perhaps the most fun part of working on this piece has been discovering all the elements from these works which were baked into the behemoth guitar sonata he ended up writing.

The theme that permeates the entire work is the most iconic Shostakovich motif: D-Eb-C-B. When read in the German pronunciation of these notes it becomes a musical signature: 'D'-'S'-'C'-'H' (Dmitri Shostakovich). Comprising two half steps, one ascending and one descending, it already has an eerie and chromatic effect which Nathan uses effortlessly in every movement of the sonata in various textures that bridge harmonic progressions. This motif first came to my attention hearing it in one of my favourite Shostakovich string quartets - the 8th. As it turns out, this quartet, dedicated "To the Memory of the Victims of Fascism and War" was written right after his tortured 'decision' to join the communist party, which according to testimony of

close friends brought him to the brink of suicide, some claiming he felt blackmailed to join a party that he knew would restrict his artistic freedoms and which he objected to on other moral grounds.

Aside from the question of whether his much more public symphonic music was pro-regime or pro-Stalin (as it was officially required to be) despite it's often thinly-veiled sardonic tone—just listen to the opening of the 9th Symphony, mandated to be dedicated to Stalin, which



1

*"He [Shostakovich] played the [8th] quartet to me on the piano and told me with tears in his eyes that it was his last work... During the next few days I spent as much time as possible with Shostakovich until I felt the danger of suicide had passed."*

— Lev Lebedinsky

comes across as a caricature of the self-aggrandizing and chauvinistic leader—it is clear that his chamber music such as the 8th quartet was much more personal music.

The first movement of this guitar sonata by Nathan Bredeson, 'Neurotica', really captures the nervousness and unease that would have been the constant companion of any artist working under a regime which was known to remove creators from existence for creating art that was even perceived as critical of the status quo. Using the aforementioned motif from the 8th string quartet, as well as plenty of his own material and other nods to Shostakovich, Bredeson takes a journey through many mental states in this movement, ranging from paranoia to humour. The score is peppered with performance indications that really help the performer play imaginatively, some of my favourites including: "sinister", "pompous", "mischevious", "sardonically", "questioning" and "totally demented".

Another quotation from a very personal piece that I requested Bredeson to use in this sonata was a melody from the 2nd movement of Shostakovich's 2nd piano concerto, a piece Shostakovich wrote for his son (who studied piano at the conservatory) to play in his final graduation recital. There is a fantastic recording on Youtube of his son conducting this very concerto with his grandson playing the piano, which was how I discovered the piece. Nathan turns this melody into a series of gorgeous tremolo passages in the second movement, titled 'Elegy', after the somber opening which uses the DSCH motif once more in a new texture. The movement ends with a very special 'shimmering' effect, achieved by brushing the strings quickly with the flesh of the index finger.



2

1. Dmitri Shostakovich

2. Nathan Bredeson





The final movement 'Scherzo' is partially a nod to our mutual love for the progressive metal band 'Between the Buried and Me', whose album 'Parallax II: Future Sequence' wraps up its 72 minutes of frenetic riffery with the track 'Silent Flight Parliament'. This track rips motifs and elements of the preceding 10 tracks and smashes them into an energetic and epic finale to the album, much as Bredeson's final movement of his guitar sonata does. The scherzo glitches along, introducing previous motifs from the sonata by playing little snippets of the motifs that get interrupted and disrupted by aggressive chords and impishly tricky slur passages. Since us guitarists can never quite get away from it, the sonata ends with a good old breakdown using strummed chords, probably how any epic guitar piece should finish, right?

This sonata is truly a masterpiece, and while I have had my moments feeling intimidated by it, I realize that this recording is but one version of hopefully many future versions by other guitarists, and need not be definitive. I can never fully express my gratitude to Nathan Bredeson for writing such a personal and finely crafted piece, and I truly hope that it takes on a life of its own beyond our collaboration together. Despite Shostakovich never having written for guitar, I hope this piece serves to scratch the itch of guitar-listeners and guitarists alike who want something related to his musical contribution, as well as opening their eyes to the contributions such a talented young composer like Bredeson is making to our repertoire now.



*Dmitri Shostakovich*



## Variations on a theme by Debussy

—  
Allan Wilcocks  
(Tilman Hoppstock)

Over another beer I remember the impish look on Simon Farintosh's face as he leaned over to ask me if I knew who Allan Willcocks really was. I was a bit tired from the road trip all the way from Vancouver where Simon picked me up to Portland, Oregon where we had both performed in the Northwest Guitar Festival competition and attended numerous master classes as well as a concert of Simon's teacher Alexander Dunn. The lack of sleep combined with the beer made my brain jam. 'What does he mean who Allan Willcocks really is? Didn't Alex tell us from the stage?' As it turns out, Alex Dunn was in on the joke: the composer Allan Willcocks didn't really exist but was in fact a fictional person and pseudonym used by Tilman Hoppstock to write music that fit sonically alongside the music of Debussy and Ravel. Dunn had simply enhanced the humorous twist Hoppstock has put on the usage of this pseudonym by pretending Willcocks existed from stage. There was now a whole other group of people going about their lives thinking Allan Willcocks was a real composer, and I had very nearly been one of them.

There is a distinct lack of guitar music from the so-called late 19th/early 20th Century 'Impressionist' era (think Debussy, Ravel, and Satie). Inventing the person of Allan Willcocks, Hoppstock created a fictional life story for this "English composer" who "worked and studied" in Paris, even going so far as to put out material with photos of "Willcocks" from throughout his life. Being a prodigious and highly adept composer, Hoppstock writes in this style effortlessly, and even more impressively, in a way that is fluid and natural on the guitar. Although he has publicly come out and dispelled his own myth, like a magician pulling back the curtain to show how the trick is done, he continues to write under this pseudonym to do his part to shore up the cracks in our repertoire.

The 'Variations on a Theme by Debussy' was brought to my attention during my masters studies with Carlo Marchione in Maastricht, the Netherlands. We found a gem hidden in the 5th Leo Brouwer sonata I was learning - a little melodic

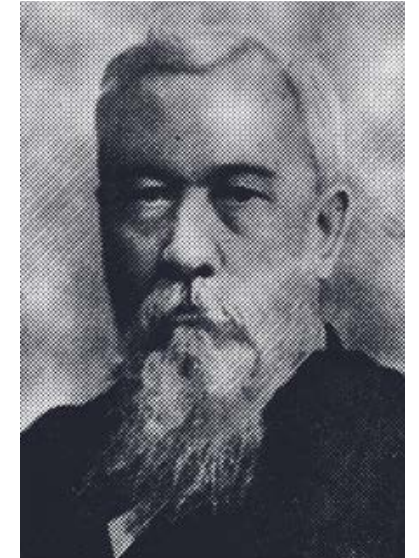
quote from Debussy's piano prelude 'Des pas sur la neige' (Footsteps in the snow). Brouwer has good taste, and so does Tilman Hoppstock, as it turns out that this was the exact theme he used in his latest set of Variations written under his pseudonym. The variations use the guitar in its full potential, utilizing slurs, arpeggios, harmonics, the 6th string dropped to D, and many other effects to create a rich and mesmerizing texture for the full duration of the piece. This is for me truly one of those pieces you can never get sick of playing, each variation is a microcosm of compositional genius, and those 4 notes from Debussy are woven in effortlessly.



Allan Willcocks at the age of 12 (1881)



Aged 32 (1901)



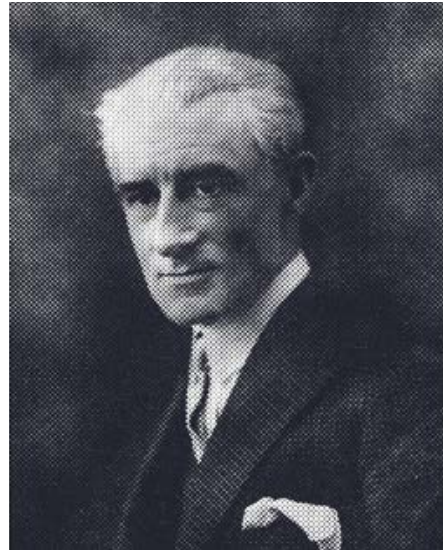
Aged 66 (1935)





**Variations on a theme  
by Ravel**  
—  
**Zaki Hagins**

It's a rare thing when a collaborator does something that makes you feel like they read your mind or somehow peered into your past. I met Zaki Hagins briefly during the orientation week at Conservatorium Maastricht where I was studying guitar performance and he was studying composition. After a short conversation at a house party where I discovered we had a mutual love for the music of Ravel, I immediately made a mental note to broach the subject of writing for guitar with him. My chosen topic for my masters thesis was, after all, collaboration between guitarists and composers, particularly contrasting the experience of working with composers who had written for guitar before and those who hadn't. Hagins was enthusiastic and generous when I approached him, even going so far as to come over to hang out with me and Leo Zeijl (a guitarist also studying in Maastricht) at Leo's apartment to get us to play for him and show him what unique textures and techniques classical guitar is capable of.



1

A few days later I received a message from him letting me know he had chosen to write a set of variations on a theme by Ravel, his chosen theme: a melody from "Trois beaux oiseaux du paradis", one of Ravel's choral pieces. Hagins told me he had sung this in choir with his brother, which lent it a nostalgic meaning for him. He couldn't have known that I had seriously participated

in my university's chamber choir during my bachelors, even going so far as to go on tour in Italy with them and seriously consider a masters in choral conducting instead of guitar performance, could he?

2



One of the most striking things about these Variations is how deftly Hagins writes despite it being his maiden voyage composing for guitar. The melody Hagins chose for his Variations is gorgeous but simple, as any good melody should be. It is introduced and expounded on in a setting that fits perfectly on the fretboard, before being playfully deconstructed and warped in the subsequent variations. Each variation

flows fluidly from one to the other, giving way to ever more articulated and dense textures which culminate in a crescendo that suddenly abates with long ringing chords of undefined length. After the relieving of tension these chords offer, the theme is once more presented in a somber and beautiful outro that brings back haunting echoes of the past. I am so grateful to Zaki Hagins for crafting a piece that means so much to us both, giving me the chance to discover his skill at writing for guitar along with having the opportunity to play material and textures inspired by one of our favourite composers: Ravel.

1. Maurice Ravel

2. Zaki Hagins



## II Alien Notation

*Taking the classical guitar  
to new frontiers*



One of the joys of playing music written by living composers is expanding my perspective of what is possible on the guitar through the sometimes blunt medium of notation.

Every composer has their own unique musical language, and the syntax of that language is found in the way they notate their ideas through the score; both in obvious and defined markings, as well as the unwritten information in between the markings that is contextual and interpretive. Just like a new spoken or written language used to communicate words and conceptual ideas, the longer one spends reading and 'speaking' (or in this case playing) the language the more its peculiarities and conventions become clear and usable to you. The next two pieces are excellent examples of works which use notation and the particularities of the guitar in effective and truly ground-breaking ways, realizing textures that I have yet to hear in any other guitar music. It is probably no coincidence that both composers are not themselves guitarists, but chose their first time writing for the guitar as a chance to take a risk and blaze a new trail.

*Illustrated Majuscule:  
Hans Holbein the Younger, 1497/1498 - 1543,  
Letter O, Alphabet of Death (series), woodcut  
with digital alterations by Laz, 2023*





**Shadow Prism**  
—  
**Jason Noble**

*“A natural harmonic isolates a single partial from the complex spectrum of an open string of the guitar, splitting the harmonic off and allowing its individual colour to be appreciated. In that way, it is like a prism. But this colour is isolated by blocking all of the other partials out. In that way it is like a shadow”*

— Jason Noble

The guitarist Steve Cowan is one of those people who makes you feel like you’re the only person in the room when he speaks with you, perhaps mirroring the attention and care he clearly dedicates to every artistic project he is a part of. After meeting online and discovering our shared love for playing new Canadian music Steve reached out to me to set up a meeting when I would be in Montreal for the Montreal Guitar Festival and Competition. I was very new to this world, being in my undergraduate degree, and I must confess to being a little star struck that this veteran and rising star who I had admired from afar would make time to go to Tim Hortons with me. He was performing a concert that evening for the festival as the winner of the previous year’s competition, and that was where I first heard ‘Shadow Prism’. Steve was more than generous with showing me the score and encouraging me to work on realizing my own version of this fabulous piece which he had commissioned from Jason Noble.

Made up entirely of harmonics and open strings, and with a scordatura of Eb-A-C#-G-Bb-E, the piece weaves a unique and mesmerizing texture. Besides the unique sound world created via this tuning and the use of harmonics, the syntax of the piece is governed by aleatoric (semi-improvised) passages contained in a combination of repeated cells and shapes. This means that the player can play each passage as many times as they choose, sometimes with pre-determined sequences of pitches or rhythmic motion (gradually getting faster or slower), and sometimes with a cluster of pitches that can be freely improvised within which are displayed in various geometric shapes or prisms.

Because the number of repeats and amount of time spent in each cell or prism is not predetermined the piece can vary greatly in length, speed, and atmosphere depending on who the player is. Despite this layer of freedom, Noble has managed to include just enough direction in terms of tempo changes, performance indications, and dynamics that the piece still has a satisfying and definite narrative ‘arc’ which is discernible, although that arc may differ in length and height from performance to performance.

The work of interpreting a text (literary or musical) is never over, and can always surprise you. One example of this is a passage in the piece where there is a predetermined sequence of notes with feathered beams above them, indicating that the player should gradually speed up in this passage, while also containing a repeat sign afterwards signifying that the cell may be repeated as many times as the player desires. I had been resetting to a slow tempo each time I repeated this phrase. My teacher Carlo Marchione noticed this while I was playing and asked if the notation might be



asking me to start very slow and then continue speeding up each time I repeated the phrase. I realized I wasn't sure what Noble's intention had been, and made a mental note to ask him about it later (one of the advantages of working with living composers). Later that week I chanced to be speaking with Steve Cowan and brought this up to him, realizing he might have known Jason Noble's intention, having worked on the piece with him while it was being written. Steve's answer was to laugh, advising me that Jason had resisted attempts to clarify some similar questions Steve had asked when he was learning the piece, since to answer them would restrict the possible permutations of the piece based on individual interpretation. I happily avoided pestering Noble, tried both options and chose the one I like, which I hadn't heard in any previous versions of the piece. Perhaps sometimes it's best not to know the author's intention, but enjoy having it both ways.

This piece is truly a groundbreaking addition to the modern classical guitar repertoire, and has its own unique beauty. It is of course true that some artists and creators can get stuck in doing something experimental and progressive for experiment and progress' sake, even if it isn't aesthetically well conceived. This couldn't be further from the truth in the case of 'Shadow Prism', which tells such a captivating and transporting sonic narrative no matter how much or how little the listener understands of aleatoricism or guitar tuning. I am immensely grateful to Jason Noble and Steve Cowan for both being so generous in their correspondence with me as I have gotten to know the piece myself, and hope you enjoy my recording of it.

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature. It features a melodic line with various ornaments and dynamics, including *f* and *p*. The lower staff is in bass clef and contains a complex rhythmic accompaniment with numerous fingerings (e.g., 1, 3, 3, 4, 3, 4, 3, 4, 4, 4, 4, 5, 4, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 6, 6, 5, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6) and dynamics like *f* and *p*. The second system also has two staves. The upper staff includes a 15-measure rest (*15<sup>ma</sup>*) and dynamics such as *ff*, *mp*, *piu ff*, *mf*, and *fff*. The lower staff includes a *brash S.P.* instruction. Below the second system, there are two musical phrases. The first phrase is marked *mf* and *smooth Norm.* with the instruction *gradually softer and slower*. The second phrase is marked *mf*. To the right of these phrases is a diagrammatic representation of the guitar's fretboard, showing two triangular fretboard diagrams. The top diagram shows a sequence of notes on the strings, and the bottom diagram shows a sequence of notes with fingerings 6, 4, 5, 6, 3. Arrows indicate the flow of the music from the phrases to these diagrams.





## Negotiation — Tova Kardonne

“Ominous approaching of a soft-footed monster” — the performance indication jumped right out at me the first time I perused the score. I was lucky enough to stumble on ‘Negotiation’ by Tova Kardonne while searching for new music for a tour Nathan Bredeson and I were planning in which we played only new Canadian music. Aside from our largely duo program we also played a smattering of solo pieces and this one immediately caught our attention as something special. In the end Nathan played this piece on that tour, but since then I also learned the piece and realized it fits perfectly under the heading of pieces which expand the language and canon of the classical guitar. A short poem by Kardonne accompanies the piece which sets the tone for a work which seems to have multiple identities weaved into it.

*“One negotiates when one cannot walk away;  
it’s a symptom of being trapped.  
Gifts and debts refused equally, I needed to find a way back to all the  
selves I compromised  
in Negotiation.”*

— Tova Kardonne

Not a guitarist herself, Tova Kardonne seems to do everything else from vocals and viola, to various jazz ensembles, composing choral and chamber music, and more. This was her first piece for classical guitar, and was the product of the ‘Class Axe’ initiative in Toronto, where guitarists are paired with composers who haven’t written for guitar before to collaborate with them on realizing new works for the instrument. This piece was the result of collaboration between Kardonne and Rob MacDonald, who runs the Class Axe program. ‘Negotiation’ is at once varied and diverse in texture, rhythm, and harmony, while also telling an enrapturing narrative that feels cohesive even when it’s intentionally disjointed.

In the opening the piece uses slurs, tamboura, and synchronization/desynchronization of the left and right hand to great effect. During this “ominous approach of a soft-footed monster” there

are dissonant interludes of Bartok pizzicatos and scurrying melodic fragments which morph into arpeggios and two-voice polyphony that crescendos before falling silent. The piece then suddenly changes tack and veers into some kind of math-rock/jazz breakdown. The riffs are cheeky and joyful, and bit by bit start slowing down and transforming into a contemplative ostinato groove which has notes stripped away bit by bit until the piece fades away with one final tamboura which recalls the opening.

I believe that composers bring all their selves to the pieces they write, and in ‘Negotiation’ we get to see Tova Kardonne negotiate many parts of her creative and musical identities. Despite the vast array of ideas on display, the piece comes across like a well-conceived film, it strikes the perfect balance between plot-twists and carefully crafted climaxes and releases. Her ideas and writing bring something so fresh to the classical guitar repertoire and I’m very grateful that she chose to write for this instrument.

6

*pp*  
tamb.  
(strings vibrating,  
ominous approach of soft-footed monster)

32

*mp* a tempo  
"scurry"

*f* obnoxious



# III Four Preludes

*Underappreciated gems of the repertoire*



The prelude is one of the most common musical forms, particularly for short and digestible pieces. The four preludes on this album are from two of my favourite sets of preludes which are, in my opinion, criminally underrated. My hope by including them here is to help bring more attention to a couple composers who deserve more recognition and airtime in the global scope of classical guitar.

*Illustrated Majuscule:  
Hans Holbein the Younger, 1497/1498 - 1543,  
Letter T, Alphabet of Death (series), woodcut  
with digital alterations by Laz, 2023*





## Preludes 8 and 10 — Bryan Johanson

It's hard to overstate the impact of Bryan Johanson in the Pacific Northwest, particularly among classical guitarists. A member of the Oregon Guitar Quartet, professor at Portland State University, and extremely prolific composer that he is, I first became acquainted with his music through the Northwest Guitar Festival, which spans the Pacific Northwest and Western Canada. His pieces were regularly played from the stage by him or other concert artists, as well as being required repertoire for the competition one year that I participated.

Since moving to Europe I have been disappointed that his music is less known and played among guitarists here, so I've been doing my fair share of evangelism for his considerable guitar output, which is of a great quantity and high quality. His set of 24 preludes were first brought to my attention by Michael Partington, who has many fabulous recordings of Johanson's music. Through years of hearing Partington play Johanson's music in various venues, playing some of them myself for Partington in masterclasses, recording and performing them myself, and now using them almost every week in my teaching, I've come to love these pieces very much.

The two I have recorded here are numbers 8 and 10. Prelude 8 is a dark but mischievous prelude that comes across to me as a mix between what you'd expect from 'modern' or contemporary classical music and some kind of bebop jazz. Prelude 10 is much more atmospheric and melodic, featuring a lot of improvisatory pentatonic passages punctuated by light trills. This prelude also has a bit of a story attached to it. Many years before writing this cycle of preludes Bryan Johanson had a new guitar built for him by Jeffrey Elliot, in which they put a "message in the bottle" in the form of a piece of paper with a newly written work on it inside the guitar. Johanson then performed the piece once in a concert and shredded the only other existing copy of the music there at that concert, resolving to leave the piece in the guitar as a long-lost work later to be discovered. However he said, "the memory of the work haunted me", and years later he ended up improvising on motifs from that original piece, which eventually turned into this prelude. Perhaps one day the guitar will be opened up and we will find out how close this work is to that original lost prelude.





## Preludes 1 and 2 — Emilia Giuliani



1

Emilia Giuliani was undoubtedly a virtuoso of her generation, if written accounts and her compositions are any indication. Alive from 1813-1850, she published many works, and led a prolific career as concert artist and composer. Sadly, her works are not as widely played in the modern classical guitar repertoire as I think they ought to be, hence my desire to include her in my collection of apocryphal works (I can think of a few contributions by women to scripture or literature which have also been excluded from the usual canon in those traditions).

Preludes are usually considered to be shorter and more digestible pieces both for audience and performer, but the term is loose enough to include pieces with many other attributes. Emilia Giuliani's preludes certainly add the dimension of virtuosity to those attributes, in that although they are short and delightful, each one is devilishly tricky in some way. Prelude 1 is an almost Chopin-esque intro to the set, with lush harmonies and a chromatic bass-line that's sure to become your next earworm. Prelude 2 is a kind of etude in octaves, where the ability (or inability) of the player to make large shifts and jumps is on display. While both pieces feature a single texture, what I love is how Giuliani uses harmony and melodic development to subvert your expectations of what is coming next, which allows both pieces to keep you on the edge of your seat, enjoying every second.

2



1. Drawing of Emilia Giuliani  
Franz Johann Heinrich Nadorp, 1794 - 1876,  
with digital alterations by Laz, 2023

2. Portrait of Emilia Giuliani  
Franz Johann Heinrich Nadorp, 1794 - 1876,  
watercolour, heightened with white,  
over pencil on paper





# In Conclusion

To return to the cursed topic of labels, categorization, and apocrypha, I suppose this is the point in this overly long document where I ought to reflect on whether I've sufficiently questioned and worked to expand the canon of classical guitar repertoire. Thankfully that task is something I could never single-handedly accomplish, so I can shrug off that monumental duty by simply stating that I hope my humble contribution serves that purpose in its own small way.

Going back to the sentiment of "ironic self-criticism" lauded by Christopher Hitchens which I quoted earlier, perhaps this would be the moment to admit that the binary I have constructed between the canon and my own apocrypha is also simply a categorical construct I made to serve my own ends. The importance of various works within the classical guitar repertoire is ultimately subjective and depends very much on the perspective of the listener or guitarist; coloured very much by our own emotions and experiences, much like what literature we consume and praise. To return as well to my Christmas music anecdote (contrasting Handel and Mariah Carey, of all things), I would not want to live in a world where we entirely lose the tradition of sacred choral music as part of holiday celebrations in countries with that heritage (no matter whether we become atheists or not).

We listen to and create music and art for any number of reasons, and when it comes down to brass tax it is often very difficult to value one reason over another. However, perhaps selfishly, I like to think that giving people a new and heretofore undiscovered musical experience has its own value, which is probably why I subject my friends and family and those who listen to my playing to all manner of experimental or unheard material. I also count myself lucky to have found some composers and colleagues willing to collaborate on filling what we see as some unfortunate stylistic gaps in the classical guitar repertoire. If anything, I hope to have expanded your view of what classical guitar music is, perhaps annoyed some purists along the way, or simply given you some sounds you can enjoy. If you've read this far, I'm impressed with your patience, but I also want to thank you for taking the time to listen to my 'Apocrypha'.

I am eternally grateful to all the composers, musicians, and friends who have been a part of me discovering this music and putting this album together. There are simply too many to name but if you have in any way contributed to this album or shown support or encouragement to me through this process please know that I value it dearly. I would also like to thank my wife Jessica (and our two cats Loki and Nayru), my family, and my friends (online and offline) for making life so awesome and continuously showing me your love and support. Thanks to Laz for the amazing art and design for the album and these liner notes, Alex Bougie and Nathan Bredeson for their contributions to mixing and mastering, and of course Tilman Hoppstock, Zaki Hagins, Tova Kardonne, Bryan Johanson, Jason Noble, and Nathan Bredeson for the outstanding music.

Happy listening, and stay heretical!



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