Alexander Dunn
Guitar

Saturday, November 21, 2015 • 8:00 p.m.
Phillip T. Young Recital Hall
MacLaurin Building, University of Victoria
Free Admission
12 Miniature Preludes

Andrew Allan Willcocks*
(1869–1956)

Fresh Summer Day
Romance
Scatterbrained
Le matin au bord de l’eau – In the Morning at the Waters Edge
Pantomine
Ô Mort, poussière d’étoiles – O Death, Dust of Stars
Paysage Sentimental – Sentimental Landscape
The Handmaid’s Dream in the Dunes
Stormy Atmosphere
Moonlight Landscape
The little Puck
The Waters Fall

Suite in C major BWV 1009

J.S. Bach**
(1685–1750)

Prélude
Allemande
Courante
Sarabande
Bourée I-II
Gigue

INTERMISSION

Beverages and snacks available at the concession located in the lounge.

Studies for Guitar

Allan Willcocks*

Weeping Willows
A Summer Breeze
Le Gibet de Ravel
Luminous Sunset
Images of Nature
Still Waters
Children playing
Frost and Dew
Reflections
Choral
The Bells of Notre Dame
A Gale is blowing

Guitar by Antonius Mueller, Aarbergen, Germany, 2014
*Canadian premiere of combined cycles
**Arranged by Alexander Dunn
Andrew Allan Willcocks
Willcocks hailed from Canterbury where as a child he was encouraged to study the guitar with Giulia Pelzer, sister to the most prominent female guitarist of the nineteenth century. He later devoted his attention to piano, organ and composition. Study in Paris under Paul Dukas exposed him to the French style and it was there he formed deep friendships with Manuel Ponce, Cyril Scott, and other notable musicians. Indeed these influences and especially Ravel, can be discerned in his blending of Impressionist syntax with expert instrumental writing.

12 Miniature Preludes date from his Paris years alongside the Studies, which were discovered and published in 2012. Tonight’s concert features the complete preludes and studies — Willcock’s combined output for guitar.

12 Miniature Preludes were composed quickly, following the first six studies. They are lighter in tone, shorter in length, and generally less technically demanding than their counterpart. They all bear titles to poems or paintings, inspired by Willcocks’ contemporaries. The composer seems to draw creative motivation from the concept of a lone figure wandering rapt in nature, as seen in all the preludes inspired by paintings.

The first, Fresh Summer Day, is drawn from Anderson Hague’s (1850–1916) sun-bathed oil landscape of the same name. Dapples of light play within its frame, suffused with intoxicating warmth, and where a solitary individual is dwarfed by tall trees. The music is a breezy arpeggio study that swells and abates, in this brief entry into the cycle. Romance is fashioned after Paul Bourget’s (1852–1935) poem from Les Aveaux — a languorous reflection on lost love, whose dolorous opening lines are: ‘The vanishing and suffering soul, / The sweet soul, the fragrant soul / Of divine lilies that I have picked / In the garden of your thoughts…’ This prelude is contemplative and resonant, tinged with more somber moments. The Debussy-like Scatterbrained (after Scott C. Wilson’s poem) is an ephemeral scherzo, unable to resolve its mood swings, but resolute in its intent. Le matin au bord de l’eau — a sumptuous oil painting by Rodolphe Piguet (1840–1915) shows a pensive figure at the early morning river’s edge, bathed in soft greys and light greens. A placid musical figure repeats throughout in gradually shifting kaleidoscopic colours. Pantomine is a snapshot of the buffoonish Pierrot — the tragicomic clown of Commedia dell’arte theatre — pining after Columbine. Paul Verlaine’s (1844–
1896) poem *Pantomime* reads: ‘Pierrot, who is nothing like Clitandre, empties a bottle without ado, and, ever practical, cuts into a pâté /…Pantomime dreams, surprised / at feeling a heart in the breeze / and at hearing voices in her heart.’ Willcocks’ prelude teases: now dynamic, now bumbling in amiable changeability. Ô Mort, poussière d’étoiles inhabits a dark, measured place. Marked *molto triste*, it tolls funereal chords in the low register, answered by luminous harmonics. Charles van Lerberghe’s (1861–1907) poem of the same title concludes: ‘And like a wine of fire and divine scent flowing from a golden amphora, pour out my soul into your abyss, so that it may perfume the dark earth and the breath of the dead.’ Paul Bourget’s poem *Paysage Sentimental* describes a winter landscape where lovers juxtapose their frozen surroundings with warm stirrings: ‘The winter sky, so soft, / so sad, so dormant, /…Of the death of all- of all, / that is, but you, whom I so love, / and of the happiness that fills my soul…’

Willcocks’ music is continuous in its movement, giving the impression of an expressive inward journey, culminating in a gentle and inevitable cadence. Johann Cornelius Pabst’s (1853–?) *Farmer Girl in the Dunes* depicts a young farm girl in an ocean-blue frock with a basket, standing alone, lost in thought, gazing from the white sands onto a distant rural farmhouse and church. She seems to be enrapt in faraway dreams of the sea. The music falls in languid sighs with fleeting pentatonic colors, hinting at exotic and unknown lands. *Stormy Atmosphere* is a dark-hued painting showing ominous clouds gathering over a landscape and reflected in water below. The prelude begins with low mysterious rumblings, gathering momentum with a burst of light before its radiant ending. Louis Douzette’s (1834–1924) *Moonlight Landscape* is a gorgeous nightscape in which a solitary boatman regards the full moon emerging from behind silvered clouds. In the distance, a dark windmill with a lone light. Willcocks’ music begins with pale harmonics, giving way to expressive arpeggios before fading away into quiet oblivion. Comic relief is found in *The little Puck* — Shakespeare’s prankster from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The passage that seems to have inspired the jocular music is from Act II, Scene I, where Puck exclaims: ‘I am that merry wanderer of the night. /…And then the whole quire hold their hips and laugh, / And waxen in their mirth and neeze and swear / A merrier hour was never wasted there’.

*12 Miniature Preludes* concludes with a setting of Lovis Corinth’s (1828–1925) *The Waters Fall* — an expressionistic hand-colored lithograph from Corinth’s late period. In an apocalyptic, wind-battered scape, the Ark seems to float near mountaintops appearing through the flood. A raven and doves
hover overhead, with a tree, signifying resurgence, in the foreground. The music is a rush of cascading sound, with a more pensive middle section, giving way to exhilarating arpeggios and a final surge of light — closing in a fleeting moment and dispersing the reflective, duskier hues of the Preludes.

The Studies form two six-work cycles, in their totality reminiscent of Debussy or Villa-Lobos’ études. They are deeper in weight and purpose than the Miniature Preludes and range in temper from effervescent to rather bleak. Each addresses a specific technical consideration: scales, arpeggios, chords, harmonics, etc. The first six were composed before 1928 and the following six, featuring unusual scordatura tunings, completed in 1941.

The first, Weeping Willows, dedicated to the Mexican composer Manuel Ponce, is largely based on the whole-tone scale, glumly ranging across the instrument and marked ‘dreary’. A Summer Breeze — a fluid arpeggio study, follows, lightly dispelling any mood of gravity. The expressive highlight of the cycle, Le Gibet de Ravel, is a stark re-imagining of the second movement of Ravel’s monumental Gaspard de la Nuit. It is a monotonic tableaux on Alois Bertrand’s poem Le gibet (The Gallows), whose translation of the first and last couplet read:

Ah! What do I hear, was it the north wind that screeches in the night, or the hanged one who utters a sigh on the fork of the gibbet?

…

It is the bell that tolls from the walls of a city, under the horizon, and the corpse of the hanged one that is reddened by the setting sun.

Willcocks begins with a direct quote of the Ravel, slowly evolving into original music, but somehow combining elegance with utter dread. Luminous Sunset — prolonging the setting of dusk — scatters the hex with a spacious treatment of harmonics and flowing arpeggios. It fades gently into high-pitched harmonics, resolving any previous anxiety. Images of Nature exists in a physical realm with dynamic figuration and chiaroscuro shifts of brightness and shadow. It relaxes into a meditative state, but only to recall the forceful exclamation of its opening. Inspired by Charles J. Pahlmie’s (1863–1911) Silent Water — a darkly hued oil on canvas landscape in which the partially obscured moon is reflected in a deep, placid lake — Still Waters is a calm, unruffled meditation on beautiful sonorities and is dedicated to the Spanish virtuoso Miguel Llobet.
The frolicsome *Children Playing* echoes Mussorsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* and Debussy; hurried musical motives scamper across its pages. *Frost and Dew* also draws its inspiration from a painting — Peter Scott Purvil's (1845–1926) *Frost and Dew* — contrasting a snow-covered lakeside with the slow thaw of early spring. In this study, Willcocks begins with frigid major seconds, slowly expanding into a radiant close. *Reflections* recalls Debussy's piano work *Images* (Vol. I) with its sumptuous harmonies. It begins with a sense of breathless urgency, soon relaxing into spacious octaves and a drooping, expressive motive. In *Choral*, we are invited to the fleeting memory of a Ravelian waltz emerging from bell-like harmonics. The clamorous *The Bells of Notre Dame* emerge from and retreat into a fog and in its expanse recalls *Frost and Dew*, but with the weighty and imperious tolling of cathedral bells. This performance of Willcocks' *Studies* ends with *A Gale is blowing*, its oppressive gusts subside only at its very conclusion.

Program notes by Alexander Dunn
UPCOMING EVENTS

Sunday, November 22, 1:30 p.m. (Admission by donation)
PIANO CLASS RECITAL
Featuring students from the studio of May Ling Kwok.
Phillip T. Young Recital Hall

Sunday, November 22, 8:00 p.m. (Admission by donation)
UVIC VOCAL JAZZ ENSEMBLE
Fall Showcase: Too Hot To Sleep in Winter
Wendell Clanton, director
The UVic Vocal Jazz Ensemble performs original and inspiring arrangements in a fun-filled audience engaging evening.
Phillip T. Young Recital Hall

Tuesday, November 24, 12:30 p.m. (Admission by donation)
TUESDAY MUSIC
Take an afternoon break to enjoy a concert of varied repertoire and instruments featuring School of Music students.
Phillip T. Young Recital Hall

Tuesday, November 24, 8:00 p.m. (Admission by donation)
CLASS RECITAL: Innovations in Music
Students premiere new works by School of Music composition students and present cutting edge repertoire as the culmination of the interdisciplinary class, MUS 350/462/562, focused on musical innovation.
Phillip T. Young Recital Hall

Wednesday, November 25, 8:00 p.m. (Admission by donation)
STRING CHAMBER CONCERT
Featuring students from the studios of the Lafayette String Quartet.
Phillip T. Young Recital Hall

Thursday, November 26, 8:00 p.m. (Admission by donation)
GUITAR CLASS RECITAL
Featuring students from the studio of Dr. Alexander Dunn in an eclectic program of solo and ensemble works.
Phillip T. Young Recital Hall

Tickets available at the UVic Ticket Centre (250-721-8480), online (www.tickets.uvic.ca) and at the door.

To receive our On the Pulse brochure and newsletter by email, contact: concert@uvic.ca