

ASYO Program Notes
April 27, 2025
By Noel Morris ©2025

Hong Eden

A note from the composer:

What an honor it is to write a piece for the Atlanta Symphony Youth Orchestra, the youth orchestra that gave me countless cherished memories, life-long friendships, and the conviction to pursue a life of music.

Working on *Eden* gave me an opportunity to step back in the shoes of my high school self, looking forward all week to Saturday_morning ASYO rehearsals in Atlanta Symphony Hall and getting a glimpse of what life was like to live and breathe music.

During my first year as a violinist in the ASYO, I was enrolled in AP Language, taught by Kelly Bryan at Walton High School. One of our assignments was an open-format project on *Paradise Lost* by John Milton, an epic about the book of Genesis from the Bible, and the exile of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. For my project, I decided to compose a piece based on the epic. Over a decade later, I felt that it was fitting to take the theme I had written for *Paradise Lost* and give it life again. After all, ASYO was my paradise, my *Eden*. And while I can't say that paradise has been lost after moving beyond youth orchestra; I will always embrace my youth orchestra memories as a time of purest joy.

ALICE HONG

Dr. Alice Hong began her violin studies at the age of ten and composing at the age of nine.

Growing up, Alice spent a year studying violin performance at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts. After returning to her hometown in Georgia, she was featured as a performer and composer of Atlanta Symphony Orchestra's *Conversation of Note* series, presented by ASO Music Director Robert Spano. She has since appeared as a soloist with orchestras across the southeast and has held concertmaster and principal positions for orchestras at Spoleto Festival USA, Sarasota Music Festival, Colorado College Summer Music Festival, Shepherd School Symphony Orchestra, the Cleveland Institute of Music, Brevard Music Center, and orchestral ensembles at the Banff Centre. She is a member of the Colorado Music Festival Orchestra, and she performs as a substitute violinist in the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Colorado Symphony, Buffalo Philharmonic, Charleston Symphony Orchestra, The Atlanta Opera, and Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony, among others. Alice has also performed in masterclasses and worked with acclaimed musicians such as James Ehnes, Pamela Frank, Donald Weilerstein, Viktor Danchenko, Noah Bendix-Balgley, and Soovin Kim, amongst others. She is a first-prize winner of the International IMKA Music Competition and has earned recognition in the Lennox, Mika Hasler, and Hellam string competitions. She has been featured on CBC Radio One, Toronto Music 311, WABE 90.1 Atlanta and WSMR 89.9 Tampa, and she was also included on CBC Music's "30 Hot Canadian Classical Musicians Under 30, 2018 Edition".

As an avid chamber musician, Alice participated in several semesters of Cleveland Institute of

Music's Intensive Quartet Seminar and has collaborated with esteemed musicians such as James Ehnes, Mihaela Martin, Frans Helmerson, Cho-Liang Lin, Jonathan Crow, and New Orford Quartet, amongst others. She toured in the inaugural Heifetz Institute's "Heifetz on Tour" series, and she has performed at festivals such as Kneisel Hall, Lake George Music Festival, Highlands-Cashier Music Festival, Sarasota Music Festival, Spoleto Festival USA, Banff Centre Masterclasses for Strings and Winds, Toronto Summer Music Festival, Heifetz Institute of Music, St. Lawrence String Quartet Seminar, Colorado College Summer Music Festival, Bowdoin International Music Festival, Rocket City New Music, Foulger Institute of Music, International Music Academy of Plzen, Brevard Music Center, and Sewanee Summer Music Festival. She has also performed in 28 countries with Lincoln Center Stage.

Alice is also an international award-winning composer. Her first orchestral piece, *Mystic Trilogy*, was premiered at age 11 and has since had compositions performed in Hungary, Sweden, China, Czech Republic, Canada, across America, and featured on Toronto's Music 311 and as film scores for Studio 3D productions. They have been programmed in concerts performed at the Kennedy Center of Performing Arts, Spoleto Festival USA, Colorado Music Festival, the Primrose International Viola Competitions recitals, Atlanta Symphony *Conversation of Note* series, and the Northern California Viola Society as the commissioned work for their Young Violists Competition. She has been commissioned by and was composer-in-residence for festivals like the Toronto Summer Music Festival and Lövestabruks Kammarmusikfestival in Sweden. Her pieces have won multiple awards from the ASCAP Morton Gould Awards, first prize and audience prize at the 2nd International Keuris Composition Competition in the Netherlands for her full orchestra piece *Phoenix*, third prize of the 2021 „Steirischer TonkünstlerBund“ International Composition Competition of Austria for her violin and cello duo *The Current (And Those Who Ride It)*, first prize at Pikes Peak Young Composers Competition, first prize of Cleveland Institute of Music's inaugural Carl E. Baldessere Competition for composer-virtuosi, first prize of the 2020 Belvedere Chamber music Festival Composition Competition, third prize as well as audience prize of Lands End Ensemble Composers Competition, audience prize and a commission for the Atlanta Symphony Youth Orchestra for the 2024 Rapido! Cycle 7 Composition Competition, and a merit award for the 2020 Tribeca New Music Young Composers Competition.

Alice's orchestral pieces have been recorded and performed by the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Niagara Symphony Orchestra, Georgian Bay Symphony, Georgia Tech Symphony Orchestra, Ludwig Symphony Orchestra, and Amersfoort Youth Orchestra, amongst others. Some of the performers of her chamber pieces include members of the New York Philharmonic, principal members of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Canadian Opera Company, and National Ballet of Canada, Cypress String Quartet and Rolston String Quartet. Upcoming commissions include an orchestral work for the Atlanta Symphony Youth Orchestra.

Alice earned her Doctorate of Musical Arts at the University of Toronto in 2018 under the private tutelage of Jonathan Crow, as well as a Master of Music degree in 2016 from Rice University's Shepherd School of Music as a Dorothy R. Starling Foundation Scholar studying with Cho-Liang Lin. She earned her Bachelor of Music degree in 2014 at the Cleveland Institute of Music with David Updegraff.

Alice also hopes to bring awareness to the importance of music programs and community appreciation for classical music and musicians, specifically for the community of Atlanta and

the members of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. In her efforts, she organized the annual ATL Symphony Appreciation Concerts for seven years, programming ensembles with current Atlanta Symphony Youth Orchestra students and ASYO alumni in collaboration with Atlanta Symphony members to celebrate the great contributions of the symphony to the community of Atlanta. Donations and proceeds from these concerts go to the ATL Symphony Musicians Foundation ASYO Scholarship Fund.

Alice is also the founder of Luxardo Entertainment Group, a collective of musicians aiming to bridge the gap between classical and pop music and producing immersive concert experiences.

As a private violin teacher, Alice's students have participated in Georgia Music Education Association's All-State orchestras, Atlanta Symphony Youth Orchestra, Emory Symphony Youth Orchestra, and Metropolitan Youth Symphony Orchestra. They have also studied at the Eastman School of Music and New England Conservatory following their private studies with Alice and have placed in competitions like the Skule Orchestra Concerto Competition, Franklin Pond Chamber Competition, and more. Alice served as a Teaching Assistant at the Cleveland Institute of Music and University of Toronto for Jonathan Crow, Annalee Patipatanakoon, Norbert Palej, and Gary Kulesha.

NIELSEN Flute Concerto, mvt 1

Danish composer Carl Nielsen didn't intend for his Flute Concerto to have any sort of program, but he did have strong feelings about the flute's personality.

"The flute cannot deny its own nature, its home is in Arcadia and it prefers pastoral moods," he wrote. "Hence, the composer has had to follow the mild character of the instrument if he did not want to run the risk of being called a barbarian."

Arcadia is a pastoral paradise of Greek mythology. (Picture Pan, god of shepherds, standing on his goat's legs clutching a flute.) A Pan-like spirit inhabits Nielsen's flute writing in his Concerto, but he sets this musical personality against a storming orchestra to create a thumping landscape for the intrepid soloist.

Nielsen was born on an island off the coast of Denmark in 1865, now home to a Viking museum. His family was poor but active in music. Young Carl played violin in a dance orchestra; he played trombone and bugle in the local army band. He went on to a varied career as concertmaster of an orchestra, conductor of an opera orchestra, and teacher at the Royal Danish Academy of Music.

Nielsen wrote six symphonies between 1892 and 1925. After writing his popular Wind Quintet in 1922, he decided to write a solo concerto for each of the wind instruments, starting with the Flute Concerto in 1926 and the Clarinet Concerto in 1928. Sadly, he didn't get around to writing the rest of them. But his Quintet and two concertos are a mainstay for wind players.

SÉJOURNÉ Marimba Concerto

A note from the composer:

I must confess, for a long time I was a product of classical music. From the age of 5 I studied the piano, entered a conservatory, then music theory, history of music, analysis, acoustic, violin and of course my dear piano. Only of Debussy, Bartok, Schumann, Handel, Bach, Beethoven, and others.

Then, because of a series of events too long to tell, I studied percussion at 16 years old with Jean Batigne, founder and director of the Percussionist of Strasbourg. I discovered a world of music completely unknown: jazz, pop, world music, fusion, contemporary music, improvisation . . . (it was the era of Weather Report, Kora/Burton, King Crimson...) In short, I delightedly dove into an incredible universe with the help of the vibraphone and marimba.

By request of Bogdan Bacanu, I wrote this concerto that was dedicated for the marimba and strings. The composition was a mark of confidence, and I thank him for giving me his. For me, the music is not a matter of instruments but rather of friendship and of meetings. Bogdan is a verifiable artist, fantastic and passionate, that has long evoked his love the romanticism and the lyricism.

My culture of jazz-rock, flamenco predominates during the 3rd movement, fast, aggressive and rhythmic, in the middle where a soft portion permits the soloist to practically improvise if he wishes to.

MEET MAURICE RAVEL

Maurice Ravel was born ten miles from the Spanish border in a house overlooking Saint-Jean-de-Luz harbor. With the Pyrenees rising in the distance, his birthplace lies in the heart of Basque Country, a region inhabited by a distinct ethnic group straddling France and Spain. His mother, Marie, grew up there and often visited her cousins in Spain. During one of those visits, she met a Swiss inventor and engineer named Joseph Ravel.

They moved to Montmartre in Paris shortly after baby Maurice arrived. During the summer, they returned to the seaside village. As a family, they shared many happy hours around Joseph's piano. Marie sang Spanish folk songs. And soon, Maurice and his little brother joined the ensemble. In 1889, 14-year-old Ravel entered the Paris Conservatory and stayed until 1903. All the while, he clashed with stodgy teachers who saw him as an upstart and a radical. (They must have been jealous when he published his first piece at age twenty.)

Daphnis et Chloe

Maurice Ravel produced his opulent ballet score *Daphnis et Chloe* in 1910-11 for Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. Diaghilev objected to various aspects of the piece, but its music proved an enduring concert hall favorite.

"I mean, it's one of the best examples of orchestration you can get because it's a swelling of sound that is just breathtaking," said Beatles producer George Martin.

Based on Greek mythology, the shepherd boy Daphnis falls in love with the girl Chloe. Suddenly, Pirates burst on the scene and carry her off. A frantic Daphnis convinces the god Pan to conduct a rescue operation. The reunited lovers go before the altar of the Nymphs and pledge their eternal love. In the end, all the creatures celebrate with the wild *Danse général*—a whirling dervish of a dance in 5/4 time (count 1-2-3-1-2 1-2-3-1-2).

Rapsodie espagnole

A hundred and some years ago, a series of non-Spanish composers dabbled in “Spanish” music, including Bizet, Debussy, Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Ravel. The vigorous rhythms and flamenco-style harmonies had instant appeal. Of all of them, Maurice Ravel could at least claim some authentic Spanish heritage through his mother.

Ravel wrote *Rapsodie espagnole* for two pianos in 1907, a fact that points to one of his most beguiling qualities: he wrote a terrific and thoroughly convincing piano piece—but then added his magic fairy dust; he orchestrated the *Rapsodie*. When you hear the crackling castanets and audacious trombones, it’s hard to imagine this dazzling music as anything but an orchestral piece.

In the first movement, Ravel offers a nighttime scene, a fragrant landscape veiled in darkness. The Finale, titled “Feria” or Fair, conjures a local celebration, traditionally accompanied by food, music, bull running, and bullfights.

La valse

Ravel’s health took a hit while serving on the front lines in World War I. He’d only recently reemerged when ballet impresario Sergei Diaghilev commissioned *La valse* in 1919. But Diaghilev rejected it.

“Ravel, it’s a masterpiece,” offered Diaghilev. “But it’s not a ballet. It’s the portrait of a ballet. It’s the painting of a ballet.” Ravel quietly picked up his score and left the room.

He never got over Diaghilev’s slight. Ravel refused to shake Diaghilev’s hand when the two men crossed paths in 1925, prompting the Russian to challenge him to a duel. (Thankfully, friends intervened.)

From the first performance of *La valse*, listeners detected a bitter reflection on the war, an allusion to a great civilization that had blown itself up. Ravel disagreed, prefacing his score with the descriptive note:

“Whirling clouds give glimpses, through rifts, of couples dancing. The clouds scatter, little by little. One sees an immense hall peopled with a twirling crowd. The scene is gradually illuminated. The light of the chandeliers bursts forth, fortissimo. An imperial court, in or about 1855.”

Its meaning is for us to decide.

