

ANTRAN

ILUMINA



NEW WORKS FOR GUITAR

PRIMA
CLASSIC

AN TRAN

ILLUMINA

Sara d'Ippolito Reichert:

- 1. Bella di Papà (4:48) *

Paul Ibbotson:

- 2. Prelude in E minor (4:27) *
- 3. Little Dancer (4:20) *

Olga Amelkina-Vera:

- 4. Ana-Lucía (5:14) *

Juan Erena:

- 5. Etude No. 8 (2:52) *
- 6. Find You Again (5:48)
- 7. Carta a Lucina (6:30)
- 8. Amanda (3:19) *

Khiem Nguyen-Duy:

- 9. Song for Soul (9:05) *
- 10. Toccata on "Lý Kéo Chài" (4:00) *

Variations and Fugue on "Ru Em" (Xê Đăng Lullaby)*

- 11. Theme and Variations (6:17)
- 12. Fugue (3:31)

Nathan Stade:

- 13. The Park Bench (3:57) *

* World premiere recordings

I L U M I N A

Dear listener,

This album began with people.

Each piece on this recording was written for me, but more importantly, each grew from a relationship, a story, or a moment in life. Some are joyful and playful, others reflective or searching. Ilumina means “to shine a light,” and this album seeks to illuminate new music, new voices, and the shared language that connects us across cultures.

The opening works invite the listener into an intimate space shaped by family, memory, and childhood. They move between motion and stillness, energy and tenderness, capturing both the simplicity and the complexity of lived experience.

As the album unfolds, the music begins to dance and to take risks. There is imagination and unpredictability, lyricism and drive, moments of reflection alongside bursts of rhythmic vitality. Personal memories and places emerge, sometimes clearly, sometimes as fleeting impressions.

The final arc turns toward broader emotional landscapes. Traditional Vietnamese melodies reappear through rhythm, counterpoint, and transformation, expanding from intimate lullabies into expansive musical statements. These works carry echoes of childhood, struggle, and hope, woven into a contemporary voice for the classical guitar.

The album closes quietly, leaving space rather than resolution. After everything that has been expressed, it simply rests with the listener, allowing their own thoughts and memories to surface.

At its heart, this recording is a series of conversations: between composers and performer, between cultures, and between generations. I am deeply grateful to the composers who entrusted me with their music and made this journey possible.

My hope is that listeners will hear something of their own lives reflected here and perhaps feel a little less alone in the listening.

This album is dedicated to my wife, Lucina Sosa.

An Tran

A N T R A N

An Tran is a Vietnamese classical guitarist praised by The Boston Globe for his “subtle, graceful virtuosity.” He has appeared at major venues and series including the Segovia Classical Guitar Series, Guitar Society of Toronto, New York Classical Guitar Society, Harvard University, and Bangkok Guitar Society, among others.

His recordings have received international acclaim. His Naxos release Napoléon Coste: Guitar Works, Vol. 6 (2023) was praised by American Record Guide for its “immaculate ornaments and cultivated sense of phrasing.” His debut album, Stay, My Beloved (2020, Frameworks Records), featuring all-Vietnamese repertoire, was named one of the Chicago Tribune’s “Recordings of the Year” and described by Classical Guitar Magazine as “an unforgettable journey.”

A prizewinner at numerous international competitions, An has been featured on Performance Today, Classical Guitar Alive!, tonebase, and Vietnam Television. He holds degrees from North Park University, Yale University, and Northwestern University.

An is currently Professor of Guitar at Roosevelt University, University of Illinois Chicago, and Northern Illinois University, where he founded the NIU International Guitar Concert Series. He is Co-Founder and Artistic Director of Chicago Artopia, a nonprofit dedicated to expanding access to the arts. An is a D’Addario Artist and performs on guitars by Stephan Connor.



I L U M I N A

Sara d'Ippolito Reichert

"Bella di papà" (Italian for "Daddy's darling") was inspired by imagining how my friend An Tran might lull his daughter, Ana-Lucía, to sleep. In the 3/4 section, the melody is shaped to articulate her name through pitch and rhythm.

The piece also offers a broader reflection on parenthood. I had lost my father the year before writing this music, and by the end of the compositional process I was pregnant myself. I found myself contemplating the hopes and expectations we carry as parents, the expectations we inherit and experience as children, and how all of these are ultimately released when we cross into whatever comes next.

"Bella di papà" is what my father used to call me. I wanted to carry that warmth into this composition and reflect the love An has for his daughter, as a wish that Ana-Lucía might always feel that warmth carrying her.

Paul Ibbotson

The Prelude in E minor is constructed around repeating rhythmic patterns and flowing melodic lines that connect contrasting sections of colour, intensity, and texture. The key of E minor allows the guitar's agility to be fully showcased through frequent use of open strings and rapid slurs. The overall impression is one of continuous, agitated movement, driving forward until it resolves into stillness in the final moments.

Little Dancer is dedicated to An's daughter. Written in a romantic tradition, it is more melodically led than the Prelude. With relaxed phrasing and subtle Spanish ornamentation, the piece evokes warmth, brightness, and a gentle sense of joy.

Olga Amelkina - Vera

Ana-Lucía for solo guitar was commissioned by An Tran to celebrate his young daughter, who was two years old at the time of the composition. In this work, I sought to portray several facets of a parent's experience with a young child: her boundless energy and excitement; her playfulness, rambunctiousness, and sudden temper tantrums; and the calm, tender rituals of naptime and bedtime.

Juan Erena

Étude No. 8 completes the group of works dedicated to guitarist An Tran. Conceived as both a technical and expressive exploration, the piece balances instrumental challenge with a clear musical narrative. Beyond its pedagogical dimension, the étude stands as a tribute to the guitarist, highlighting sensitivity, precision, and depth of expression.

Find You Again reflects the reunion of people bound by a deep emotional connection, even after time, distance, or silence have intervened. The music moves between longing and hope, capturing the moment when two paths that once diverged meet again. Intimate and lyrical, the piece suggests that some bonds, when genuine, inevitably find their way back to one another.

Carta a Lucina is conceived as a wordless letter born from memory and waiting. Each note becomes a whisper from the past; each chord, an echo of emotions that refuse to fade. Inspired by the fragility of a love that slowly dissolves yet never entirely disappears, the piece translates nostalgia, absence, and the quiet beauty of remembrance into sound, creating an intimate and timeless musical space.

Amanda is inspired by the courage to follow one's inner voice. The piece portrays the act of leaving behind comfort and certainty in order to embrace a more authentic life, deeply connected to nature and personal passion. Through arpeggios and flowing passages that evoke the strength and movement of horses, the music explores a profound communion between the human spirit and the natural world. It concludes with an open, warm atmosphere suggesting fulfillment and freedom. This work is a tribute to those who dare to reinvent themselves and seek their true place in the world.

Khiem Nguyen-Duy

Song for Soul is my musical autobiography.

Composed over several years, this seven-movement suite traces the inner journey of a soul shaped by displacement, solitude, struggle, and the slow, difficult process of self-recognition. It is not a narrative in the literal sense, but rather an emotional map that moves through innocence, doubt, rage, endurance, memory, and finally, a fragile yet honest sense of hope.

This work was not written about the soul; it was written from it. Each chapter grew out of lived experience: the silence of exile, the weight of loneliness, the necessity of fighting inwardly and outwardly in order to remain truthful to oneself. As a composer living far from home, I found in music a space where conflict, vulnerability, and resilience could coexist without explanation. *Song for Soul* became the place where I could gather everything I had lived through—love, loss, anger, perseverance—and allow it to speak without disguise.

Structurally, the piece unfolds as a continuous arc rather than a sequence of isolated movements. Themes reappear transformed; memories return altered by time. Moments of violence or despair are never presented as ends in themselves, but as necessary passages within a larger human journey. What matters most to me in this work is not virtuosity, but sincerity: the sense that every sound exists because it must.

To hear *Song for Soul* performed is, for me, an intimate and exposed experience. It is a part of my inner life made audible—imperfect, searching, and deeply personal.

Alongside this deeply introspective work, **Toccata on “Lý Kéo Chài”** reveals a different facet of my musical voice. Drawing on a Southern Vietnamese fishermen’s song, it embraces rhythmic drive, contrapuntal interplay, and physical energy. Here, the guitar becomes communal and extroverted, capturing movement, labor, and collective joy through relentless motion.

Variations and Fugue on “Ru Em” (Xê Đăng Lullaby) represents yet another path: one of reverence and structure. Built on a traditional lullaby from Vietnam’s Central Highlands, the piece employs classical forms not to distance the melody, but to magnify it—allowing a simple song of tenderness to expand into a large architectural statement.

These three works reflect different ways of seeking meaning: through self-confrontation (Song for Soul), cultural memory (Lý Kéo Chài), and formal devotion (Ru Em). I am deeply grateful to An Tran for giving them voice with such commitment, sensitivity, and imagination.

Nathan Stade

Sitting on The Park Bench, I looked down and noticed the quiet traces left behind by others: discarded cigarettes, marks of passing time. In that moment, the idea for The Park Bench began to form. A park bench is a place of pause, where people come to rest, to think, to cope with life in its many forms. Some sit in silence; some smoke; some simply watch the world move past them. It is a small, ordinary space that becomes deeply meditative.

This piece reflects that search for stillness and clarity, and looks back on life from the quiet perspective of a park bench, where memory, presence, and longing gently intersect. The final sound lingers as a harmonic, suspended in the air like a thought not fully spoken.

C R E D I T S

Produced by An Tran and Drew Henderson

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