

Saturday, March 24, 2012, 8pm
First Congregational Church

David Finckel, *cello*
Wu Han, *piano*

PROGRAM

Franz Schubert (1797–1828) Sonata for Arpeggione and Cello in A minor,
D. 821 (1824)
Allegro moderato
Adagio
Allegretto

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897) Sonata for Cello and Piano No. 1 in E minor,
Op. 38 (1862–1865)
Allegro non troppo
Allegretto quasi Menuetto
Allegro

INTERMISSION

Robert Schumann (1810–1856) Adagio and Allegro for Cello and Piano, Op. 70
(1849)

Brahms Sonata for Cello and Piano No. 2 in F major,
Op. 99 (1886)
Allegro vivace
Adagio affettuoso
Allegro passionato — Trio
Allegro molto

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Franz Schubert (1797–1828)
Sonata for Arpeggione and Piano in A minor,
D.821 (1824)

The French composer Olivier Messiaen (whose own music, with its exotic and complex scales and rhythms, may itself not be what is commonly considered “melodious” music) opens his treatise *The Technique of My Musical Language* with the acknowledgment that, “The melody is the point of departure. May it remain sovereign! And whatever may be the complexities of our rhythms and our harmonies, they shall not draw it along in their wake, but, on the contrary, shall obey it as faithful servants.” The supremacy in music of a perfectly crafted melody is difficult to challenge; such melodies were a particular specialty of the 19th-century Romantic composers. And to invent, not a melody of the staid “Three Blind Mice” variety, but the kind of melody that flows so naturally and seamlessly that it seems to invent itself from one note to the next—this is an ability with which precious few people in all of humanity have been graced.

Names like Mozart and Mendelssohn, Schubert and Schumann, come immediately to mind. In the case of Franz Schubert, whose gift for melody is evident in the vast oeuvre of songs for which he is mostly known, the Sonata for Arpeggione likewise serves as a fine example. The arpeggione was a bowed string instrument invented in Vienna in 1814; it was also referred to as a bowed guitar, the instrument that it most resembled. Similarly to the modern cello, the sound of the arpeggione bore an expressive speechlike quality, especially in its upper register. Although it is unclear how or when he was first introduced to the arpeggione, Schubert was a quick study on this new instrument, and wrote with exquisite sensitivity to its timbre. Nevertheless, by the time of the sonata’s posthumous publication in 1871, the arpeggione had fallen out of fashion; the first published edition of the piece already included an alternative cello part. Modern arrangements of the “Arpeggione” Sonata exist today for instruments ranging from the cello to the flute.

The opening *Allegro moderato* begins with a long and mellifluous melodic line. This breathless opening gesture stands in stark contrast to such compact, self-contained themes as the “Hallelujah” chorus from Handel’s *Messiah*, or the defiant four-note motif of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, composed just 15 years earlier. Schubert’s music here displays a heightened subjectivity, a brand of heart-on-one’s-sleeve, not present in (save, indeed, for the middle and late works of Beethoven) music prior to the Romantic era. A quick transition from this plaintive opening melody to the buoyant second theme similarly shows how manic the music of the early 19th century has become.

The *Adagio* first offers a seemingly brief melodic idea, only to grow into another long and lyrical musical statement. The meditative tenderness of this music owes just as much to Schubert’s ravishing harmonies. Long sustained notes by the soloist seem to change inflection, as colored by new harmonies in the piano accompaniment. A delightful *Allegretto* finishes the sonata, with the gentle music of its opening measures alternating with a moodier 16th-note theme, recalling the contrast between the two central ideas of the first movement.

Schubert completed the “Arpeggione” Sonata in 1824, when he was 27 years old. Although parallels between the events of a composer’s life and the works produced in correlation with those events are always drawn perilously at best (note that Beethoven’s stormy Fifth and “Pastoral” symphonies, for instance, were composed within a year of each other), it is nonetheless worth noting—if only for the sake of historical context—that the early 1820s were marked by the emergence of the syphilis that would claim Schubert’s life in 1828. Schubert, fully aware that he was dying, often drew into reclusion over the final years of his life. Nevertheless, in spite of his illness, he continued to work at his typically superhuman pace—indeed, it has been often suggested that the immediacy of his mortality during these years may have motivated Schubert to create as much music as time would allow. Ultimately, it

is of course unfair to reduce such ingenious late works as the “Arpeggione” Sonata to a sense of despair: especially in the case of a composer with such an inherent and prodigious gift for the elements of melody and harmony.

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)
Sonata for Cello and Piano in E minor,
Op. 38 (1862–1865)

Brahms composed the first two movements of the Cello Sonata No. 1 (his first work for a solo instrument with piano) while in his late twenties. By this time, Brahms had already composed a great deal of chamber music and become sufficiently well versed in the nuances of writing for individual instruments. In the summer of 1862, Brahms visited the Lower Rhine Music Festival in Cologne, and spent the following weeks on holiday with the conductor and composer Albert Dietrich and Clara Schumann, Robert Schumann’s widow. The vacation was a happy one: Brahms and Dietrich spent the days hiking and composing; in the evenings, Clara—one of her generation’s greatest pianists, and a gifted composer in her own right—would play.

Brahms revered Bach above all composers (it can be safely surmised that he was aware of the Baroque composer’s Cello Suites while composing his own Cello Sonatas) and paid homage to him with the E minor Sonata. The principal theme of the first movement resembles in shape and mood the fugal subject of Bach’s *Die Kunst der Fuge* (“The Art of Fugue”), and the fugal subject of the third movement directly quotes from the same work’s Contrapunctus XIII. Nevertheless, in his late twenties and early thirties, Brahms the young Romantic had already established his voice with such confidence that despite the explicit nod to a past master, the language of this Sonata is unmistakably his own.

An insistent, syncopated piano accompaniment underscores the cello’s brooding opening melody, creating a feeling of inner agitation. This tension culminates as the cello ascends to its upper register, and as the piano assumes

the theme, the first of a series of heated arguments between piano and cello begins. A yet more impassioned dialogue follows, ushering in the second subject. Commentary on the two Cello Sonatas of Brahms often makes note of the inherent problems of sonic balance in pairing cello with piano (as dense keyboard textures easily drown out the cello’s middle register). Throughout this opening *Allegro non troppo*, Brahms makes a virtue of the challenge, often pitting the two instruments as combatants in contentious dialogue. The development section avoids danger as well, exploiting the extremes of the cello’s range to symphonic results. The conflict dissipates with the appearance of cascading triplets in the piano, and after a full recapitulation, the movement ends serenely in E major. Although composed before Brahms’s move to Vienna, the second movement minuet parleys a distinct Viennese flavor: exuberant, but with a tinge of darkness more evocative of Mahler than of the waltzes of Johann Strauss. The heart of the movement is the divine trio section, which departs from the key of a minor to the even more mysterious, remote tonality of F-sharp minor. The cello offers a lyrical melody, doubled by a shimmering accompaniment in the right hand of the piano: rippling 16th notes give the effect of a voicelike vibrato.

The finale, in turns gentle and unrelenting, begins with a three-voiced fugue. The movement is indebted not only to Bach, but also to the fugal finale of Beethoven’s Cello Sonata, Op. 102, No. 2. Brahms departs from that model, however, by traversing more extreme emotive territories. Following the intensity of the opening episode, the music takes a tranquil, pastoral turn; the next instance of this romantic dance-like music is interrupted by a reappearance of the fugal opening. After building to an even greater climax, the storm dissipates, teasing the listener with the expectation of a somber ending. But the surprise appearance of a *piu presto* coda drives the work to a restless finish, the cello and piano continuing their battle for supremacy to the end.

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Robert Schumann (1810–1856)
Adagio and Allegro for Cello and Piano,
Op. 70 (1849)

The amazing life of Robert Schumann rivals Beethoven's in its intensity and complexity. Obsessive, paranoid, brilliant, wayward, over-emotional and given to fantasy, he walked a very fine line between sanity and insanity for most of his adult life, finally flinging himself into the Rhein at age 44. The year 1849 was a good one for him during which he composed some 20 important works. Schumann composed largely in creative bursts in which he would focus all his attention on a certain kind of repertoire. In the springtime he apparently became quite enamored of the French horn, writing a concerto for not one but four horns and orchestra, and the *Adagio* (originally called *Romanza*) and *Allegro* recorded here. (The manuscript gives the option of playing the solo part on the cello and violin as well.)

The *Adagio* is one of the most romantic (and frankly, in my opinion, erotic) partnerships between two instruments imaginable. For 41 bars the cello and piano exchange melody in a practically unbroken phrase; its lovers' conversation, sometimes complementing, interrupting, questioning, but in the end finally uniting (after some suggestive turbulence) in a calm A-flat major. The piano lets out two little sighs and one big one and the cello responds with a tender and noble cadential flourish. The coda has a radiance and peace not heard before, and for want of a better metaphor, the lovers soon drift off to sleep. The atmosphere is then totally shattered by the *Allegro* which begins as though shot from a gun. Interrupted only momentarily by a briefly slower section in a totally unrelated key, the *Allegro* charges to the finish in a joyful, unbroken stream of energy. Because of the key (A-flat major) the *Allegro* is somewhat awkward for the cello, but the struggle to reach the high E-flat, as on the French horn, makes a successful ascent all the more rewarding.

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Brahms
Sonata for Cello and Piano No. 2 in F major,
Op. 99 (1886)

Brahms spent the summer of 1886 in the idyllic Swiss resort town of Thun. He rented the second floor of a hillside house on the Aare River, and spent much of the summer at a local casino, drinking beer and playing cards with musicians from the house orchestra. He wrote happily to his friend Max Kalbeck, "It is simply glorious here. I only say quite in passing that there are crowds of beer-gardens—actual beer-gardens—the English [tourists] are not at home in them!"

The F major Cello Sonata was composed for Robert Hausmann, a close friend of Brahms and cellist of the great Joachim String Quartet. Like the violinist Joseph Joachim and the clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld, Hausmann served Brahms as the prototypical performer-muse, very directly inspiring Brahms's cello writing over the last decade of his career. By all accounts, Hausmann played with a remarkably burnished tone and ample technique; Brahms's writing suggests that Hausmann had no trouble negotiating the cello's highest registers, nor rising above the clanging *fortissimo* chords in the piano. Brahms's facility with instrumental technique is similarly evident in the striking tremolo across the strings, taken from the piano's opening gestures, which Brahms uses to end the exposition, and then echoes at the haunting end of the development section. (It is also interesting to note that, despite that mastery Brahms had achieved in writing for the cello by the time of this work, as well as the Double Concerto the following year, he still was not satisfied. Upon hearing Dvořák's Cello Concerto of 1895, he reportedly exclaimed, "Why on earth didn't I know one could write a violoncello concerto like this? Had I only known, I would have written one long ago!")

At the time of the F major Sonata's premiere, the conductor and critic Eduard Hanslick wrote, "In the Cello Sonata, passion rules, fiery to the point of vehemence, now defiantly challenging, now painfully lamenting. How boldly the first

Allegro theme begins, how stormily the *Allegro* flows!" Indeed, Brahms's writing at this stage in his career evinces a sense of daring often overlooked in the dichotomy between a Brahmsian conservatism and Wagnerian progressivism.

The Sonata unfolds with a bristling energy, with a jolting explosion in the piano answered by a triumphant cry from the cello. The opening *Allegro vivace*'s central theme comprises these shouting fragments, rather than a continuous melodic line. Remarking on its unusual rhythms and bold melodic leaps, Schoenberg would later write: "Young listeners will probably be unaware that at the time of Brahms's death, this Sonata was still very unpopular and was considered indigestible"—a useful reminder to the contemporary listener, for whom this work fits well within common practice, that Brahms was nevertheless a "progressive" composer (Wagner and company notwithstanding). The movement's harmony is similarly insolent, handily integrating dissonant tones, and flirting with minor key tonality throughout the exposition.

The work's harmonic boldness carries into the *Adagio affettuoso*, which begins in the surprising key of F-sharp major, a half-step from the key of the opening movement. Hypnotic pizzicati mark time under the melody in the piano before Brahms again employs the cello's luminous upper register to sing a long phrase which climbs passionately, before settling into a sweet lullaby. The movement is organized into ternary (A–B–A) form: as in the first movement, the harmonies throughout the central B section are exquisitely rich. A moment of mystery presages the appearance of the troubled and turbulent middle section. After a jarring transformation of the cello's opening pizzicati, the music of the opening returns, beautifully decorated by a flowing accompaniment in the piano. Music of heavenly serenity closes the movement.

The fiery scherzo recalls Brahms's ebullient Hungarian dances, with its chromatic melodic turns and hard syncopations. The trio section lends the movement a lyrical tenderness, but still with dense chromatic chords in the piano accompaniment. Brahms the extroverted

Romantic emerges in full form for the Sonata's finale, which seems to go from gesture to gesture and episode to episode with an excitedly child-like impatience. The subject's pastoral melody offers a contrast from the ferocity of the previous movements. Soon after the opening, however, the music builds to a crisp march, heralded by staccato double-stops in the cello. The next episode departs from the movement's idyllic quality dramatically with a lyrical melody in B-flat minor, suffused with 19th-century *Sturm und Drang* ("Storm and Stress"). The piano's sweeping triplet accompaniment leads seamlessly into a restatement of the theme (now in the foreign key of G-flat major), against which Brahms sets a charming pizzicato commentary. The movement ends triumphantly in a flourish and with great abandon.

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Christian Seiner

MUSICAL AMERICA'S 2012 Musicians of the Year, cellist **David Finckel** and pianist **Wu Han** rank among the most esteemed and influential classical musicians in the world today. The talent, energy, imagination and dedication they bring to their multifaceted endeavors as concert performers, recording artists, educators, artistic administrators and cultural entrepreneurs go unmatched. Their duo performances have garnered superlatives from the press, public and presenters alike.

In high demand year after year among chamber music audiences worldwide, the duo has appeared each season at the most prestigious venues and concert series across the United States, Mexico, Canada, the Far East and Europe to unanimous critical acclaim. Highlights include performances at Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center and Aspen's Harris Concert Hall, recital debuts in Germany and at Finland's Kuhmo Festival, their presentation of the complete Beethoven sonatas for cello and piano in Tokyo, and their signature all-Russian program

at London's Wigmore Hall. They have also been frequent guests on American Public Media's *Performance Today*, *Saint Paul Sunday* and other popular classical radio programs. Beyond the duo's recital activities, Mr. Finckel also serves as cellist of the Emerson String Quartet, which has won eight Grammy Awards including two honors for "Best Classical Album," three Gramophone Awards and the prestigious Avery Fisher Prize, awarded in 2004 for the first time to a chamber ensemble.

In addition to their distinction as world-class performers, the duo has established a reputation for their dynamic and innovative approach to the recording studio. In 1997, Mr. Finckel and Ms. Wu launched ArtistLed, classical music's first musician-directed and Internet-based recording company, which has served as a model for numerous independent labels. All 13 ArtistLed recordings have met with critical acclaim and are available via the company's website at www.artistled.com. This season, ArtistLed releases its 14th recording, an album featuring the Mendelssohn piano trios with violinist Philip Setzer.

Mr. Finckel and Ms. Wu have served as Artistic Directors of The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center since 2004. They are also the founders and Artistic Directors of Music@Menlo, a chamber music festival and institute in Silicon Valley now celebrating its tenth anniversary season. In these capacities, they have overseen the establishment and design of the Chamber Music Society's CMS Studio Recordings label, as well as the Society's recording partnership with Deutsche Grammophon (which includes CMS concert downloads made available through the Digital DG Concerts Series); and Music@Menlo LIVE, Music@Menlo's exclusive recording label, which has been praised as a "breakthrough" (*Billboard*) and "probably the most ambitious recording project of any classical music festival in the world" (*San Jose Mercury News*). In 2011, Mr. Finckel and Ms. Wu were named Artistic Directors of Chamber Music Today, a new festival to be held annually at the Seoul Arts Center in Korea.

The duo's repertoire spans virtually the entire literature for cello and piano, with an equal emphasis on the classics and the contemporaries. Their modern repertoire includes all the significant works, from Prokofiev and Britten to Alfred Schnittke and André Previn. Their commitment to new music has brought commissioned works by Bruce Adolphe, Lera Auerbach, Gabriela Lena Frank, Pierre Jalbert, Augusta Read Thomas and George Tsontakis to audiences around the world. In 2010, the duo released *For David and Wu Han* (ArtistLed), an album of four contemporary works for cello and piano expressly composed for them. In 2011, Summit Records released a recording of the duo performing Gabriela Lena Frank's concerto, *Compadrazgo*, with the ProMusica Columbus Chamber Orchestra.

Mr. Finckel and Ms. Wu have achieved universal renown for their passionate commitment to nurturing the careers of countless young artists through a wide array of education initiatives. For many years, the duo taught alongside the late Isaac Stern at Carnegie Hall and the Jerusalem Music Center. They appeared annually on the Aspen Music Festival's Distinguished Artist Master Class series and in various educational outreach programs across the country. Last season, under the auspices of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Mr. Finckel and Ms. Wu have established chamber music training workshops for young artists in Korea and Taiwan, intensive residency programs designed to bring student musicians into contact with an elite artist-faculty. Mr. Finckel and Ms. Wu reside in New York with their 18-year-old daughter, Lilian.

For more information, please visit www.davidfinckelandwuhan.com.

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Mr. Finckel and Ms. Wu's recordings are available exclusively on ArtistLed (www.artistled.com).

Wu Han performs on the Steinway Piano.