

Sunday, November 24, 2019, 3pm  
Hertz Hall

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

PROGRAM

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770–1827) Cello Sonata No. 3 in A major, Op. 69  
Allegro ma non tanto  
Scherzo: Allegro molto  
Adagio cantabile – Allegro vivace

Johannes BRAHMS (1833–1897) Cello Sonata No. 2 in F major, Op. 99  
Allegro vivace  
Adagio affettuoso  
Allegro passionato – Trio  
Allegro molto

INTERMISSION

Claude DEBUSSY (1862–1918) Nocturne and Scherzo for Cello and Piano

César FRANCK (1822–1890) Violin Sonata in A Major (trans. cello)  
Allegro ben moderato  
Allegro  
Recitativo-fantasia  
(Ben moderato – Molto lento)  
Allegretto poco mosso

*David Finckel and Wu Han appear by arrangement with David Rowe Artists  
([www.davidroweartists.com](http://www.davidroweartists.com)).*

*Public Relations and Press Representative: Milina Barry PR ([www.milinabarrypr.com](http://www.milinabarrypr.com))*

*David Finckel and Wu Han recordings are available exclusively through ArtistLed  
([www.artistled.com](http://www.artistled.com)).*

*Artist website: [www.davidfinckelandyuhan.com](http://www.davidfinckelandyuhan.com)*

*Wu Han performs on the Steinway Piano.*

*This performance is made possible, in part, by Patron Sponsors Will and Linda Schieber.  
Cal Performances' 2019–20 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo.*



## Ludwig van Beethoven Cello Sonata No. 3 in A major, Op. 69

Beethoven composed the Sonata in A major—one of the greatest works in the cello literature—between 1807 and 1808, in the midst of one of his most phenomenally prolific periods (these years also saw the birth of the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, the Fourth Piano Concerto, the Choral Fantasy, and the Op. 70 Piano Trios). The new prominence of the cello, the sweeping use of the instrument's range, and the long, singing lines in the work all herald the full flowering of the cello's role in Beethoven's compositions. The earliest sketches of the sonata appeared in 1807, among those for the Fifth Symphony; Beethoven completed the work in Vienna in the spring of 1808, at the age of 38.

Beethoven dedicated the sonata to Baron Ignaz von Gleichenstein, an amateur cellist and one of the composer's closest friends and advisers between 1807 and 1810. Gleichenstein helped to organize a consortium of sponsors who offered Beethoven a guaranteed annual stipend to remain in Vienna. It is thought that the dedication of the sonata was a gesture of thanks to the baron. After the agreement was signed, Beethoven asked Gleichenstein to help him find a wife.

A year after the work was completed, Beethoven complained that the sonata “had not yet been well performed in public.” The first record of a performance is from 1812, when the sonata was played by Beethoven's pupil Carl Czerny and Joseph Linke, the cellist who would later give the first performance of the Op. 102 sonatas. Linke was the cellist of the Razumovsky Quartet, which premiered many of Beethoven's string quartets.

After presenting the first movement's noble theme alone, the cello rests on a low note while the piano continues to a cadenza. The music is then repeated with the roles reversed, the cello playing an ascending cadenza marked *dolce*. The mood is rudely broken by a ferocious version of the theme in minor that quickly dissipates to allow for the entrance of the second subject, a beautiful combination of a rising scale (cello) against a falling arpeggio (piano).

The cello and piano continue trading motifs, each repeating what the other has just played. A heroic closing theme is the culmination of the section and a brief, contemplative recollection of the opening motif leads to the repeat of the exposition.

The development explores even more incredible worlds, turning through mysterious, rhapsodic, stormy, soaring, and mystical sound worlds before reaching the recapitulation, where the cello plays the theme in its original form against triplet decorations in the piano. The coda is thoughtful, and an extended chromatic buildup leads to a heroic statement of the theme. After some dreamy, languishing music almost dies away, Beethoven finishes this great movement with a surprise *forte*.

The extraordinary second movement is the only appearance of a scherzo (meaning “joke”) in all five cello sonatas. The music begins on the upbeat, and the 3-1 rhythm never ceases, even in the happier trio section. Although there are many clever exchanges, the incessant, manic energy leaves the distinct impression that this scherzo is no joke.

A short Adagio cantabile, a beautiful song for both instruments, relieves the nervousness of the scherzo. A moment of hesitation leads to the quiet, almost surreptitious appearance of the final Allegro vivace. The theme, though happy like its predecessors in the earlier sonatas, is more lyrical and has greater emotional depth. It introduces a movement in which the composer employs virtuosity not as an end in itself, but as a means of creating internal excitement. The second subject presents a difference of opinion between cello and piano, the cello singing a short phrase, the piano responding with percussive eighth notes. The development section is mostly wild, with flying scales and pounding octaves. Approaching the recapitulation, Beethoven employs the basic materials of the movement: the rhythmic eighth-note accompaniment is combined with chromaticism, grasping for the main theme. The coda is full of thoughtfulness and pathos. There is a sense of reflection amidst excitement, of Beethoven yearning to be understood, yet with satisfaction denied. After a series of repeatedly

unsuccessful attempts, the home key of A major is finally attained, as the eighth-note melody accelerates to frenzied sixteenth notes. The ending is triumphant, as Beethoven hammers his point home, the cello repeating the first bar of the theme over and over again with the piano pounding out the eighth-note accompaniment (“I will not give up!”).

—*David Finckel*

## Johannes Brahms

### Cello Sonata No. 2 in F major, Op. 99

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 Cello Sonata in F major 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—very directly inspiring Brahms’ cello writing over the last decade of his career. By all accounts, Hausmann played with a remarkably burnished tone and ample technique; Brahms’ writing suggests that Hausmann had no trouble negotiating the cello’s highest registers, nor rising above the clanging fortissimo chords in the piano. Brahms’ 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 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’ 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 work 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’ 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 that 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' 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 to 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 dramatically from the movement's idyllic quality with a lyrical melody in B-flat minor, suffused with 19th-century *sturm-und-drang*. 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.

—Patrick Castillo and David Finckel

### Claude Debussy

#### Nocturne and Scherzo for Cello and Piano

In the summer of 1880, Nadezhda von Meck, the Russian businesswoman and enigmatic patron to Tchaikovsky, hired the 18-year-old Claude Debussy to give her children music lessons; his professional duties also included serving as Mme. von Meck's piano duet partner. It was while in von Meck's employ that Debussy produced his first work for solo piano, the *Danse bohémienne*; and the Piano Trio, both completed in 1880. (Von Meck had a resident violinist and cellist with her as well, with whom Debussy could join forces on the trio.) Two years later, while spending another summer with the von Meck family, Debussy wrote the Nocturne and Scherzo for violin and piano; it was performed once, by vio-

linist Maurice Thieberg with the composer at the piano, before Debussy rewrote it as a cello piece.

The Nocturne and Scherzo was never published, and was only rediscovered in the early 1970s, on which occasion Rostropovich gave the work's overdue public premiere. Or, more accurately, the Scherzo was rediscovered, as what we have is a short single-movement work in lithe triple meter; the Nocturne is presumed lost. An early work that predates the sea-parting innovations of Debussy's more celebrated scores (it would be another 14 years before *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, with which, Boulez declared, "The art of music began to beat with a new pulse"), this delectable piece nevertheless betrays an ear for unexpected harmonies and a confident approach to instrumental writing—the scaffolding of his mature works. Debussy's instinctive understanding of the piano is readily audible in the accompaniment's clarion textures. The melodic flow and graceful handling of the cello's sonorous bass and vibrant upper registers likewise reveal a facility in writing for string instruments on which later experimental works (the String Quartet of 1893 and, especially, the Cello Sonata of 1915, among others) would build.

—Patrick Castillo

### César Franck

#### Violin Sonata in A Major (trans. cello)

In contrast to Richard Strauss' youthful F-major sonata, César Franck's Sonata in A major was written during the last decade of the composer's life and reflects the maturity of style that characterizes this highly creative period.

The sonata was composed as a wedding present for Franck's Belgian compatriot, the violinist Eugene Ysaÿe, who first performed it at his own nuptial festivities on September 26, 1886. Three months later, on December 16, these two artists gave the sonata's first public performance during a festival of César Franck's music presented by the Arts Club of Brussels. When the sonata was played a year later at the Société Nationale in Paris, the audience reaction was so enthusiastic that the fina-



Lisa-Marie Mazzucco

le had to be repeated. Since then, the A-major sonata has emerged as one of the most important 19th-century compositions for violin and piano. Its enduring popularity has inspired several transcriptions for other instruments—flute, double-bass, organ (with mixed choir), and, most often, the cello, Franck's romantic writing benefiting from the depth of sonority and expressive range of the instrument. The first version for cello was arranged by a prominent French cellist and contemporary of Franck, Jules Delsart (1844–1900). The transcription heard on today's performance is David Finckel's.

After a brief piano prologue based on an extended ninth chord, the cello introduces intervallic cells—major and minor thirds as well as a falling semi-tone—out of which the sonata evolves. This structural principle, cyclic form—something found in several of Franck's later works, including the *Symphony in D minor* (1886–88) and the *String Quartet in D*

major (1889)—unifies the sonata with thematic material that occurs from one movement to another. The cello's opening statement of the sonata returns in the *Recitativo-Fantasia* played by the piano, and a lyrical phrase in the middle of this movement reappears as the second subject of the finale. Franck's dramatic use of cyclic form was possibly inspired by Beethoven's (and Schubert's) technique of recalling previously heard themes. In addition, the influence of Liszt is apparent in the tempestuous mood and virtuosity of the *Allegro* second movement. The spirit of Bach can be felt in the third movement, and the famous finale is the culmination of all that has preceded it: the cyclic thematic material is skillfully recapitulated, and a flowing canon that harmoniously unites the cello and piano in lyrical counterpoint brings the sonata to a masterful conclusion.

—Steven Paul



David Finckel and Wu Han are among the most esteemed and influential classical musicians in the world today. They are recipients of *Musical America's* Musicians of the Year award, one of the highest honors granted by the music industry. The energy, imagination, and integrity they bring to their multifaceted endeavors as concert performers, artistic directors, recording artists, educators, and cultural entrepreneurs go unmatched.

Highlights of their 2019–20 season include a new CD release, a national PBS television special, a new residency appointment, a busy international tour schedule, along with multiple performances with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center (CMS) in the United States, Taiwan, and Columbia.

David Finckel and Wu Han are currently in their third term as artistic directors of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. Under their leadership, CMS is celebrating three global broadcasting initiatives bringing chamber music to new audiences around the world, via partnerships with Medici TV, Radio Television Hong Kong, and the All Arts broadcast channel. David and Wu Han are the founders and artistic directors of Music@Menlo in Silicon Valley, and of Chamber Music Today, an annual festival held in Seoul, South Korea. Wolf Trap appointed Wu Han to serve as artistic advisor of its Chamber Music at the Barns series, and this season, she is Montclair State University's Artist in Residence.

Leaders of the classical recording industry, they created ArtistLed in 1997, the first musician-directed and Internet-based classical

recording company. David Finckel and Wu Han have also overseen the establishment of the CMS Studio Recordings label, the society's partnership with Deutsche Grammophon, CMS' live stream programming, and Music@Menlo LIVE, which has been praised as "the most ambitious recording project of any classical music festival in the world" (*San Jose Mercury News*).

David Finckel and Wu Han have received universal praise for their passionate commitment to nurturing the artistic growth of countless young artists through a wide array of educational initiatives. Under their leadership at CMS, the Bowers Program identifies and inducts the finest young chamber artists into the entire spectrum of CMS activities. As artistic directors of Music@Menlo, their Chamber Music Institute has provided hundreds of students with incomparable, immersive musical experiences over 17 summers.

From 2009–18, David Finckel and Wu Han directed the LG Chamber Music School in South Korea, which served dozens of young musicians annually, and they also led an intensive chamber music studio at the Aspen Music Festival and School. David Finckel and Wu Han's website recently launched a new initiative that addresses the challenges and opportunities facing today's classical music performers and presenters.

David Finckel and Wu Han reside in New York.

For more information, please visit [www.david-finckel-and-wu-han.com](http://www.david-finckel-and-wu-han.com).