

Sunday, February 5, 2023, 3pm  
Hertz Hall

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

PROGRAM

Camille SAINT-SAËNS (1835–1921) Sonata for Cello and Piano No. 1  
in C minor, Op. 32 (1872)  
Allegro  
Andante tranquillo sostenuto  
Allegro moderato

Johannes BRAHMS (1833–1897) Sonata No. 2 in F major for Cello and  
Piano, Op. 99 (1886)  
Allegro vivace  
Adagio affettuoso  
Allegro passionato—Trio  
Allegro molto

INTERMISSION

Pierre JALBERT (b. 1967) Selections from *Ephemeral Objects* for  
Cello and Piano (2019, California Premiere)  
VI. Timeless  
III. Playful and dramatic

Dmitri SHOSTAKOVICH (1906–1975) Sonata for Cello and Piano in D minor,  
Op. 40 (1934)  
Allegro non troppo  
Allegro  
Largo  
Allegro

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

*Wu Han performs on the Steinway Piano.*

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Photographing and/or recording this performance is strictly prohibited.

**Camille Saint-Saëns**  
**Sonata for Cello and Piano No. 1**  
**in C minor, Op. 32**

In early 1871, a consortium of French composers that included César Franck, Gabriel Fauré, Camille Saint-Saëns, and many others, established a new organization. Called the Société Nationale de Musique, it aimed to promote the performance, publication, and evolution of contemporary French music. The group's motto of *Ars Gallica*, or "French art," and its strict policies on performing music written outside France were taken by many to be an emblem of the anti-German sentiment in French culture that followed the Franco-Prussian war of 1870–71. But in fact, the members of the Société were interested in exploring a productive artistic synthesis of the experimental composition practices of Wagner, Liszt, and Schumann and the unique lightness and melodic clarity of the existing French style.

The first of their major concert events occurred on December 7, 1872. It featured music of several young French composers along with premieres by some of the founders. Among the works to receive its first public hearing there was Saint-Saëns' Cello Sonata in C minor, Op. 32. The composer was on a cello kick that year, working on his ground-breaking Cello Concerto in A minor (Op. 33) at the same time. Both these pieces display his attempt to combine the "serious" instrumental genres of the cello sonata and concerto with the cyclic structures, uncompromisingly beautiful melodies, and fleeting textures that became markers of "musical patriotism" in France during that period.

The drama and C minor tonality of the opening movement of Op. 32 has led many critics over the years to see it as an homage to Beethoven. Still, its harmonic ambiguities, sweeping piano writing, and the use of whole-tone scales in transitional melodies are all characteristics that would be associated with French writing of the late

19th and early 20th centuries. Saint-Saëns sticks to a traditional sonata form in this Allegro, but with a wonderfully varied, hushed recapitulation that lends haunting mystery to the cello's pizzicato sound.

The second movement recalls church music, with the cello and piano passing off an easy going, staccato bassline that supports a heavenly chorale. This is no accident; Saint-Saëns based this Andante on music he improvised at the organ, seeing the sonata as a chance to "reproduce the text of what I had extemporized." Many have commented on the similarities between the tune of this chorale and the chorus that closes Act I of Giacomo Meyerbeer's opera *LAfricaine*, where the lead character open heartedly begs for salvation and forgiveness after he is arrested. Whether or not the allusion was intended by Saint-Saëns, it is evocative to think of this movement as a series of prayers, first hopeful, then more desperate, and then full of faith and expectation once again.

When the sonata had its public premiere, the composer was not pleased with the finale he had written; apparently, he thought it was "not up to scratch" and in need of revision. This dissatisfaction may have related to the negative response to the movement shared by Clemence Saint-Saëns, the composer's mother, who according to fellow composer Charles-Marie Widor thought the original finale was "worthless." The revised Allegro moderato, completed by the end of December, 1872, includes a particularly virtuosic, perpetual-motion piano part. Toward the end, there is an apparent turn from the dominating, tense world of C minor to a resolution on a lyrical theme in a brighter key. But Saint-Saëns decides to revert to stormy, minor fortissimos to close out the work, reinforcing with each accented chord the seriousness that he and those of the Société Nationale wished to bring into French music.

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**Johannes Brahms**  
**Sonata No. 2 in F major for Cello and**  
**Piano, 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-muse, 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 work’s premiere, the conductor and critic Eduard Hanslick wrote, “In the Cello Sonata, passion rules,

fieri 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 sonata unfolds with a bristling energy, with a jolting explosion in the piano answered by a triumphant cry from the cello. The first movement’s central theme comprises these shouting fragments, rather than a continuous melodic line. Remarking on its unusual rhythms and bold melodic leaps, Schoenberg later wrote: “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...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 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*. 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

#### **Pierre Jalbert (b. 1967)**

##### **Selections from *Ephemeral Objects* for Cello and Piano (California Premiere)**

*Ephemeral Objects*, a duo for cello and piano, contains seven contrasting movements. Each movement can stand on its own, or several can be grouped together to form a smaller set, or the entire set can be performed to form a larger work. Each brief movement represents a different aspect of my musical language. The first movement pairs timeless, suspended music with more rhythmically aggressive music. The second movement is slow and lyrical, with long song-like lines in the cello. The third movement is a wild, rhythmic scherzo of sorts. The fourth movement is influenced by French-Canadian folk song. The fifth movement is more experimental in nature and

makes use of the timbral possibilities of the instruments (including playing inside the piano). The sixth movement is based on Gregorian chant, and the last movement is a pulse-oriented, bravura-style finale to the work.

—Pierre Jalbert

#### **Dmitri Shostakovich**

##### **Sonata for Cello and Piano in D minor, Op. 40**

*Composed:* Begun in mid-August 1934 in Moscow. On August 17, the composer noted that the first movement was nearly finished. The third movement was completed on September 13, and the last movement on September 19 in Leningrad. The sonata was written for cellist Viktor Kubatsky, former principal cellist of the Bolshoi Theater, Moscow, and organizer of the Stradivarius Quartet. Shostakovich and Kubatsky toured as a duo, performing not only Shostakovich's sonata but also the sonatas of Rachmaninoff and Grieg. Shostakovich reportedly performed all the piano parts from memory. The composer was 27 years old.

*First performance:* In Leningrad, December 25, 1934, by Viktor Kubatsky and Shostakovich.

*Other works from immediately before:* Piano Concerto No. 1, Op. 35; Jazz Suite No. 1. *Other works from immediately after:* *The Tale of the Priest and His Servant Balda*, Op. 36a (cartoon opera for children based on Pushkin); *The Limpid Stream*, Op. 39a (ballet); Symphony No. 4, Op. 43.

*The composer and the music:* In public interviews at this time Shostakovich spoke of his need to "struggle for a simple language" and he invoked Maxim Gorky's phrase about a need for a "purity of language." At the same time, his private letters suggest a connection with emotional experiences at this time. Although already married, in June the composer had fallen in love with a young translator, Elena Konstantinovskaya. He and his wife Nina took a long seaside

holiday in the South, during which time he wrote continually to Elena. Stopping in Moscow on their way home to Leningrad, in mid-August, Nina decided she had had enough and pushed for a separation. She continued on to Leningrad, leaving Shostakovich behind in Moscow. It was at this time that he began the cello sonata.

Soon after the first performance of the work, Shostakovich asked his wife for a divorce. By later 1935, however, Nina was expecting their first child, Galina, and the couple were re-united.

—Gerard McBurney

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## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Celloist David Finckel and pianist Wu Han are the recipients of *Musical America's* Musicians of the Year Award, the highest honor bestowed by the organization. Together, the two enjoy a multifaceted musical life that encompasses performing, recording, and artistic direction at the highest levels. Their concert activities have taken them from New York's stages to the most important concert halls in the United States, Europe and Asia. They regularly perform a wide range of music that includes the standard repertoire for cello and piano, commissioned works by living composers, and virtually the entire chamber music literature for their instruments.

In 1997, David Finckel and Wu Han founded ArtistLed, the first internet-based, artist-controlled classical recording label. ArtistLed's catalog of more than 20 releases includes the standard literature for cello and piano, plus works composed for the duo by George Tsontakis, Gabriela Lena Frank, Bruce Adolphé, Lera Auerbach, Edwin Finckel, Augusta Read Thomas, and Pierre Jalbert. Artistic Directors of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center since 2004, they recently led the 53-year vanguard organization through two pandemic seasons, conceiving and producing over 270 digital events that sustained chamber music communities across the country. A 2022 contract extension positions them to become the longest serving artistic directors in the society's history. David Finckel and Wu Han

are also Founders and Artistic Directors of Silicon Valley's Music@Menlo, where, since 2002, the festival's innovative thematic programming and educational initiatives have set an example that is admired internationally. The festival's exclusive recording label, Music@Menlo LIVE, has to date released over 130 audiophile-quality CDs.

Passionately dedicated to education for musicians of all ages and experience, the duo was instrumental in transforming the CMS Two Program into today's Bowers Program, which admits stellar young musicians to the CMS roster for a term of three seasons. They also oversee the Chamber Music Institute at Music@Menlo, which immerses some 40 young musicians every summer in the multifaceted fabric of the festival. The two were privileged to serve on multiple occasions as a faculty members of Isaac Stern's Chamber Music Encounters in Israel, New York, and Japan. In addition, the Resource section of their website ([davidfinckel.wuhan.com/resource](http://davidfinckel.wuhan.com/resource)) provides, at no cost, a wealth of guidance for students on both music study and careers, as well as invaluable information for arts organizations and individuals on every aspect of concert presenting.

Born in Taiwan, Wu Han came to the United States as a graduate student, where her talent quickly came to the attention of noted musicians. Mentored by legendary pianists such as Lilian Kallir, Menahem Pressler, and Rudolf Serkin, Wu Han



thrived at the Marlboro and Aspen Music Festivals and subsequently won the prestigious Andrew Wolf Award. She currently serves as Artistic Advisor for Wolf Trap's Chamber Music at the Barns series and for Palm Beach's Society of the Four Arts, and in 2022 was named Artistic Director of La Musica in Sarasota, Florida. David Finckel was raised in New Jersey, where he spent his teenage years winning competitions, among them the Philadelphia Orchestra's junior and senior divisions, resulting in two performances with the orchestra. The first American student of Mstislav Rostropovich, Finckel went on to become the cellist of the Emerson String Quartet, which, during his

34-season tenure, garnered nine Grammy Awards and the Avery Fisher Prize. Finckel is a professor at both the Juilliard School and Stony Brook University.

David Finckel and Wu Han married in 1985 and divide their time between touring and residences in New York City and Westchester County.

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