

Sunday, February 11, 2024, 3pm

Hertz Hall

David Finckel, *cello*

Wu Han, *piano*

PROGRAM

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770–1827) Sonata No. 1 in F major, Op. 5, No. 1 (1796)
Adagio sostenuto – Allegro
Rondo: Allegro vivace

Sonata No. 2 in G minor, Op. 5, No. 2 (1796)
Adagio sostenuto ed espressivo –
Allegro molto più tosto presto
Rondo: Allegro

INTERMISSION

Sonata No. 3 in A major, Op. 69 (1808)
Allegro ma non tanto
Scherzo: Allegro molto
Adagio cantabile – Allegro vivace

PAUSE

Sonata No. 4 in C major, Op. 102,
No. 1 (1815)
Andante – Allegro vivace
Adagio – Tempo d'andante – Allegro vivace

Sonata No. 5 in D major, Op. 102,
No. 2 (1815)
Allegro con brio
Adagio con molto sentimento d'affetto
Allegro fugato

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Wu Han performs on the Steinway Piano.

THE EARLY WORKS: THE SONATAS & VARIATIONS OF 1796

These pieces are milestones of the cello literature. Although during the 18th century the cello had gradually come to be regarded as a solo as well as an accompanying instrument, neither Mozart nor Haydn had composed a cello sonata. Beethoven was the first major composer to write works with equally important roles for the cello and piano.

Sonatas Op. 5, Nos. 1 and 2

Composed: Berlin, in the late spring or summer of 1796. Beethoven was on his first and only significant concert tour, which also included the cities of Prague, Leipzig, and Dresden. He was 25 years old.

Dedicated to: King Friedrich Wilhelm II, nephew and successor to Frederick the Great. The king was an amateur cellist and devotee of the instrument who had entertained both Mozart and Haydn at his court. Both of these composers had already dedicated string quartets featuring prominent cello parts to the king.

First performance: 1796, during the visit to Berlin, at the royal palace. Beethoven played the piano, and it is thought that Jean-Louis Duport, rather than his older brother, Jean-Pierre, was the cellist. The Duports were renowned virtuosos who lived in Berlin and played in the king's orchestra. It is likely that Beethoven and Jean-Louis Duport performed the G major *Judas Maccabaeus* variations on this occasion as well.

Published: February 1797, Vienna

Other works from this period: the Piano Trios Op. 1, Piano Sonatas Op. 2 and Op. 7. In the following year, Beethoven began composing sonatas for piano and violin.

Sonata No. 1 in F major, Op. 5, No. 1

In the *Adagio sostenuto* introduction, Beethoven begins his first cello sonata with caution—hesitations and tense silences lead to melodic ideas that are left undeveloped, as

though the sonata is struggling to begin. After a climactic cadential flourish, the music pauses and the piano introduces the *Allegro* main theme, ornamented in the style of Mozart, full of details and virtuosity. The second theme begins with serious-sounding chromaticism but ends light and carefree, moving through virtuosic scales to a sequence in staccato eighth-notes full of playful rhythmic confusion. In the exuberant closing material, the pianist's hands leap over one another with forceful answers from the cello, followed by a contemplative coda leading to the repeat of the exposition. The development section shows the composer's ever-lurking stormy side and a surprise *forte* announces the recapitulation. As in many of Beethoven's concertos, there is a lengthy written-out cadenza, beginning with a short fugato passage. An obsessive sixteenth-note figure in the right hand of the piano leads to an unexpectedly droll and sleepy *Adagio* that is interrupted by a wild *Prestissimo*. The movement concludes happily and vigorously.

The Rondo: *Allegro vivace* is an exciting ride full of virtuosic outbursts from both instruments. One can imagine the court's amazement at the spectacle of Beethoven devouring the keyboard in this finale. The only calm moments are dreamy interludes of piano arpeggios over cello drones. Near the finish, a long *ritard* winds the action down to a standstill, and when the composer has us in the palm of his hand, he ends the work with an explosion of notes from both instruments.

Sonata No. 2 in G minor, Op. 5, No. 2

Beethoven enjoyed surprising and even scaring his listeners. The opening *Adagio sostenuto ed espressivo* does just that. A jarring G minor chord is quickly hushed by the marking *forte-piano*, itself a novel idea, and a spooky scale descends in the piano (foreshadowing the slow movement of the *Ghost* Trio, which he would write in 1808). The motifs and themes of this *Adagio* are more fully

developed than those of the F major sonata's introduction, creating a movement of much greater substance. Unbelievably long silences near the end hold the listener under a spell that is broken quietly by the brooding *Allegro molto più tosto presto*. In contrast to the previous sonata, the cello takes the theme first, passing it back and forth with the piano. This is a remarkable movement, emotionally multi-layered even through the frequent stormy sections. In the development the excitement continues until a new theme enters, dance-like and delicate, the accompaniment changing from nervous triplets to steady eighth notes. At the recapitulation, the theme is beautifully harmonized, intensifying the emotion. The movement proceeds tempestuously to the finish.

By contrast, the Rondo: *Allegro* is a study in gaiety and the joy of virtuosity. The movement begins with a harmonic joke: it starts out squarely in C major instead of the expected G major. After a moment the music slides into the home key, a trick Beethoven used later in the finale of the Piano Concerto No. 4, also in G major. Virtuoso stunts abound: for piano, for cello, and again for piano. A dark episode is dispelled by a chromatic passage returning to the main theme, which leads to an extended middle section in C major and a new theme. The instruments trade virtuosic displays in an almost competitive fashion. The cello surprises by substituting an unexpected E-flat in the theme, and this event wrenches the music into the foreign key of A-flat major.

After a full recapitulation, sweeping scales in the piano herald an extended and brilliant coda. One can imagine Beethoven, filled with the coffee he loved to drink, rattling away on the keys. After some pompous closing music, the piano settles things down to a standstill only to have the cello burst in with the main theme in jumping octaves. Joyful wildness concludes the sonata.

THE "HEROIC PERIOD" SONATA OF 1808

One of the greatest works in the cello literature, the A major sonata was composed by Beethoven in the midst of one of his most phenomenally prolific periods. The new prominence of the cello, the sweeping use of the instrument's range, and the long, singing lines all herald the full flowering of the cello's role in the duo sonata.

Sonata No. 3 in A major, Op. 69

Composed: sketches appear in 1807 amongst those for the Fifth Symphony. Completed in Vienna in the spring of 1808. Beethoven was 38.

Dedicated to: Baron Ignaz von Gleichenstein, an amateur cellist and one of Beethoven's closest friends and advisers from 1807–1810. 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 Gleichenstein. After the agreement was signed, Beethoven asked Gleichenstein to help him find a wife.

First performance: not documented. 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 quartets.

Published: 1809, Leipzig.

Other works from this period: the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, the Fourth Piano Concerto, the Choral Fantasy, and the Piano Trios, Op. 70.

After presenting the noble theme alone in the *Allegro ma non tanto* first movement, the cello rests on a low note while the piano con-

tinues 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 mysterious, rhapsodic, stormy, soaring, and mystical 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 Scherzo: *Allegro molto* is the only appearance of a scherzo (meaning “joke”) in all five 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 chromatic groupings 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 to reach the home key, A major is finally attained, as the eighth-note melody accelerates to frenzied sixteenths. 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!”).

THE LATE SONATAS OF 1815

Sonatas Op. 102, Nos. 1 and 2

Composed: Vienna, July - August 1815, at the age of 44. They are the last works Beethoven wrote for piano and a solo instrument.

Dedicated to: Countess Marie von Erdödy, a long-time patron of Beethoven and a good amateur pianist. Many of Beethoven's works were played at her house concerts, and she remained loyal to Beethoven in his later years when his music was losing its widespread public appeal.

First performance: summer, 1815, at the country estate of the countess. Joseph Linke was the cellist and the countess played the piano.

Published: 1817, Bonn.

Other works from this period: very few. These sonatas are regarded as Beethoven's only significant works from the year 1815.

Sonata No. 4 in C major, Op. 102, No. 1

Beyond the heroic struggles of his middle

period, and by this time almost completely deaf, Beethoven looked to the future in his last two cello sonatas. As in the A major sonata, the cello begins alone, but in an entirely new world. Whereas the A major theme is solid and firmly grounded in the cello's lower register, this one breathes an unearthly air, and the entire Andante seems to float somewhere beyond reality. The writing is contrapuntal, with independent voices of equal importance moving gently against each other. The thematic material is once again more complex: the decorative elements Beethoven once applied in his early period are now fused seamlessly into the larger structure. Long trills function not merely as ornaments but as orchestration, adding inner intensity to the sound.

The demonic and anguished *Allegro vivace* shatters the hypnotic serenity, Beethoven using every possible device to contrast with the previous music. Not only dynamics, rhythm, and texture are changed but also tonality: the rest of the movement is no longer in the sonata's main key of C major but in the relative A minor. (In the Op. 5 sonatas, both introductions and subsequent movements were in the same key). This movement is written in a style new to Beethoven's cello works. In his late period, Beethoven drastically varied the length of his movements. Some of his shorter movements, while having all the structural requirements, are devoid of transitions—Beethoven simply stops writing one kind of music and begins writing another, as if manners and civility had ceased to matter. This happens near the outset of the *Allegro* where Beethoven uses a surprise F-sharp to stop the motion dead in its tracks.

Out of nowhere, the second subject appears—soothing, quiet, but only for a moment. Turmoil returns and the feisty movement is at the double bar before one realizes it. A very brief development section contains two ideas: a contrapuntal one followed by a brief chorale, leading to the stormy recapitulation. An abrupt “get out and stay out!” end-

ing concludes the movement. (An interesting comparison is the first movement of the Op. 95 *Serioso* Quartet.)

Beethoven was fascinated by the stars and is reported to have composed in his head while contemplating the mysteries of the universe. Certainly the slow-motion *Adagio* evokes an otherworldly atmosphere. The movement's timeless feeling is gently punctuated by fleeting scales, as distant as comets. The mystery soon turns to brooding, with a turbulent modulation moving through several keys before coming to an inconclusive halt. At this moment, a different kind of music emerges, deeply tender in a way that is unique to Beethoven. He then proceeds to create something unexpected and of inspired beauty: the sonata's opening theme reappears, but this time so warmly that its first incarnation seems only a dream. Phrases repeat over and over, as if asking for something in prayer. After this deeply confessional episode, the *Allegro vivace* begins in a humorous way, and we are off on a frisky and sometimes funny adventure, full of fantasy and invention. There are inexplicable starts and stops that must have sounded very strange to listeners in Beethoven's time (as indeed they still do). There is a fugato passage and, at the end, a brilliant coda that shows he had not lost interest in using virtuosic feats to create excitement. After a brief unwinding, a surprise finish recalls the end of the F major sonata.

Sonata No. 5 in D major, Op. 102, No. 2

This final sonata bears similarities to one of the composer's late string quartets, Op. 130. Both works employ Baroque elements, such as the continuous sixteenth-note patterns found in Vivaldi and Bach. Beethoven's application of this style is powerful: in the opening *Allegro con brio* he uses the figurations like weapons, firing them off here and there, like a frightened soldier in the dark. (Schubert may well have heard and copied Beethoven's opening five notes in his *Death and the Maiden* quartet of 1826, which also in-



cludes Baroque-style passage work). Although showing strength and confidence, this movement contains odd tentative moments, for example the vague and distracted-sounding transition to the second subject. In the development, there is feverish wandering, madness, and confusion. No longer composing music that was easy to understand, Beethoven gradually came to be regarded as a mad genius.

The next movement, especially, offers an extraordinary contrast to the heavenliness of the previous sonata. As with the Op. 5 sonatas, Beethoven took a giant step forward with the second of the set. Indeed, the haunting *Adagio con molto sentimento d'affetto* is the most profound music in the entire cycle, the deathly opening evoking images of funerals. Beethoven uses thickly-written chords in the piano to create a muddy, rumbling sound (he could be called the first tone-painter of the piano). After the suspenseful opening, a dirge begins, the pianist's left hand sounding like the slow falling of horses' hooves. A new theme and a change to D major recall better times. The return of the opening music is more complex harmonically. A skipping, dotted rhythm introduces a vision of a dance

of death—the smiling skull, the skeletal horse, the black hood.

The transition to the finale contains moments of supreme intimacy. The magical modulation to B-flat major takes the listener to a place beyond the pain of all that preceded, seeing the light of heaven for a brief moment.

An unexpected dip downwards to C-sharp minor brings back the sensation of a cold grave. However, Beethoven unexpectedly starts to play games, introducing the finale in much the same way as he did in his previous sonata. In the final movement, the *Allegro fugato*, Beethoven takes the piano and cello sonata to new realms. Reaching the pinnacle of integration, the two instruments join together to create a dancing fugue full of dissonance even in its cheerful sections. Completely baffling to listeners in Beethoven's own time, the movement still shocks the ear. This fugue, victorious in its conquest of a new language, looks forward to the music of the twentieth century, and is a fitting conclusion to Beethoven's towering literature for piano and cello.

—David Finckel
and Michael Feldman

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. They enjoy a multi-faceted 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 Adolphe, 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 com-

munities across the country. A 2022 contract extension positions them to become the longest serving artistic directors in the society's history. Founders and artistic directors of Silicon Valley's Music@Menlo 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 more than 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 duo was privileged to serve on multiple occasions as a faculty member of Isaac Stern's Chamber Music Encounters in Israel, New York, and Japan. In addition, the Resource section of their website (davidfinckel.wuhan.com) 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.

Brad Mehldau

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One of the most lyrical and intimate voices of contemporary jazz piano, **Brad Mehldau** has forged a unique path that embodies the essence of jazz exploration, classical romanticism, and pop allure. From critical acclaim as a bandleader to major international exposure in collaborations with Pat Metheny, Renée Fleming, and Joshua Redman, Mehldau continues to garner numerous awards and admiration from both jazz purists and music enthusiasts alike. His forays into melding musical idioms, in both trio and solo settings, has seen brilliant re-workings of songs by contemporary songwriters like The Beatles, Cole Porter, Radiohead, Paul Simon, George Gershwin, and Nick Drake; alongside the ever-evolving breath of his own significant catalogue of original compositions. With his self-proclaimed affection for popular music and classical training, "Mehldau is the most influential jazz pianist of the last 20 years" (*The New York Times*).