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GIFT CONCERT

JONATHAN SWENSEN | Cello

STEPHEN WAARTS | Violin

JUHO POHJONEN | Piano

Thursday, February 15, 2024 | 7:30pm

Herbst Theatre

This concert is in memory of Frank S. Bayley

SHOSTAKOVICH Piano Trio No. 1 in C Minor, Opus 8

JANÁČEK Pohádka (A Fairy Tale)

Con moto

Con moto

Allegro

JANÁČEK Sonata for Violin and Piano

Con moto

Ballada

Allegretto

Adagio

INTERMISSION

FRANCK Piano Trio in F-sharp Minor, Opus 1, No. 1

Andante con moto

Allegro molto

Allegro maestoso

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Jonathan Swensen is represented by Monica Felkel Creative Partners monicafelkelcreativepartners.com

Stephen Waarts is represented by Harrison Parrott
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Juho Pohjonen is represented by Kirshbaum Associates Inc.
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ARTIST PROFILE

Jonathan Swensen and Stephen Waarts make their San Francisco Performances debuts. SF Performances presents Juho Pohjonen for the third time. He first appeared in March 2008.



Rising star of the cello **Jonathan Swensen** is the recipient of the 2022 Avery Fisher Career Grant and was recently featured as both *Musical America's* "New Artist of the Month" and "One to Watch" in *Gramophone* magazine. Jonathan first fell in love with the cello upon hearing the Elgar Concerto at the age of six, and ultimately made his concerto debut performing that very piece with Portugal's Orquestra Sinfónica do Porto Casa da Música.

September 2022 saw the release of Jonathan's debut recording *Fantasia* on Champs Hill Records, an album of works for solo cello which received rave reviews on its release, including from *Gramophone*, *BBC Music*, and *The Strad* which printed "An exciting young talent emerges. I would gladly buy a ticket to see Swensen on the strength of this appealing calling card."

Jonathan has performed with orchestras including the Philharmonia Orchestra, Orquesta Ciudad de Granada, Copenhagen Philharmonic, Aarhus Symphony Orchestra, Odense Symphony Orchestra, Iceland Symphony Orchestra, Mobile Symphony, and the Greenville Symphony. He made his critically acclaimed recital debuts at the Kennedy Center's Terrace Theater and New York's Merkin Concert Hall, with additional performances in Boston's Jordan Hall, the Morgan Library and Museum, and the Krannert Center's Foellinger Great Hall.

In addition to his many solo appearances, Jonathan is a frequent performer of chamber music in the U.S. and Europe, appearing at the Tivoli Festival, Copenhagen Summer Festival, ChamberFest Cleveland, Krzyżowa-Music, San Francisco Conserva-

tory of Music, Vancouver Recital Society, San Francisco Performances, and the Use-domer Musikfestival, among others.

Jonathan will join the Bowers Program of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in 2024. He has captured First Prizes at the 2019 Windsor International String Competition, 2018 Khachaturian International Cello Competition, and the 2018 Young Concert Artists International Auditions. A graduate of the Royal Danish Academy of Music, Jonathan continued his studies with Torleif Thedéen at the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo, and Laurence Lesser at the New England Conservatory, where he received his Artist Diploma in May 2023.



Stephen Waarts' innate and poetic musical voice has established him as a firm favorite with audiences across the globe.

Stephen has performed with orchestras such as Konzerthausorchester Berlin, Chamber Orchestra of Europe, hr-Sinfonieorchester, Antwerp Symphony Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestre National de Belgique, Lucerne Symphony Orchestra, Israel Philharmonic Orchestra and Halle Orchestra.

In the 2023–24 season, Waarts will make his debut with Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra performing Beethoven's Violin Concerto under the baton of Robert Spano, Berner Sinfonieorchester performing Mozart's *Violin Concerto No. 5* with Dalia Stasevska, and Donnacha Dennehy's Violin Concerto with Killian Farrell and the Meininger Hofkapelle. Further dates include concerts with Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana and Aziz Shokhakov as part of Settimane Musicali Ascona, and Armenian State Symphony Orchestra performing Khachaturian's Violin Concerto.

A passionate recitalist and chamber musician, Waarts debuts at San Francisco Performances and returns to the Vancouver Recital Society with Jonathan Swensen and

Juho Pohjonen, Wigmore Hall with Timothy Ridout and Marie-Elisabeth Hecker, and he appears at the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg with Sir András Schiff and friends.

Waarts' diverse recording releases include Mozart's *Violin Concerto No.1* with Camerata Schweiz under Howard Griffiths for Alpha Classics, and Hindemith's *Kammermusik No.4*, as part of Ondine Classic's Kammermusik cycle with Christoph Eschenbach, the Kronberg Academy Soloists and Schleswig-Holstein Festival Orchestra in 2020. He released his acclaimed debut recital album for Rubicon Classics in November 2018 with pianist Gabriele Carcano, featuring works by Schumann and Bartók.

Stephen was awarded the International Classical Music Awards Orchestra Award by Lucerne Symphony Orchestra in 2019. In March 2017 he was awarded the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant. He also won Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern's soloist award the same year and has performed at the festival every year since. In 2015, he was awarded a scholarship from Mozart Gesellschaft Dortmund following his appearance at Krzyżowa-Music. In the same year, his prize-winning success at the 2015 Queen Elisabeth Competition—including securing the majority vote of the television audience—boosted international attention.

Stephen studied at the Kronberg Academy under Mihaela Martin, and at the Curtis Institute, Philadelphia, with Aaron Rosand. He also worked with Itzhak Perlman at the Perlman Music Program, and Li Lin and Alexander Barantschik in San Francisco. In 2013 he won the Young Concert Artists International Auditions in New York, aged just 17. He was also prize-winner at the 2013 Montreal International Competition and won first prize at the 2014 Menuhin Competition.



Pianist **Juho Pohjonen**, lauded for his "impeccable technique" (*The Washington Post*) and "elegant musicianship" (*The New*

York Times), is in demand internationally as an orchestral soloist, recitalist, and chamber performer. An ardent exponent of Scandinavian music, Pohjonen's growing discography offers a showcase of music by Finnish compatriots such as Esa-Pekka Salonen, Kaija Saariaho and Jean Sibelius.

Recent engagements include the German Radio Philharmonic, Taiwan, BBC, and Los Angeles Philharmonic orchestras; Cleveland and Minnesota Orchestras; the Symphonies of San Francisco, Atlanta, New Jersey, and Colorado; National Arts Centre Orchestra, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Danish National Symphony, Finnish Radio Symphony, Philharmonia Orchestra of London, and the Mostly Mozart Festival. Pohjonen has also collaborated with today's foremost conductors, including Marin Alsop, Lionel Bringuier, Marek Janowski, Fabien Gabel, Kirill Karabits, Osmo Vänskä, Pietari Inkinen, Stefan Asbury, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Robert Spano, Markus Stenz, and Pinchas Zukerman. Pohjonen has performed in recital at New York's Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center, at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, the Steinway Society in San Jose, Society of the Four Arts in Palm Beach, and in San Francisco, La Jolla, Philadelphia, Detroit, Savannah, and Vancouver. He made his London debut at Wigmore Hall, and has played recitals throughout Europe in Antwerp, Hamburg, Helsinki, St. Petersburg, and Warsaw.

An alum of The Bowers Program, he enjoys an ongoing association with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. In 2019, Pohjonen launched MyPianist, an AI-based app that provides interactive piano accompaniment (*mypianist.app*).

PROGRAM NOTES

Piano Trio No. 1 in C Minor, Opus 8

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH
(1906–1975)

For years, audiences knew of only one Shostakovich piano trio, the *Trio in E Minor* of 1944. But Shostakovich had written a *Piano Trio in C Minor* in 1923, when he was a 17-year-old student at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. Though he did not have it published, he did perform the music in public and listed it as his Opus 8. In the sequence of Shostakovich's work, this trio comes just before the *First Symphony*

of 1925, which catapulted the composer to worldwide fame. Like several other of Shostakovich's early works, it dropped out of sight and remained unknown, in this case for 60 years.

In 1981, six years after Shostakovich's death, his pupil Boris Tishchenko prepared a performing edition of the trio. This was necessary because some small sections of the manuscript had disappeared. Tishchenko had to compose a 22-measure passage for the piano to make up for this, and he edited the work for performance. Soon performed in the West as well as in Russia, the trio was recognized as fully characteristic of Shostakovich's early style. It has been recorded and represents a valuable addition to the catalog of the composer's chamber works.

Only about 14 minutes long, the *Trio in C Minor* is in one continuous movement that falls into four subsections. Even these, however, are characterized by so many sudden and mercurial shifts of key, tempo, and mood that the trio has been compared to a rhapsody. But Shostakovich unifies this music around the cello's three-note figure heard at the very beginning; this will recur in many guises throughout. It is altogether characteristic of Shostakovich—even at age 17—that he has left the home key of C minor behind before he has fully presented the opening statement. A lyric second idea is also announced by the cello, and the structure of this trio is very loosely based on sonata form as the music moves through a series of sharply-contrasted sections (one of them titled *Prestissimo fantastico*) to the energetic close.

Pohádka (A Fairy Tale)

LEOS JANÁČEK
(1854–1928)

Janáček composed *Pohádka*, or *A Fairy Tale*, in February 1910, at the same time he was writing his little-known opera *Mr. Brouček's Excursion to the Moon*. The composer had long admired Russian folk literature, and in particular he had been taken with the work of Vasili Andreyevich Zhukovsky (1783–1852), a Russian poet and translator who also served as tutor to the future Czar Nicholas II. One of Janáček's favorites among Zhukovsky's works was *The Story of Czar Berendi*, which became the inspiration for *Pohádka*. This exceedingly complex poem tells the story of a young czar whose father makes a pact pledging his son to a prince of the underworld

(called "The Immortal Skeleton" in the tale). The young man's escape, his love for the beautiful Marya, their separation and tribulations, and their ultimate marriage and happiness form the subject of the tale. The story is full of surprises, including magic spells, daring escapes, and characters transformed into birds. Audiences should not, however, expect the depiction of these events in Janáček's *Pohádka*—this is not programmatic music, nor does it try to tell Zhukovsky's story. Instead, Janáček has written a three-movement work for cello and piano that tries to capture the spirit of Zhukovsky's magic tale.

The first movement, *Con moto*, opens quietly with murmuring piano figurations. The cello's first entrance—a five-note figure, played pizzicato—recurs repeatedly, but gives way to a lyric subject for the cello, marked *Andante*. This theme is developed, and the movement closes quietly. The second movement is in sonata form. Once again, the cello begins pizzicato but soon bows the main figure—marked *Adagio*—over rippling piano accompaniment. Janáček stresses that he wants this figure played *la melodia dolcissimo pronunc*. Both the pizzicato introduction and the *Adagio* figure are developed, and the cello plays them pizzicato at the very quiet conclusion. The final movement, marked *Allegro* and also in sonata form, opens with a firm melody for cello that forms the basis of the movement. A second, more lyric theme arrives quickly, but at the end the main theme returns, and—like its two predecessors—the movement ends very quietly.

Sonata for Violin and Piano

Leoš Janáček composed his *Violin Sonata* in 1914, just as Europe was engulfed by World War I. That war brought catastrophe to millions, but Janáček welcomed it, believing that the Russian army would sweep in and liberate his Czech homeland from German subjugation: "I wrote the *Violin Sonata* in 1914 at the beginning of the war when we were expecting the Russians in Moravia," he later wrote. Janáček would be disappointed by the Russians, and at first the *Violin Sonata* brought disappointment as well—Janáček could find no violinist interested in performing it. He set the music aside, returned to it after the war, and revised it completely; the first performance of the final version took place in Brno in 1922, when the composer was 68.

Listeners unfamiliar with Janáček's music will need to adjust to the distinctive

sound of this sonata. Janáček generates a shimmering, rippling sonority in the accompaniment, and over this the violin has jagged melodic figures, some sustained but some very brief, and in fact these harsh interjections are one of the most characteristic aspects of this music. Janáček also shows here his fondness for unusual key signatures: the four movements are in D-flat minor, E major, E-flat minor, and G-sharp minor.

The opening movement, marked simply *Con moto*, begins with a soaring, impassioned recitative for violin, which immediately plays the movement's main subject over a jangling piano accompaniment reminiscent of the cimbalon of Eastern Europe. Despite Janáček's professed dislike of German forms, this movement shows some relation to sonata form: there is a more flowing second subject and an exposition repeat, followed by a brief development full of sudden tempo changes and themes treated as fragments.

Janáček originally composed the *Ballada* as a separate piece and published in 1915, but as he revised the sonata he decided to use the *Ballada* as its slow movement. This is long-lined music, gorgeous in its sustained lyricism as the violin sails high above the rippling piano. At the climax, Janáček marks both parts *ad lib*, giving the performers a wide freedom of tempo before the music falls away to its shimmering close.

The *Allegretto* sounds folk-inspired, particularly in its short, repeated phrases (Janáček interjects individual measures in the unusual meters of 1/8 and 1/4). The piano has the dancing main subject, accompanied by vigorous swirls from the violin; the trio section leads to an abbreviated return of the opening material and a cadence on harshly clipped chords.

The sonata concludes, surprisingly, with a slow movement, and this *Adagio* is in many ways the most impressive movement of the sonata. It shows some elements of the *dumka* form: the rapid alternation of bright and dark music. The piano opens with a quiet chordal melody marked *dolce*, but the violin breaks in roughly with interjections that Janáček marks *feroce*: "wild, fierce." A flowing second theme in E major offers a glimpse of quiet beauty, but the movement drives to an unexpected climax on the violin's *Maestoso* declarations over tremolandi piano. Janáček regarded this passage as the high point of the entire sonata—he identified the piano *tremolandi* with the excitement generated by the approach of the Russian army during the first months

of the war. And then the sonata comes to an eerie conclusion: this declamatory climax falls away to an enigmatic close and matters end ambiguously on the violin's halting interjections.

Janáček's *Violin Sonata* is extraordinary music, original in conception and sonority and finally very moving, despite its refusal ever to do quite what we expect it to. For those unfamiliar with Janáček's late music, this sonata offers a glimpse of the rich achievement of his remarkable final fourteen years.

Piano Trio in F-sharp Minor, Opus 1, No. 1

CESAR FRANCK
(1822–1890)

The three piano trios that make up Franck's Opus 1 are virtually unknown to audiences today, who—when they think of Franck's chamber music—think of the *Piano Quintet* of 1879 or the *Violin Sonata* of 1886. These trios were written nearly 50 years earlier while Franck, then between the ages of 15 and 18, was a student at the Paris Conservatory. They were published as a set in 1842, and Franck's ambitious father assembled a distinguished list of subscribers to his son's first official publication, a roster that included Liszt, Chopin, Meyerbeer, Adam, Donizetti, Halévy, Thomas, and many others. Liszt, who would be a lifelong friend of Franck, particularly admired these trios and performed them in his home with visiting musicians.

Inevitably, we look at a composer's first official effort for signs of future greatness: does the *Piano Trio in F-sharp Minor* point, however tentatively, to the *Symphony in D Minor* or the *Violin Sonata*, still half a century in the future? Answers to that question have been mixed. Some feel that there is no connection whatever between this youthful music and those late masterpieces, while others have claimed to see in it portents of Franck's late style. Franck's student Vincent d'Indy praised this trio for its cyclic use of themes, a technique Franck later employed with great imagination. D'Indy tried to make a connection here to an earlier master, saying that the teenaged Franck had picked up "the threads of Beethoven's discourse, so rudely cut off by Fate and lying unused and unnoticed on the ground."

Such a claim appears grandiose. Though well-made and engaging, the *Trio in F-sharp Minor* is no beacon of originality, and it should be admired not as a sign of

things to come but for its youthful energy and passion. Its three movements are in a somewhat unusual sequence: a moderately-paced opening movement is followed by a scherzo and a fast finale—this trio lacks a true slow movement.

Franck presents three themes in the first moments of the *Andante con moto*: the piano's ominous and steady progression is quickly joined by the cello's countermelody, over which the violin enters *espressivo*; a third subject is announced by the piano over rippling accompaniment. The development is extremely animated, and listeners can only marvel at the volume of sound generated by the piano: at one point Franck marks the piano part triple *forte* and stresses that it should be played "with violence." Yet the recapitulation brings a lovely return of the third theme, now marked *dolcissimo*, and the movement marches to its close on the regular rhythms of the opening theme.

The *Allegro molto* is a scherzo in B minor with two trios. The propulsive rhythm of the opening seems to pound throughout in the piano as the strings race above it. The powerful first trio unleashes a furious volume of sound, but the second, marked *queto*, is a lovely chordal tune that has been compared to the music of Brahms. Alert listeners will detect the kinship between this melody and the third subject of the first movement, a connection that apparently triggered d'Indy's admiration for the cyclic technique of the trio. The scherzo proceeds without pause into the finale, which is marked *Allegro maestoso*. Powerful as the opening movement was, it does not begin to compare to the volcanic eruption of sound generated by this movement. Much of the piano-writing in this sonata-form movement is in brilliant octaves, which thunder across the range of the keyboard. The singing second subject brings welcome relief, but it is the spirit of the movement's opening that drives this music to its dramatic conclusion.

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger