



Sunday, March 8, 2015, 3pm

Hertz Hall

David Finckel, *cello*

Wu Han, *piano*

PROGRAM

Russian Reflections

Sergey Prokofiev (1891–1953) Sonata for Cello and Piano in C major,
Op. 119 (1949)

- I. Andante grave
- II. Moderato
- III. Allegro ma non troppo

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906–1975) Sonata for Cello and Piano in D minor,
Op. 40 (1934)

- I. Allegro non troppo
- II. Allegro
- III. Largo
- IV. Allegro

INTERMISSION

Aleksandr Skryabin (1872–1915) Five Préludes for Solo Piano, Op. 16
(1894–1895)

- No. 1 in B major
- No. 2 in G-sharp minor
- No. 3 in G-flat major
- No. 4 in E-flat minor
- No. 5 in F-sharp minor

Serge Rachmaninoff (1873–1943) Sonata for Piano and Cello in G minor,
Op. 19 (1901)

- I. Lento — Allegro moderato
- II. Allegro scherzando
- III. Andante
- IV. Allegro mosso

*This performance is made possible, in part, by Patron
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Hamburg Steinway piano provided by Steinway & Sons, San Francisco.

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RUSSIAN REFLECTIONS

We are delighted to present a program of music that is alternately grand, nostalgic, mystical, and earthy—a recital in which cello and piano tell the gripping story of Russian music of the 20th century. Culminating in Rachmaninoff’s ultra-romantic cello sonata, a masterpiece of the repertoire, the program showcases the styles of four of Russia’s most beloved composers, with Prokofiev’s stately and lyrical sonata opening the great gates to the vast Russian landscape. The groundbreaking sonata by Shostakovich, composed on the eve of some of his most controversial musical creations, quickly took its place among the pantheon of cello sonatas, championed worldwide by the great Rostropovich. This unusual recital program also features the voice of the solo piano in a short work by one of the instrument’s most innovative masters, Aleksandr Skryabin, whose sublime Op. 16 Préludes connect the language of Tchaikovsky with the coming age of modernism.

David Finckel and Wu Han

Sergey Prokofiev (1891–1953)
Sonata for Cello and Piano in C major,
Op. 119 (1949)

In 1936, after nearly 15 years spent living in Paris and traveling worldwide, Sergey Prokofiev, admittedly “patriotic and homesick” and longing to “see the real winter again and hear the Russian language in my ears,” moved back to the Soviet Union with his non-Russian wife and two sons. Relocating during one of the most savage political and social periods in Russian history, Prokofiev was set on establishing himself as one of Russia’s greatest composers. Rachmaninoff had his hold on America, Stravinsky claimed Europe, and Shostakovich had just been censored by Stalin. Prokofiev kept his passport to tour without having to petition, but upon routine inspection it was confiscated without return, grounding

Prokofiev in Moscow for the remainder of his life. The late 1930s saw very few public débuts of Prokofiev’s works, save the Cello Concerto, Op. 58 (1938), and *Romeo and Juliet* (1936), both met with negative criticism.

In the years following World War II, seeking to recover the Soviet “socialist realism” ideal of art, Andrey Zhdanov, the leading Soviet cultural policy maker, passed a series of resolutions affecting literature, art, film, and, finally, in 1948, music. This decree stunted artistic growth in the Soviet Union until Stalin’s death, lasting out the remaining years of Prokofiev’s life. The elderly composer grew ill and deeply insecure. Much of his work had been banned from public performance, and though still composing, he hardly was living the pampered lifestyle he had anticipated returning to Russia.

Prokofiev’s Sonata for Cello and Piano, remarkably, was permitted by the Committee of Artistic Affairs to receive a public première. It was debuted in 1950 by cellist Mstislav Rostropovich and pianist Sviatoslav Richter, with the first movement bearing the quote, “Mankind—that has a proud sound.”

Despite the sheer horror that besieged Prokofiev at the time of the work’s composition, the work remains remarkably expressive. The first movement, marked *Andante grave*, opens with a resounding call by the cello, followed by a short call-and-response folk melody between the cello and piano. A throbbing interlude brings the main theme, a cheery and flippant duet. The movement slows as the cello rings out a beautiful harmonic cadence, and the second theme enters much more heavily mechanically than the first.

The second movement, a playful Scherzo and Trio, follows suit. A percussive pizzicato entrance transmutes to a complacent romantic trio section. The final *Allegro ma non tanto* remains timid, with melodies and chordal structure based heavily on Russian folk music. The movement lacks neither energy nor drive, yet each climax, rather than developing in timbre and expressive nature, actually becomes more simplistic; sometimes diminishing down

to a single note piano melody. The coda recounts the opening resonant notes of the cello in a grand duet statement, marking a turbulent and virtuosic conclusion.

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Dmitry Shostakovich (1906–1975)
Sonata for Cello and Piano in D minor,
Op. 40 (1934)

While interpreting the events of a composer's life as impetus for his creative work is always risky business, one important personal development from Shostakovich's life around the time of his Cello Sonata nevertheless remains inescapable. In summer 1934, Shostakovich fell passionately in love with Yelena Konstaninovskaya, a 20-year-old translator. Much to the dismay of his wife Nina (despite their mutual agreement to an open marriage), the composer spent the majority of their summer holiday writing letters to his young mistress. "There is nothing in you which fails to send a wave of joy and fierce passion inside me when I think of you," he wrote. "Lyalya, I love you so, I love you so, as nobody ever loved before. My love, my gold, my dearest, I love you so; I lay down my love before you."

William T. Vollman dedicates a chapter of his epic novel *Europe Central* to the tempting—albeit improbable—influence of the affair with Konstaninovskaya on the music of the Cello Sonata. Though rooted in fancy, Vollman's poetic assessment of the work nevertheless speaks to its lyrical pathos and sense of romantic abandon:

Each of Shostakovich's symphonies I consider to be a multiply broken bridge, an archipelago of steel trailing off into the river. Opus 40, however, is a house with four rooms. ... [He] built Opus 40 for her and him to dwell in, and she led him inside. They were going to have an apartment with a dark passageway, then steps and half-steps.

They'd live there, deep below the piano keys in Moscow. Nina could stay in Leningrad.... Therefore, Opus 40, and in particular the first movement, composed of firelight and kisses, remains the most romantic thing that Shostakovich ever wrote.

Shostakovich and Nina separated, and the composer, as Vollman alludes, remained in Moscow with no definite plans to follow his wife back to Leningrad. It was during this time that work on the Cello Sonata began. By 1935, however, Nina was pregnant with the Shostakoviches' first child, and the marriage essentially righted itself (which did not preclude later extramarital affairs by both Dmitry and Nina). Shortly after the affair ended, Konstaninovskaya received an anonymous political denunciation and spent roughly a year in prison.

Shostakovich composed the Cello Sonata for the cellist Viktor Kubatsky, an esteemed cellist and one-time principal at the Bolshoi Theater. Shostakovich, also an able pianist, subsequently toured with Kubatsky, premiering his Cello Sonata in Leningrad on Christmas Day 1934, alongside the cello sonatas of Grieg and Rachmaninoff. The composer reportedly performed the piano parts to all three works from memory.

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Aleksandr Skryabin (1872–1915)
Five Préludes for Solo Piano, Op. 16
(1894–1895)

A student of the Moscow Conservatory alongside the likes of Serge Rachmaninoff and Alexander Goldenweiser, the pianist and composer Aleksandr Skryabin struggled greatly to compose, enduring massive anxiety attacks for much of the 1890s. With the support of the conservatory's director, Vasily Safonov, Skryabin was permitted to graduate early (in the same year as Rachmaninoff), although his

mentor, Anton Arensky, who had been working closely with Skryabin on counterpoint and fugue, was adamantly against his departure. Nevertheless, Skryabin graduated from the conservatory, and through Safonov's support was soon contacted by Mitrofan Belyayev, an Imperial Russian music publisher in Moscow.

Through Belyayev's connections, Skryabin was given opportunity to tour Russia in 1894, and was sent to Paris in 1895. Compositionally, during this period, Skryabin devoted himself almost entirely to composing *préludes* toward an outstanding bet he had made with Belyayev that he could compose 48 *préludes* before departing for Paris; it was to fulfill this bet that Skryabin composed his *Twenty-Four Préludes*, Op. 11, and *Five Préludes*, Op. 16.

The first of the Op. 16 *Préludes* paints a heavily romantic dreamscape. Like a wind-up music box, it is as if Skryabin leads us to question whether the next note will actually come, or whether it will leave us in an airy suspense. Far more decisive than is the following *prélude*, in G-sharp minor: The work carries a depth in the left hand reminiscent of Franz Liszt, whom Skryabin deeply admired. The third and fourth *préludes* alternate between a hymn-like chordal melody and a dainty right-hand melody, which recalls the first *prélude*'s sensibility. The set concludes with a brief, yet fulfilling *Allegretto* in F-sharp minor.

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Serge Rachmaninoff (1873–1943)
Sonata for Cello and Piano in G minor,
Op. 19 (1901)

In the wake of the successful completion of his Second Piano Concerto, Rachmaninoff spent

summer 1901 on the family's country estate Ivanovka in the Tambov region, several days' travel to the south of Moscow.

To judge by his letters, it was only after he returned to Moscow in late September that he began to work on the sonata, the performance of which was already planned. The Sonata for Cello and Piano, Op. 19, was composed in the fall and early winter of 1901 for the cellist Anatoly Brandukov. Toward the end of the last movement, Rachmaninoff wrote the date "November 20th." At the very end he wrote "December 12th," showing that he revised the ending immediately after the first performance. The work debuted in Moscow, on December 2, 1901, by Anatoly Brandukov, with the composer at the piano.

By mid-November he was crying off social engagements, complaining that "my work's going badly, and there's not much time left. I'm depressed..." On November 30, however, he sent a message to the composer Taneyev inviting him to a rehearsal at 11:30 that morning. By the following January 15 he was hard at work on the final proofs of the piece: "I've found almost no mistakes."

In later years, Rachmaninoff remembered his cello sonata as one of a series of pieces through which, with the help of Dr. Nikolai Dahl, after a long period of depression and inability to create, he was born again as a composer: "I felt that Dr. Dahl's treatment had strengthened my nervous system to a miraculous degree.... The joy of creating lasted the next two years, and I wrote a number of large and small pieces, including the Sonata for Cello."

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Lisa-Marie Mazzucco

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. In addition to his duo activities, Mr. Finckel served as cellist of the Grammy Award-winning Emerson String Quartet for 34 years.

Aside from their distinction as world-class performers, Mr. Finckel and Ms. Wu have 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 16 ArtistLed recordings, including the recent Dvořák piano trios, have met with critical acclaim and are available via the company's website at www.artistled.com.

The duo's repertoire spans virtually the entire literature for cello and piano, with an equal emphasis on the classics and the contemporaries. Their commitment to new music has brought commissioned works by many of today's leading composers 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 also overseen the establishment and design of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's CMS Studio Recordings label, including the Society's recording partnership with Deutsche Grammophon, as well as Music@Menlo Live, which has been praised as a "the most ambitious recording project of any classical music festival in the world" (*San Jose Mercury News*).

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Now in their third term as Artistic Directors of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Mr. Finckel and Ms. Wu hold the longest tenure as directors since Charles Wadsworth, the founding Artistic Director. They are also the founders and Artistic Directors of Music@Menlo, a chamber music festival and institute in Silicon Valley, soon to celebrate its twelfth season, that has garnered international acclaim. Additionally, Mr. Finckel and Ms. Wu are Artistic Directors of Chamber Music Today, an annual festival held in Seoul, Korea.

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. Under the auspices of the Chamber Music Society of

Lincoln Center, Mr. Finckel and Ms. Wu direct the LG Chamber Music School, which provides workshops to young artists in Korea. In 2012, Mr. Finckel was named honoree and Artistic Director of the Mendelssohn Fellowship, a program established to identify young Korean musicians and promote chamber music in South Korea. In 2013, Mr. Finckel and Ms. Wu established a chamber music studio at the Aspen Music Festival and School. Mr. Finckel serves as Professor of Cello at the Juilliard School, as well as Artist-in-Residence at Stony Brook University. Mr. Finckel and Ms. Wu reside in New York.

David Finckel and Wu Han appear by arrangement with David Rowe Artists and are represented by Milina Barry PR. Mr. Finckel and Ms. Wu's recordings are available exclusively on ArtistLed. Wu Han performs on the Steinway piano. To learn more, visit www.davidfinckelandwuhan.com.