



Sunday, March 18, 2018, 3pm
Hertz Hall

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

PROGRAM

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770–1827) Twelve Variations in G Major
on “See the conqu’ring hero comes” from
Handel’s *Judas Maccabaeus*, WoO 45 (1796)

Bruce ADOLPHE (b. 1955) *Couple* (1998)
Dreamily, expansively – Quicker, flowing
Gently flowing, warmly
Slowly, mysteriously
Bouncily, playfully

Lera AUERBACH (b. 1973) Sonata No. 1 for Violoncello and Piano,
Op. 69 (2002)
Allegro moderato
Lament (Andante)
Allegro assai
With extreme intensity

INTERMISSION

Felix MENDELSSOHN (1809–1847) *Lied ohne Worte (Song Without Words)*
in D Major for Cello and Piano, Op. 109 (1845)

Edvard GRIEG (1843–1907) Cello Sonata in A minor, Op. 36 (1882–83)
Allegro agitato
Andante molto tranquillo
Allegro molto e marcato

David Finckel and Wu Han recordings are available exclusively on ArtistLed (www.ArtistLed.com).

Wu Han performs on the Steinway Piano.

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Ludwig van Beethoven
Twelve Variations in G Major on
“See the conqu’ring hero comes” from
Handel’s *Judas Maccabaeus*, WoO 45

Composed in 1796. Premiered in 1796 in Berlin, along with the Op. 5 Sonatas, by Jean-Louis Duport and the composer. Published in 1797 in Vienna.

Beethoven’s variations on “See the conqu’ring hero comes” from Handel’s *Judas Maccabaeus* were composed in 1796. Borrowing another composer’s melody was considered a gesture of homage at the time, and Beethoven was a great admirer of Handel. He may have also chosen the “Conqu’ring hero” theme as a tribute to King Friedrich Wilhelm.

The piano plays the noble and elegant theme while the cello accompanies in the middle register as if it were the viola in a string quartet. This treatment of the theme sets the tone for the entire work—light and transparent in contrast to the weightier F and E-flat variations. The middle (or B) section of the theme is in the relative minor key, adding a moment of pathos.

Variation I, entirely for solo piano, is smooth and flowing in contrast to the stately theme. Scales move gently against each other.

Variation II allows the cello its own version of the theme in broken, sweeping arpeggios. The piano accompanies with bubbling staccato triplets.

Variation III is a display of virtuosity for the pianist’s right hand. Broken scales start explosively but end apologetically.

Variation IV turns dark with a change to a minor key. The middle section’s usually minor episode becomes a glowing E-flat Major.

Variation V is a coy conversation between the two instruments. The piano is optimistic and brilliant, the cello sober and simple.

Variation VI sounds much like Bach, featuring broken scales in a highly contrapuntal setting.

Variation VII allows the cello to run in a brilliant virtuosic display. The piano gets one chance to show off, in an outburst typical of the composer.

Variation VIII shows Beethoven’s famous stormy side. In a shocking G-minor fortissimo,

the piano pounds out the tune in crashing chords against wild scales that move from hand to hand. Dramatically, the storm ceases for a moment in the prayer-like middle section.

Variation IX is childlike and innocent, breezing over the anger of the previous variation.

Variation X captures the glory and heroism evoked by Handel’s title. The theme is played in canon between the cello and the booming bass of the piano, while the pianist’s right hand supplies a bristling sixteenth-note accompaniment.

Variation XI, marked Adagio, is the most extended slow movement of all three sets of variations.

Variation XII, the finale, is the most carefree. Beethoven transforms the theme into a lively dance in triple meter. After some odd excursions into foreign keys, the mirth returns and the work ends in appropriately triumphant style.

—© Patrick Castillo

Bruce Adolphe

Couple

Composed in 1998. Commissioned by James and Lois Lasry for La Jolla SummerFest 1999. Premiered by David Finckel and Wu Han, summer of 1999, La Jolla SummerFest, La Jolla, CA.

Couple was commissioned by James and Lois Lasry for David Finckel and Wu Han, who premiered the work at SummerFest La Jolla in 1999. I called the piece *Couple* because the word suggests an intensification of the more common musical word “duo,” and since I wrote it for a married duo, well... you get the idea. *Couple* is in four movements with two very lyrical, introverted, dream-like middle movements and two more narrative, dynamic outer ones. The first movement is restless and mercurial. The second is both dreamy and ecstatic, using some of the same material as the first movement. It is the third that is the most personal—it might be more accurate to say *private*—music. In this movement, I left the musical thoughts in their most fundamental and essential state, without much lighting or scenery. The final movement is a scherzo, which I thought of as a musical game with rules that you could possibly figure out if you listen to it enough times. It has been

a pleasure to listen to David and Wu Han play the piece many times over many seasons.

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Lera Auerbach

Sonata No. 1 for Violoncello and Piano, Op. 69
Composed in 2002. Co-commissioned by Hancher Auditorium/University of Iowa and the Music in the Park Series, St. Paul, MN. Premiered by David Finckel and Wu Han, February 19, 2003, Hancher Auditorium, Iowa City, IA.

I was happy when David Finckel and Wu Han asked me to write a large-scale work for them. They form a very dramatic union, capable of captivating audiences with magnetic intensity and powerful interpretations. I was well aware of these qualities while writing the sonata.

In any performance, there is an element of theater and drama. In this work, the instruments often play different roles and embody different characters, even though they might be playing simultaneously. At times this coexistence is a dialogue, at times a struggle or an attempt to solve inner questions.

I began working on the piece while reading Herman Hesse's novel *Demian*. Although there is no direct connection and the work is not programmatic, perhaps some of the imagery from Hesse's novel may have infiltrated the writing, especially in the first movement—*Allegro moderato*—where I thought of a dance of Abraxas, a mysterious god who combines in himself both good and evil. The sonata starts with the violent and terrifying statement of the piano, full of inner tension. The cello's response is more human, desperate, and questioning. The very first "calling" statement of the cello becomes a leitmotif throughout the piece. This introduction leads to a dark and strange waltz in 5/4—as if from the depth of the past shadows have emerged. The second theme is both dreamy and passionate and leads to a fugal development with its dry twists.

In the second movement, the juxtaposition of characters is also present. The piano carries a column-like inescapable choral progression, while the cello's lamenting monologue is free and deeply human.

The third movement—*Allegro assai*—is a toccata with fiery syncopations and obsessive energy.

The last movement may be one of the most tragic pieces I have written. It begins with the cello playing quarter-tone trills. The image I had in mind was of reaching a point in life where one stands at the very edge of the abyss, when nothing is left of the past or of the future, and one is completely alone with his trembling soul. Sometimes it is possible, through pain and tragedy, to find lost beauty and meaning—as it may release something in the soul that was aching to be freed. At the end, both instruments rise beyond the limits of their registers, as if entering a different kind of existence.

I completed most of the sonata while in residence at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts during the summer of 2002.

Sonata No. 1 for Violoncello and Piano is dedicated to David Finckel and Wu Han and was co-commissioned by Hancher Auditorium/University of Iowa and the Music in the Park Series, St. Paul, MN.

—© 2002 Lera Auerbach

Felix Mendelssohn

Lied ohne Worte (Song Without Words)
in D Major for Cello and Piano, Op. 109

Composed ca. October 1845. Published in 1868.

Felix Mendelssohn's *Lieder ohne Worte* (*Songs Without Words*) provide an essential snapshot of Romanticism. They are, first and foremost, a paean to the sovereignty of melody. They also reference, in an abstract way, the Romantic generation's preoccupation with poetry, as reflected in the lieder of Schubert, Schumann, and others: Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words* succeed in capturing the clarity and expressivity of sung texts, but they do so relying solely on musical character, without the aid of poetry. Mendelssohn biographer R. Larry Todd writes that the *Songs Without Words* "broached in a different way the ability of music to convey extramusical ideas." Indeed, Robert Schumann surmised that Mendelssohn originally composed them as songs *with* words and then withdrew the texts. Todd continues: "The new genre, which blurred

the lines between the song and the character piece, later enjoyed great success and became synonymous with Mendelssohnism.”

In addition to the eight volumes of *Lieder ohne Worte* for Solo Piano he composed over his career (comprising six songs apiece), Mendelssohn composed one for cello and piano, in D Major, published posthumously as his Opus 109. It was Mendelssohn's final work for cello and piano, joining a corpus comprising the *Variations concertantes*, Op. 17, a single-movement *Assai tranquillo* in B minor, and two cello sonatas, Opp. 45 and 58. Among both subsets of Mendelssohn's oeuvre—his music for cello and piano and his beloved *Songs Without Words*—the Opus 109 *Lied* stands out for its melodic perfection. Set in ternary (A–B–A) form, the work begins with an eloquent strain by the cello, supported by an elegant accompaniment. The piano turns turbulent in the middle section, engulfing the cello's *agitato* melody in a swirl of sixteenth notes. The cello ascends to a high *pinissimo* A-natural (above the treble staff); a subdued transition leads calmly to the A section's return.

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Edvard Grieg

Cello Sonata in A minor, Op. 36

Composed between 1882 and 1883. Premiered in October 1883 in Leipzig by cellist Julius Klengel and the composer.

“Artists like Bach and Beethoven erected churches and temples on ethereal heights. My aim in my music is exactly what Ibsen says about his plays: ‘I want to build homes for the people in which they can be happy and contented.’” Like Bartók, Grieg discovered his musical mission in the culture of his native land. Schooled formally in Leipzig, he rejected rule-bound composing and instead adopted the romantic spirit of Schumann. He traveled widely and met many great musicians, including Brahms, Wagner, Tchaikovsky, and Liszt (who was an admirer). Perhaps his broad knowledge of music contributed to insecurities about his own compositional technique; it took him over six months to complete the cello sonata. “Every

other day I decide not to compose because I am less and less satisfied with myself” (1882).

I. Allegro agitato

How quickly the first of many storms in this movement comes up! This is in no way the relatively calm *La Mer* of Debussy, but the crashing waves and howling winds of the north. The cello begins with the main theme quietly over the piano's nervous accompaniment, but the piano, like the storm itself, soon rises to fever pitch and all but drowns the cello in crashing chords and octaves. All this is over in a few moments, closed by a brief and even more violent coda, and we are left in stunned silence. Then, magically, three peaceful C-Major chords announce the arrival of fair weather (or the second subject, if you must). As the cello sings the theme over rich harmonies so typical of Grieg, one can feel the warmth of the sun or a glowing fire. An expressive dialogue between the instruments carries the theme through various keys before C Major re-emerges, this time excitedly, and we are swept by cascades of arpeggios into the development. One senses trouble on hearing the second subject in a minor key and sure enough, big storm number two soon hits in F-sharp minor. Frantically, the cello and piano exchange lightning bolts in ever-quicker succession. This storm never totally dies, and reappears in full force again as the recapitulation. In the coda as expected, we are again drenched and blown about, hopefully lashed to the mast.

II. Andante molto tranquillo

The gorgeous slow movement opens with one of the most poignantly beautiful chord progressions imaginable, as if the piano itself is dropping down from heaven. By the cello entrance we are seated on rich earth. I find particularly inspiring Grieg's seemingly endless resource of harmonies, which color the single, oft-repeated notes of the melody. Contentedness gives way to brooding, however, and tempers rise, giving way to succeeding violent outbursts, and culminating in a passage where the pianist is called upon to practically bang the

piano to pieces. As if knocked unconscious, we hear, in *pianississimo*, a trace of the first theme, and gradually warmth begins to flow in our veins as the first theme returns, this time with an even more beautiful harmonization. After a climax worthy of Rachmaninoff, a delicate and sentimental coda concludes the movement.

III. Allegro molto e marcato

Grieg's finale is in folk-style, with a jumping, dancing theme. However, there is also a bit of mystery here in the ghostly little solo cello line that bridges from the slow movement. It is like something that you know will come back to haunt you later, and it does! After an exuberant virtuosic episode, two big cantabile phrases in

the piano and cello bring in the second theme, which is actually made from the first subject slowed to half tempo. But how different it sounds! Would you have recognized it? Of course we're still in Norway, so we must have some more storms and sailing before we get to a very curious passage which, although obviously out of Grieg's imagination, seems like an explosion brewing in a nuclear reactor. When the blast finally comes, it goes on and on, and, as if saved by aliens, we are transported out by the reappearance of the opening other-worldly melody, now harmonized. A full recapitulation follows, with a brilliant coda in which the mystery theme makes its final, triumphant, and ultimately dominating appearance.

—David Finckel

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

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, and their duo performances have garnered superlatives from the press, public, and presenters alike.

In high demand 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. London's *Musical Opinion* said of their Wigmore Hall debut: "They enthralled both myself and the audience with performances whose idiomatic command, technical mastery, and unsullied integrity of vision made me think right back to the days of Schnabel and Fournier, Solomon and Piatigorsky."

Aside from their distinction as world-class performers, David Finckel and Wu Han have established a reputation for their dynamic and innovative approach to the recording studio.

In 1997, they 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. David Finckel and Wu Han have also overseen the establishment and design of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's CMS Studio Recordings label, as well as the Society's recording partnership with Deutsche Grammophon; and Music@Menlo LIVE, which has been praised as a "the most ambitious recording project of any classi-

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

cal music festival in the world” (*San Jose Mercury News*).

Now in their third term as artistic directors of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, David Finckel and Wu Han 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 that has garnered international acclaim, soon to celebrate its twelfth season. Additionally, David Finckel and Wu Han are artistic directors of Chamber Music Today, an annual festival held in Seoul, Korea.

The two musicians 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, David Finckel and Wu Han direct the LG Chamber Music School, which provides work-

shops to young artists in Korea. In 2012 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 the duo established a chamber music studio at the Aspen Music Festival and School. Finckel serves as professor of cello at the Juilliard School, as well as artist-in-residence at Stony Brook University.

In addition to his duo activities, Finckel served as cellist of the Grammy Award-winning Emerson String Quartet for 34 years. David Finckel and Wu Han reside in New York.

For more information, please visit the artists’ website at www.davidfinckelandwuhan.com.

David Finckel and Wu Han appear by arrangement with David Rowe Artists (www.davidrowe-artists.com).

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