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**JONATHAN SWENSEN, CELLO**  
**NOREEN CASSIDY-POLERA, PIANO**  
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2021

*Claude Debussy*

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NOVEMBER 21, 2021

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Jonathan Swensen, *cello*  
Noreen Cassidy-Polera, *piano*

Jonathan Swensen appears by arrangement  
with Young Concert Artists, Inc.  
[www.yca.org](http://www.yca.org)

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THIS AFTERNOON'S PROGRAM

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**CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862–1918)**

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*Sonata for Cello and Piano*

Prologue: Lent, sostenuto e molto risoluto

Sérénade: Modérément animé

Final: Animé, léger et nerveux

**LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)**

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*Sonata in A Major for Cello and Piano, Op. 69*

Allegro ma non tanto

Scherzo: Allegro molto

Adagio cantabile—Allegro vivace

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INTERMISSION

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**SERGEI RACHMANINOFF (1873–1943)**

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*Vocalise, Op. 34, no. 14*

**SERGEI PROKOFIEV (1891–1953)**

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*Sonata in C Major for Cello and Piano, Op. 119*

Andante grave—Moderato animato

Moderato—Andante dolce

Allegro, ma non troppo

This afternoon's concert  
is sponsored by the  
generous contribution of  
Elliott & Wendy Weiss.

# PIANO & FRIENDS

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## JONATHAN SWENSEN

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Jonathan Swensen first fell in love with the cello upon hearing the Elgar Concerto at the age of six, and ultimately made his concerto debut at the age of twenty performing that very piece with Portugal's Orquestra Sinfónica do Porto Casa da Música. Since then, he has appeared with the Orquesta Ciudad de Granada, Venice State Symphony Orchestra, Denmark's Aarhus Symphony Orchestra, and Poland's NFM Leopoldinum Orchestra.

Mr. Swensen has captured First Prizes at the 2018 Young Concert Artists International Auditions, 2018 Khachaturian International Cello Competition, and 2019 Windsor International String Competition. In his native Denmark, he was recipient of the Jacob Gades Scholarship in 2019, the Léonie Sonning Talent Prize in 2017, and First Prize at the 2016 Danish String Competition.

Young Concert Artists presented Mr. Swensen's recital debuts in New York on the Michaels Award Concert at Merkin Concert Hall, and in Washington, D.C., on the Alexander Kasza-Kasser Concert at the Kennedy Center's Terrace Theater. This season, he performs as soloist with the Greenville and Mobile Symphony orchestras, and gives recitals at the Friends of Music concert series in Westchester County, New York, and the Arizona Friends of Chamber Music.

Recent recital and chamber music appearances outside of the U.S. have included a return to Armenia to take part in the Khachaturian Festival in Yerevan, the Usedomer Musikfestival in Germany, the Tivoli Festival in Copenhagen, and a South Korean debut at the Seoul Arts Centre. He is also a frequent performer at festivals in Denmark, including the Schubertiaden, the Copenhagen Summer Festival, and the Hindsgavl Summer Festival.

A graduate of the Royal Danish Academy of Music, Mr. Swensen has studied with Professor Torleif Thedéen at the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo. He now attends the New England Conservatory of Music for graduate studies, under the tutelage of Laurence Lesser.

This concert marks his first appearance with AFCM.

## NOREEN CASSIDY-POLERA

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Pianist Noreen Cassidy-Polera ranks among the most highly regarded and diverse chamber artists performing today, and maintains a career that has taken her to every major American music center and abroad to Europe, Russia, and Hong Kong, Shanghai, Beijing, and Seoul. Recent performances include at Alice Tully Hall, Zankel Hall, Weill Recital Hall, 92nd Street Y, Jordan Hall, Gardener Museum, Kennedy Center, and Salle Cortot, as well as appearances at the Caramoor, Bard, and Grand Teton festivals.

Winner of the Accompanying Prize at the Eighth International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, Ms. Cassidy-Polera regularly collaborates with laureates of the Queen Elisabeth, Tchaikovsky, and Naumburg international competitions. She has collaborated with leading soloists, including David Shifrin, Matt Haimovitz, Carter Brey, Antonio Meneses, Aurora-Natalie Ginastera, Yo-Yo Ma, and Leonard Rose.

Her mastery and affection for the complete standard cello-piano repertory is well known, as is her attention and dedication to the works of living composers. In recent seasons she performed Elliott Carter's venerable Sonata for Cello and Piano on tour in Paris, New York, and Philadelphia, along with new works by Lowell Liebermann, Benjamin C.S. Boyle, and Kenji Bunch to critical acclaim. Her CD recording "Sound Vessels" (with cellist Scott Kluksdahl) features the recording premiere of Richard Wernick's Duo, and works of Robert Helps, Augusta Read Thomas, as well as Elliott Carter. She has recorded for EMI, Audiophon, and Centaur Records.

Ms. Cassidy-Polera holds Bachelor of Music and Master of Music degrees from the Juilliard School, where she studied with Martin Canin.

We last heard her as part of a Piano & Friends concert in April 2015.



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# PROGRAM NOTES

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**DEBUSSY WROTE HIS** Sonata for Cello and Piano (1915) as France suffered through World War I. He had projected a set of six sonatas for various combinations of instruments but completed only three before his death. Each of these works offers a different aspect of Debussy's style, but as a group they can be heard as statements of patriotism. His impressionistic gestures, now minimized, are replaced by a retrospective of classical seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French models emphasizing the older values of grace, formal balance, and logic. On the title page of each work he signed "Musicien français" next to his name.

Debussy's Cello Sonata depicts two beloved characters from classical French comedy—the vulnerable buffoon Pierrot and the spoiled Colombina, whom he wishes to win over. Debussy described their winsome drama of love and loss at the work's premiere: "Pierrot awakens with a start, shaking off his torpor. He runs to serenade his beloved, who, despite such pleading, remains unresponsive. He consoles himself for his failure by singing a song of freedom."

The cello sings Pierrot's noble but yearning song of solitude in the Prologue. Debussy described the theatrical *Sérénade* as "Pierrot angry at the moon," his original title for the sonata. The cello here imitates a bass guitar and articulates melodic fragments episodically to suggest Pierrot's drunkenness. The animated finale, based on an old French song, contains echoes of earlier movements.

**BEETHOVEN ENTITLED THE THIRD** of his five cello sonatas "Grande Sonate pour Piano et Violoncelle" (1807–8) and dedicated it to his close friend, the young amateur cellist Baron Ignaz von Gleichenstein. Beethoven penned the enigmatic phrase "Amid tears and sorrow" in Latin on his manuscript, which has led to much speculation. The two men had both courted the aristocratic Therese Malfatti, but she favored the Baron; quite possibly Beethoven felt the sting of rejection. Nevertheless, the sonata projects overall optimism, especially in its spirited finale. Composed at the same time he was writing his Fifth

and Sixth Symphonies, the Opus 69 Sonata represents the height of Beethoven's "second style period." It reveals the bolder treatment of sonata form—the classically grounding framework for his adventurous thematic explorations—and the emotional intensity characteristic of this productive time.

Despite its title listing as second to the piano, the cello achieves full equality with the keyboard in Beethoven's third sonata. This parity is heard in the distribution of the three themes developed in the Allegro movement: the first is stated in an unaccompanied cello line; the second occurs in the piano against a cello scale; the warm third theme is introduced by the cello. Developed in sonata form, the movement concludes with an exuberant statement of the main theme played in unison by the cello and piano.

The strongly syncopated and energetic scherzo movement (which occurs in no other cello sonata) is built on an ABABA pattern that alternates between the minor and major modes. The third movement opens with a songful theme that promises to develop into a full-scale slow movement—but after a mere nineteen measures leads into the Allegro vivace, a vivacious sonata-rondo movement that ends with a substantial and brilliant coda.

**RACHMANINIOFF'S VOCALISE** (1912) is the final song of his Fourteen Romances, Opus 34. He revised it in 1915 with enhanced chromaticism, an expressive heightening that many attribute to an atmosphere of mourning at the beginning of World War I. A wordless song, *Vocalise* was intended to be performed on a vowel of the singer's choice. When the work's dedicatee, the coloratura soprano Antonina Nezhdanova, complained about the absence of text, Rachmaninoff replied that she could "convey thoughts more expressively through vocal interpretation than anyone could do with words." However, *Vocalise* has become a staple of the repertoire for numerous instrumental combinations, including a cello octet. Anatoly Brandukov and Raphael Wallfisch have made transcriptions for cello and piano, both adjusting the original key from C sharp minor to E minor. Perhaps its most notable recent performance was cellist Yo-Yo Ma's tribute to Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

Compact and intense, *Vocalise* is constructed in classical three-part song form. Lyrical, long-breathed phrases move against the restrained accompaniment, which is throughout subordinated to the melodic line. The harmonies, basically diatonic, frequently modulate to convey subtle nuance of emotion.

**DURING HIS TWENTY CAREER YEARS** in the USSR, Prokofiev was internationally praised for his synthesis of traditional techniques with twentieth-century innovations. But an artist's life in the Soviet Union was continuously dangerous. Like Shostakovich, Prokofiev had endured the sweeping 1948 composers' censure by the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party and was forced to issue a public apology for artistic errors such as "infatuation with Western formalism." His music was then banned in the USSR until 1950. Nevertheless, Prokofiev continued to compose, and in 1949 he created his masterful Opus 119 cello sonata. Before it could be performed, it had to undergo formal auditions held by the Composer's Union and the Radio Committee to determine if the sonata met Soviet criteria or was "hostile to the spirit of the people." After passing its tests, Opus 119 was premiered the following year at the Moscow Conservatory by Mstislav Rostropovich and Sviatoslav Richter, both of whom had inspired its composition.

A stately solo statement in the cello's lowest register announces the opening movement. This theme is extended by running passagework in both instruments, then a second idea is sung in the cello's upper register. The two ideas are developed through dramatic metric changes, dialogues with nuanced tempo fluctuations, and virtuoso passagework that decorates the thematic contour.

The piquant and lyrical Moderato (F major) is constructed in three-part song form. Its playful main theme begins with pizzicato passages in the cello and supportive statements in the piano. Drama builds with the cello's rapid bowing flourishes. The Andante dolce central section (B-flat major) develops an expansive, soaring theme in the cello; the lively main theme returns in the final section.

"Before playing [Prokofiev's Cello Sonata] in concert, we had to perform it at the Composer's Union, where these gentlemen decided the fate of all new works. During this period more than any other, they needed to work out whether Prokofiev had produced a new masterpiece or, conversely, a piece that was 'hostile to the spirit of the people.'"

SVIATOSLAV RICHTER

Allegro, ma non troppo (C major) explores two songful themes through colorful changes of harmony and rhapsodic exchanges between the instruments. Its slower central section (F major) develops a third motif in the cello; the piano assumes the idea and the cello accompanies with rapid muted passagework. The opening idea returns (B-flat major). Fervent runs in both instruments and virtuoso trill passages in the cello lead to short phrases that steadily ascend to a bravura C major conclusion.

Notes by Nancy Monsman

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Sunday, January 9, 2022  
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### **Imani Winds**

Wednesday, January 19, 2022  
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**Gilles Vonsattel, *piano***  
Wednesday, February 2, 2022  
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### **Goldmund Quartet**

Wednesday, February 23, 2022  
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Friday, March 18, 2022  
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Saturday, March 19, 2022  
Gala Dinner and Concert  
6:00 pm Arizona Inn

Sunday, March 20, 2022  
3:00 pm Leo Rich Theater

## APRIL

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### **Vienna Piano Trio**

Wednesday, April 6, 2022  
7:30 pm Leo Rich Theater

# VERSE

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Like a sweet-apple  
turning red  
high  
on the tip  
of the topmost branch.  
Forgotten by pickers.

Not forgotten—  
they couldn't reach it.

SAPPHO (630 – 570 B.C.E.)

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Public domain.

Translation by Julia Dubnoff



THE AULOS ENSEMBLE | November 14, 2021

TUCSON BAROQUE MUSIC FESTIVAL  
Avi Stein, Artistic Director | January 28–30, 2022

PARTHENIA VIOL CONSORT | February 27, 2022

PAUL O'DETTE & RONN McFARLANE | March 27, 2022

THE TALLIS SCHOLARS, DIRECTOR PETER PHILLIPS | April 20, 2022



The Tallis Scholars, Director Peter Phillips  
Photo © Nick Rutter

For tickets and more information, please visit [azearlymusic.org](http://azearlymusic.org).

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# A NEW DAY

Imagine a World Transformed

21 - 22 SEASON

**FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT**

OCTOBER 22 - 24

**FROM CONFLICT TO PEACE**

*Haydn Mass in Time of War*

Vaughan Williams

*Dona Nobis Pacem*

NOVEMBER 19 - 21

**FROM ANTICIPATION TO JOY**

*Lessons & Carols by Candlelight*

DECEMBER 9 - 12

**FROM SILENCED TO SINGING**

*In Partnership with*

*Tucson Desert Song Festival*

JANUARY 28 - 30

**FROM THE EDGE TO HOPE**

FEBRUARY 25 - 27

**FROM MOURNING TO DANCING**

*Bach B-Minor Mass*

MARCH 25 - 27

**CLOSE-UP SERIES**

Susanna Phillips, soprano

FEBRUARY 1

Paul Max Tipton,

bass-baritone

MARCH 1

Kim Leeds, mezzo-soprano

& Gene Stenger, tenor

MARCH 29

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