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FROM THE BOARD

Welcome to the first concert of our Piano and Friends series for the 2025–2026 season. We are pleased to begin this year with cellist Benett Tsai and pianist HyeJin Kim, two outstanding young musicians who are quickly gaining international attention.

Benett Tsai, a recent First Prize winner at the Young Concert Artists International Auditions, is recognized for his mature and expressive playing. His program today highlights a wide range of composers, from Haydn's clarity and Boulanger's lyricism to the intensity of Shostakovich, the romantic power of Barber, and the spiritual reflection of Bloch. HyeJin Kim, an acclaimed performer and teacher at the Colburn School, brings her own depth of artistry and experience to this partnership.

The Piano and Friends series exists to introduce exceptional early-career artists to Tucson audiences. It gives us a chance to hear musicians at an exciting stage in their development, and to support them as they move forward in their professional lives.

We are grateful to you, our audience and supporters, for helping make this series possible. Ticket sales cover only a small portion of the cost of presenting concerts like this. Your continued contributions allow us to bring excellent performers to Tucson and to offer music programs in local schools.

Thank you for being here and for supporting live chamber music in our community.

PAUL A. ST JOHN
Piano & Friends Director



BENETT TSAI

NOVEMBER 9, 2025 | 3:00 PM



Benett Tsai, cello

Benett Tsai appears by arrangement with Young Concert Artists, Inc. www.yca.org

BENETT TSAI

“Most certainly a star on the rise. An outstanding young cellist in complete command of his craft and his own unique musical vision.”

—The Violin Channel

The music-making of Australian cellist Benett Tsai has been described as “electrifying...flawless freshness” (Süddeutsche Zeitung) and “charismatic, heartfelt playing full of fluid intensity” (Sydney Arts Guide). Named a VC Artist on The Violin Channel, he gained recognition at the 2022 Grand Prix Emanuel Feuermann in Berlin, where he received both the Third Prize and Special Prize for the Best Haydn Concerto as the youngest entrant. The following year, he joined the roster of Young Concert Artists for management upon winning First Prize and The Stern Young Artist Award at the 2023 YCA Susan Wadsworth International Auditions in New York. His subsequent recital was listed as one of the best debuts in 2024 by New York Classical Review, and he was most recently selected for the 2025/26 Classeek Ambassador Programme based in Lausanne, Switzerland.

Since his mainstage debut at the age of thirteen, Benett has performed actively as a soloist and chamber musician. He has appeared with orchestras such as the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra, Sinfonia Lahti, Queensland Symphony Orchestra, Kammerphilharmonie Metamorphosen Berlin, Maryland Symphony Orchestra, Anchorage Symphony Orchestra, Australian Chamber Orchestra Academy, and the Canberra Symphony Orchestra. Conductors with whom he has collaborated include Esa-Pekka Salonen, Umberto Clerici, Joseph Bastian, Nicholas Milton, and Elizabeth Schulze.

Among other venues worldwide, Benett has been presented in recitals at The Kennedy Center (Washington D.C.), Berliner Philharmonie, Shanghai Oriental Arts Center, Kaufman Music Center (New York), City Recital Hall (Sydney), and Melbourne Recital Centre. He has also made appearances at the Verbier Festival, Rose Theater at Lincoln Center with Emanuel Ax, Musica Viva Australia, and the Morgan Library & Museum (New York). Notably, he was featured in the 2020 film, *The Way Forward*, where he played with pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet.

Highlights of the 2025/26 season include a return to Shanghai Oriental Arts Center, in addition to further concerts with the Colgate University Orchestra, Classical Arts Society of Washington, Arizona Friends of Chamber Music, and Classeek (Switzerland). Joining YCA on Tour, he will also perform chamber music across North America, with engagements at The Kennedy Center, Kravis Center for the Performing Arts, Calgary ProMusica, UAB Alys Stephens Center, Ithaca College, and the Sarasota Artist Series Concerts.

Born in 2003, Benett began playing the cello at the age of five under the guidance of his uncle and teacher, Thomas Tsai. He currently studies with Clive Greensmith at The Colburn School in Los Angeles, where he holds a Bachelor of Music degree. In previous years, he also learned with Susan Blake and Li-Wei Qin. His other significant mentors include Ralph Kirshbaum, Steven Isserlis, and his pianist father, Joshua Tsai.

Benett plays on a 1719 Giuseppe Guarneri ‘filius Andreae’ cello, on loan to him from a generous benefactor.

PIANO & FRIENDS SERIES



HYEJIN KIM

Praised by critics for her “passionate... polished and expressive” performances, pianist HyeJin Kim is one of South Korea’s most exciting young classical stars.

She has received numerous awards, including prizes at the 2008 Hong Kong International Piano Competition, DAAD Prize, Steinway & Sons Advancement Award Competition, and Toronto International Piano Competition.

Her major-label debut recording of Rachmaninov’s Piano Concertos Nos. 1 & 2 with the Armenian Philharmonic Orchestra on Sony Classical was released in 2013. In 2018 she made her debut with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, followed by her first recital at Carnegie Hall featuring works by Scarlatti, Brahms, Rachmaninoff, Barber, and Gershwin.

HyeJin Kim is a recipient of the Amron–Sutherland Grant for Young Pianists from the Colburn School. She joined the faculty of the Colburn Community School of Performing Arts and its pre-college division in 2018 and is a resident artist with the Salastina Music Society.

This appearance of Benett Tsai is sponsored by the generous contribution of Dagmar Cushing.

PROGRAM

FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN (1732–1809)

- Divertimento in D Major*
Arr. Gregor Piatigorsky (1903-1976)
- Adagio
- Menuet
- Allegro di molto

NADIA BOULANGER (1887–1979)

- Trois Pièces for Cello and Piano*
- Modéré
- Sans vitesse et à l’aise
- Vite et nerveux

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906–1975)

- Sonata for Cello and Piano in D minor, Op. 40*
- Allegro non troppo
- Allegro
- Largo
- Allegro

INTERMISSION

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840–1893)

- Pezzo capriccioso, Op. 62 for Cello and Piano*

ERNEST BLOCH (1880–1959)

- From Jewish Life, B. 54*
- Prayer
- Supplication
- Jewish Song

SAMUEL BARBER (1910–1981)

- Cello Sonata in C Minor, Op. 6*
- Allegro ma non troppo
- Adagio
- Allegro appassionato

Haydn: *Divertimento in D Major*

Haydn wrote many works for small chamber gatherings in the 18th century, when music was often performed in aristocratic homes or salons rather than large concert halls. The *Divertimento*—literally “diversion” or “entertainment”—was meant to charm and delight, offering music of sophistication without heaviness. Haydn’s gift was to take this light genre and fill it with invention, wit, and expressive depth, making even the simplest textures engaging.

In this *Divertimento in D Major*, the music alternates between elegance and playfulness, showing Haydn’s signature mix of clarity and surprise. The melodies are graceful and balanced, yet full of rhythmic energy and unexpected turns. In this version, arranged by the legendary 20th-century cellist Gregor Piatigorsky, the cello carries the full conversation of the original ensemble. The adaptation highlights the cello’s ability to sing warmly in the upper register and to dance nimbly in the lower, preserving the sparkle and humor of Haydn’s original chamber style while showcasing the instrument’s expressive voice.

Boulanger: *Trois Pièces for Cello and Piano*

Best known as one of the most influential composition teachers of the 20th century, Nadia Boulanger guided generations of composers, including Aaron Copland, Astor Piazzolla, and Philip Glass. Yet before she devoted herself fully to teaching, Boulanger was an accomplished composer in her own right. The *Trois Pièces* (Three Pieces), written around 1914, offer a rare glimpse of her creative voice before she largely stopped composing in the 1920s.

These short works—gentle, atmospheric, and concise—belong to the world of French impressionism that followed Debussy and Fauré. Each piece explores a single mood rather than a formal structure, using flowing lines and shifting harmonies to create subtle color and emotion. The cello sings with an intimate, vocal quality while the piano provides a luminous backdrop. The result is music of quiet beauty and refinement, revealing Boulanger’s gift for clarity, restraint, and expressive nuance, qualities she later passed on to so many of her students.

Shostakovich: *Sonata for Cello and Piano in D minor, Op. 40*

Shostakovich’s classically structured cello sonata barely hints at the turmoil in his life at the time of its writing. His wife had recently initiated a separation, and the composer reacted badly. Political difficulties were growing; only months after he composed this 1934 sonata, a work influenced by the modernists Prokofiev and Stravinsky, Stalin denounced him vehemently for writing music that lacked correct moral and social values. Perhaps fortunate to survive, Shostakovich slowly regained favor with works of conventional simplicity that commemorated various party endeavors, such as Stalin’s reforestation plan.

In his most inspired works, which include this popular cello sonata, Shostakovich explores a wide range of declamation varied with high-spirited humor and introspective meditation. The sonata’s opening movement states at its beginning a simple theme that is transformed from an initially calm statement into a dramatic proclamation. At the coda, this theme returns in coldly somber guise. The composer’s sardonic humor surfaces in the second movement (*Allegro*), which is propelled by rapidly driving rhythms. The intensely moving *Largo*, an extended tragic song, provides the emotional center of the sonata. The genial rondo finale provides contrast. An extended section in the middle of this exuberant movement depicts practice room noises that Shostakovich heard while working in his studio at the Leningrad Conservatory.

Note by Nancy Monsman

Tchaikovsky: *Pezzo capriccioso*, Op. 62 for Cello and Piano

Tchaikovsky composed this *Pezzo capriccioso* in 1887 for his friend, the virtuoso cellist Anatoly Brandukov, later arranging it for orchestra. In a single, continuous movement, it unfolds as a dramatic miniature full of shifting moods and color. The piece opens in a dark, melancholy tone, the cello singing with a deeply expressive voice while the piano provides steady harmonic support. Gradually, the music brightens, moving into quick, playful exchanges that show both instruments at their most agile.

The structure suggests a broad three-part design: an introspective opening gives way to a brilliant middle section, filled with quick runs, leaps, and flashes of virtuosity, before returning to the somber mood of the beginning. In the closing pages, the emotion turns urgent and the pace accelerates toward an exuberant finish. Throughout, Tchaikovsky explores the full range of the cello's voice—from rich, vocal warmth to high, ringing brilliance—while the piano acts as a true partner rather than accompaniment. The result is a compact but vivid concert piece that combines lyric beauty with theatrical spirit.

Bloch: *From Jewish Life*, B. 54

Composed in 1924 near the close of Bloch's "Jewish Cycle," this set of three short pieces reflects his effort to express what he called "the voice of the Jewish soul." The cello serves as a kind of cantor, its line shaped by the flexible rhythms and intervals of chant rather than direct quotation.

Prayer unfolds in free, speech-like phrases over sustained piano chords, its melody colored by the augmented intervals typical of Jewish modes. Supplication grows more urgent, built from rising gestures and shifting harmonies that heighten its emotional intensity. Jewish Song brings a feeling of ease and simplicity, with a lyrical tune touched by folk-like ornament and gentle rhythmic sway.

Together, these movements form a spiritual arc from inward meditation to communal expression, revealing Bloch's ability to blend deep cultural identity with modern harmonic language.

Barber: *Cello Sonata in C Minor*, Op. 6

The nephew of Metropolitan Opera contralto Louise Homer, Samuel Barber grew up surrounded by operatic song. Perhaps because of this early influence, his stylistic hallmark is lyricism paired with a powerful dramatic sense. Often described as neo-romantic, Barber's early compositions are finely crafted, emotionally warm statements conveyed through strongly profiled phrases and clear, occasionally pungent, harmonic patterns. Stunning climaxes result from his sure sense of rhythmic pacing.

A youthful work, the Opus 6 sonata (begun in 1932, published in 1936) was dedicated to Rosario Scalero, Barber's composition professor and mentor at the Curtis Institute. It was premiered by the composer and Orlando Cole, professor of cello at Curtis.

The first movement (C minor) develops three themes — a widely arched, restless melody, a more subdued chorale-like theme, and an ethereal songlike theme. Cadenzas for each instrument punctuate the movement, which overall develops with much imitation between the two instruments. The three-part second movement combines the traditional adagio with an extended scherzo. It opens with a slow statement that is interrupted by a *Presto* section (F major) resembling a rapid and rhythmically complex dance. The slow section returns to end the movement in a tranquil atmosphere. The passionate finale (C minor) explores three ideas — a fervent theme introduced by turbulent phrases in the piano; a lighter scherzando motif; a sinuous theme that climbs with intensity to the highest register of the cello. A brief but emphatic coda concludes the movement.

Note by Nancy Monsman

"I have written a small cello piece, and would like you to look through it, and put the final touches to the cello part."

— Tchaikovsky to Anatoly Brandukov, August 1887, during the piece's creation.

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Miró Quartet with Karen Slack, soprano Wednesday, January 28, 2026 7:30 p.m.		
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Benett Tsai, cello Sunday, November 9, 2025 3:00 p.m.		<i>Tickets online or at the box office.</i>
Michael Yeung, percussion Sunday, January 18, 2026 3:00 p.m.		<i>For program and artist information, please visit arizonachambermusic.org.</i>
Anran Qian, piano Sunday, April 12, 2026 3:00 p.m.	<i>If you are interested in sponsoring a concert or a musician, please contact Cathy Anderson in the box office or at arizonachambermusic.org.</i> <i>If you are interested in sponsoring a commissioned work, please contact Cathy Anderson at office@arizonachambermusic.org</i>	

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Calloway, mezzo
soprano



SUNDAY, JANUARY 18
Michael Yeung,
percussion

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