

SEASON 13

String Theory

AT THE HUNTER

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH LEE UNIVERSITY &
THE HUNTER MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2022



Sponsored by UBS Donina Group



UBS

DONINA GROUP

Alexander Sitkovetsky VIOLIN*David Requiro* CELLO**Gloria Chien* PIANO

SUK

Elegy, Op. 23

KODÁLY

Duo for Violin and Cello, Op. 7

- I. Allegro serio, non troppo
- II. Adagio - Andante
- III. Maestoso e largamente,
ma non troppo lento - Presto

SMETANA

Piano Trio in G minor, Op. 15

- I. Moderato assai
- II. Allegro, ma non agitato
- III. Finale: Presto

*Chattanooga Debut

COVER ART:

Robert Seldon Duncanson (1821 – 1872) Landscape
1851, oil on canvas, Hunter Museum of American Art, Chattanooga, Tennessee, Museum purchase, 2007.6
Currently on view in special exhibition “Beyond the Frame: Celebrating 70 Years of Collecting”



ALEXANDER SITKOVETSKY



DAVID REQUIRO



GLORIA CHIEN

*Alexander Sitkovetsky* VIOLIN

Alexander Sitkovetsky was born in Moscow into a family with a well-established musical tradition. His concerto debut came at the age of eight, and in the same year he moved to the UK to study at the Menuhin School. Lord Menuhin was his inspiration throughout his school years and they performed together on several occasions.

Highlights include performances with the Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Australian Chamber Orchestra, Munich Chamber Orchestra, Konzerthaus Orchester Berlin, Norwegian Chamber Orchestra, Royal Northern Sinfonia, New York Chamber Players, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Sinfonietta Rīga, Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra, Poznan Philharmonic, Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, Tokyo Symphony Orchestra, European Union Chamber Orchestra, Academy of St. Martin's in the Fields, Moscow Symphony Orchestra, Welsh National Opera Orchestra, London Mozart Players and Orquesta Filarmónica de Bolivia.

Last season's highlights included engagements with the Arctic Symphony Orchestra, National Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Russian State Philharmonic Orchestra, English Symphony Orchestra, Amsterdam Sinfonietta, Aarhus Symphony Orchestra, and a return to Camerata Salzburg.

Alexander is a regular guest soloist in nationwide tours of the UK, including tours with the Brussels Philharmonic, St Petersburg Symphony Orchestra, and the Tonkünstler Orchester. His critically acclaimed CPO recording of Andrzej Panufnik's Violin Concerto with the Konzerthaus Orchester Berlin commemorating the composer's 100th birthday won an ICMA Special Achievement Award.

Alexander was awarded 1st prize at the Trio di Trieste Duo Competition alongside pianist Wu Qian. He is an alumnus of the prestigious 'Chamber Music Society Two' programme at the Lincoln Center, and in 2016 received the Lincoln Center Emerging Artist Award. Alexander is a founding member of the Sitkovetsky Piano Trio, with whom he has won various prizes including the Mecklenburg Vorpommern Kammermusik Prize. The trio has performed all over the UK and Europe including Alte Oper Frankfurt, Concertgebouw Amsterdam and Wigmore Hall, and toured Asia in 2018, with concerts in South Korea, Singapore and Japan. Alexander has also played in a String Quartet project with Julia Fischer since 2012, meeting once a year to perform in some of Europe's most prestigious venues.

Alexander has shared the stage with Julia Fischer, Janine Jansen, Maxim Rysanov, Alexander Chaushian, Mischa Maisky, Natalie Clein, Éric Le Sage, Polina Leschenko, Julian Rachlin, Boris Brovtsyn, and many others. He also performs frequently with the Razumovsky Ensemble and the Ensemble RARO.



David Requiro CELLO

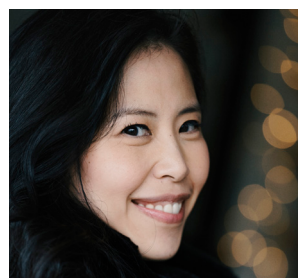
First Prize winner of the 2008 Naumburg International Violoncello Competition, DAVID REQUIRO (pronounced re-KEER-oh) has emerged as one of today's finest American cellists. After winning First Prize in both the Washington International and Irving M. Klein International String Competitions, he also captured a top prize at the Gaspar Cassadó International Violoncello Competition in Hachioji,

Japan, coupled with the prize for the best performances of works by Cassadó.

Mr. Requiro has made concerto appearances with the National Symphony Orchestra, Seattle Symphony, Tokyo Philharmonic, and several orchestras from California including the Marin, Oakland East Bay, Peninsula, Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa, and Stockton Symphonies. He also has been featured as soloist with the Ann Arbor, Breckenridge, Canton, Edmonton, Lansing, Olympia, Pine Bluff, and Santa Fe Symphony Orchestras as well as with the Northwest Sinfonietta, Symphony ProMusica, and Naples Philharmonic. His Carnegie Hall debut recital at Weill Hall was followed by a critically acclaimed San Francisco Performances recital at the Herbst Theatre. Soon after making his Kennedy Center debut, Mr. Requiro also completed the cycle of Beethoven's Sonatas for Piano and Cello at the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C. Actively involved in contemporary music, Mr. Requiro appeared as a guest artist at the 2010 Amsterdam Cello Biennale where he gave the Dutch premiere of Pierre Jalbert's Sonata for Cello and Piano. He has collaborated with composers such as Krzysztof Penderecki and Bright Sheng, as well as with members of the Aspen Percussion Ensemble, giving the Aspen Music Festival premiere of Tan Dun's concerto, *Elegy: Snow in June*, for cello and percussion. An avid chamber musician, Mr. Requiro is a founding member of the Baumer String Quartet and has performed with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Seattle Chamber Music Society, Concertante Chamber Players, ECCO (East Coast Chamber Orchestra), and the Alexander String Quartet. For over eight seasons, he has served as a frequent performing artist of the Jupiter Symphony Chamber Players Series in New York City. The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center recently appointed Mr. Requiro to its prestigious Bowers Program (formerly CMS Two) beginning in the 2018-2019 season.

In 2015, Mr. Requiro joined the faculty of the University of Colorado Boulder as Assistant Professor of Cello. He previously served as Artist-in-Residence at the University of Puget Sound as well as Guest Lecturer at the University of Michigan. His artist faculty appointments include the Music@Menlo Festival and Institute, Bowdoin International Music Festival, Seattle Chamber Music Society Summer Festival, Giverny Chamber Music Festival, Innsbrook Music Festival and Institute, Maui Classical Music Festival, and Olympic Music Festival. As a member of the Baumer String Quartet, he co-founded the annual Monterey Chamber Music Workshop.

A native of Oakland, California, Mr. Requiro began cello studies at age six and his teachers have included Milly Rosner, Bonnie Hampton, Mark Churchill, Michel Strauss, and Richard Aaron.



Gloria Chien PIANO

Taiwanese-born pianist Gloria Chien has a diverse musical life as a noted performer, concert presenter, and educator. She was selected by the Boston Globe as one of its Superior Pianists of the year. She made her orchestral debut at the age of 16 with the Boston Symphony Orchestra with Thomas Dausgaard, and performed again with the BSO with Keith Lockhart. In recent seasons she has performed as a recital-

ist and chamber musician at Alice Tully Hall, the Library of Congress, the Phillips Collection, the Kissinger Sommer festival, the Dresden Chamber Music Festival, and the National Concert Hall in Taiwan. She performs frequently with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and is an alum of CMS's Bowers Program. In 2009 she launched String Theory, a chamber music series at the Hunter Museum of American Art in downtown Chattanooga that has become one of Tennessee's premier classical music presenters. The following year she was appointed Director of the Chamber Music Institute at the Music@Menlo festival by Artistic Directors David Finckel and Wu Han, a post she held for the next decade. In 2017, she joined her husband, violinist Soovin Kim, as Co-Artistic Director of the Lake Champlain Chamber Music Festival in Burlington, Vermont. The duo is the new Artistic Directors at Chamber Music Northwest, celebrating its 50th season, in Portland, OR. Ms. Chien received her bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees from the New England Conservatory of Music as a student of Russell Sherman and Wha-Kyung Byun. She is an artist-in-residence at Lee University in Cleveland, Tennessee and is a Steinway Artist.

PROGRAM NOTES

INTRODUCTION

The powerful thread that binds our program this evening is Eastern European nationalism during the latter part of what historians call the "long 19th century" (1789-1914). All three composers represented embraced their roles in establishing musical identities for their respective homelands. Bookending the program are emotionally charged works by two composers from Bohemia (now the Czech Republic); we hear the music of a pioneering Hungarian between them. The models for such patriotism can be traced to Germany and Italy, where struggles for national identity found musical champions in Wagner and Verdi respectively. However, the specific impetus for each work on tonight's program is as individual as the fascinating composers who penned them.

SUK: Elegy, Op. 23

The first leg of our musical journey takes us down the Vltava river (also known by its German name, the Moldau) to Prague, the capital of Bohemia. High above the eastern bank stands the Vyšehrad, a castle complex that dates from the 11th century. Having been reimagined and refurbished over the centuries, it now includes a church and cemetery where many renowned Czechs, including the composers Smetana and Dvořák, are buried.



Vyšehrad, Prague

To honor Zeyer's memory, Suk penned his brief *Elegy: Under the Influence of Zeyer's "Vyšehrad,"* Op. 23, on the first anniversary of the poet's death.

Apparently, this was a happy time in the composer's life. The Czech String Quartet, whose members included Suk and his teacher Hanuš Wihan (1855–1920), regularly performed at home and abroad to great acclaim. Suk was also recognized as the leading Czech composer of his day. His son Josef was born around the same time. (The younger Josef was the father of the noted 20th-century violinist of the same name).

The composer's training and experience had prepared him well for this time, having been born into the home of a choirmaster, who trained his son to play piano, violin, and organ. At the tender age of 11, Josef entered the Prague Conservatory, qualifying for graduation in composition six years later. However, he decided to remain there for an additional year as a special student since Antonín Dvořák had recently joined the faculty. Suk became a favorite student of Dvořák and married his daughter Ottilie in 1898. Two years earlier, the influential Simrock firm published Suk's *Serenade for strings* on a recommendation from no less a composer than Johannes Brahms.

Suk's *Elegy* was originally scored the work for violin, cello, string quartet, harmonium (reed organ), and harp; he rearranged it for piano trio shortly after its premiere in 1902. The six-minute work features chromatically inflected melodies and turns of harmony that are said to show Dvořák's influence. The violin sounds the first of these melodies, the serene beauty of which contrasts with a restless underpinning of the piano's syncopated chords. Adding the cello only intensifies the pleasurable atmosphere.

Suddenly, like an unexpected squall, the mood changes with rushing arpeggios in the piano and urgent melodic fragments in the strings. Some have suggested that this represents the unrest of the prewar era in Bohemia to which Zeyer poetically alludes. Almost as abruptly as it appeared, the tempest abates, eventually returning to the mood of the opening. This time, strings add mutes, and rumbles of the storm interrupt the otherwise

whimsical song. Pizzicato arpeggios in the cello add a sparkling touch to the quiet repose of the work's ending.

KODÁLY: Duo for Violin and Cello, Op. 7

Our next musical destination is Hungary, home of composer Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967). Like his contemporaries, he was inspired by the nationalism of Wagner and Verdi, which was expressed mostly in their choices of operatic plots. Not satisfied with this approach, Kodály and his compatriot Béla Bartók (1881–1945) infused much of their music with authentic Hungarian folksongs, researching and codifying them by travelling around the countryside, recording the songs as sung by older members of their society. This groundbreaking approach became the wellspring of the discipline later called ethnomusicology.

Closely related to this scholarly engagement with folk music was Kodály's later work in music education, which resulted in a systematic method for teaching music literacy and appreciation. While the pedagogical approach was tried first in Hungarian schools, music educators later adapted it to other settings, including many in the United States. The curriculum continues to have a significant presence in musical education today.

The Duo for Violin and Cello, however, dates from 1914, only four years after the first significant performances of the composer's works. Some scholars have suggested a plausible connection between the emotional intensity of the Duo and the anxiety of the prewar years. In retrospect, one can easily reach that conclusion.

Kodály's writing is expansive and perfectly suited for the two instruments, which present the musical material as equal partners, frequently alternating melodic and accompanimental roles. Modally inflected melodies often exploit wide-ranging pitches in a short space, while accompaniments feature a variety of distinctive patterns and techniques.

Using the basic outline of sonata form, the first movement builds in density and passion toward the recapitulation of the main themes. Masterfully, the composer gradually winds the movement to a quiet close, beginning with a short, cadenza-like section for solo cello (the composer's own instrument), which is later answered by a similar figure in the violin part. The movement ends on a quiet D-major chord, realized through the "icy" sound of the violin's false harmonics.

Though the slower, second movement opens at a similar dynamic, this soon morphs to an ardent representation of the political climate of the time. The composer achieves this fervency by expanding the upper range of the violin even more than before, and by introducing complex, syncopated rhythms, intense tremolos, and active figuration.

A recollection of the work's opening serves as an expansive introduction to the

finale, the main body of which is an authentic Hungarian dance. The fast, energetic dancing continues until interrupted by a section where, according to Chris Darwin, “the violin slides around like an exhausted drunk, before being dragged to his feet for a rousing and even faster finish.”

SMETANA: Piano Trio in G Minor, Op. 15

Returning to Bohemia, we come to rest in the musical world of the real champion of Czech nationalism, Bedřich Smetana (1824–1884), whose best-known orchestral work immortalizes the Vltava (Moldau) River in luscious aural images. This is the second of a set of six symphonic poems appropriately titled *Má vlast* (My Fatherland, 1874-1879). (Incidentally, the first piece in the set pays tribute to the Vyšehrad Castle, as Zeyer’s poem—referenced above—did in 1880).

Smetana’s Trio in G Minor appeared much earlier in the composer’s career, during a time when Bohemia was embroiled in civil war and political unrest festered in much of Europe. Aligning with the revolutionaries, Smetana composed several nationalistic works by 1850. At the same time, Smetana was trying desperately to break out of the provincial environs of Prague, hoping to launch an international career as pianist and composer.

In 1848, the composer opened a music school in Prague, and the next year he married Kateřina Kolářová. In short order, they were blessed with four daughters, the first of whom, Bedřiška, was named for her father. Like him, Bedřiška’s musical talent was recognized early, and her doting father (who nicknamed her “Fritzi”) poured himself into developing her gift.

Tragedy struck the young family in 1854, when Gabriela, the couple’s second daughter, died. Roughly a year later, Fritzi succumbed to scarlet fever, prompting Smetana to compose the G-minor Piano Trio. He lovingly dedicated it “in memory of our eldest child Bedřiška, whose rare musical talent gave us such delight; too early snatched from us by death at the age of 4½ years.”

Symbolically, the trio begins with the violin alone. Its mournful melody features a falling half-step, the gesture long used in musical laments. To further add to the pathos, Smetana directs the player to use only the instrument’s G string. Soon, the piano and cello join, repeating the sonata form’s first theme. As the exposition section unfolds, emotions seem to ebb and flow, much like the waves of the grieving process. The more intense passages exploit a wide range, especially the upper regions of each instrument.

As though recalling a happier time, the movement’s second theme appears in the cello’s upper range. Its major key and initial ascending direction provide stark contrast with the opening. According to the composer, this melody resembled Fritzi’s favorite song.

A faster closing theme pushes towards a dramatic development in which tremolos, thundering octaves, and sforzandos provide waves of intensity set off by extreme changes in texture: to solo violin or the strings in slower note values. The section finally closes with a Chopinesque cadenza in the piano, allowing a return to the solo violin’s opening theme. After a fairly predictable recapitulation, the coda rushes headlong to an overwhelming finish.

The theme with which Smetana opens the second movement initially provides some respite from the tumult. Its happier, elfin dance is much like a scherzo but in duple meter. However, a melancholic undertone unfolds with off-beat accents and more descending half-steps.

Unlike most scherzo movements, this one has two trios with reminiscences of the opening dance sandwiched in between them. In the leisurely first trio, we can almost picture the happy family strolling along a picturesque path on a sunny day. The second trio is more regal with full, block chords. Pizzicato chords in the strings connect this movement with the end of Suk’s *Elegy*.

Not surprisingly, the tortured reality of mourning returns, this time in the tarantella-like music that opens the finale. One can be assured that the associations of this dance with death were not lost on Smetana, a composer steeped in Romanticism. The movement evolves into a modified rondo in which the first contrasting section sounds a hauntingly beautiful melody. When first heard in the cello, the piano provides a simple chordal accompaniment. As it develops, Smetana slyly reintroduces the triple division of the tarantella in the piano to effortlessly return to the refrain. Near the end, we hear an intense funeral dirge complete with the tolling of church bells in the piano’s lowest register.

Perhaps the intensely personal nature of the work or its dark themes elicited an inauspicious response to its premiere in 1855. As Smetana wrote to a friend, “the audience was unresponsive, and the critics hated it.” A year later, however, Liszt praised the work following a performance at the composer’s home. After some revising, the trio was published in its current form, eventually taking its proper place in the chamber music repertoire.

Thank you to Dr. Phillip Thomas for tonight’s program notes



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EPHESIANS 5:19