

**David Finckel, Cello &
Wu Han, Piano**

The College of Wooster
Gault Recital Hall
525 E. University Street
Wooster, Ohio 44691

Sunday, May 8, 2005
3:00 P.M.

Completed in December of 1901, the G-minor Cello Sonata was among the first in a string of significant works following the breakthrough concerto. The work was premiered shortly thereafter with dedicatee Anatoly Brandukov on cello and the composer on piano. The four-movement sonata is often referred to as a “piano sonata with cello accompaniment;” though the piano often asserts itself as the dominant instrument, the cello’s extended melodic lines ensure that its voice will not be overpowered. The opening movement, marked *Lento – Allegro moderato – Moderato*, illustrates this relationship particularly well. Motives generated by the more active piano line are often transformed into long, arching melodies by the cello.

The second movement (*Allegro scherzando*) presents an even greater challenge to the pianist. Following the fiery initial theme is a contrasting slower section reminiscent of portions of the just-completed Second Piano Concerto. The beautiful third movement (marked *Andante*) brings to mind the evocative intimacy of the well-known slow section of the later Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini. The striking movement also suggests for some the influence of Russian Orthodox Church music, particularly in the repeated-note portions of the opening theme. The *Allegro mosso* Finale opens with a sprightly first theme which quickly gives way to a more typical Rachmaninov melody, full of passion and emotional substance. Traversing a wide variety of emotions, the movement settles at last on a brilliant Coda that lends an extraordinarily satisfying conclusion to this highly-regarded member of chamber music repertory.

Written by Brian Biddle

David Finckel, Cello & Wu Han, Piano

Cellist David Finckel and pianist Wu Han are two of the most highly regarded and influential classical musicians alive today, with a solid reputation as musical innovators both on and off the stage. Their performances in concert and on CD have consistently garnered stellar praise from many directions worldwide. In addition to performing at numerous prestigious American venues, including New York’s 92nd Street Y, Washington’s Kennedy Center and Dumbarton Oaks, Boston’s Gardner Museum, Princeton University Concerts, UCLA’s Performing Art Series, and leading music festivals, they have also toured Mexico, Canada, the Far East, and Europe. Recent performances have included the complete Beethoven cycle in Tokyo and the duo’s signature all-Russian program at London’s Wigmore Hall.

David Finckel and Wu Han’s repertoire spans nearly the complete literature for cello and piano, both classical and contemporary. Their contemporary repertoire includes not only all of the significant twentieth century works, but also an expanding number of works written specially for them by composers such as Bruce Adolphe, Augusta Read Thomas, and Lera Auerbach.

In recent years, David Finckel and Wu Han have received increasing recognition for their far-reaching efforts to nurture greater audiences for classical music, and for their influence on the careers of countless younger musicians. In August 2003, the couple launched Music@Menlo, a chamber music festival in Silicon Valley that is receiving widespread acclaim for its innovative programming, world-class artists, workshop and mentoring opportunities for young musicians, community education, and strong visual arts component. Prior to this, they served for three seasons as Artistic Directors of SummerFest La Jolla. The pair were named Artistic Directors of The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in June of 2004. They have taught at the Isaac Stern Chamber Music Workshops at Carnegie Hall and in Jerusalem, and at the Aspen Music Festival, as well as contributing to educational outreach programs across the country. Finckel is also well-known to this audience as a member of the Emerson String Quartet.

In 1997, David Finckel and Wu Han founded the recording company, ArtistLed, a unique venture that keeps complete control of all recording with the artists themselves. The musicians choose which music to record (that which they love), and at what time (when they are playing it to perfection), producing all their own recordings. Their critically acclaimed CDs are available by mail through a toll-free number, through their website, www.ArtistLed.com, and at concerts. The seven recordings available so far through ArtistLed include Russian Classics (Rachmaninov, Shostakovich and Prokofiev), and works by Schubert, Beethoven, Grieg and Chopin, Strauss and Franck, Tchaikovsky and Kodaly, and Edwin Finckel (the cellist’s father).

David Finckel and Wu Han are married and live in New York City with their daughter Lilian.

Written by Sarah Buck

PROGRAM NOTES

Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953)

SONATA FOR CELLO AND PIANO IN C MAJOR, OP. 119 (1949 -

Prokofiev lived the last years of his life as a defeated artist. Returning from a long period abroad in the mid-1930s, he was celebrated for many years among the finest Soviet composers of his generation. For a time he was able to escape the harsh government condemnation that faced colleagues such as Shostakovich while still practicing a forward-looking (and not necessarily populist) style. Treading on the ideal of “socialist realism” finally caught up with Prokofiev when, in the mid-1940s, his work was denounced by the Soviet powers-that-be and many of his most popular works were banned from performance. His career never recovered; though he still composed, performances of new works had to be “screened” privately by the Soviet Composers’ Union to be approved for public consumption, no doubt a humiliating ordeal.

The C Major Cello Sonata is among the works that received a favorable response in this most undesirable critical arena. It was premiered (publicly) in 1950 by two exceptional performers: Mstislav Rostropovich on cello and Sviatoslav Richter on piano. The first of the sonata’s three movements (marked *Andante grave*) unavoidably begs comparison with Rachmaninov-esque melodic lyricism, even though Prokofiev claimed that he himself could not write a good melody. Occasional pizzicato arpeggios serve as punctuations within the otherwise calm and expressive movement.

The two subsequent movements continue in the same tranquil vein as the opening movement. Though in quadruple (rather than the typical triple) meter, the *Moderato* replicates the classical Scherzo-and-Trio form, with a playful, dance-like opening section and serene interior Trio. Though more active, the closing *Allegro ma non troppo* retains a reserved character, and at times borders on a practically Viennese stateliness. The influence of Russian folk music (imitated rather than explicitly quoted) may be observed as well. The closing Coda features a restatement of the main theme of the initial *Andante grave*.

Lesser artists would have retreated from the scathing rebuke of Soviet censorship. Prokofiev, however, viewed his public defeat as a challenge which he answered in works such as the Cello Sonata, becoming (in the words of Blair Johnston) “a composer who has learned subtler, more patient, and, ultimately, clearer ways to fully speak his mind.”

Written by Brian Biddle

Lera Auerbach

SONATA NO. 1 FOR VIOLONCELLO AND PIANO - 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. 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 - *Lament (Adagio)* - 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 - *With extreme intensity* - 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/The University of Iowa and the Music in the Park Series, St. Paul, MN.

Written by Lera Auerbach

Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943)

SONATA IN G MINOR FOR CELLO AND PIANO, OP. 19 (1901) - By his late teens, Rachmaninov was well on his way to establishing himself as a formidable pianist and composer; he earned degrees with honors in both disciplines in 1891. His promising future seemed in jeopardy when his first significant large scale work, the First Symphony of 1895, was premiered by the Russian Symphony to enthusiastic critical disapproval (César Cui compared it to “a programme symphony on the Seven Plagues of Egypt”). A protracted period of uncertainty and depression followed. After three years of almost no compositional output, the composer gradually began to rebuild his self-confidence, apparently due in part to hypnotic therapy. The momentous Second Piano Concerto of 1901 ended this dark period and firmly established Rachmaninov as a composer of international renown.

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Program

Sonata for Cello and Piano in C Major, Op. 119 (1949) PROKOFIEV
Andante grave (1891-1953)
Moderato
Allegro ma non troppo

Sonata No. 1 for Violoncello and Piano LERA AUERBACH
Allegro moderato
Lament (Andante)
Allegro assai
With extreme intensity

Intermission

Sonata for Piano and Cello in G minor, Op. 19 (1901) RACHMANINOV
Lento; Allegro moderato (1873-1943)
Allegro scherzando
Andante
Allegro mosso

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