

29
JUNE*Saturday*

8 PM

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Sergey Antonov, cello
Ilya Kazantsev, piano

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*Pre-concert talk with Dr. Elizabeth Seitz, 7 PM***SONATA FOR CELLO AND PIANO, OP. 36 (1883)****Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)**

Allegro agitato
Andante molto tranquillo
Allegro molto e marcato

SUITE FOR CELLO AND PIANO, OP. 66 (1956)**Paul Creston (1906-1985)**

Prelude
Scherzino
Cantilena
Tarantella

:: INTERMISSION ::

SONATA IN G MINOR FOR CELLO AND PIANO, OP. 19 (1901)**Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)**

Lento—Allegro moderato
Allegro scherzando
Andante
Allegro mosso

This concert is made possible in part through the generosity of the Selma and Bayness Andrews Fund of The Boston Foundation, Kathe and Allan Cohen, advisors.

Notes
ON THE
PROGRAM

BY
Sandra Hyslop

SONATA FOR CELLO AND PIANO, OP. 36

Edvard Grieg (b. Bergen, June 15, 1843; d. Bergen, September 4, 1907)

Composed 1883; 25 minutes

Edvard Grieg's lifetime works list is heavily balanced toward compositions in small musical forms. The well-known Piano Concerto in A minor, the incidental music for Henrik Ibsen's drama *Peer Gynt*, and the charming *Holberg Suite* are three well-known large-scale exceptions amidst the hundreds of short-form songs and piano pieces, and the (relatively few) chamber works that he composed over the course of 40-odd years.

Never interested in formal school work, but showing early musical talent, Grieg was sent at the age of fifteen from his home in Bergen, Norway, to Leipzig, where he studied at that city's conservatory of music. There, too, he chafed at the formal pedagogy, but the training he received in Leipzig, naturally emphasizing the Germanic approach to performance and composition, sufficed to set Grieg on his professional path. Upon his return to Bergen, his own aesthetic inclinations and the socio-political upheavals surrounding the Norway/Denmark/Sweden tensions of that era determined the direction of his creative life. Grieg turned his energies toward creating his own kind of music, which quickly came to symbolize the Norwegian nationalist spirit.



A 1904 photograph of the cellist Pablo Casals, two years before he performed Grieg's Cello Sonata with the composer in Amsterdam

From Edvard Grieg's diary entry for May 2, 1906, a concert day in Amsterdam:

"A day of despair!...First, the cellist—the so highly regarded Pablo Casals—has still not arrived in the city....But he arrived at 2 p.m., and I, poor fellow, was to rehearse the demanding Cello Sonata with him for the concert the same evening. For a moment I considered playing without a rehearsal, but I abandoned that idea as it would have resulted in even greater nervousness. And it is good that I did, for as a result I got a great pleasure. Casals is incomparable, a great, great artist for whom the work of art is No. 1 and the artist No. 2....[During the concert] I was ill at ease and displeased with myself throughout the evening. In addition to playing the Cello Sonata, I played Lyric Pieces Op. 43 and accompanied all the songs, so I was at the piano the whole time. Fortunately, my displeasure was not shared by the audience that filled the auditorium. There was demonstrative warmth in the applause, and there were many curtain calls..."

Beset throughout his adult life by fragile health, Grieg wrote the Sonata for Cello and Piano during a period of personal struggle and self-doubt. The work's strength and vitality give no hint of the composer's failing nerve. Although he dedicated the piece to his brother John, an excellent amateur cellist, the Sonata was premiered by the cellist Friedrich Ludwig Grützmacher; the performance took place on October 22, 1883, in Dresden, with the composer at the piano.

The Cello Sonata, like Grieg's beloved Piano Concerto, is in A minor. The two instruments create an orchestral sound in the *Allegro agitato*, a passionate first movement. Its quiet second theme is reminiscent of similar passages in *Peer Gynt*, and in Grieg's songs; it gives two islands of momentary relief from the overall, unrestrained drama of the movement.

The second movement reveals Grieg's lyrical sense at its most affecting. The piano sets up the *Andante molto tranquillo* mood and tempo, which the cello continues in a long *arioso* passage that leads to a second theme, equally lyrical and affecting. With increasing tempos and expansion of dynamic range, the movement reaches a climax and a return to the quiet lyricism of the opening.

The Cello Sonata concludes with a third movement, *Allegro molto e marcato*, whose quiet cello opening forms a bridge from the tranquility of the second movement to an exceptionally vibrant ending, with hints of Norwegian dances and Nordic charm peppering the musical landscape.

SUITE FOR CELLO AND PIANO, OP. 66

Paul Creston (b. New York City, October 10, 1906; d. near San Diego, August 24, 1985)

Composed 1957; 18 minutes

Born of poor Italian immigrant parents in New York, Giuseppe Guttoveggio received minimal formal education: a few piano and organ lessons in his childhood and two years of general high school studies. As a youth he assumed the American name by which he was thereafter known, Paul Creston. Studying and copying music scores by Scarlatti, Chopin, Debussy, Ravel, Stravinsky, and—above all—Bach, Creston achieved the knowledge and skills that would inform his professional life as a successful composer.

In his adult years Creston supported himself as the organist at St. Malachy's Church in New York, while building a reputation as one of America's most significant composers. From about 1932 through the early 1980s, he composed steadily, created notable works in many genres, and received numerous distinguished awards and prizes. In a period when dodecaphonic and aleatory compositional styles were dominating academic circles, he remained resolutely committed to composing tonal music—loosely categorized as Neo-Romantic—characterized by sophisticated contrapuntal structures and spiced by distinctive, often dissonant, harmonic explorations. His studies in the complex subject of rhythm contributed to the vitality of his creations.

The Suite for Cello and Piano, composed in 1956, is such a Neo-Romantic work. It was premiered in Washington D. C. in October that year at the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation's Festival of Chamber Music. The composer was at the piano as partner to the esteemed cellist Raya Garbusova.

After the charged cello and piano announcement of the Suite's opening, the cello introduces a quiet meditation that speaks from within the piano's surround: an ostinato figure in the bass and a chorale figure in the treble. Gradually Creston urges the cello to a dramatic exploration of its entire vocal range, supported fully by the piano. After a quick cello cadenza, the Prelude ends with a grumbling "Amen" from the cello.

The piano scampers quickly into the Scherzino, with firm pizzicatos from the cello. Rhythmically asymmetrical throughout, the themes are tossed back and forth, as the instruments trade scampering and pizzicato themes in a modified rondo pattern. The piano introduces a lyrical cello statement in the center section. The instruments return to their skittish modes and meet for a unison pizzicato section in tandem rhythm, before the piano, swooping upward, crosses the cello on its downward fall toward a finishing flick.

The steady 4/4 measure of the Cantilena quiets the mood and sets up the cello's lengthy, passionate song of longing. The piano alternates between two equally steady chord patterns, richly supporting the cello as it climbs to a passionate ending in the treble of its range, then descends to end its song on a wistful and inconclusive tone.

The piano ignites the rapid Tarantella (one of Creston's favored dance forms) in 6/8 measure, and the two instruments take off as though a whole flock of arachnids were on their heels. The rapid scales and pizzicatos of the dance cease momentarily when the piano stomps out rough and aggressive chords. After a digression into a brief, plaintive cello melody, the dance takes up again with an increase in tempo, and the Tarantella ends with an emphatic flourish.



The American composer Paul Creston

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Sandra Hyslop

SONATA IN G MINOR FOR CELLO AND PIANO, OP. 19

Sergei Rachmaninoff (b. Semyonovo, April 1, 1873; d. Beverly Hills, March 28, 1943)

Composed 1901; 35 minutes

Sergei Rachmaninoff dedicated his only cello sonata to the eminent Russian cellist Anatoly Brandukov, who gave the first performance of the work, with Rachmaninoff at the piano, in Moscow on December 2, 1901. Fourteen years older than Rachmaninoff, Brandukov nevertheless had become an excellent friend and colleague and had served as the pianist's groomsman in his marriage to Natalya Satina.

In January 1892 Brandukov and Rachmaninoff gave their first concert together, the first of many appearances they would make as chamber music partners. A composer himself, Brandukov always generously supported Rachmaninoff's music.



Sergei Rachmaninoff with his dog, Levko, near his family home, Krasenkoye, in 1899, two years before composing the Cello Sonata

In 1900 Rachmaninoff suffered a serious crisis of self-confidence in his abilities as a composer. His first composition upon recovery was this Sonata for Cello and Piano. At the peak of his powers when he wrote the sonata, Rachmaninoff could not know that this would be his last chamber music work.

The sonata that Rachmaninoff wrote for his friend makes an excellent measure of Brandukov's talents. This large, powerful work penetrates to the core of the cello's capabilities for expressiveness, lyricism, and drama.

The first tones of the piece, an upward-moving half-step in the cello's middle register, act as the germ of a tentative, suspenseful introduction. Hesitantly, supported by the piano, the cello gathers its thoughts, preparing to tell its story. One last sigh, an exhale, and it begins. The sonata's story is richly colored and passionate, a grand statement for the cello's voice, with a piano part of concerto proportions.

In the second chapter of the story, the rambunctious scherzo alternates with lyrical passages of great tenderness, a tenderness that becomes even more sublime in the Andante, when the two instruments join in intimate conversation. Together they tell an unforgettable tale, which after two grand climaxes finds a magically spun resolution. The fourth movement, *Allegro mosso*, reaffirms the truth of the story's emotions and celebrates their endurance.