

The Ph.D./D.M.A. Programs in Music

May 5th, 2021 1:00 p.m.

Baisley Powell Elebash Recital Hall



Clare Monfredo, cello Edward Kass, double bass

Sept Papillons for Solo Cello (2000)

Kaija Saariaho
(b. 1952)

Suite VI in D Major for Unaccompanied Cello, BWV 1012

Prelude

Allemande

Courante

Sarabande

Gavotte I & II

Gigue

J. S. Bach
(1685–1750)

INTERMISSION

Trois Strophes sur le nom de Sacher (1979)

Henri Dutilleux
(1916–2013)

~ Brief Pause ~

Hymnus II for cello and double bass (1974)

Alfred Schnittke
(1934–1998)

Dual for cello and bass (2015)

Matthew Aucoin
(b. 1990)

This recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the D.M.A. degree.

Notes on the Program

Sept Papillons for Solo Cello (2000) by Kaija Saariaho

Duration: 11 minutes

Kaija Saariaho is one of today's great composers. Highly influenced by French spectralist composers such as Gérard Grisey and Tristan Murail, her work explores unusual uses of timbre and overtone series in traditional instruments, often in conjunction with electronics. Saariaho is well-known for her collaborations with the American theater director Peter Sellars; her opera, *L'Amour de loin* (2000), was inspired by her viewing of Sellars's directorial work of Messaien's opera *Saint François d'Assise*. Her innovative use of texture and density in sound invites the imagination to create fantastical visual and tactile landscapes.

Sept Papillons is one of the many pieces Saariaho has written in collaboration with the Finnish cellist Anssi Karttunen. Of the piece, Karttunen writes:

“*Sept Papillons* was the first piece Saariaho wrote after her opera *L'Amour de loin*. It was written during the rehearsal period of the opera in Salzburg. One can sense the desire to find a world which has nothing to do with the opera neither in style nor in language. From the metaphors of the opera, which all have an eternal quality—love, yearning and death—she moved to a metaphor of the ephemeral: the butterfly. Still, the opera is present in one or two melodic passages of the piece.

Also, from the long timespans of the opera she moved to these seven miniatures, which each seem to be studies on a different aspect of fragile and ephemeral movement that has no beginning nor end.”

Suite VI in D Major for Unaccompanied Cello, BWV 1012 by Johann Sebastian Bach

Duration: 30 minutes

Johann Sebastian Bach's Cello Suites are widely recognized and beloved works of music. They are played in times of celebration and grief; just a year ago Yo-Yo Ma performed all six to commemorate those lost in the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Cello Suites all follow the same form: a prelude preceded by five dances of French, Italian and English traditions, each carrying a distinct rhythmic and affectual character. Within the collection of six suites, the D Major is unusual: unlike the first five, which were written for an instrument that generally resembles today's modern cello, the sixth was composed for a smaller five-stringed instrument, possibly a piccolo cello or a viola da spalla (a stringed instrument that is played on the arm). The higher strings and smaller instrument inspired a work that is undeniably brighter and more virtuosic than the other suites: rapid arpeggios abound, as do the use of double stops, chords, and contrasting registers.

Played on a four-string cello, this suite presents a number of technical challenges for the player. In addition to frequent use of high positions, there are many issues of executing chords without a fifth

string, particularly in the last three movements. Perhaps the greatest challenge of all in playing this piece is that the cellist must look beyond the work's technical demands to convey the music's buoyant dance rhythms, instrumental brilliance, and transcendent, heavenly tone.

***Trois Strophes sur le nom de Sacher* (1979) by Henri Dutilleux**

Duration: 10 minutes

The *Trois Strophes sur le nom de Sacher* was Henri Dutilleux's contribution to the great cellist Mstislav Rostropovich's commissioning project celebrating Swiss conductor and arts patron Paul Sacher's 70th birthday. Other composers involved in the project included Luciano Berio, Pierre Boulez, Benjamin Britten, Witold Lutoslawski, and Alberto Ginastera. Each wrote a work for solo cello (or, in the case of Boulez, solo cello plus six cellos) based on a series of notes that spelled out Sacher's name: eS (e-flat), A, C, H (b-natural), E, and Re (D).

Dutilleux's *Trois Strophes* is heavily based off of this row of pitches, though equally memorable is his use of intervallic contour: to express the SACHER motive, Dutilleux opts for large expressive intervals such as major sevenths rather than smaller, simpler intervals. He also adds an interesting additional layer of dedication to Paul Sacher at the end of the first strophe with the inclusion of a brief fragment of Bela Bartok's *Music for String Percussion and Celeste*, a work both commissioned and premiered by Sacher himself. Those who are familiar with Stanley Kubrick's movie *The Shining* will also recognize this theme.

Notably, the piece is written for a *scordatura* cello: the lower two strings are tuned down, the G by half-step to F sharp, the C by whole-step to B-flat, resulting in an expansion of the cello's naturally large range. The *Trois Strophes* also employs a number of interesting techniques and effects, inviting performer and listener alike to broaden their conception of how a cello "should" sound: strumming pizzicato, *ponticello*, natural and artificial harmonics, percussive *col legno*, and the exploration of contrasting registers show up repeatedly throughout the three movements.

***Hymnus II* for cello and double bass (1974) by Alfred Schnittke**

Duration: 7 minutes

The second of four voiceless "hymns" written by Alfred Schnittke, *Hymnus ii* is a remarkable seven-minute work for cello and bass that alternates between transcendence and despair.

The piece begins on a simple motif of hushed unfolding parallel major and minor triads that emphasize the low resonance of this unusual instrumentation. The overarching aura is one of divine mystery, befitting of the work's title. The chordal material dissolves into a slow but increasingly frenzied pizzicato section: both instruments strum chords simultaneously yet with different accentuation patterns, implying conflict between the two previously harmonious instruments. After an abrupt and unresolved conclusion, the pair return to the opening theme, this time using natural harmonics of the instruments. The result is an eerie shadow-like reproduction of the piece's beginning.

Suddenly, the cello bursts through the delicate tension of the high-pitched harmonic chords with a wailing *subito forte* melody. Meanwhile, the bass resumes playing violent pizzicato chords from earlier in the piece. The section is brief—only seven bars—but its contrasting dynamic, timbre, and texture express a powerful moment of despair.

The final part of the piece continues the opening theme of building chords across the two instruments. While the bass holds a drone, the cello traverses up its different overtone series with strings of ascending natural harmonics. After reaching a final resting spot in the highest register of the piece, the bass departs its low pedal and similarly climbs down the fingerboard via natural harmonics. The final high harmonics of the two instruments conclude on a dissonant chord, ending the movement on an angelic yet unsettling note.

***Dual* for cello and bass (2015) by Matthew Aucoin**

Duration: 8 minutes

The combination of cello and double bass has rarely been exploited in recent centuries for free-standing duets. Composers could be forgiven for wondering if two instruments with such similar qualities – if they were a comedy duo, they’d be Low and Lower – might not simply cancel out one another’s power.

Fortunately, this isn’t the case, and the great Yo-Yo Ma, for whom *Dual* was written, has often reminded us in recent years of the vitality and potency of this combination, often with his regular collaborator, double bass virtuoso Edgar Meyer. The cello and the double bass, being two strapping, well-built brothers from the same instrumental family, share a number of genetic traits – a warm, dark timbre in the lower register; a uniquely earthy quality to the very sound of the bow being drawn across the instrument – that are doubly satisfying when the two instruments speak together.

Dual makes use of these two instruments’ special capacities to rumble, roar, pulse and croon. The title has a punning double meaning: the piece is a dual effort, since its very fabric is the friction that the rich, rough textures of these two instruments create when they come into contact. The piece’s harmonic fabric – harmonies that shift and revolve slowly within a pulsing texture, heightening the impact of each new change – unfolds in two-part, “mirroring” counterpoint.

But the piece is also a duel. As the tension grows and the harmonic development becomes more unstable, these two voices – which had for a while been progressing side by side, like race cars in parallel lanes – begin to shove and jostle each other for primacy. Even their successive melodies, which emerge like brief oases within the piece’s journey, have the flavor of competition to them, as if a miniature song contest were embedded within the piece. (*Program note by the composer.*)

About the Artists

Clare Monfredo is a New York City-based cellist committed to chamber music and collaboration across the arts. Clare has performed extensively at home and abroad, including with Ensemble Intercontemporain on tour and as part of the Lucerne Festival, Kurt Weill Fest, Cello Akademie Rutesheim, International Sommerakademie Wien, Fontainebleau Schools of Art and Music, the Banff Centre, and the Aldeburgh Festival. Her US festival experience includes summers at the Tanglewood Music Center, Norfolk Chamber Music Festival, Music Academy of the West, Piatigorsky International Cello Festival, and Chamber Music Northwest.

As a fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center, Clare was the winner of the Karl Zeise Memorial Cello Award and worked closely with distinguished artists such as Yo-Yo Ma and Emanuel Ax. In 2016–17 she studied in Leipzig, Germany with Peter Bruns on a Fulbright Scholarship. Clare received her Master's of Music degree from Rice University as a recipient of the three-year Graduate Artist Award granted to her by the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation. She also graduated with distinction from Yale University with a Bachelor of Arts in English. Clare is currently the recipient of the five-year Graduate Fellowship as a DMA student at the CUNY Graduate Center and teaches at Hunter College. She is a member of the Victory Players ensemble based in Holyoke, MA and the Sprechgesang artist collective in New York.

Bassist **Edward Kass** has performed around the world as a chamber musician, orchestral musician, and soloist. Festival appearances include Tanglewood Music Center, Lucerne Festival, and Pacific Music Festival. As a member of Departure Duo (soprano+double bass), Kass has appeared in recitals and artist residencies at Spoleto Festival USA, Yellow Barn, Omaha Under the Radar, and more.

Born in San Jose, CA, he started playing bass at his public elementary school. A devoted and passionate performer of contemporary music, Kass believes that musicians should strive to connect today's music to the rich traditions of the past, rather than treating contemporary music as a novelty or niche field. With his duo partner, soprano Nina Guo, Kass has received support and recognition for his commissioning work from Chamber Music America and New England Conservatory's Entrepreneurial Musicianship Department.

Kass completed his graduate and undergraduate studies at New England Conservatory under the tutelage of Todd Seeber and Lawrence Wolfe. In 2015, Kass received the New England Conservatory John Cage Award for Outstanding Contribution to Contemporary Music Performance. In addition to his work with Departure Duo, recent appearances include performances and recordings with Ensemble Dal Niente, Callithumpian Consort, and the Charleston Symphony Orchestra.

Spring 2021 Online Events

March

- 8 Ari Livne, piano
- 12 Han Chen, piano

April

- 7 Kirsten Jermé, cello
- 16 Audrey Chen, cello
- 23 Carrie Frey, viola
- 26 Federico Diaz, guitar
- 28 Antonio Valentin, piano
- 30 Austin Lewellen, double bass

May

- 3 Thapelo Masita, cello
- 5 Clare Monfredo, cello
- 12 Julia Danitz, violin
- 14 GC Composers
- 17 Isabel Fairbanks, cello
- 19 Jeremy Kienbaum, viola
- 21 Fifi Zhang, piano

All events begin at 1:00pm and will be live-streamed free of charge at this link:

<https://gc-cuny.zoom.us/j/95813229159>

For detailed concert information, please visit our website at: <http://gcmusic.commonsgc.cuny.edu>