

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

May 17th, 2021 1:00 p.m.

*Baisley Powell Elebash Recital Hall*



Isabel Fairbanks, cello  
Zach Mo, piano

Fantasiestücke, Op. 73 (1849) Robert Schumann  
*Zart und mit Ausdruck* (Tenderly and with expression) (1810-1856)  
*Lebhaft, leicht* (Lively, light)  
*Rasch und mit Feuer* (Quick and with fire)

*Orbit* for solo cello (2013) Philip Glass  
(b. 1937)

Sonata for Cello and Piano in C minor, Op. 6 (1932) Samuel Barber  
*Allegro ma non troppo* (1910-1981)  
*Adagio*  
*Allegro appassionato*

INTERMISSION

Sonata No. 1 for Cello and Piano in E minor, Op. 38 (1862, 1865) Johannes Brahms  
*Allegro non troppo* (1833-1897)  
*Allegretto quasi Menuetto*  
*Allegro*

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

## Notes on the Program

### Robert Schumann (1810-1856) Fantasiestücke, Op. 73 (1849)

In April 1849 Robert Schumann wrote to a friend, “I’ve been very busy---it’s been my most fruitful year.” Schumann wrote over forty pieces that year and among them was his *Drei Fantasiestücke* (Three Fantasy Pieces), Op. 73. Composed over the course of just a few days in February 1849, it was originally conceived for clarinet and piano, but the first edition, published in July 1849, also included a violin part and a cello part, either of which could substitute the clarinet part. Schumann initially called the piece *Soiréestücke* (Night Music), but ultimately settled on the title *Fantasiestücke*, emphasizing the piece's literary ties. The title, one he had already used in earlier compositions, was borrowed from one of his favorite authors, fantasy writer, E.T.A. Hoffman.

Though it was one of the most happy and prolific times for Schumann as a composer, 1849 was a turbulent time for both the Schumann family and for Germany. A revolution against the monarchies was sweeping across the country and the Republican military wanted Schumann to enlist. The Schumann household accounts described “riots in town” and “monstrous political commotion.” Schumann, a pregnant Clara, and their four children, ultimately fled from Dresden that spring, a few months after *Fantasiestücke* was written. Surely the political unrest was a worry to Schumann, yet that worry seems absent from his *Fantasiestücke*; the work is infused with an untroubled romanticism.

While each of the three pieces has its own aesthetic, the set is highly unified, and indications to perform the pieces *attacca* (without pause), show Schumann's intent that the three be presented together. Compositional devices unite them: each of the three pieces uses the A-B-A song form so often used during the Romantic period, the triplet rhythm is nearly constant, and the relationships of A and B themes within each piece mirror one another. The element of fantasy is another unifying device, perhaps behaving differently in each, but ultimately acting as the literary thread that binds the three together. The cello and piano respond to each other in fragments, a dream-like language, and we happen upon new themes with little warning, as if we have suddenly been dropped onto a new landscape. And, as with most stories, themes are introduced, transmuted, and revisited throughout the work.

Marked *Zart und mit Ausdruck* (tender and with expression), the first piece begins as if we have opened the doors on a conversation already underway. The wistful, sometimes melancholic melody in the darker key of A minor, is constantly searching. A more diffuse middle section of intertwining duple and triplet arpeggios destabilizes before the return to our first theme. This return brings us back to A minor before finding a sunnier A Major in the last few bars.

The second piece, *Lebhaft, leicht* (lively, light) is a blithe reverie. It embraces the A Major key achieved in the first piece with a playful, fragmented dialogue between the cello and piano. This gives way to a dance-like middle section in which the piano and cello exchange triplet motives. The first theme returns with disarming suddenness, a reminder that we are in Schumann's dreamworld.

*Rasch und mit Feuer* (Fast and with fire) begins with an exuberant sense of urgency: a burst of sixteenth notes leads to a soaring melody. A moment of inward reflection tempers this exuberance in the more subdued middle section. The return of the A section delivers us to a coda which begins tenderly but then drives energetically towards the end. Schumann marks the coda, *schneller* (faster) twice, creating an ecstatic frenzy, while quoting fragments of all three pieces, and finally leading us to a jubilant ending.

**Philip Glass (b. 1937)**  
**Orbit (2013)**

Written in 2013, Philip Glass's *Orbit* was premiered by Yo-Yo Ma at New York's Le Poisson Rouge. The work, a collaboration between Glass, Ma, and Memphis dancer, Charles "Lil Buck" Riley, was commissioned by ballet dancer, Damian Woetzel. In the years prior to the premiere, Lil Buck had popularized the street dance style known as "jookin," a style first developed in Memphis during the 1990s. Lil Buck's style juxtaposes quick angular movements with moments of watery, sometimes rubbery motion. Going *en pointe* is common of the style, though, like other dancers of the "jookin" style, Lil Buck abandons the pointe shoes for athletic sneakers. Though *Orbit* might not necessarily be classified as a dance movement, and easily stands alone as a work purely for solo cello, any performer tackling the work may benefit from knowledge of the "jookin" style.

Glass's title is certainly fitting. Between the legato articulation and arching physicality of the string crossings, the curved motion of the bow arm gives the cellist a sensation of orbiting around the instrument. Nearly constant arpeggiation seems to revolve around a melodic axis and a weightless transparency gives the sense of spaciousness. Alternation between duple and triple note groupings spins the ear in different directions, and the use of double stops in climactic moments adds volume and weight. The work ends with a spareness that is typical of Glass's minimalist style.

**Samuel Barber (1910-1981)**  
**Sonata for Cello and Piano in C minor, Op. 6 (1932)**

Even as a child Samuel Barber felt a profound pull towards composition. A note addressed to his mother, penned by a nine-year-old Barber, read:

*Dear Mother: I have written this to tell you my worrying secret. Now don't cry when you read it because it is neither yours nor my fault. I suppose I will have to tell it now without any nonsense. To begin with I was not meant to be an athlet [sic] I was meant to be a composer, and will be I'm sure. I'll ask you one more thing.—Don't ask me to try to forget this unpleasant thing and go play football.—Please—Sometimes I've been worrying about this so much that it makes me mad (not very).*

Just one year later he wrote his first operetta, and five years later, at the age of 14, he began his studies at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. At the age of 22 he completed his only cello sonata---one of the most important, and widely performed twentieth century works for the cello.

Barber conceived of his cello sonata on a trip to Italy, in the summer of 1932, where he completed a rough draft of the first movement. But it was upon his return to the United States that the work really came to fruition. Back at Curtis Barber connected with Orlando Cole, a fellow student who would later become an important performer and pedagogue. Cole and Barber began a significant collaboration, and Cole's presence still looms large over the sonata for any cellist who performs it. The work was premiered by Cole and Barber in January of 1933 at Curtis and received another performance two months later at a concert of the League of Composers in New York City. Years later Cole reflected on the sonata, calling it, "very cellistic, very singing," and that "it takes advantage of the best qualities of the instrument."

Though the work is harmonically adventurous, its form is undeniably traditional and displays all the hallmarks of a good student who holds his predecessors in high esteem. The work is unarguably

indebted to the sonatas of Brahms, which Barber had tackled several years earlier on a trip to Europe. In terms of register and sense of trajectory, its opening certainly echoes Brahms's first sonata, and its vigor and intensity channel the power of Brahms's second sonata. And like the sonatas of Brahms, the piano is no mere supporting character, the writing is virtuosic and soloistic, not a distant backdrop, but rather a partner in crime.

The first movement, marked *Allegro ma non troppo*, begins with a sweeping first theme. As in Brahms's first sonata, this theme surges from the lowest to the highest register of the cello, giving a sense that musicians and audience are embarking on a journey. The energy of the opening gives way to a tenderly majestic second theme whose harmonic language and simple accompaniment are quintessentially American. A rhythmic expansion and *tranquillo* indication at the return of the first theme make the recapitulation almost imperceptible; but a *fortissimo* dynamic and return to the original rhythm in the second half of the phrase makes the return more apparent. As with the first movement of Brahms's sonata, a coda brings us to the movement's parallel key - a calm ending not in c minor, but rather in a more tranquil C major.

Barber's second movement, marked *Adagio*, is written in a traditional A-B-A form. It begins with an earnest intimacy that toggles between taut dissonance and placid resolution. But the sincerity of the *Adagio* is rudely snatched away with a sudden impish scherzo, marked *Presto*. The return of the A section, marked *di nuovo Adagio*, reframes the original melody, this time reaching a *fortissimo* dynamic and an impassioned climax before a quieter moment of revelation brings the movement to a poignant cadence.

The finale, marked *Allegro appassionato*, fully embraces its indication. The piano shines at the beginning with a melody full of abandon, supported by surging arpeggiated waves. This muscular theme, taken over by the cello, leads to a mischievous, staccato section, followed by a surging transition back to the first theme. As is typical of Barber's writing in this piece, a coda grows from *pianissimo* to an energetic climax to conclude the piece.

### **Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)**

#### **Sonata No. 1 for Cello and Piano in E minor, Op. 38 (1862, 1865)**

Although not his first attempt at a duo sonata, Brahms's cello sonata, op. 38 was his first to be published. Notoriously self-critical, he had destroyed any previous attempts at the genre, and so the E minor Cello Sonata was his first to reach the public sphere. Initially rejected by Breitkopf & Hartl, the manuscript was ultimately published by Simrock shortly after its first performance in 1865. Brahms was thirty-two, but he had begun work on the piece during his late twenties, a time that was fruitful for his chamber music output. Among other chamber works, the period from 1860-1865 saw the creation of his two string sextets, op. 18 and op. 36--works we can certainly hear echoed in this sonata, harmonically, melodically, and in their treatment of the cello as a significant voice. The original title of this work was not *Sonata for Cello and Piano*, but rather the inverse, *Sonata for Piano and Cello*. Though this was a common title for the duo sonata at that time, it could not be more appropriate--the piano never provides a purely accompanimental role, but is rather a strong partner, often taking the lead role.

The first movement, *Allegro non troppo*, a substantial work in its own right, makes a slow climb. Brahms's first theme gradually reaches from the lower depths of the cello's register to the ether of its upper regions. Likewise, it reaches from a place of brooding introversion to a place of expansion, where it achieves the unashamed romanticism that we might expect of a composer writing in his twenties. The

exposition ends with a moment that embraces the vulnerability of tenderness. A gradual transition out of this tenderness brings a fiery climax in the development. The movement, written in a traditional sonata form, returns to the original themes just as we expect. The coda returns to that brief moment of tenderness expressed at the end of the exposition, this time expanding it. This same theme broadens into a songful, arching melody that leaves the movement in a place of repose. The journey from the opening's dark key of e minor to its parallel key of E major enhances this feeling of restfulness.

The *Allegretto quasi Menuetto*, a dance movement in the traditional A-B-A form, puts Brahms's sense of humor on full display. The playful interchange between piano and cello parts, as well as the coy staccato articulation keeps the minuet lighthearted, despite its minor mode. In the trio, a sweeping, legato line evokes a new kind of dance; Brahms abandons the politeness of the minuet for a romantic line reminiscent of an elegant ballroom dance. Both these dances make significant use of the hemiola device, one of Brahms's favorite tricks to keep an audience on their toes; a trick that fools the ear into a false duple meter, rather than triple, even though no such change has actually occurred.

The finale, marked *Allegro*, makes a skilled use of fugal counterpoint in the first theme, a reminder of Brahms's reverence for the music of Bach. A new theme, marked *tranquillo*, introduces a delicate melodic line before the development tumultuously revisits the fugal triplets of the opening, this time descending rather than ascending. The recapitulation returns to the theme and character of the opening, leading us to a coda, marked *Piu Presto*, which brings all the drama and vigor we would expect of a Brahms finale.

## About the Artists

A graduate of the Manhattan School of Music and Boston University, cellist **Isabel Fairbanks** has performed throughout the United States, Canada, and Asia as a chamber and orchestral musician. Currently residing in New York City, she has been heard most recently at the 92nd Street Y and the American Songbook at Lincoln Center, as well as Carnegie Hall, Merkin Hall, Boston's Jordan Hall, Le Poisson Rouge, and at the United Nations Friendship Summit. Festival appearances include the Banff International Masterclasses, Roundtop Music Festival, Tanglewood, Bowdoin International Music Festival, and the Orpheus Institute. Ms. Fairbanks is currently a doctoral student studying with Marcy Rosen at the CUNY Graduate Center. Other primary teachers include David Geber, David Soyer, George Neikrug, Mary Lou Rylands, and Andres Diaz. Ms. Fairbanks has performed with the Circe Ensemble, Philharmonic Orchestra of the Americas, the Salome Chamber Orchestra, the Atlantic Symphony Orchestra, and alongside members of the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. She has been a finalist and prizewinner at the Montpelier Arts Center Competition as part of the Circe Ensemble, the New England Chamber Music Competition, and the Fischhoff Chamber Music Competition. She teaches the 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y and holds a private studio in New York City and Westchester. Ms. Fairbanks plays an Italian cello made in 1910 by Carlo Carletti.

Pianist **Zach Mo** has had a wide-ranging variety of performing and teaching experiences around the globe. His performance engagements have taken him to Europe, Asia, as well as the United States, as a solo recitalist, a chamber musician, a choral accompanist, and an orchestral pianist. An avid collaborator, Zach has served as faculty for music schools, festivals, and competitions, including 92Y School of Music, Point Counterpoint, and Weill Institute of Music and Carnegie Hall. Additionally, he has been an adjunct faculty member of the Fine and Performing Arts Department at Baruch College in New York City.

As a teacher, Zach Mo has instructed students of all ages and skill levels, from pupils of age three becoming newly acquainted with music to advanced pianists preparing for auditions and competitions. He has been invited to China as a guest instructor at the Piano Arts School in his home province of Hunan, teaching students and presenting recitals in the Yueyang city's new and only music school. Zach has been teaching over 10 years and considers education the greatest gift a person can give. He helps students discover and decode the magic and mystery in music while approaching it logically by developing solid practice habits, theoretical understanding, and musical creativity.

Mr. Mo is currently a doctoral candidate at the CUNY Graduate Center, studying under Alan Feinberg. He has received his Master of Music degree from the Manhattan School of Music in 2008 under the tutelage of Daniel Epstein. He has also studied at Northwestern University, the Rimsky-Korsakov St. Petersburg State Conservatory, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he the recipient of the Lucille Kimball Scholarship. Furthermore, he has had the privilege of participating in master classes with such great pianists as Yefim Bronfman, Murray Perahia, and Barry Snyder.

## 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>