

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

May 3rd, 2021 1:00 p.m.

*Baisley Powell Elebash Recital Hall*



## Thapelo Masita, cello Yoon Lee, piano

Cello Suite No. 6 in D Major, BWV 1012 (1717–23)

*Prelude*

*Allemande*

*Courante*

*Sarabande*

*Gavotte I*

*Gavotte II*

*Gigue*

J. S. Bach  
(1685–1750)

### INTERMISSION

Gramata Cellam (1978)

*Fortissimo*

*Pianissimo*

Petris Vasks  
(b. 1946)

Sonata in C Major for Cello and Piano, Op. 119 (1949)

*Andante Grave*

*Moderato*

*Allegro, ma non troppo*

Sergei Prokofiev  
(1891–1953)

## Notes on the Program

Light and dark, night and day, are ever constant binary relationships in our lives which may even seem mundane to us. Even so, these so-called polarities allow us to orient ourselves in our day to day and in so doing, ultimately help understand the journey of our lives by giving us a frame of reference. Bach's 6th cello suite is like a rallying of the troops, a celebration of our highest ideals. Petris Vasks' *Gramata Cellam* for solo cello presents a stark depiction of darkness and light in two contrasting movements. Prokofiev's Sonata for Cello and Piano contextualizes all these experiences in terms of our shared humanity. The work takes us through a path full of tragedy, ridiculous humour and culminates in a triumph of the human spirit, thereby reminding us all of our capacity to do the same.

### Cello Suite No. 6 in D Major

Bach's cello suites hold a special place in the life of every cellist today. We are all introduced to the first three suites in our early years and are gradually introduced to the second half of the book as our technical toolbox expands. While the first three suites are by no means musically simple, they can at the very least be executed by a young and enthusiastic cellist. The last three suites retain and, dare I say, even expand in both musical and technical complexity at the instrument. In the case of the 6th Cello Suite in D Major this fact is quite apparent. Of all the suites, it is the only one that was originally composed for a five string cello. Today, the standard cello has only four strings, A, D, G and C strings. The instrument which Bach had originally composed this work for had an additional high E string. This gave the instrument an even wider range than the standard cello we know today and gave the instrument a sense of virtuosic ease commonly associated with violin. Nowadays most of us perform this work on our standard four-string instruments. In so doing, we trade the relative ease that comes with an additional string for convenience.

The suite consists of the standard movements we have come to expect in this form. It begins with a forward driven *Prelude* in perpetual motion which expresses a sense of joy and worship. The *Allemande* is lyrical and weightless. It is followed by a rapid and exciting *Courante*. The *Sarabande* forms the centerpiece of the work. A mammoth task to execute given all the sonorous chords but a privilege to play indeed. Two wonderful *Gavottes* follow, the first is more sophisticated - perhaps like a person from the city - and the second more folk-like. The work ends with a rollicking *Gigue*.

### Gramata Cellam

What makes this work so compelling is how radically opposing its two movements are from one another and from any other work in the solo cello repertoire. The composer describes the work as follows: *Gramata Cellam consists of two contrasting sections. The first, extremely vigorous section "fortissimo" (Allegro, free sonata form) works through raw and gressive musical materin in an unbroken state of tension, ultimately reaching a despairing climax. The second part "pianissimo" begins in a free, quasi improvisational style giving way to an "Andante Cantabile" with a long extensive melody over a pedal point. The movement culminates very softly in a reprise of the musical events as a reminiscence of its beginnings.*

The first movement is harmonically held together using octatonic scales that act as key areas in what the composer has described as an “Allegro, free sonata form”. These scales pose a unique technical challenge for the performer. The second movement begins with trills on artificial harmonics in the “improvised section” and requires the cellist to sing in the “Andante Cantabile”. This was unique to this work at the time. The coexistence of the cellist's voice, a melodic line and the sustained pedal tone creates a sense of mystical otherworldliness.

### **Sonata in C Major for Cello and Piano, Op. 119**

Completed in 1949, Prokofiev's Sonata for Cello and Piano is a work that has become a staple in the repertoire for this instrumentation. Similar to many other works for cello composed in 20th century, this work was inspired by the playing of virtuoso cellist Mstislav Rostropovich whose influence is solidly built into much of the piece. The first movement is an *Andante Grave* which opens with the solo voice of the cello in the lowest register. The cello is joined and affirmed by the piano in a style reminiscent of music in the Russian Orthodox choral tradition. The work has a lovely second theme which contrasts the dark sonorities of the opening. The music is expressive throughout and is balanced by short interludes of quick music. The coda is a fiery deception of death and destruction which is ultimately cooled down by trills on natural harmonics that sound like church bells in the distance. Next is a playful *Scherzo and Trio* movement marked *Moderato*. Visualize yourself on a night out at the circus with acts being introduced one at a time and all together erupting into a big celebration which comes to a quiet close by the end of the night. The movement is characterised by instrumental acrobatics which bring this circus atmosphere to life. The final movement of the work is both lyrical and exuberant. The music expresses irony with unusual beat displacements and real melodrama as well. It brings the Sonata to an end with a big statement of national pride and dignity.

### **About the Artists**

A pianist, educator, and entrepreneur, **Yoon Lee** is the Special Prize winner of the Anton G. Rubinstein International Piano Competition. Yoon Lee is a member of faculty of SUNY Purchase College and Heifetz International Music Institute, as well as a staff pianist of The Juilliard School. Her performance of Beethoven has been described as “equal to Beethoven's virtuosic demands” by *New York Concert Review*. As an international concert pianist, she has been on the stages of Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Château de Fontainebleau, Hamarikyu Asahi Hall, and Seoul Arts Center, and featured on WQXR and KBS. As a collaborative pianist, Yoon has collaborated with members of the Juilliard String Quartet, Borromeo String Quartet, Orion String Quartet, Brooklyn Rider, Elmar Oliveira, Catherine Cho, and Laurie Smukler. Yoon Lee has been the pianist for master classes by Itzhak Perlman, Leonidas Kavakos, Steven Isserlis, Frans Helmerson, and David Geringas. Yoon has taught piano and chamber music at Kneisel Hall ACMI, Manhattan School of Music Precollege and served as a judge of Manhattan School of Music Concerto Competition and Chamber Music Competition, YMF by the Schubert Club, and NFMC Junior Music Festival. Yoon received Doctor of Musical Arts from Manhattan School of Music and a Graduate Diploma from The Juilliard School. She is an Artistic Director of Noree Chamber Soloists, a chamber ensemble she founded in 2017.

**Thapelo Masita** uses his music to help further the arts in his home country of South Africa. He earned a Bachelor of Music in cello performance from the Eastman School of Music in 2017 and a Master of Music degree from the Juilliard School in 2019.

Through a faculty position at the Opportunity Music Project and a fellowship in the Music Advancement Program – a Juilliard Sponsored Community Engagement Initiative, Masita has been able to serve young people from underrepresented communities.

Masita is a founding member of the Uhuru String Quartet, which seeks through artistic collaborations and performance to connect and empower women who have experienced domestic violence and homelessness. The Quartet has commissioned and performed a new quartet by Japanese-American composer Sato Matsui, and has collaborated on several occasions with Pulitzer Prize winning composer Caroline Shaw.

Masita is the founder and executive director of the Bokamoso International Chamber Music Festival and Workshop in South Africa, which aims to share the joys of music with local communities while providing high level training to promising youths from around the country.

Thapelo is pursuing a Doctor of Musical Arts Degree at CUNY Graduate Center where he works with Julia Lichten. He performs on a cello made by Oded Kishony, on generous loan to him by the Virtu Foundation.

## 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>