

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

April 17, 2023 6:00 p.m.

*Baisley Powell Elebash Recital Hall*



## Thapelo Masita, cello Fifi Zhang, piano

Silent Woods, Op. 68, No. 5, B. 173 (1884)

Antonín Dvořák  
(1841–1904)

Evening Prayer (2021)

Alexander F. Johnson  
(b. 1968)

*Pohádka* (“Fairy Tale”), Op.16 (1910/1923)

*Con moto*

*Con moto*

*Allegro*

Leoš Janáček  
(1854–1928)

Soweto Cello Riffs (2020)

Bongani Ndodana-Breen  
(b. 1975)

### INTERMISSION

Five Pieces in Folk Style, Op. 102 (1849)

*Mit Humor*

*Langsam*

*Nicht Schnell, mit viel Ton zu spielen*

*Nich zu rasch*

*Stark und markiert*

Robert Schumann  
(1810–56)

This recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the D.M.A. degree.  
Please switch off your cell phones and refrain from taking flash pictures.

Lamentations (Black/Folk Song Suite) (1973)

*Fuguing Tune*

*Plaintive*

*Calvary Ostinato*

*Perpetual Motion*

Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson

(1932–2004)

## Notes on the Program

**Antonín Dvořák, *Silent Woods*, Op. 68, No.5, B.173**

**Antonín Dvořák** is known for his chamber music and glorious symphonies. Having lived as an immigrant in the United States, he longed for his homeland - its forests and its people. He admired and found great inspiration in the music of black Americans, whose influence is palpable throughout his oeuvre. In *Silent Woods*, the composer paints a loving picture of his homeland in homage to its natural landscapes and culture.

**Alexander F. Johnson, *Evening Prayer***

*Evening Prayer* is a hauntingly beautiful work. The central theme is introduced with a high and fragile passage in the cello. Once the piano joins, the two instruments move through lyrical utterances that become increasingly desperate. The tension is contrasted by glassy tones staged in a desolate context. Hope returns when fragments of the main theme return in the cello accompanied by undulating 8ths notes. The fragmented thematic material is then put back together and presented fully in the piano creating a sense of completion. This work was originally commissioned for the UNISA International String Competition 2022 in South Africa.

**Leoš Janáček, *Pohádka* (Fairy Tale), Op. 16**

Loosely translated as “fairy tale,” *Pohádka* is **Janáček’s** only chamber music work for cello and piano. The work has had several revisions since Janáček first published it in 1910. The version performed today is a three-movement set published in 1923. These years were a challenging time for the composer as he had just lost his daughter, Olga. Janáček was an avid lover of Russian culture and had a special fondness for Russian literature. His *Pohádka* draws its inspiration from “The Tale of Tsar Berendyey” by the Russian poet Vasily Zhukovsky (1783-1852). An abstract from the story tells of a king who had been happily married for years but had no children. Aggrieved by this, he decides to leave his palace and wife, to go on an 8-month voyage in his kingdom. When he returns, he finds that his wife has given birth to a child. The composer combines the simplicity of this happy ending with dark harmonies and distant keys throughout the three movements of this work. He uses themes in the Russian style, all of which are his original creations.

## **Bongani Ndodana-Breen, *Soweto Cello Riffs***

**Dr. Bongani Ndodana-Breen** is one of the most exciting composers of written music to come out of South Africa whose musical expression is authentically African. *Soweto Cello Riffs* takes inspiration from South African pop music and the solo suites of J.S. Bach and jazz improvisation. The main material of the work is heroic and virtuosic. A gentle lyrical middle section brings relief before the virtuosic material returns and soon thereafter ending in a triumphant C major. This work was originally commissioned by German cellist Benedict Klöckner in 2020.

## **Robert Schumann, *Fünf Stücke Im Volkston* (Five Pieces in Folk Style)**

**Schumann's *Five Pieces in Folk Style*** is one of the most widely performed works by cellists today and for good reason. The work's movements combine simple forms (ABA' in each movement) with vivid characters and colorful harmony. The first movement titled "Vanitas Vanitatum" is an off-kilter humorous work which is likely a depiction of the one-legged soldier Goethe's poem of the same name. The second piece is a calm lullaby in F major. The third movement introduces a mysterious lyrical theme which seems to have no fixed ending evoking the ancient "musical round". This section is contrasted by a glorious middle-section in D major before yielding to the return of the opening theme. In the fourth movement is a typical march with a lyrical middle section. A muscular final movement brings the work to a virtuosic end.

## **Coleridge Taylor-Perkinson, *Lamentations* (Black/Folk Song Suite)**

**Coleridge Taylor Perkinson's *Lamentations Suite*** for solo cello is one of the most important American contributions to the solo cello literature of the 20th century. Using several aspects of African American spirituals, Perkinson's work takes inspiration from the Blues and Baroque learned style in the first movement "Fuguing Tune," theater songs of yore in the second movement "Song Form" and even plucking and drone techniques usually attributed to the banjo and west African plucked instruments in "Calvary Ostinato" and "Perpetual Motion" - movements 3 and 4 respectively. Described by the composer as "a reflection and statement of a people's crying out," *Lamentations Suite* tells the triumphant story of black ingenuity and imagination in music.

## About the Artists

**Thapelo Masita** uses his music to help amplify the visibility of the artists in his home country of South Africa. Masita was recently invited to performed in recital for MetLiveArts at The Met Cloisters featuring Bach's First Cello suite in conversation with his own arrangements of Negro spirituals, South African hymns and the work of Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson. His playing was described as "assured, his face aspiration[al], imploring" ([Bachtrack.com](https://bachtrack.com)). Masita is a 1st prize winner of the New York division of the National Association for Negro Musicians String Competition 2023, 3rd prize winner of the Patricia Eaton Memorial String Competition 2023 and received 2nd prize at the 2021 UNISA National String Competition which led to solo engagements with the Johannesburg Philharmonic Orchestra. He is a frequent guest musician with Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, Harlem Chamber Players and the Orchestra of St. Luke's. Masita has collaborated with world-class artists such as Agustin Hadelich, Damien Sneed, Anna Clyne and Pulitzer Prize winner Caroline Shaw among others. He is a sought-after chamber musician and was a founding member of the Uhuru String Quartet, which empowered women who are survivors of domestic abuse and homelessness through artistic collaborations and performance. He is a graduate of the Eastman School of Music, The Juilliard School, and is in pursuit of 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.

Pianist **Fifi Zhang** made her debut with the Washington Metropolitan Philharmonic at age 11, playing the Saint-Saens G minor Concerto, and has since performed in venues such as Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Miller Theatre, and concert halls throughout Canada, Finland, Spain, Korea, and Poland. She also has a keen interest in performing contemporary music, having worked with SEM Ensemble, NewMusicMannes, and premiered numerous solo and chamber works by living composers. An alumnus of the Columbia-Juilliard Exchange, Fifi holds a BA in History from Columbia University and an MM in Piano Performance from Juilliard. Former teachers include Julian Martin, Matti Raekallio, Pavlina Dokovska, and Ursula Oppens. She is currently a fourth-year doctoral candidate at CUNY Graduate Center where she is working on a critical examination of classical music performance practice through a phenomenological lens.