

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

March 22, 2024 6:00 p.m.

Baisley Powell Elebash Recital Hall



Cheng “Allen” Liang, cello Po-Wei Ger, piano

Rhapsody No. 1 for Cello and Piano, Sz. 88 (1929) Béla Bartók
(1881–1945)
* arr. from the violin and piano version by Béla Bartók

Prima parte (Lassú)

Seconda parte (Fris)

Three Romances for Oboe and Piano, Op. 94 (1849) Robert Schumann
(1810–56)
*arr. for cello and piano by Valter Dešpalj

Nicht schnell

Einfach, innig

Nicht schnell

Sonata for Solo Violin in D Minor “Ballade,” Op. 27, No. 3 (1923) Eugène Ysaÿe
(1858–1931)
*arr. for solo cello by Allen Liang

INTERMISSION

Three Pieces for Solo Cello (2024)**world premiere* Allen Liang
(b. 1999)
Prelude

Chant

Capriccio

Sonata for Cello and Piano in G Minor, Op. 65 (1845-7) Frédéric Chopin
(1810–49)
Allegro moderato

Scherzo

Largo

Finale. Allegro

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.

Notes on the Program

Béla Bartók, Rhapsody No. 1, Sz. 88 (1929)

Hungarian composer and ethnomusicologist Béla Bartók (1881-1945) composed the two Rhapsodies for Violin and Piano in 1928 and dedicated them respectively to Hungarian violinists Joseph Szigeti and Zoltán Székely. Bartók then arranged the first rhapsody for cello in 1929, although not much documentation reveals his process or inspiration for this arrangement. In the same year, he also made an arrangement for solo violin and orchestra.

Bartók arranged the cello version to be largely loyal to the violin version. However, keeping the original keys led to many alterations in the cello part. The cello part at times switch octaves, omits a note in an original double-stop, or plays the left hand of the piano while the piano plays the violin melody. Despite the changes, the virtuosity of the piece stays intact with the wide register, large leaps, and the many double-stops that survive in this version.

While Bartók collected and documented many folk songs, which greatly contributed to the development of ethnomusicology, this Rhapsody No. 1 features melodies played on the fiddle rather than sung. More interestingly, out of the six melodies he quotes, only one of them is Hungarian, while the remaining ones are Romanian tunes he collected during 1912-1914 from Transylvanian fiddlers. Perhaps because Bartók adapted these Romanian tunes to Hungarian characteristics, he was not willing to specify the region of origin for these tunes, but only indicated that the Rhapsody used Hungarian and Romanian Tunes.

Despite Bartók's reluctance in specifying the tunes, scholars have identified each of the six melodies from his notes: "De Ciuit," "Árvátfalvi kesergő," "Judecata," "Crucea," "Pre Loc," and "Cuișdeanca" (listed in the order they appear). The Rhapsody consists of two movements, the slower *lassú* and the faster, showy *friss*, which are the two parts that constitute a *verbunkos*, a recruiting dance that grew out of its original military functions. The *lassú* features a characteristic dotted rhythm manifested in the cello opening of the "De Ciuit" melody in the Lydian mode. After the opening section, the lyrical "Árvátfalvi kesergő" (lament from Árvátfalvi) appears next and remains the only Hungarian tune in the Rhapsody. The opening theme then comes back in the subdominant, making the *lassú* a movement in the ternary (ABA) form. The rest of the melodies appear in the *friss* in chain form, where each tune appears in succession. The virtuosity in this fast movement makes the Rhapsody stand out from Bartók's other compositions, many of which remain as faithful as possible to the source material.

Throughout the Rhapsody, the piano frequently imitates characteristics of the cimbalom, an Eastern European instrument that is often used to symbolize "Gypsy" music. This Romani reference along with the use of Hungarian and Romanian music perhaps reflect his concept of the "brotherhood of peoples," an idealism where through the blending of these cultural forces, the different peoples live harmoniously in his music.

Robert Schumann, Three Romances for Oboe and Piano, Op. 94, arr. Valter Dešpalj (1849)

Robert Schumann (1810-1856) composed the Three Romances for Oboe and Piano, Op. 94, for his wife Clara Schumann as a Christmas present in December 1849, the most prolific year in his life. Despite Robert Schumann's deteriorating mental health, he was able to produce some of the most lyrical and touching melodies in the tonal repertoire in these character pieces. These qualities are typical of the Romance genre popular in Germany in the 19th century, whose naive and touching melodies set itself apart from its closely-related yet dramatic Ballade.

Romances, while lyrical, does not typically follow or present a descriptive narrative. Despite the lack of concrete representation, the three Romances in Schumann's Op. 94 illustrate a fairytale-like sound world. Fantasies, sorrows, and tenderness permeate the three movements, all of which conform to the ABA form that features a contrasting middle section. The outer movements begin in A minor, while the middle movement starts in A major, presenting yet another ABA form through a broader perspective. Interestingly, the tonality of A major/minor also appears in every movement in the rest of Schumann's instrumental miniatures, namely the *Fantasiestücke* for Clarinet and Piano, Op. 73, and the Five Folk Pieces for Cello and Piano, Op. 102. The absence of accidentals in the key signature of A minor perhaps contributes to the simplicity that Schumann delineates in these miniature pieces.

Although these Romances are not virtuosic, they exhibit other technical challenges for the oboe, especially in endurance. The second movement does not have a single rest until the very end, and although the outer movements provide opportunities for breathing, the challenge to capture the nuances in a single sound world persists. Despite the subtle difficulty, the loveliness of these Romances has prompted numerous arrangements for the violin, the clarinet, and in the case of this program, the cello.

Eugène Ysaÿe, Sonata for Solo Violin in D minor "Ballade," Op. 27, No. 3, arr. Allen Liang (1923)

Belgian violinist, composer, and conductor Eugène Ysaÿe (1858-1931) wrote a set of six violin sonatas in July 1923, after being inspired by Joseph Szigeti's performance of Bach's Violin Sonata No. 1 in G minor. Ysaÿe dedicated each of the six sonatas to his contemporary violinists, and this third sonata was dedicated to George Enescu. As one of the most influential violinists of the Franco-Belgian school, Ysaÿe incorporates demanding techniques into each sonata while asking that musical expression should always be the highest goal, and such challenge and musicality have brought the six sonatas to their unshakable status today in the solo violin repertoire.

Like the rest of Ysaÿe's sonatas, the "Ballade" exhibits a masterful range of technical brilliance on the violin, while the counterpoint and harmony pay tribute to Bach's violin sonatas and partitas. The "Ballade" is a single-movement work that starts in a recitative manner, beginning in a slow, whole-tone ascending scale in double stops that sets up the atmosphere of the movement. The recitative develops into a 5/4 section that gradually increases in dynamic and tempo, finally leading into the 3/8 section marked *Allegro in tempo giusto e conbravura*.

The main theme in the *Allegro* features an agitated dotted rhythm as well as double and triple stops, while the chromatic contour in the top voice transforms into different shapes in the calm, flowing middle passage with relentless 32nd notes. Finally, the main theme reappears just before the coda, where the 32nd notes and string crossings propel the music unyieldingly and brilliantly to the end.

Arranging this violin masterpiece to be playable on the cello was without a doubt difficult, for I wanted to keep the original D minor for the cello. Since Ysaÿe is exalted as one of the best violinists, his violin writing fits the characteristics and flair of the instrument, which is difficult to translate onto the cello. Finding apt fingerings and hand positions was the most challenging part in the process, since the original writing explores the high register of the violin, and the lack of the E string on the cello, whose string lengths measure about twice as long as violin strings, contributes greatly to this difficulty. Despite minor respellings of certain chords and omission of a handful of notes, I eventually succeeded in maintaining the integrity of the original version. I hope this arrangement can demonstrate the virtuosic competence

of the cello while maintaining the singing quality that draws people toward this beautiful and talented instrument.

Allen Liang, Three Pieces for Solo Cello (2024)

As a cellist, I enjoy the opportunity to explore works of great composers. However, in almost every encounter of a musical work, I need to interpret the intention of a composer through the written musical notation. Despite the fun in the deciphering, it is often a difficult task to know what composers were thinking when they wrote the music down. This very reason, along with the capacity of the musical form to freely create expressions, inspired me to compose.

I composed the Three Pieces for Solo Cello from February to early March of the current year. The movements were composed in sequence. The short *Prelude* features oscillating broken chords, much like a Bach prelude, although I only noticed the similarity after this movement was finalized. The constant yet free eighth notes travel across the wide range of the cello. After two interruptions by groups of 16th notes, the theme emerges in the lowest register of the cello and finally ascends into harmonics.

The second piece, *Chant*, consists of harmonics and dwells in the Dorian mode before interrupted by unusually wide chromatic intervals. The end of this movement restates the simple rhythmic pattern of the opening tune, while the melodic line plays precisely in retrograde, providing an eerie atmosphere that fades into silence.

Coming out of silence, the *Capriccio* is a through-composed movement, as suggested by the title, and recycles motifs from previous movements, such as broken chords and harmonics. The propulsive, swingy rhythm takes up the first portion of this movement, which then dives into a perpetual motion immersed in lush tonality that brings the piece to the end.

Frédéric Chopin, Sonata for Cello and Piano in G minor, Op. 65 (1845-7)

As a pillar in the piano literature, Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849) composed only a few chamber works outside the piano, which is nonetheless present in all of these works. The cello, besides voice, was the instrument he frequented the most outside the realm of piano, appearing in the *Introduction and Polonaise Brillante*, the Piano Trio in G minor, and the Sonata for Cello and Piano in G minor, Op. 65.

Chopin only composed four works titled Sonata in his lifetime. Three are for the piano (Sonata No. 1 is rarely performed), and the last one is for cello and piano. As the last piece published during Chopin's lifetime, this Sonata for Cello and Piano was composed in 1845-1847 during a tumultuous time for the composer. While suffering from illness, Chopin was experiencing the end of his relationship with George Sand and unhappy incidents related to the engagement of Sand's daughter. One year before his death in 1849, he performed the last three movements of this Sonata with cellist Auguste Franchomme, the dedicatee of the work, at Salle Pleyel in France. This concert became his final public performance.

According to Chopin's student Camille O'Meara, Chopin omitted the first movement in this performance because of the criticism he received from his music circle. Even Chopin himself felt ambivalent toward this work, which is embodied in a letter he wrote to his family in 1846: "Sometimes I am satisfied with my sonata with violoncello and at other times I am not. I throw it into a corner only to gather it up again later."

One can perhaps understand the dilemma he experienced through a listening of this now-exalted chamber work. A sense of regret, helplessness, and vulnerability occurs through the intricate counterpoint between the cello and the piano. His writing reveals complicated emotions such as agitation, frustration, and anger, qualities that are seldom found in his repertoire. These emotions are nevertheless accompanied by the noble and sentimental quality of his exquisite *bel canto* style. In the quietest areas, such as the second theme of the first movement and the entire third movement, his distinct lyricism returns in a simple yet heartbreaking manner. Although these qualities seem to denote the declining of his life, the coda of the final movement brings an exuberant and hopeful vigor to conclude the prevalingly melancholic work in an optimistic fashion that looks back to his earlier vital style of writing.

About the Artists

Taiwanese cellist **Cheng “Allen” Liang** has established a vibrant musical career in Taiwan and the United States, captivating audiences as a soloist, chamber musician, and orchestral player. In addition to performing, his passion for Western Art Music delves into the realms of composition and arrangement.

At the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival, Allen premiered *The Heart is Deeper than the Ocean* by Silkroad Ensemble member Angel Lam, performed alongside Pipa virtuoso Wu Man and pianist Melvin Chen. Additionally, Allen has demonstrated his compositional prowess through works such as his Suite for Cello and Piano (2023), Three Pieces for Solo Cello (2024), and arrangements for 12 cellos, including Bruch’s *Kol Nidrei*, Dvorak’s *Silent Woods*, and Debussy’s *La Mer*.

Allen has performed the Dvorak Cello Concerto in B minor with the Eastman Philharmonia and the Boccherini Cello Concerto in G major, G. 480 with the Colburn Music Academy Virtuosi Orchestra. As a versatile musician in various musical styles, he was named one of the three finalists in the Lillian and Maurice Barbash J.S. Bach String Competition in 2022. As an orchestral cellist, he plays in the cello section of the New Haven Symphony Orchestra and the Taiwan Connection Chamber Orchestra.

As a dedicated chamber musician, Allen earned the bronze medal in the Junior Division of the Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition as a member of the Aurielle Quartet. He has refined his chamber music skills at prestigious festivals, including the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival, Taos School of Music, Heifetz International Music Institute, Music@Menlo, Taipei Music Academy & Festival, Sarasota Music Festival, Meadowmount School of Music, and Bowdoin International Music Festival. Having worked with esteemed members of the Borromeo, Brentano, Calidore, Dover, Emerson, Shanghai, St. Lawrence, and Ying Quartets, he is set to attend the International Program of Music@Menlo this summer as one of the 11 participants.

A two-time recipient of the Chimei Arts Award, Allen is currently pursuing his DMA at the CUNY Graduate Center under the tutelage of Mark Steinberg. He holds a master’s degree from the Yale School of Music, where he studied with Paul Watkins, and a Bachelor’s degree from the Eastman School of Music under the mentorship of Steven Doane and Rosemary Elliott, following studies with Clive Greensmith at the Colburn Academy. Allen graduated from the Eastman School of Music in 2021 with High Distinction, a Performer’s Certificate, and a minor in Linguistics, where he extends his curiosity beyond music.

Born on December 6th, 1995, pianist **Po-Wei Ger** graduated from the Yale School of Music in 2021 with a degree in Master of Musical Arts under the guidance of Dr. Melvin Chen. He is currently pursuing his Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Manhattan School of Music under the guidance of Dr. Solomon Mikowsky.

Po-Wei began studying piano with Ms. Jia-Li Shu at the age of seven. At the age of ten, he further continued his study with Dr. Ming-Hui Lin, who serves on the piano faculty of the National Taiwan Normal University. Po-Wei has been to the Annual Music Festival at Walnut Hill in 2009 and 2011. In 2012, he was selected to perform in the prizewinner concert of the Mozarteum University Summer Academy as part of the Salzburg Festival. During his Bachelor of Music degree at the Manhattan School of Music, where he studied with Dr. Solomon Mikowsky, Po-Wei collaborated with the Cuban National Symphony Orchestra in 2015 and 2016. Additionally, he was a prizewinner of the Panama International Piano Competition in 2016 and 2018. In April 2021, Po-Wei won the 2nd Prize, Chamber Music Prize, as well as the Audience Prize of the Premio Jaén Competition in Spain.

An avid chamber musician, Po-Wei has participated in the masterclass of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center under the guidance of Gilbert Kalish. Po-Wei and his chamber partners have won the Lillian Fuchs Chamber Music Competition at the Manhattan School of Music and have performed in the Vista Chamber Music Series of Yale School of Music. Po-Wei and his friends, Chao-Chih Chen and Tzu-Wei Huang, formed the clarinet trio – Trio Astralis, and have won the Youth Chamber Music Program of the Eslite Bookstore, the leading bookstore chain in Taiwan. Having attend the 2019 Norfolk Chamber Music Festival as one of the three pianists, Po-Wei further attended the Taos School of Music in New Mexico in summer 2021. In summer 2022, he made a second appearance at the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival. He also performed at the YellowBarn music festival in Putney, Vermont in the summer of 2023, where he is set to return in 2024.

As a teaching artist, Po-Wei has given secondary piano lessons to music-major students at the Yale School of Music from 2018 to 2020. He has worked with children and adults whose piano proficiency ranges from complete beginner to conservatory-level piano majors. He currently serves as a piano instructor at the Manhattan School of Music, where he teaches required/elective piano in addition to pursuing his doctoral studies.