



**Zuill Bailey, cello**  
**Victor Santiago Asunción, piano**

**April 29, 2023**

**PROGRAM NOTES**

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*Support for the program notes is generously provided by Roberta Viviano.*

**LUIGI BOCCHERINI**

(LUCCA, 1743–MADRID, 1805)

**Sonata No. 2 in C major for Cello and Piano (1772, arr. 1966)**

*Arranged by Gregor Piatigorsky and Stephen Kates*

The great cellist Gregor Piatigorsky (discussed in more depth below) was influential in reviving early Classical composer Luigi Boccherini's cello sonatas, unearthing little-known compositions and even encouraging his mother-in-law, Baroness Germaine de Rothschild, to write a meticulously researched biography of Boccherini, first published in French in 1962. Piatigorsky's student, Stephen Kates, states that Piatigorsky advised him to play the Sonata in C in the 1966 Tchaikovsky Competition, but the arrangement and recording that Piatigorsky had made in collaboration with his pianist was missing and his pianist had died. Kates transcribed Piatigorsky's recollection of the cello part and worked with several pianists on creating a new piano part. Kates described the final product as "ninety percent Piatigorsky and ten percent Boccherini," but his performance of the piece charmed the jury, who had no idea what it was, and Kates was awarded a silver medal in the competition, a spectacular feat for an American performer during the Cold War.

**GASPAR CASSADÓ**

(BARCELONA, 1897–MADRID, 1966)

**Suite for Solo Cello (1926)**

As a precocious nine-year-old, Spanish cellist Gaspar Cassadó was invited by Pablo Casals to study with him in Paris. Casals became Cassadó's most important mentor and "spiritual father," and encouraged his young

pupil to study composition with Manuel de Falla and Maurice Ravel. Cassadó's compositional output consists of approximately sixty pieces, including a solo cello concerto, many pieces for cello and piano, three string quartets, a piano trio, and several works for solo guitar. He was inspired to compose a cello suite after hearing Casals perform J.S. Bach's Cello Suites in recital, as at that time they were regarded as teaching pieces and not featured on concert programs. In the early 1930s, Cassadó emerged as an internationally celebrated virtuoso and decided to focus on performance, but faced scrutiny from Casals and the press for continuing to perform in fascist Spain, Germany, and Italy.

Cassadó's suite begins with an improvisatory-style prelude, highlighting the cello's full range, followed by the zarabanda, a Spanish dance. Two unexpected musical quotations from twentieth-century compositions arise in this movement: the flowing flute solo from Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé* is highly audible while a passage from Zoltan Kodály's Cello Sonata may go unnoticed by those not intimate with the piece. The second movement features a sardana, a Catalonian circle dance, beginning in 6/8 meter with a delicate introduction. A shift to 2/4 meter and open fifths in the cello marks the start of the section of the dance where the dancers raise their arms and perform a sequence of steps and small jumps. The suite's concluding movement pairs a lyrical intermezzo with an exciting jota dance, bursting with flamenco gestures and syncopated accent patterns.

## **GREGOR PIATIGORSKY**

(DNIPRO, UKRAINE, 1903–LOS ANGELES, 1976)

### **Variations on a Paganini Theme for Cello and Piano (1946)**

Gregor Piatigorsky was one of the twentieth-century's most talented and captivating cellists, as well as an acclaimed pedagogue who taught at the Curtis Institute of Music and the University of Southern California. Piatigorsky had a flair for performing dramatic pieces, like Richard Strauss's *Don Quixote*, for which the composer praised him, declaring that "Now I've heard my Don Quixote as I imagined him." Virtuosity and dramatic portrayals abound in his *Variations on a Paganini Theme*, which he originally composed for cello and orchestra in 1946. Based on Paganini's Caprice No. 24, but conceptually similar to Edward Elgar's *Enigma Variations*, Piatigorsky portrays a specific musician friend or colleague in each movement. According to Piatigorsky's student, Denis Brott, these are caricatures of Pablo Casals, Paul Hindemith, Raya Garbousova, Erika Morini, Felix Salmond, Joseph Szigeti, Yehudi Menuhin, Nathan Milstein, Fritz Kreisler, Piatigorsky himself, Gaspar Cassadó, Mischa Elman, Ennio Bolognini, Jascha Heifetz, and Vladimir Horowitz.

## **SERGEI RACHMANINOFF**

(ONEG, RUSSIA, 1873–BEVERLY HILLS, CA, 1943)

### **Sonata in G minor for Cello and Piano (1901)**

Sergei Rachmaninoff composed his Second Piano Concerto and Cello Sonata after emerging from the darkness of a personal crisis. The failure of his First Symphony resulted in the composer suffering a nervous breakdown, and seeking out Dr. Nikolai Dahl, a psychoanalytic clinician who employed hypnotherapy to ease Rachmaninoff's anxieties. Rachmaninoff dedicated his Second Piano Concerto to Dr. Dahl and was rejuvenated by the success, later attesting that "Dr. Dahl's treatment strengthened my nervous system to a miraculous degree... The joy of creating lasted the next two years." Rachmaninoff then set to work on the Cello Sonata, which was composed for Anatoly Brandukov and premiered in Moscow on December 2, 1901, with the composer at the piano. Similar to chamber works by Johannes Brahms, Rachmaninoff created a difficult piano part that highlights important musical material in soloistic passages and propels the composition forward.

The mysterious slow introduction features the cello playing several phrases that emphasize an ascending semitone (minor 2<sup>nd</sup>) interval, immediately establishing this as the unifying motive in the lengthy sonata form movement. Detached piano chords introduce the sonata's form exposition section after which the cello presents several broad phrases that Rachmaninoff interweaves with the piano, which both echoes the cello and asserts its independence through the repetition of the detached block chords. The tempo changes to Moderato for a lovely solo piano interlude, which Rachmaninoff extends into a lyrical duet to close out the exposition. The development section emphasizes the cello's ascending semitone motive from the introduction, now building tension through faster pacing, dispersing the motive through the cello's full register, and pizzicato articulation. Another passage for solo piano, again emphasizing the detached chords, leads into the recapitulation.

The scherzo begins with an ominous motive, outlining a descending C minor scale, in the bass line of the piano part. Rachmaninoff transforms this motive through traditional procedures, such as inversion and retrograde, so it takes on new guises as the movement progresses and Rachmaninoff modulates into major key areas. The slow movement, a ternary ABA form, begins placidly with solo piano in the key of E-flat major. Rachmaninoff introduces more modernistic harmonies in this movement, including chords with added fourths, often contributing to the flowing and unhurried quality. The solo piano's bravura-style introduction in the key of G major launches us into Rachmaninoff's exhilarating finale. The cello enters with an energizing melody that soars into the upper register and emphasizes heroic

triplets. The momentum slowly dissipates as the music gradually transitions into a beautiful song in the key of D major. Rachmaninoff's treatment of sonata form in this piece is unconventional as both of the outer movements feature contrasting tempos and pianistic figurations for the second thematic group to produce extremely lyrical sections within what is typically a fast sonata-allegro formal framework. The descending scale motive from the scherzo movement reappears at the start of the development section, now in the key of D minor. Rachmaninoff's signature dense textures and use of impassioned chromatic harmonies grows throughout the beginning of the long ninety-nine measure development section, briefly subsiding for a quiet modulatory exploration prior to landing on the dominant. The recapitulation restates the opening themes in G major as expected, after which Rachmaninoff drifts into a dreamy coda, the cello rhapsodizing over a low G pedal tone in the piano. The final section of the coda, marked *Vivace*, reintroduces the triplet rhythms from the beginning of the movement and provides a rousing conclusion to this well-crafted composition.

*Program Notes* © Dr. Jessica Payette, Associate Professor of Music, Oakland University.

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