



Beethoven 250 Celebration
Amit Peled, cello and Noreen Cassidy-Polera, piano
Sunday, November 15 and Thursday, November 19, 2020 7:00 pm PST

Welcome to Season 38!

We're coming to you virtually this fall due to the restrictions imposed by our county and state regulations, as well as out of concern for the safety and health of all our patrons, musicians, and staff. While we miss seeing you in person and sharing the wonderfully warm atmosphere of our beloved Kohl Mansion, this season affords us new opportunities, and a chance to see and hear our superb performers in their own home towns. We're thrilled to be able to bring you these programs, short and compact for easy viewing in the comfort of your living rooms. You will hear lively introductions by our resident musicologist, Kai Christiansen, as well as informal conversations with the musicians that bring us close and give us a glimpse of who they are outside the concert hall.

The world is now our stage! Friends and family members near and far who could not join you at the Kohl Mansion may now sign up online at www.musicatkohl.org and become part of our extended concert family. We hope you'll invite them to experience Music at Kohl Online!

Now more than ever, great music brings us comfort and offers us a welcome respite from the challenges of our daily lives. Thank you for joining us for this new adventure in chamber music.

Zerlina Chen Hayes
President

Patricia Kristof Moy
Executive Director

Tickets and information: 650.762.1130 ~ www.musicatkohl.org

Music at Kohl Mansion

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A Beethoven Celebration

Amit Peled, *cello*

Noreen Cassidy-Polera, *piano*

Program

Cello Sonata No. 3 in A Major, Op. 69

Allegro, ma non tanto

Scherzo. Allegro molto - Trio

Adagio cantabile – Allegro vivace

Ludwig van Beethoven

Cello Sonata No. 4 in C Major, Op. 102, No. 1, “Free Sonata”

Andante - Allegro vivace

Adagio - Tempo d'Andante - Allegro vivace

Ludwig van Beethoven

Music at Kohl Mansion is presented in collaboration with
Mercy High School, Burlingame – Natalie Cirigliano Brosnan, Head of School.

Program Notes

A Beethoven Celebration: The Cello Sonatas

December 2020 marks the 250th anniversary of Beethoven’s birth and effulgent celebrations abound. Among the symphonies, concertos, chamber music and piano sonatas (to name only the most obvious), there is ample, if not endless, music to explore: music not just for a year, but also for a lifetime. For chamber music lovers in particular, nearly every year features Beethoven’s extraordinary output comprising ensembles from three to eight players centering most especially on his unparalleled “cycle” for string quartet. But Beethoven also wrote numerous “duo sonatas” (for featured instrument and piano) including a rich trove of ten violin sonatas and a smaller but arguably deeper set of cello sonatas. The five cello sonatas span the three traditionally named periods of Beethoven’s creativity (early, middle and late) thereby representing, in a single microcosm, the totality of his musical life. Unknown to many, the last cello sonatas inaugurate Beethoven’s late period. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Beethoven’s early cello sonatas constitute an important

milestone in themselves as they are the first sonatas for cello and piano where both parts are completely written out, the essential beginnings of the Classical repertoire. The special program tonight focuses on two of his most celebrated cello sonatas representing the peak of his middle, “heroic” period and the dawn of his final, transcendent phase.

The Middle Cello Sonata, Op. 69, 1808

Beethoven’s middle period features expansion, innovation, and -- as at least one defining characteristic -- epic heroism. Essential works of this phase are the Third and Fifth Symphonies, the “Razumovsky” String Quartets, the “Waldstein” and “Appassionata” Piano Sonatas, as well as the final piano trios. In 1808, the same year he produced both the Fifth and the Sixth symphonies, Beethoven composed his third cello sonata in A Major published as Op. 69. This is just one number before the equally astonishing Op. 70 piano trios with which Beethoven’s grandest cello sonata shares much in character. Beethoven dedicated the sonata to Baron Ignaz von Gleichenstein, a German aristocrat and amateur cellist who was a close friend and a significant patron.

Cast in three movements, Op. 69 is the longest of the five cello sonatas and undoubtedly the most popular. In this lone middle period cello sonata, Beethoven arguably achieves a true equality between cello and piano for the first time. This is seemingly announced from the onset as the solo cello alone sings the first theme while themes throughout the sonata are generously shared by both instruments and often entrusted first to the cello. The first movement presents a robust and sprawling sonata-allegro form with many themes, one with a dark, exotic flavor in a “Gypsy” vein that finds kindred themes across all three movements. The middle movement darkens into the key of A minor and relentlessly pursues another “Gypsy-esque” theme with broad melodic leaps and arresting syncopations that constantly confound a regular rhythmic pattern. Beethoven’s fecundity of invention finds expression in not one but two contrasting trios. The rousing *Allegro vivace* finale begins with a sweetly singing adagio introduction that very briefly seems to recall the extended introductions of the earlier Op. 5 sonatas and provides the only real hint of a slow movement. Typical of his middle period, the mood throughout the three movements is extroverted, full of bold dramatic contrasts and, in the end, bristling with bright vitality.

The First of the Late Cello Sonatas, Op. 102, No. 1

Beethoven returned to the cello sonata one more time, seven years later in 1815, producing a set of two sonatas that were published the following year as Op. 102 with a dedication to Countess Marie Erdödy. Erdödy was a Hungarian noblewoman and amateur pianist who maintained a close relationship with Beethoven dating back to at least 1802. She was often seen in Beethoven’s company – he considered her a close confidante in spite of the occasional ruptures in their turbulent

friendship. It is quite possible and sometimes speculated that Beethoven had deeper feelings. She, like Gleichenstein, was a significant patron who, along with him, was able to secure a crucial annuity that supported Beethoven throughout his years in Vienna. It seems that she was also instrumental in commissioning Beethoven's Op. 102 cello sonatas for the benefit of a mutual friend, the professional cellist Joseph Linke. Linke was the cellist in the legendary Schuppanzigh Quartet that premiered many of Beethoven's string quartets. They were the "house" quartet for yet another of Beethoven's royal patrons, the Russian Count Razumovsky. On New Year's Eve the previous year in 1814, Razumovsky's palace burned to the ground leaving him in financial ruin and forcing him to return to Russia. Losing their main gig, the Schuppanzigh Quartet disbanded and the disenfranchised cellist Linke sought new work to make ends meet. Countess Erdödy hired him as a musical tutor for the family and subsequently asked Beethoven to write some new music for him to play. Beethoven composed his last two cello sonatas as a kind of farewell gift for Linke.

Although Beethoven's third and final "late" period is most famous for the Ninth Symphony, the late string quartets, and the last four piano sonatas, it begins with the Op. 102 cello sonatas of 1815 composed actually just *before* the first of his late piano sonatas, Op. 101. The cello sonatas contain many features typical of late period Beethoven including unconventional form, deeply probing emotional expression, as well as transcendental technical and experiential difficulty particularly concerning his complex exploration of fugue. And while today the last cello sonatas are firmly in the repertoire, at the time, they caused some of the same confusion and even dismay as many of the late works in terms of difficult comprehension by the listener.

The first of the set, the fourth cello sonata is sometimes called the "Free Sonata" after the same title Beethoven used in his manuscript to suggest something unconventionally fantasia-like in its structure. It comprises only two movements and, like its Op. 102 companion, is significantly shorter than the three previous cello sonatas. Both movements begin with a soulful, slow introduction and both introductions share thematic materials in a manner suggesting an interconnected, cyclic design or, rather, that one theme influences both and thereby the whole. Following the introduction, the first movement presents a sonata-allegro form made especially potent for being grounded not in C Major (like the introduction and the finale) but A minor. The second movement introduction is at once darker and more probing than the first but it lightens and coheres as it invokes the luminous theme from the beginning of the sonata binding both movements into a single large fantasia. This leads to the main material of the finale that emerges, newly born, as if from a fresh, primordial simplicity with silences, drones, a pert "wakeup" motif and new stirring to life in the form of a rustic, lively gigue with "follow-the-leader" counterpoint in three parts: the cello, the left and the right hand of the piano.

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Kai Christiansen is a musicologist, writer, and lecturer on chamber music, and is the founder of earsense.org, an online chamber music exploratorium.

Meet the Musicians

Amit Peled, *cello*

Israeli-American cellist, conductor, and pedagogue Amit Peled, a musician of profound artistry and charismatic stage presence, is acclaimed worldwide as one of the most exciting and virtuosic instrumentalists on the concert stage today. From 2012 through 2018, Peled performed on the Pablo Casals 1733 Goffriller cello. He served as Music Director for CityMusic Cleveland for the 2019-2020 season.

In 2017, Peled published a children's book, *A Cello Named Pablo*, written by Marni Fogelson and illustrated by Avi Katz. It follows Peled's journey from the basketball courts of rural Israel to the world's great concert halls playing one of the most famous instruments of all time and continuing the legacy of Pablo Casals.

Peled's extensive discography includes critically acclaimed CDs on the Naxos, Centaur, CAP, CTM Classics, and Delos Labels. His recording, *To Brahms with Love... From the Cello of Pablo Casals* (CAP Records, June 2018), features Brahms' Cello Sonatas Nos. 1 and 2 with pianist Noreen Polera. Peled released a recording of Bach's iconic Cello Suites Nos. 1-3 on the Casals cello in February 2019, which *AllMusic* called "an important new statement in the history of these works." Upcoming album releases include a recording of the Cassado cello sonatas for Naxos and the second installment of the Bach Suites for CTM Classics.

One of the most sought after cello teachers in the world, Peled has instructed students who have gone on to garner top prizes and finalist spots at prestigious international competitions such as the Carlos Prieto International Competition in Mexico, the Schoenefeld International competition in China, and Young Concert Artist Guild in New York. The Amit Peled Cello Gang is composed of students from Peled's studio at the Peabody Institute at Johns Hopkins University, where he has taught since 2003 and was one of the youngest professors ever hired by a major conservatory. Peled and the Cello Gang record in professional studios and tour regularly around the country, performing concerti, cello choir repertoire, and more in an effort to give the conservatory students more professional experience. Peled is also the founder, conductor, and artistic director of the Mount Vernon Virtuosi, a chamber orchestra dedicated to launching the careers of recently graduated music students. Peled is a founding member of the famed Tempest Trio with pianist Alon Goldstein and violinist Ilya Kaler.

Peled lives in Baltimore, Maryland with his wife and children and performs on a cello made by the Italian master Giovanni Grancino, ca. 1695, on generous loan from the Roux Family Foundation.

For more information, visit www.amitpeled.com.

Noreen Cassidy-Polera, *piano*

Pianist Noreen Cassidy-Polera ranks among the most highly regarded and diverse chamber artists performing today. She maintains a career that has taken her to every major American music center

and abroad to Europe, Russia, and Asia. Recent performances include those at Alice Tully Hall, Zankel Hall and Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, 92nd Street Y, Jordan Hall, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Kennedy Center, and Salle Cortot. She has appeared at the Caramoor, Bard, Grand Teton, and Cape Cod music festivals, and has performed with the chamber music societies of Philadelphia and La Jolla. She has recorded for Sony, EMI, Audiophon, and Centaur Records.

Ms. Cassidy-Polera has collaborated with leading soloists, including David Shifrin, Matt Haimovitz, Carter Brey, Antonio Meneses, Aurora-Natalie Ginastera, Yo-Yo Ma, and Leonard Rose. Winner of the accompanying prize at the VIII International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, she regularly collaborates with laureates of the Queen Elisabeth, Tchaikovsky, and Naumburg international competitions.

Ms. Cassidy-Polera's mastery and affection for the complete standard cello-piano repertory is well known, as is her attention and dedication to the works of contemporary composers. In recent seasons, she performed Elliott Carter's venerable Sonata for Cello and Piano on tour in Paris, New York, and Philadelphia, along with new works by Lowell Liebermann, Benjamin C. S. Boyle, and Kenji Bunch to critical acclaim. Her CD recording *Sound Vessels* (with cellist Scott Kluksdahl) features the recording premiere of Richard Wernick's Duo, as well as works by Robert Helps, Augusta Read Thomas, and Elliott Carter.

Ms. Cassidy-Polera holds bachelor's and master's degrees in music from The Juilliard School, where she studied with Martin Canin.