

SAN
FRANCISCO
PERFORMANCES



presents

JOSHUA ROMAN, cello
ANDRIUS ZLABYS, piano

Sunday, January 29, 2012, 2pm
San Francisco Conservatory of Music Concert Hall

DEBUSSY

Sonata in D minor for Cello and Piano

Prologue
Sérénade
Finale: Animé

PIAZZOLLA

Le Grand Tango

VISCONTI

Selections from “Americana”

INTERMISSION

BRAHMS

Sonata for Cello and Piano in F Major, Opus 99

Allegro Vivace
Adagio affettuoso
Allegro passionato
Allegro molto

This performance is made possible in part through the generous support of James and Kathleen Leak.

Joshua Roman is represented by Opus3 Artists, 470 Park Avenue South, 9th Floor North, New York, NY 10016 info@opus3artists.com

Hamburg Steinway Model D, Pro Piano San Francisco



Photo: Tina Su

ARTIST PROFILES

Joshua Roman makes his San Francisco Performances and Bay Area recital debut with this performance. Andrius Zlabys also makes his Bay Area recital debut with this performance.

Joshua Roman

Dubbed a “Classical Rock Star” by the press, cellist Joshua Roman has earned a national reputation for performing a wide range of repertoire with an absolute commitment to communicating the essence of the music at its most organic level. The *San Francisco Chronicle* hailed Roman as “a cellist of extraordinary technical and musical gifts” following his 2010 debut with the San Francisco Symphony under Herbert Blomstedt. For his ongoing creative initiatives on behalf of classical music, Roman was named a 2011 TED Fellow, joining a select group of Next Generation innovators of unusual accomplishments with the potential to positively affect the world.

In the 2011–12 season Roman is guest artist for the Seattle Symphony’s opening night gala, which marks Ludovic Morlot’s first concert as Music Director. He makes his Toronto Symphony debut, performs at the U.S. Open Tennis Tournament, and is presented in recital by San Francisco Performances and on the Dame Myra Hess series in Chicago. He also plays concertos with orchestras in Colorado, Indiana, Iowa, Nebraska, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, North and South Carolina and Oregon.

Among the highlights of this past season, Roman performed duos with Yo-Yo Ma at a State Department event hosted by Hillary Rodham Clinton and Vice President Joe Biden for the President of China, participated in the 2011 TED Conference in Long Beach and played at the Oslo Freedom Forum in Norway. He made his debut as soloist and conductor with the Ensemble Orchestral de Paris at the Cité de la Musique in Paris, and appeared with the Indianapolis Chamber

Orchestra. Summer engagements included debuts at the Caramoor International Music Festival and La Jolla Summerfest.

Before embarking on a solo career, Roman was for two seasons principal cellist of the Seattle Symphony, a position he won in 2006 at the age of twenty-two. Since that time he has appeared as soloist with the Seattle Symphony, where he gave the world premiere of David Stock's *Cello Concerto*, as well as with the Albany and Santa Barbara Symphonies, and the Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional del Ecuador, among many others. He performed Britten's third *Cello Suite* during New York's Mostly Mozart Festival in a pre-concert recital at Avery Fisher Hall, and was the only guest artist invited to play an unaccompanied solo during the YouTube Symphony Orchestra's 2009 debut concert at Carnegie Hall.

In addition to his solo work, Roman is an active chamber music performer. He has enjoyed collaborations with veterans like Earl Carlyss, Christopher Taylor and Christian Zacharias, as well as with the Seattle Chamber Music Society and the International Festival of Chamber Music in Lima, Peru. He often joins forces with other dynamic young soloists and performers from New York's vibrant music scene, including artists from So Percussion, the JACK Quartet and the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's CMS Two.

In spring 2007, Roman was named Artistic Director of TownMusic in Seattle, where he creates programs that feature new works and reflect his eclectic musical influences and inspirations. TownMusic's 2011–12 season offerings feature Roman in the complete Bach Cello Suites, performances by Brooklyn Rider and Alarm Will Sound, and a commission for composer Mason Bates.

Committed to making music accessible to a wider audience, Roman may be found anywhere from a club to a classroom, performing jazz, rock, chamber music, or a solo sonata by Bach or Kodály. His versatility as a performer and his ongoing exploration of new concertos, chamber music, and solo cello works have spawned projects with composers such as Aaron Jay Kernis, Mason Bates, Derek Bermel, Gabriela Lena Frank and Dan Visconti. He has collaborated with photographer Chase Jarvis on Nikon video projects, and *Paste* magazine singled out Roman and DJ Spooky for their cello and iPad cover of Radiohead's *Everything in Its Right Place*, created for The Voice Project. One of Roman's ongoing undertakings is an online video series called "The Popper Project": wherever the cellist and his laptop find themselves, he performs an étude from David Popper's *High School of Cello Playing* and uploads it, uned-

ited, to his YouTube channel. Roman's outreach endeavors have taken him to Uganda with his violin-playing siblings, where they played chamber music in schools, HIV/AIDS centers, and displacement camps, communicating a message of hope through music.

The Oklahoma City native began playing the cello at the age of three on a quarter-size instrument, and played his first public recital at age ten. Home-schooled until he was 16, Roman then pursued his musical studies at the Cleveland Institute of Music with Richard Aaron. He received his Bachelor's Degree in Cello Performance in 2004, and his Master's in 2005, as a student of Desmond Hoebig, former principal cellist of the Cleveland Orchestra.

Joshua Roman has been singled out as "Musical America's New Artist of the Month." He is grateful for the loan of an 1899 cello by Giulio Degani of Venice.

Andrius Zlabys



Pianist Andrius Zlabys has appeared widely throughout the world as soloist and chamber musician. A prizewinner at the 2003 Cleveland International Piano Competition, he has performed as a soloist with the New York Philharmonic, Boston Symphony and Cleveland Orchestra.

Mr. Zlabys made his Carnegie Hall debut with the New York Youth Symphony Orchestra in 2001. He has also performed at venues including Avery Fisher Hall, Concertgebouw, Carnegie's Zankel and Weill halls, Teatro Colon, Wigmore Hall, Musikverein and Suntory Hall. His European engagements include Menuhin, Salzburg and Lockenhaus music festivals.

Mr. Zlabys recorded Enesco's Piano Quintet for Nonesuch in collaboration with the renowned violinist Gidon Kremer. This recording was nominated for the 2003 Grammy Award. Mr. Zlabys performed extensively with Mr. Kremer, including recitals in Japan, China, Europe, and South America. In 1998, he toured in recital with the violinist Hilary

Hahn. In 2000, Andrius was a winner of Astral National Auditions in Philadelphia.

Mr. Zlabys began piano studies at the age of six in his native Lithuania and studied with Laima Jakniuniene at the Ciurlionis Art School for eleven years. Subsequent to his arrival in the U.S., he studied with Sergei Babayan (Cleveland Institute on Music), Claude Frank (Yale School of Music), Seymour Lipkin (Curtis Institute of Music) and Victoria Mushkatkol (Interlochen Arts Academy). He made his debut with Rotterdam Philharmonic in the spring of 2007.

Program Notes

Sonata in D minor for Cello and Piano

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

Born August 22, 1862, Saint-Germain-en-Laye
Died March 25, 1918, Paris

Near the end of his life Debussy planned a cycle of six sonatas for various combinations of instruments. He completed only the first three: for cello and piano (1915), flute, viola, and harp (1915), and violin and piano (1917). Projected—but never written—were sonatas for oboe, horn, and harpsichord; for trumpet, clarinet, bassoon, and piano; and a final sonata that would have included all the instruments from the five earlier sonatas.

This was not a happy period in the composer's life. He was suffering from the cancer that would eventually kill him, and World War I was raging across Europe—Paris was actually being shelled on the day the composer died there. The three sonatas that Debussy completed have never achieved the popularity of his earlier works. Audience have found them abstract in form, severe in expression, and Debussy himself deprecated them with the self-irony that marked his painful final years. Of the *Violin Sonata* he said: "This sonata will be interesting from a documentary viewpoint and as an example of what may be produced by a sick man in time of war."

But this music has a power all its own, and listeners who put aside their preconceptions about what Debussy should sound like (and about what a sonata should be) will find the music moving and—in its austere way—painfully beautiful. One of the most impressive things about the *Cello Sonata* is its concentration: it lasts less than twelve minutes. Further intensifying this music's severity is Debussy's refusal to develop—or even to use—themes in a traditional sense: this is music

not of fully-developed themes but of thematic fragments appearing in various forms and shapes. The opening movement, *Prologue–Lent*, is only 51 measures long, but Debussy alters the tempo every few measures: the score is saturated with tempo changes and performance instructions. The piano’s opening three-measure phrase recurs throughout, contrasting with the cello’s *agitato* passages in the center section. At the end, the cello winds gradually into its highest register and concludes hauntingly on the interval of a perfect fifth, played in harmonics.

The second and third movements are performed without pause. The second is marked *Sérénade*, but this is unlike any serenade one has heard before: there is nothing lyric about this song. The cello snaps out grumbling pizzicatos (Debussy considered calling this movement *Pierrot Angry at the Moon*), and when the cello is finally given a bowed passage, it is marked *ironique*. The finale—*Animé*—opens with abrupt pizzicatos. As in the first movement, there are frequent changes of tempo, a continuing refusal to announce or develop themes in traditional senses, sudden changes of mood (the performer is instructed to play the brief lyric section at the movement’s center *con morbidezza*, which means “gently”), explosive pizzicatos. Such a description makes the sonata sound fierce, abstract, even mocking. But beneath the surface austerity of this sonata lies music of haunting emotional power.

Le Grand Tango

ASTOR PIAZZOLLA

Born March 11, 1921, Mar de Plata, Argentina
Died July 4, 1992, Buenos Aires

As a young man, Astor Piazzolla learned to play the bandoneon, the Argentinian accordion-like instrument that uses buttons rather than a keyboard, and he became a virtuoso on it. But his musical path was not at first clear: he gave concerts, made a film soundtrack, and created his own bands before a desire for wider expression drove him to the study of classical music. He received a grant to study with Nadia Boulanger in Paris, and it was that great teacher who advised him to follow his passion for the Argentinian tango as the source for his own music.

Piazzolla returned to Argentina and gradually evolved his own style, one that combines the tango, jazz, and classical music. In his hands, the tango—which had deteriorated into a soft, popular form—was revitalized. Piazzolla transformed this old Argentinian dance into music capable of a variety of

expression and fusing sharply-contrasted moods: his tangos are by turn fiery, melancholy, passionate, tense, violent, lyric, and always driven by an endless supply of rhythmic energy.

Le Grand Tango, which Piazzolla wrote specifically for cello and piano, is one of his few chamber works and one of his few pieces of “classical” music, though it too is driven by the varying moods and vitality of the tango. This is a big piece, and it has become a great favorite of cellists—there are a number of recordings available. *Le Grand Tango* is episodic in structure: moments of lilting languor alternate with impassioned sequences full of energy, and finally this *Tango* rushes to its fiery close on a great upward glissando.

Americana

DAN VISCONTI

Born 1982, Chicago, Illinois

I’ve known Joshua for nearly ten years now—since he was a sixteen-year-old—and while during that time he and I have collaborated on a number of projects as students, we had yet to embark on our first full-fledged collaboration as young professionals. I had just returned from a year in Berlin when Joshua informed me that there might be an opportunity to secure support for an extended work, something around thirty minutes that would premiere the following year. So as I began to imagine the kind of piece I might want to compose for Joshua, I was acutely conscious of my year abroad and my own identity as an American composer.

Returning to my home outside of Washington, D.C. brought with it an influx of American patriotic music, and I felt an urge to respond to this overwhelming sense of American-ness in the form of a cello sonata that explored the simplicity and sense of community that forms the backbone of American popular folksong. The new sonata, titled *Americana*, is just that—a wide-ranging and somewhat scrappy patchwork of folk-styled melodies inspired by images drawn from American culture. As I learned during encounter with my more “theoretical” German colleagues, the sense of being unburdened by tradition—that anything is possible—is a uniquely American trait. The idea of composing music as form of play—as a way of expressing my curiosity about sound and by extension, myself and my own limits—has less to do with continuing or reacting to any particular musical tradition and much more to do with my desire to disassemble and recombine the sound-artifacts of everyday culture in way

that is personally satisfying and expressive—almost like the challenge of solving a puzzle.

One of the many puzzles in working with a great performer like Joshua involves freedom: how much should the composer allow? How much should be left up to the performer? In working with Joshua on this piece, I opted to make space for more freedom than in some of my more heavily notated chamber and orchestral works; this was to be a solo piece, after all, and I wanted Joshua to have the space to be a soloist. There are also semi-improvised passages that allow Joshua to rock out within the confines of certain prescribed parameters. There are also new playing techniques that, while clearly defined in the score, require a little ingenuity and experimenting to execute, and thus there is a certain amount of freedom that comes with these as well. Some special playing techniques include a passage where Joshua plays with his bow under the strings, producing wide intervals on his outer two strings that would normally be impossible; the tone is dark, viol-like, and touchingly rustic. Another passage uses ricochet bowing on dead pitches to imitate the cadence of military drums; sometimes one of the most interesting things an instrument can do is to sound like another instrument!

This sonata has truly been a “work in progress” through many stages of revision, but I think that Joshua, Helen, and I are all very excited that the premiere is drawing closer. Commissioning a new work can be a long, multi-step process but securing the commission is just the beginning. Now after a year of writing, revising, and rehearsing I’m looking forward to seeing what began life as “my piece” become “our piece”—something that each of us has natured and invested in.

—Dan Visconti

Sonata for Cello and Piano in F Major, Opus 99

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Born May 7, 1833, Hamburg
Died April 3, 1897, Vienna

Brahms was frequently inspired to write for a particular instrument by a particular virtuoso player. He wrote much of his violin music with Joseph Joachim in mind, and late in life he wrote a series of works for clarinet after being impressed with the playing for Richard Mühlfeld. It was his association with the Austrian cellist Robert Hausmann (1852-1909) that led to the composition of Brahms’ second and final cello sonata. Brahms heard

Hausmann perform his *Cello Sonata in E Minor* in Vienna in March 1885 and was so taken with Hausmann's playing that he wanted to write a new work specifically for him. But Brahms, then in the process of composing his *Fourth Symphony*, could not begin such a work immediately. It was not until the summer of 1886, which Brahms spent at Hofstetten on Lake Thun in Switzerland, that he could finally set to work on the sonata.

When he returned to Vienna in the fall, he brought the manuscript with him, and he and Hausmann gave the work several private hearings before it had its first public performance in Vienna on November 24, 1886. Brahms himself was a virtuoso pianist, but he had the unfortunate habit of grunting and snorting as he played. His friend Elizabeth von Herzogenberg referred gently to this when she wrote of her enthusiasm for the sonata:

So far I have been most thrilled by the first movement. It is so masterly in its compression, so torrentlike in its progress, so terse in the development, while the extension of the first subject on its return comes as the greatest surprise. I don't need to tell you how we enjoyed the soft, melodious Adagio, particularly the exquisite return to F sharp major, which sounds so beautiful. I should like to hear you play the essentially vigorous Scher-

zo. Indeed, I always hear you snorting and puffing away at it—for no one else will ever play it just to my mind. It must be agitated without being hurried, legato in spite of its unrest and impetus.

Those who claim that Brahms never wrote true chamber music have some of their most convincing evidence in this cello sonata, for this is music conceived on a grand scale—muscular, passionate, striving. The first movement is marked *Allegro vivace*, and from its first moments one senses music straining to break through the limits imposed by just two instruments. If the *tremolandi* beginning suggests the scope of symphonic music, the rising-and-falling shape of the cello's opening theme recalls the rising-and-falling shape of the opening movement of the composer's just-completed *Fourth Symphony*. The first movement is in sonata form, and the vigorous opening theme is heard in various guises throughout the movement. Its quiet and stately reappearance in the piano just before the coda is a masterstroke.

Brahms specifies that the *Adagio* be played *affettuoso*—"with affection"—yet for all its melting songfulness, this is a serious movement, full of surprises. Brahms moves to the distant key of F-sharp major for this movement and then to the equally unexpected F minor for the second subject. He uses pizzi-

cato, a sound not typical of his string writing, for extended periods and sometimes has the piano mirror that sound with its accompaniment. And he builds his themes on something close to echo effects, with one instrument seeming to trail the other's statement. It is imaginative writing—and often very beautiful. With the third movement, *Allegro passionato*, the music returns to the mood of the first, for it begins and ends with a great rush of energy. Between the scherzo sections comes a haunting trio featuring some of Brahms' most sensitive writing for the cello. In the felicitous words of American composer Daniel Gregory Mason, "throughout this movement there are few of those places, unhappily frequent in most music for the cello, that sound so difficult that you wish, with Dr. Johnson, they were impossible."

The *Allegro molto* is by far the shortest movement of the sonata, and after the driving power of the first and third movements, the finale seems almost lightweight, an afterthought to the sound and fury that have preceded it. Its main theme, possibly of folk origin, rocks along happily throughout and—in another of Brahms' many successful small touches in this sonata—is played pizzicato just before the final cadence.

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger