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SPRING CONCERTS 2022

**Nicolas Altstaedt** cello

Sunday May 1 2022

# From the Artistic Director

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Dear Friends:

We are delighted to welcome the French-German cellist Nicolas Altstaedt to our stage for his long-overdue Vancouver debut. Nicolas is a multi-talented musician who performs a great variety of repertoire. He is also a conductor and the Artistic Director of two music festivals in Europe. It is as a solo cellist that we shall hear him in concert today, with works ranging from the Baroque era right up to music from the present time.

The Kodály Sonata is a major work for cello and yet is something of a rarity in the concert hall. How lucky we are to be able to hear it today!

We are most grateful to our Season Sponsor, the Peak Group of Companies, and to Robert Bailey and Elizabeth Arnold-Bailey for sponsoring Nicolas' performance.

We would also like to thank the City of Vancouver for its support of the Vancouver Recital Society, and our accommodation partner, the Westin Bayshore Hotel, for providing Nicolas with a wonderful home-away-from-home while he's with us in Vancouver.

Enjoy the performance.



Leila Getz



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音乐厅内禁止使用手机，禁止拍照，录音，录像。请观众关闭所有电子器材，感谢您的合作。

# Program

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**Nicolas Altstaedt** cello

Sunday, May 1, 2022 3:00 pm  
Vancouver Playhouse

HENRI DUTILLEUX (1916-2013)

**Trois strophes sur le nom de Sacher**

Un poco indeciso  
Andante sostenuto  
Vivace

[approx. 9 minutes]

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)

**Cello Suite No. 5 in C minor BWV 1011**

Prélude  
Allemande  
Courante  
Sarabande  
Gavotte I  
Gavotte II  
Gigue

[approx. 27 minutes]

INTERMISSION

ZOLTÁN KODÁLY (1882-1967)

**Sonata in B minor for solo cello Op. 8**

Allegro maestoso ma appassionato  
Adagio, con gran espressione  
Allegro molto vivace

[approx. 28 minutes]

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# Nicolas Altstaedt

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**Early Life & Education:** Nicolas Altstaedt was born in 1982 into a family of German and French descent. He was one of Boris Pergamenschikow's last students in Berlin, and has since continued his studies there with Eberhard Feltz.

**This Season:** The 2021-22 Season includes debuts with both the London and Munich Philharmonic Orchestras, Symphonieorchester des Bayrische Rundfunks, RAI Torino, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, National Orchestra of Spain, and tours with l'Orchestre des Champs-Élysées and Philippe Herreweghe, as well as the Junge Deutsche Philharmonie and Dmitri Slobodeniouk. This autumn, Nicolas will debut with the Budapest Festival Orchestra and Iván Fischer, as well as with the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra and Osmo Vänskä.

**Recordings:** Nicolas' most recent recordings for the Lockenhaus Festival garnered both the BBC Music Magazine and Gramophone Chamber Awards in 2020. He received the BBC Music Magazine Concerto Award 2017 for his recording of C.P.E Bach Concertos on Hyperion with Arcangelo and Jonathan Cohen, and the Edison Klassiek 2017 for his Recital Recording with Fazil Say on Warner Classics.



Photo credit: Marco Borggreve

**Awards and Prizes:** Nicolas received the Beethovenring Bonn in 2015 and Musikpreis der Stadt Duisburg in 2018. Nicolas was a BBC New Generation Artist from 2010-2012, and a recipient of the Borletti Buitoni Trust Fellowship in 2009.

**Did you know:** In 2012, Nicolas was chosen by Gidon Kremer to succeed him as the new artistic director of the Lockenhaus Chamber Music Festival, and in 2014 by Ádám Fischer to become the new Artistic Director of the Haydn Philharmonie. Nicolas regularly performs with Ádám Fischer at the Vienna Konzerthaus, Esterházy Festival, and recently on tour in both China and Japan. Nicolas is Artistic Director of the Pfingstfestspiele Ittingen 2019 and 2023.

Nicolas Altstaedt is represented by HarrisonParrott, London, UK.

# Program Notes

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## Henri Dutilleux

### Trois strophes sur le nom de Sacher

Swiss conductor Paul Sacher (1906-1999), founder of the Basel Chamber Orchestra, was an immensely important figure in 20th-century music. With a family fortune based on a controlling share of the Hoffman-LaRoche pharmaceutical empire, he commissioned works from some of the century's greatest composers. These commissioned works include Stravinsky's *Concerto in D* for string orchestra, Bartók's *Divertimento for Strings*, and Richard Strauss' *Metamorphosen* for 23 solo strings.

In 1976 Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich set about to celebrate Sacher's 70th birthday by commissioning new works for solo cello from 12 of the Western world's leading composers: Conrad Beck, Luciano Berio, Pierre Boulez, Benjamin Britten, Wolfgang Fortner, Alberto Ginastera, Cristóbal Halffter, Hans Werner Henze, Heinz Holliger, Klaus Huber, Witold Lutosławski ... and Henri Dutilleux.

Each piece was to use the dedicatee's name spelled out 'musically', i.e., with each letter representing a musical pitch – *Es* being the German notation of E flat, *H* being B natural and *R* (*re* in the language of solfège) as D. The spelled out musical motive to be used was therefore: E flat-A-C-B flat-E-D.

In his works Dutilleux had a tendency not to introduce his thematic material in complete form right away but rather to slowly unveil it, as he does at the opening of the first movement of his *Trois strophes*. First we hear E flat, then E flat-A, then E flat-A-C-B natural, and then finally the entire series of pitches making up the 'musical spelling' of the name Sacher. He also likes to 'anchor' his musical gestures around stable recurring pitches, from which his gestures depart and to which they constantly return, as is the case in this movement with the augmented 5th B flat – F# at the bottom of the cello's pitch range. (The cello's normal range extends down only to low C, but for this work Dutilleux has the instrument tuned down to low B flat.) Near the end of this movement he introduces a short quotation in quivering 32nd-note double-stop tremolo from Bartók's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*, yet another work commissioned by Sacher.

The second movement, marked *Andante sostenuto*, explores the rich low register of the cello, but for most of its duration only hints obliquely at the intervals making up the musical spelling of Sacher's name, which is revealed in six bold strokes just before the end.

This musical cryptogram also inspires the *Vivace* last movement, but it is buried in the intervals of the whirling pattern of triplet 16ths of the opening and in various transpositions and transformations of these pitches throughout.

While the pitches corresponding to the name Sacher may be the point of departure for this work, Dutilleux's real 'subject' in these three movements is the resonance of the cello itself, and the range of possible ways for summoning it up and manipulating it.

## Johann Sebastian Bach

### Cello Suite No. 5 in C minor BWV 1011

The six cello suites were written between 1717 and 1723, when Bach was employed as Kapellmeister to the music-loving Prince Leopold von Anhalt-Köthen. But after Bach's death, they seemed to have gone underground, passed from hand to hand among musicians of an antiquarian bent until the first printed editions began to appear in the 1820s. But even during the 19th century they were viewed more as studies for practice in the studio rather than masterpieces for performance in the concert hall.

All that changed in the 1930s as a result of the pioneering work of one man, the Spanish cellist Pablo Casals (1876-1973), who did for the Bach Cello Suites what Glenn Gould did for the Goldberg Variations. Intrigued by a 19th-century edition he found in a thrift shop in Barcelona, Casals began performing them in public and by 1939 had produced the first complete recording of the whole set.

From this point on the Bach Cello Suites joined the repertoire of cellists around the world, leading to another milestone in their history: Yo-Yo Ma's recording of the complete set that won him a Grammy Award in 1986.

\* \* \*

The Baroque suite, a collection of dances from across Europe all in the same key, was normally comprised of the moderately-paced German *allemande*, the more animated French *courante*, the slow and stately Spanish *sarabande*, and the leap-loving English *jig*, or to use its posh French name, *gigue*. All of the dances are in two-part binary form, with each part played twice. Harmonically, the first part moves from the home key to end in the dominant, with the second part moving back to cadence in the home key again.

Optional dances were often inserted to ease the transition between the normally grave sarabande and the frequently raucous gigue. These included the courtly *minuet*, the hot-trotting *gavotte*, and the heartbeat-quickenning *bourrée*. They often occurred in contrasting pairs, with the first minuet, gavotte or bourrée being played again (without repeats) after the second, to give a rounded A-B-A form to the whole. Many suites also began with a *prelude*, meant to establish the key in listener's ear, and to allow the performer to warm up his fingers by playing passagework in a stable rhythmic pattern.

\* \* \*

Bach's Cello Suite No. 5 in C minor BWV 1011 is somewhat unusual in having its *Prelude* in the form of a French overture, i.e. with a slow, pompous and dead serious opening section constructed in phrases that lurch forward in dotted rhythms, followed by a quick section with a fugal texture. Bach's opening section establishes a mood of *gravitas* with its triple- and quadruple stops on many of the section's downbeats. But as for the 'fugue' meant to follow, how to write polyphonic music on a single-line instrument? Bach solves this problem by writing such a bouncy, well-balanced and catchy fugue subject that listeners end up 'hearing' the other voices in their head.

This is the Central-Bank magic of quantitative easing applied to harmonic voice-leading. It's the fluttering veils of Gypsy Rose Lee suggesting far more than the eyes of her audience are actually seeing. And Bach was an unsurpassed master at this compositional sleight-of-hand.

The *Courante* employs the same multiple-stop emphasis on downbeats as in the *Prelude*, but the effect is more dance-like because instead of dotted rhythms this movement uses 'running' notes, as its name implies, to keep things moving between points of rhythmic emphasis.

The emotional heart of this suite is its *Sarabande*, which contains no multiple-stop chords at all, just a steady stream of 8th notes in a single melodic line roving restlessly over more than two octaves of sonic space. While its rhythmic surface is flat, the great leaps and many sighing phrases in its melodic line create a state of continuous harmonic tension as implied dissonances hang in the air, to be resolved only in the final cadence arrived at in each section. This is the art of saying much by saying little. The stark beauty of this movement and its indomitable will to move forward, step by step, no matter the pain, made it the work chosen by Yo-Yo Ma to play on September 11, 2002, at the first anniversary of the World Trade Centre attacks, as the names of the dead being honoured were read out, one by one.

The two strong upbeats leading into the following *Gavotte* establish us firmly back on the rough rhythmic terrain of country dancing. In this and the following triplet-obsessed *Gavotte II*, a constant 1-2, 1-2 pulse makes counting easy, and toe-tapping inevitable.

The concluding *Gigue*, with its leap-friendly dotted rhythms, agreeably balanced phrases and easy-to-follow repetitive sequences of melody and harmony, ends the suite in a mood of unbridled merriment, despite the 'serious' key of C minor in which it is written.

## **Zoltán Kodály**

### **Sonata in B minor for solo cello Op. 8**

"In twenty-five years no cellist will be accepted into the world of cellists who does not play my piece", boldly declared Zoltán Kodály of his *Cello Sonata in B minor* Op. 8. And he was right. When composed in 1915 this work represented the most important contribution to the solo cello literature since the Bach cello suites of the early 18th century. But because of its extraordinary technical difficulty and innovative musical language,



it struggled to find an audience until Hungarian cellist János Starker (1924-2013) recorded it in 1939, winning a *Grand Prix du Disque* for his efforts. And as its fame grew, he went on to record it again – three more times.

The sonata's roots lie deep in Hungarian folk music, which Kodály had studied in his travels through the Hungarian countryside with Béla Bartók in 1908. Specifically, the Sonata inhabits the sound world of the Hungarian *folk lament*, with which it shares the same improvisatory feel, *parlando rubato* (free reciting) performance style, and downward-seeking melodies. Its harmonies are non-functional but rather modal, with a preference for the pentatonic scale. And yet Kodály manages to fit these non-standard features into the formal structures of traditional Western-European art music.

This is a powerful piece, a piece that grabs you by the throat and impresses itself on you. The reason is easy to see. As Kodály says: "What musical features are characteristic of Hungarian music? In general, it is active rather than passive, an expression of will rather than emotion. Aimless grieving and tears of merriment do not appear in our music. Even the Székely [region] laments radiate resolute energy."

This resolute energy is on full display as the work opens. It begins with two quadruple-stop B minor chords, followed by a defiant theme in a sarabande rhythm, heavily weighted on the second beat of the bar. Motivic elements announced in these opening bars will permeate the movement. The sonata's second theme is much quieter and features a recurring murmur of neighbour notes that continually shadow its melody lines. The development deals almost exclusively with the first theme and climaxes in an orgy of trills, leading to a recapitulation which, by compensation, deals mostly with the second theme. Each section in this movement clearly opens with quadruple-stop chords, giving a degree of formal clarity to the whole.

The second movement *Adagio* comes closest in this sonata to imitating the sound of the human voice. Beginning its low lament deep at the bottom of the instrument's register it is soon accompanied by the echoing ornate melody of a shepherd's pipe and a plucked low drone, as if from a lyre, that acts as an anchoring pitch for much of the movement. Playing both *arco* and *pizzicato* at the same time, the cello imitates a solo voice in company with a fitful instrumental accompaniment. The emotional outpouring reaches a height of improvisatory frenzy in a middle section rife with quivering tremolos and rapidly accelerating figurations, before returning to the darkly contemplative mood of its opening bars.

The third movement *Allegro molto vivace* is a major test of endurance for the performer. It contains some of the most challenging technical passages in the cello repertoire as the instrument is called upon to imitate a wide range of folk instruments, from the jangling timbre of the *cimbalom* or hammered dulcimer, to the bagpipes (with drone 5ths in the bass), and plucked instruments such as the lyre. Unfolding as a series of textural variations, it alludes strongly to the repertoire of *verbunkos* melodies, played by gypsy bands in the 19th century to accompany town recruitment drives into the army. And the 'flashiness' of gypsy fiddling is everywhere apparent in variation after variation as this movement drives to its frenetic conclusion.

Donald G. Gíslason 2022

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COVID-19 has changed a great many things about the way in which we move through the world and interact with one another. Over the last couple of years, our supporters have sustained us in ways that we couldn't have imagined, and never have we been more grateful.

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