

LUKA COETZEE, cello
JON KIMURA PARKER, piano

OMAR DANIEL (b. 1960)

Duo for Violoncello and Piano (2018)

Vivace

Andante

Allegro barbaro

(approx. 13 minutes)

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897)

Cello Sonata No. 2 in F major Op. 99

Allegro vivace

Adagio affettuoso

Allegro passionato

Allegro molto

(approx. 27 minutes)

- Intermission -

GEORGE GERSHWIN (1898-1937)

Three Preludes for Piano

Allegro ben ritmato e deciso

Andante con moto e poco rubato

Allegro ben ritmato e deciso

(approx. 6 minutes)

CÉSAR FRANCK (1822-1890)

Sonata in A major for Violin and Piano (arr. for cello)

Allegretto ben moderato

Allegro

Recitativo-Fantasia. Ben moderato

Allegretto poco mosso

(approx. 30 minutes)

Omar Daniel

Duo for Violoncello and Piano (2018)

Omar Daniel is a multi-award-winning Canadian composer of Estonian heritage who is Associate Professor of Composition at Ontario's Western University. He describes his musical style as "firmly rooted in the European concert-music tradition," but his interest in that tradition coalesced slowly in and from many directions. Growing up in a family that respected the arts, he nonetheless spent most of his time studying STEM subjects while also being involved in swimming and track and field. He claims to still be able to throw a mean javelin.

It was the piano that introduced him to the richness of classical music, leading him to complete a Bachelor of Music degree in theory and composition at the University of Toronto, and later a Ph.D. in composition — while founding along the way the Toronto rock band Spectrum and the new music ensemble Continuum.

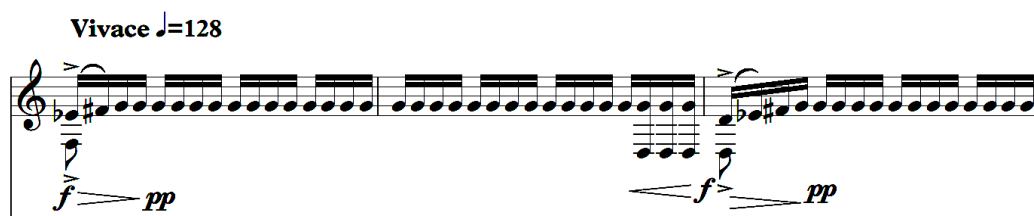
An early enthusiasm for popular music thus also informs his work. He is perhaps unique amongst composers — Canadian composers, at least — for having worked as a bouncer at Toronto's legendary El Mocambo tavern, where he remembers vividly helping his fellow bouncers carry a half-conscious Meat Loaf to the stage for his second encore.

One element linking these early experiences to his present work as a contemporary composer is his desire for his music to be accessible while still having intellectual depth. In responding to winning the 2007 K.M. Hunter Artist Award for classical music, he explained that

You have to be immediate so that somebody, on one listen, can take something away from the work. But then you have to be, as well, 'layered,' in that, on repeated listenings, there's more there.

The "immediacy" of his works results from the clarity of his musical textures and especially his frequent use of ostinato patterns and strong repetitive rhythms, all of which make his music easy to "follow" for the new listener, despite its abundance of tone-clusters and dissonant sonorities, many used percussively.

Daniel's **Duo for Violoncello and Piano (2018)** opens with a brisk ostinato pattern in solo cello, animated by abrupt changes in dynamics and sudden accents, almost in a drumming idiom.



The entry of the piano is muddily percussive but imitative, in its own way, using the same dynamic accents and establishing a third layer of interest at the top of the texture.

Then it is the inverse: the piano gets the ostinato jitters in 16ths while the cello hops between the high and low registers.

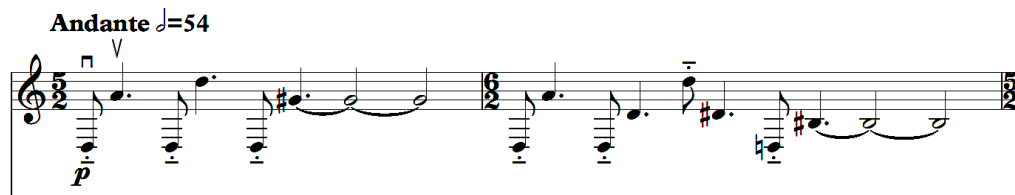
A solo cello interlude clears the sonic palette in the movement's middle section:

But then the pace picks up and strong rhythms return in an almost dance-like final section.

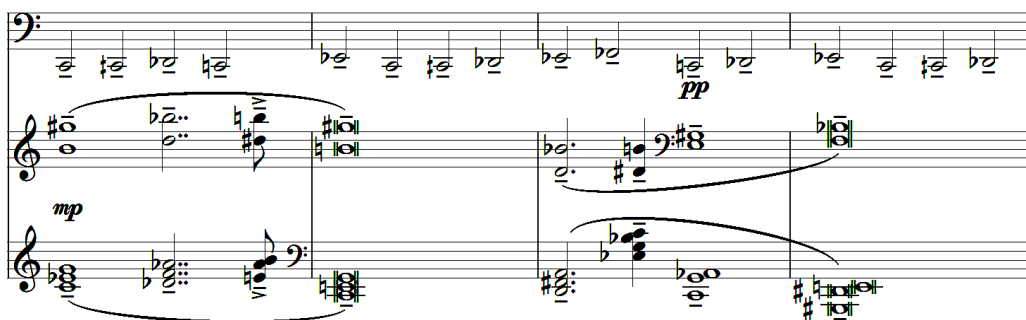
And yet it is the solo cello once again that is given the honour of closing out the movement, discreetly but rhythmically.

Daniel, in some of his works, notably his Four Estonian Runo Songs, has used melodies derived from pagan singing rituals practised in his ancestral homeland, Estonia. This ancient time seems to be evoked in the mysterious but enchanting opening of the *Andante* second movement, with the solo

cello once more leading us into the scene, its resonant open intervals suggestive of the vast expanse of human memory.



But then there emerges, as if rising out of the earth, a motive of small range in the bottom register of the cello, to which the piano eventually adds its quiet but resonant voice. This cello motive features the highly unusual microtonal interval of C# to D flat.



The entire movement is dominated by this half-note pace. At first it is the cello's preserve, but then, as in the first movement, the cello's motive is adopted by the piano, leaving the cello to wail out its mournful lament until the movement's searing climax.



Note how skillfully Daniel layers his sonorities here, with contrapuntal activity moving through many registers at once.

It is the solo cello once again that opens the *Allegro barbaro* finale with a theme treated as if it were a fugue subject, one that inches its way up the scale degrees.

This is very much in the manner of Bach's Fugue in F# minor from The Well-Tempered Clavier Book 1:



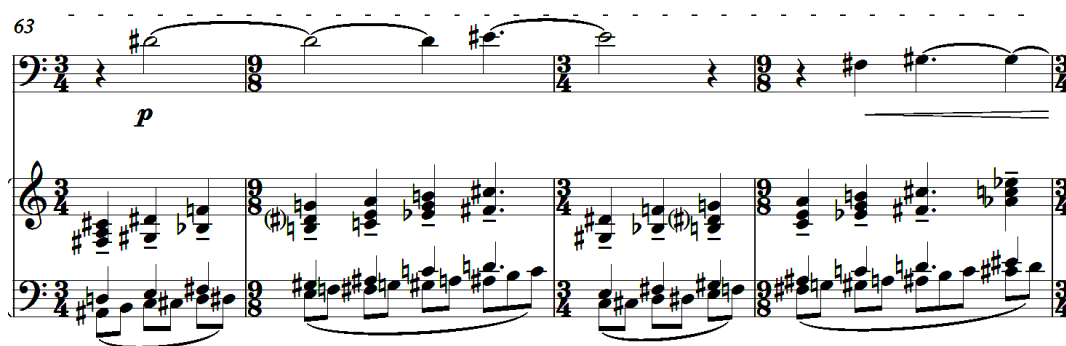
but without the tonic-dominant contrast of tonalities between voice entries.



And the Bachian inspiration for this movement becomes even clearer when the piano enters with its own version of the subject — in augmentation!



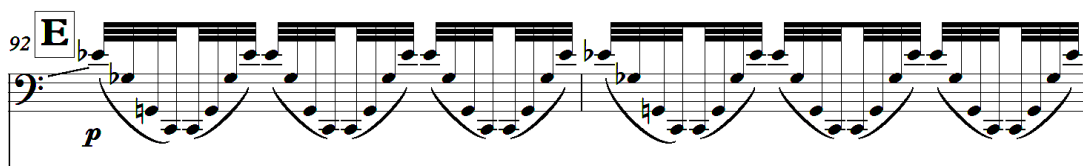
Daniel develops this rising-scale figure on many levels at once in what follows:



The movement reaches its moment of greatest exultation in a bell-ringing climax of resounding sonorities echoing across a wide range of registers,



leaving it to the cello to pick up the pieces in a final section of whispering arpeggiando figuration.

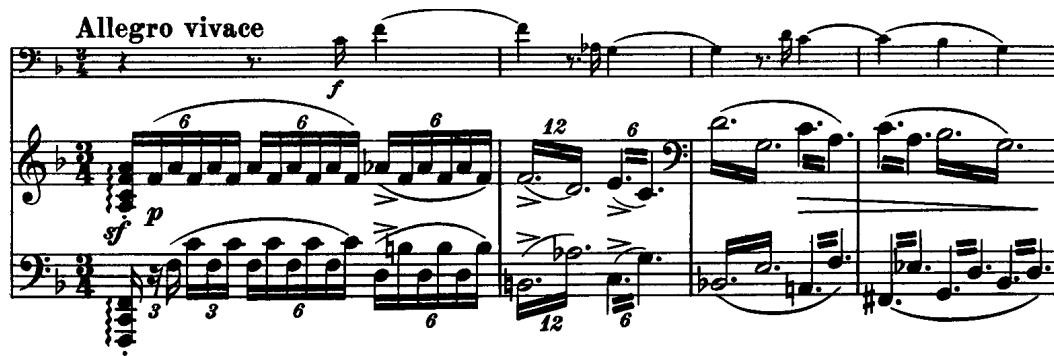


Johannes Brahms

Cello Sonata No. 2 in F major Op. 99

Brahms' Cello Sonata is a "meaty" work, designed expansively in four movements, in the Beethovenian manner, with a scherzo as its third movement. Composed in the summer of 1886 while the 53-year-old Brahms was vacationing in the Swiss countryside, it breathes the clean fresh air of the mountain slopes and often echoes with hints of rural folksong. The sound palette is full and resonant, especially the piano part, which often plumbs the lowest register of the keyboard and seems to be written with a symphonic sonority in mind.

This is especially true of the orchestral sweep that characterizes the sonata's opening, with its rich carpet of tremolando figuration in the piano supporting bold fanfares in the cello line, a melody line that seems to be shouting important news in all directions, like a town crier.



The second theme when announced by the piano is equally bold but projected as a more smoothly connected melody.



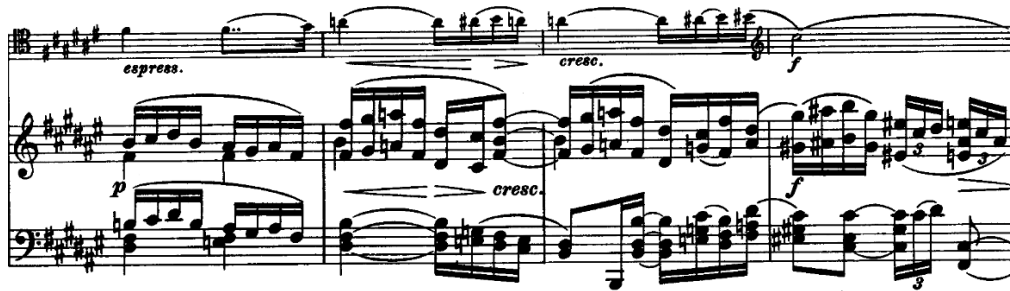
The tremolo figuration of the opening is not just sonic filler: it functions as a stabilizing counterfoil to the disjointed character of the sweeping opening theme and plays a major role at the opening of the development section, as well.

Especially noteworthy in this movement is the magical passage that prepares the recapitulation,



a passage in which time seems to stand still as the cello plays tremolo while the piano enacts great leaps from the bottom of the keyboard to the top.

The *Adagio affettuoso* second movement in simple ternary form carries the major emotional weight of the sonata. After a procession-like tune in the piano sets the scene, the cello emerges in full-throated glory to sing out a richly chromatic but ever-so-lyrical melody that shows off the instrument richly to advantage in its high range.



A minor-mode middle section gives the piano a place in the sun, as well,



but pride of place in this movement goes to the cello, which returns in the third section to sing out once again, enveloped in an even more lavishly decorative piano accompaniment.

If the second movement belongs to the cello, the propulsive energy of the third movement, a scherzo marked *Allegro passionato*, is due to strongly assertive piano writing.



Cresting and subsiding in waves of sound, the opening section builds up sonic resonance through the frequent use of pedal tones in the bass combined with a constant chatter of eighth-note motion.

Adding to the intensity of effect are the standard Brahmsian techniques of two-against-three rhythms and syncopations that recall the opening of the scherzo from the composer's Quintet in F minor Op. 34.



The cello emerges more clearly in the trio middle section, where it hums a wistful melody in simple note values.



While this tune seems folk-like in its simplicity, a number of odd melodic turns indicate that it has more on its mind than it is letting on.

After three impressively weighty movements, Brahms ends his sonata with a light and gently playful finale like that of his Piano Concerto No. 2 in B flat Op. 83. Its form is that of a sonata rondo — a formal layout that combines the refrain-episode alternations of the rondo with the recapitulatory structure of sonata form. This thematic carousel spins to present three themes in the order A-B-A-C-A-B-A.

The “A” theme is the opening refrain, a blithely wandering tune in a simple rhythm but with a few modal inflections that give it a folk-like feel.



The first-episode “B” theme, by contrast, is a strutting, off-beat affair presented in octaves by the piano.



Darker in tone is the pleading voice of the second-episode “C” theme, sung out by the cello against a rippling countertide of triplets in the piano.



With these three themes, presented in palindromic order, Brahms brings to a conclusion his mountain-inspired, folk-inflected Sonata in F major Op. 99.

George Gershwin

Three Preludes

Gershwin’s Three Preludes for piano solo hardly need any introduction, so fresh and alive are they to our modern ears. They are jazz for the concert stage and well deserving of their place on it.

Prelude No. 1 opens with a pert call to attention that foretells both the sassy leaps of the theme to come and the harmonic vocabulary to be used in projecting it — especially the “blue” note (A flat) in the second bar that announces clearly that “this is jazz.”



Further confirmation of the jazz idiom comes in the heavily stomping but syncopated rhythms of the “vamp” laid down before the theme arrives. This is music of enormous vitality and irresistible appeal.

Prelude No. 2 by contrast conveys the slow passing of time in the heat of the Deep South so picturesquely evoked in Gershwin's “Summertime” from his opera *Porgy and Bess*.



Against the backdrop of the left hand's slow ostinato in quarter notes, the right hand lazily spins out a sultry modal melody of slightly mournful character, as if unable to alter the inevitable passage of time or the times in which it passes.

The set ends with the mischievous **Prelude No. 3** that scurries about in the unlikely key of E-flat minor, only to cadence often enough in E-flat major.



Irregular patterns of accents in the left-hand accompaniment and insidiously climbing chromatic lines in the inner voices keep this prelude exciting to listen to at every moment.

César Franck

Sonata in A major for Violin and Piano (arr. for cello)

It will be a while yet before the Huffington Post is read by musicologists as a scholarly journal, and yet Alan Elsner, the Huff-Po reporter covering developments in 19th-century Belgian chamber music, is not wide of the mark in observing that:

There is a kind of breathless religious ecstasy to Franck's music — soaring themes; simple, pure harmonies; those ceaseless, swirling, gliding accompaniments. This, one feels, is truly the music of the angels.¹

The work inspiring such shortness of breath and heady spiritual delirium in the intrepid journalist is, of course, Franck's Sonata in A major for Violin and Piano, a work often played by cellists as well in a version for their instrument.

The work was Franck's wedding present to Belgian violinist Eugène Ysaÿe (1858-1931) and was in fact performed at the wedding in 1886 by Ysaÿe himself and a wedding-guest pianist.

The *Allegro ben moderato* first movement floats in a world of harmonic uncertainty. It opens with a number of dreamy piano chords, each followed by

¹ Huffington Post (29 Nov. 2011).

a simple chordal interval, as if giving the pitches to the instrumentalist, who then obliges by using them to create a gently rocking, barcarolle-like melody, the outline of which will infuse much of the work as a whole.



This theme, played by the violin over a simple chordal accompaniment from the piano, builds in urgency until it can hold it no more, and a second theme takes centre stage in a lyrical outpouring of almost melodramatic intensity but ending in a dark turn to the minor.



The violin will have none of it, however, and dreams both sleepwalkers back to the major mode for an amicable review of the two themes, both in the home key. The serenity of this movement results from its rhythmic placidness, often featuring a sparse, simple chordal accompaniment in the piano, and very little rhythmic variation in the wandering pastoral “de-DUM-de-DUM” triplets of the violin.

Where drama breaks out for real is in the *Allegro* second movement, one of the most challenging in the chamber repertoire for the pianist. This sonata-form movement bolts from the starting gate with a swirling vortex of 16ths in the piano, fretting anxiously over a chromatically creeping theme in the mid-range that is soon picked up by the violin.



Its worrisome collection of motives is based on the same small-hop intervals that opened the first movement, but reversed in direction and cast in the minor mode.

A sunnier mood prevails in the second theme



which, however, ebbs away as both instruments take stock of the ground covered in a sober interlude marked *Quasi lento*, which is based on the opening “fretting” theme, but in augmentation, i.e., longer note values.



The development section engages in a full and frank discussion of the two themes until the convulsive agitation of the opening theme returns in the recapitulation. Despite the turbulence roiling at the heart of this movement, it still manages to pull a major-mode ending out of a hat for its final cadence to conclude its “race-to-the-finish-line” coda.

The slow third movement, a free-form meditation marked *Recitativo-Fantasia*, is bruised with the memory of the first movement's bliss. Its opening musings contain a bewildered quotation of the first movement's opening theme.



As this thematic material is brooded over, the violin tries to change the subject several times in distracted flights of fancy but eventually agrees to join with the piano in a ruminative journey that passes from nostalgic reminiscence to heart-wrenching pathos. The searing intensity of the octave-leap “wailing” motif at the end of this movement is the most profound moment in the sonata. No major-mode ending here.



All tensions are eased, all hearts healed, however, in a last-movement rondo that offers up a simple tuneful melody in continuous alternation with brief sections of contrasting material.



This tune, so harmonically rooted as to suit being presented in strict canonic imitation (like a round), is shaped from the melodic outline of the theme that opened the sonata, bringing its journey full circle. Even the “wailing” motif from the previous movement is recalled to the stage to give it, too, a happy ending.

British musicologist David Fanning got it right when he intuited the celebratory meaning beneath Franck's remarkable use of imitative counterpoint for the end of this "wedding present" sonata:

It is hard to resist reading this as a musical symbol of married bliss, especially when the dialogue is placed even closer together, at a distance of half a bar rather than a full bar, on the deliriously happy closing page.

Donald G. Gíslason 2026