

Lincoln Center's
Great Performers

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The Program

Sunday, February 2, 2020 at 11:00 am

Sunday Morning Coffee Concerts

István Várdai, Solo Cello

BACH Cello Suite No. 3 in C major (c. 1720)

Prelude
Allemande
Courante
Sarabande
Bourrée I and II
Gigue

KODÁLY Sonata for Solo Cello (1915)

Allegro maestoso ma appassionato
Adagio
Allegro molto vivace

This program is approximately one hour long and will be performed without intermission.

Please join us for coffee and refreshments following the performance.

Please make certain all your electronic devices are switched off.

This performance is made possible in part by the Josie Robertson Fund for Lincoln Center.

Walter Reade Theater

Great Performers

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UPCOMING GREAT PERFORMERS EVENTS:

Tuesday, February 4 at 7:30 pm in Alice Tully Hall

Susan Graham, mezzo-soprano

Malcolm Martineau, piano

Schumann's beloved song cycle *Frauenliebe und -leben*, in dialogue with works by Fauré, Mahler, Strauss, and others

Sunday, February 23 at 11:00 am in the Walter Reade Theater

Russian Renaissance

Inventing new possibilities for Russian folk instruments, the lively Russian Renaissance quartet performs a wide-ranging program including works by Bach, Rameau, Prokofiev, and Brazil's Egberto Gismonti.

Sunday, February 23 at 3:00 pm in David Geffen Hall

Budapest Festival Orchestra

Iván Fischer, conductor

Renaud Capuçon, violin

An all-Dvořák program, including his Violin Concerto and Symphony No. 8

For tickets, call (212) 721-6500 or visit LCGreatPerformers.org. Call the Lincoln Center Info Request Line at (212) 875-5766 to learn about program cancellations or to request a Great Performers brochure.

Visit LCGreatPerformers.org for more information relating to this season's programs.

Join the conversation: @LincolnCenter

We would like to remind you that the sound of coughing and rustling paper might distract the performers and your fellow audience members.

In consideration of the performing artists and members of the audience, those who must leave before the end of the performance are asked to do so between pieces. The taking of photographs and the use of recording equipment are not allowed in the building.

By Kathryn L. Libin

Cello Suite No. 3 in C major, BWV 1009 (c. 1720)

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Born March 21, 1685, in Eisenach, Germany

Died July 28, 1750, in Leipzig

Approximate length: 20 minutes

Johann Sebastian Bach's six suites for solo cello originated early in his career, during a period when he was employed as Kapellmeister in the musical establishment of Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen. This young nobleman, who spent much of his Grand Tour attending opera in Europe's theaters, loved music and was a true connoisseur. Certainly compositions as unique and complex as Bach's sonatas for solo violin and the suites for solo cello could have been fully appreciated only by a serious music lover. Prince Leopold played the viola da gamba, violin, and harpsichord, and also possessed a good baritone voice; under his reign a fine orchestra flourished at the court, its music library expanded, and excellent new instruments were purchased. With such stimulus, Bach produced a great many important chamber works between 1717 and 1723, including the Brandenburg concertos as well as the solo pieces for violin and cello. Among the musicians at the court, Christian Ferdinand Abel stood out as the leading viola da gamba and cello player, and it is thought likely that Bach composed the six cello suites for him. If that was the case, Abel must indeed have been a master of the instrument. The suites presented hitherto unthinkable challenges for the cello, and were in every respect the most adventurous Baroque masterworks in that genre. But these works were not an isolated case in Bach's own oeuvre, since his general approach to instrumental writing combined musical inspiration and craftsmanship with great virtuosity, no doubt reflecting his own powers as a performer.

Bach's suites for solo cello liberated the instrument from its normal role of playing bass accompaniment and exploited its rich sonorities and melodic potential, demonstrating that it could stand very well on its own. He handled the single voice with superb skill, implying harmonic progressions and weaving a contrapuntal texture from its melodic lines, as well as strengthening the sound with double stops and full chords. The third suite, in C major, takes robust advantage of the cello's low C string, which we hear resonating at the bottom of the *Prelude's* opening motive. This *Prelude* is something of a virtuosic toccata with freely flowing sixteenth notes, though many performers perform it in majestic style. After the improvisatory *Prelude*, a series of stylized French dances unfolds. The *Allemande*, an elegant court dance in duple or quadruple meter, was described in 1739 by a leading theorist, Johann Mattheson, as "a serious and well-composed harmoniousness...expressing satisfaction or amusement, and delighting in order and calm." Bach's *Allemande* achieves buoyancy with its lively 32nd-note rhythms. The nimble triple-meter *Courante* features constant

activity and lively string crossings. The slow and introspective *Sarabande* opens with rich chords and unfurls beautifully embroidered melodic lines. A pair of *galant Bourrées* follows, the first gay and appealing, and the second in the more somber C-minor mode with a particularly transparent, chordless texture. The concluding *Gigue*, in rollicking triple meter, is the most lively and exuberant of all the dances, with drone motives evocative of folk piping.

Sonata for Solo Cello, Op. 8 (1915)

ZOLTÁN KODÁLY

Born December 16, 1882, in Kecskemét, Hungary

Died March 6, 1967, in Budapest

Approximate length: 30 minutes

Zoltán Kodály spent his early years in the Hungarian countryside, where he sang in a church choir and learned to play several instruments, before leaving for Budapest to study languages and music. He began to collect and analyze folk music in 1905. Almost immediately he came into contact with Béla Bartók, and their first collaboration together resulted in the 1906 publication of *Magyar népdalok* (“Hungarian Folk Songs”), for which Kodály wrote a scholarly preface. The collection of peasant songs and dances by composers like Bartók and Kodály was motivated not simply by an urge to preserve the past, though that played a role at the start of a new century, but by a sense of appreciation for the beauty and authenticity of native cultures in their region; they strongly felt that through the dissemination of these musical pieces, a revitalization of contemporary culture could take place. In later years Kodály would state that for him and Bartók, “the vision of an educated Hungary, reborn from the people, rose before us. We decided to devote our lives to its realization.” Apart from his work as an ethnomusicologist, Kodály was a dedicated educator who taught for many years at Budapest’s Academy of Music. Most of Kodály’s music was written for voice, with numerous works for chorus or soloists. Even his instrumental music, though sensitive and idiomatic, seems vocal in inspiration, with lyrical well-crafted melody always a central concern. The first public performance of his music took place in Budapest in March 1910, when his friend Bartók and the youthful Waldbauer-Kerpely Quartet played his first string quartet, Op. 2, his Op. 3 piano pieces, and his sonata for cello and piano, Op. 4.

In 1915 Kodály composed a solo sonata for the cellist in the quartet, Jeno Kerpely, who would present its premiere in Budapest on May 7, 1918. Kodály was deeply inspired by Bach’s suites in choosing to write this substantial and serious work for solo cello; indeed, it was the first such work since Bach had produced his some 200 years earlier. The B-minor Sonata, published in 1922 as Op. 8, combines conventional formal structures with Hungarian folk materials, and a highly innovative approach to the timbre and character of the cello. The work is extremely virtuosic, which prevented it from becoming immediately popular, though it would come to play a significant role in the career of the great cellist Janos Starker. One of the sonata’s outstanding features is its use of *scordatura*

tuning, an old technique—indeed, Bach employed it—which extends the range of the cello, alters its main resonating pitches, and enhances the timbre. Here the cello's C and G strings are lowered to B and F-sharp, so the open strings become B–F sharp–D–A, creating a minor seventh chord on B. The opening movement, *Allegro maestoso ma appassionato*, reminds the listener that it was written beneath the cloud of a great war in Europe; it is emotionally bold, muscular, and full of massive chordal gestures. The *Adagio* combines darkly lyrical outer themes with an aggressively dance-like central section. The idea of folk-dancing extends into the wildly brilliant finale, in which the cello evokes the sounds of bagpipe, zither, and gypsy winds, all playing a tumult of Hungarian melodies. It is a matchless *tour de force* of instrumental composition, and one of the most original and demanding works ever conceived for cello.

Musicologist Kathryn L. Libin teaches music history and theory at Vassar College.

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Meet the Artist



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

István Várdai

István Várdai balances performing wide-ranging concerto repertoire with a deep love of chamber music, collaborating with partners including András Schiff, Yuri Bashmet, Gidon Kremer, Jean-Efflam Bavouzet, and Mischa Maisky. In chamber music and recitals, he has performed in some of the world's leading venues. In 2019 he performed at London's Wigmore Hall three times, most recently with the legendary pianist Elisabeth Leonskaja and violinist Liza Ferschtman on their European tour of Schubert Trios, which also visits Vienna's Musikverein.

His broad range of concerto repertoire includes many 20th-century masterpieces, and in the 2018–19 season he performed Prokofiev's *Sinfonia Concertante* with the Helsinki Philharmonic under Susanna Mälkki, and the Hungarian National Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Hannu Lintu. He was invited by the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra and conductor Douglas Boyd to perform Dutilleux's *Tout un monde lointain*.

Mr. Várdai performs the Elgar again in 2019–20 with Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra under Marek Šedivý. Other highlights include Tchaikovsky's *Variations on a Rococo Theme* with Orchestre Philharmonique Royal de Liège and Gergely Madaras, and Saint-Saëns's Cello Concerto No. 1 with the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra and Jun Märkl, a work he performed twice last season with Klaus Mäkelä and Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse. As a recitalist, Mr. Várdai performs several concerts in the U.S. this season, including appearances on the Dumbarton Oaks Concert Series in Washington, D.C. and the Los Angeles Philharmonic's Green Umbrella Series.

Lincoln Center's Great Performers

Initiated in 1965, Lincoln Center's Great Performers series offers classical and contemporary music performances from the world's outstanding symphony orchestras, vocalists, chamber ensembles, and recitalists. One of the most significant music presentation series in the world, Great Performers runs from October through June with offerings in Lincoln Center's David Geffen Hall, Alice Tully Hall, Walter Reade Theater, and other performance spaces around New York City. From symphonic masterworks, lieder recitals, and Sunday morning coffee concerts to films and groundbreaking productions specially commissioned by Lincoln Center, Great Performers offers a rich spectrum of programming throughout the season.

Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Inc.

Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts (LCPA) serves three primary roles: presenter of artistic programming, national leader in arts and education and community engagement, and manager of the Lincoln Center campus. A presenter of thousands of free and ticketed events, performances, tours, and educational activities annually, LCPA offers a variety of festivals and programs, including American Songbook, Avery Fisher Career Grants and Artist program, David Rubenstein Atrium programming, Great Performers, Lincoln Center Emerging Artist Awards, Lincoln Center Out of Doors, Lincoln Center Vera List Art Project, LC Kids, Midsummer Night Swing, Mostly Mozart Festival, White Light Festival, the Emmy Award-winning *Live From Lincoln Center*, which airs nationally on PBS, and Lincoln Center Education, which is celebrating more than four decades enriching the lives of students, educators, and lifelong learners. As manager of the Lincoln Center campus, LCPA provides support and services for the Lincoln Center complex and the 11 resident organizations: The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Film at Lincoln Center, Jazz at Lincoln Center, The Juilliard School, Lincoln Center Theater, The Metropolitan Opera, New York City Ballet, New York Philharmonic, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, School of American Ballet, and Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts.

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