

Wethersfield Chamber Concerts

7 April 2019 – 4pm

MAXIM CALVER

Cello

Gorka Plada-Giron - Piano

PROGRAMME NOTES *by John Woollard*

Stravinsky (1882 - 1971): Suite Italienne

Stravinsky's Suite Italienne for cello and piano is an arrangement of several movements from his "Pergolesi" ballet Pulcinella (1919 - 1920). In Pulcinella, Stravinsky had taken works by the early eighteenth-century Italian composer Giambattista Pergolesi and effectively rewritten them by cutting, altering, and transforming the music into his own style. The result was a work which was, in Stravinsky's words, "the epiphany through which the whole of my late work became possible." Pulcinella was, in other words, Stravinsky's first work in which style in and of itself was the primary compositional determinate.

His Suite Italienne was not Stravinsky's first attempt to transform some of the numbers from the ballet into a work for solo string instrument and piano. In 1925, he wrote a

Suite for violin and piano, after themes, fragments and pieces by Giambattista Pergolesi. In 1932, Stravinsky enlisted the aid of cellist Gregor Piatigorsky to re-work the earlier Suite into the Suite Italienne for cello and piano. In this version, the order of movements is "Introductione," "Serenata," "Aria," "Tarantella," "Scherzino," and "Minuetto e Finale." In 1933, Stravinsky and violinist Samuel Dushkin re-worked the Suite one last time for violin and piano.

The charm of Pergolesi's melodies and the piquant flavor of Stravinsky's re-writing makes his Suite Italienne one of his most enjoyable works. It is his only work for cello and piano.

Beethoven (1770 - 1827): Cello Sonata in G.minor, Op. 5, No. 2

- I. Adagio sostenuto ed espressivo
- II. Allegro molto più tosto presto
- III. Rondo: allegro

Between May and July of 1796 Beethoven was in Berlin as part of a concert tour, traveling, as Mozart had done in 1789, with Prince Lichnowsky. While there, he began a number of important works, including the two cello sonatas of Op. 5 and the Variations for Cello and Piano in G major on "See the conqu'ring hero comes" from Handel's oratorio, Judas Maccabaeus, WoO 45. The Op. 5 cello sonatas are dedicated to Friedrich Wilhelm II, King of Prussia, a capable amateur cellist. Beethoven occasionally sought to dedicate works to influential people in the hopes of obtaining a reward. In the case of the Op. 5 sonatas, Beethoven received a gold snuff box filled with louis d'or -- French 20-franc gold pieces.

The first cellist of the Court Orchestra (and Wilhelm II's teacher) was Jean-Pierre Duport (1741-1818), for whom Beethoven composed the two Op. 5 cello sonatas. The premiere of the two sonatas was given in Berlin in May or June of 1796 and it is possible that Beethoven performed the works not with Jean-Pierre Duport, but with Duport's younger brother, Jean-Louis. Certainly, the style and ability of these two cellists influenced Beethoven's compositions. In fact, a few aspects of the cello writing in the Op. 5 sonatas appear in a tutor for the instrument later published by Jean-Louis Duport. The two sonatas of Op. 5 were printed in February 1797 by Artaria & Co. in Vienna. Both are in two movements with a slow introduction to the first movement and a rondo-form finale.

Beethoven's composition of sonatas for cello and piano was unprecedented; he had no models in the works of Haydn or Mozart. Only recently had the instrument begun to liberate itself from its role in the traditional basso continuo. Beethoven was the first to completely write out the keyboard parts for large-scale cello and keyboard works. Although he composed variations for cello and piano -- Op. 66, WoO. 45, and WoO. 46 -- Beethoven would not write another sonata for the combination until 1807, when he began the Cello Sonata, Op. 69. The sonatas of Op. 5 are remarkable in the density of their material as well as Beethoven's increasing ability to relate more distant keys to the tonic. In these aspects, the two sonatas have no parallel in their time.

Each of the two sonatas of Op. 5 features a slow introduction in the manner of Haydn's symphonies; that for No. 2 opens in G minor, the key of the piece, but moves astray into flat harmonies. The main theme of the Allegro is brief in comparison to that of the first movement of Op. 5, No.2, and sounds once in each instrument before being subjected to motivic transformation in the transition to the second theme area. On the relative major (B flat), the second theme has a shape exactly the opposite of the first. The implications of the "flat" harmonies in the introduction are realized in both the second theme area and the brief development section. As in Op. 5, No. 1, the Rondo finale proves to be a vehicle for virtuosity that must have tested the limits of even the best players of the time.

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~~~~ Interval ~~~~

## Rachmaninov (1873 - 1943): Cello Sonata in G minor, Op. 19

- I. Lento - Allegro moderato
- II. Allegro scherzando
- III. Andante
- IV. Allegro mosso

The common wisdom on Rachmaninov's Sonata for Cello and Piano is that it is really a piano sonata with cello accompaniment. While this assessment may be a slight exaggeration, it cannot be denied the piano is the dominant instrument in the work. The composer completed this sonata in November 1901, and gave the premiere in Moscow with cellist Anatoly Brandukov, on December 2 of that year, but apparently made several alterations over the next ten days, since he wrote the date of December 12, 1901, on the final page of the score.

The work is cast in four movements. The first is marked Lento - Allegro moderato - Moderato and is the longest of the four, especially when the exposition repeat is observed. It begins with a slow introduction in which the piano presents a six-note theme that at first appears insignificant, but in fact plays a key role throughout. The tempo picks up and the cello presents a passionate, beautiful theme. A slower, somewhat more wistful melody follows, after which comes the stormy development section. The reprise ensues and the movement ends in typical Rachmaninoviean fashion: the tempo speeds up as thematic morsels appear in a race to the finish, the piano crowning the coda with three resolute chords.

The second movement, marked Allegro scherzando, begins with piano writing reminiscent of the faster and more sinister passages in the Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini. The cello presents a rhythmic idea in the opening moments of marginal interest. Two other themes are also presented, the latter of which is quite beautiful and recalls the mood of much of the slow music in the Second and Third Piano Concertos, especially in the piano writing.

The third movement is viewed by many as the strongest of the four. Marked Andante, it begins on the piano with a lovely theme of intimate and passionate character. After the cello enters, the material expands much the way the melody does in the second movement of the Second Piano Concerto. A powerful climax is reached, and the third movement ends softly.

The finale starts off with a robust theme on the cello that rather lacks the individual stamp of the composer. Still, the music is bright and vivacious and has strong appeal. There follows a second subject more in the Rachmaninoviean vein, full of passion and beauty and seeming to soar to the heavens. The two themes reappear throughout, the composer deftly manipulating their interplay. In the beginning of the coda, the cello recalls the piano's opening (six-note) theme from the first movement, and then the work ends brilliantly.

## ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

British cellist **Maxim Calver** made his concerto debut in Symphony Hall, Birmingham as part of the Grand Final of BBC Young Musician 2018. His performance of Tchaikovsky's Rococo Variations with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, broadcast live on BBC Radio 3 and BBC 4, was praised for its 'natural ease' and 'emotional lyricism'. Earlier in the competition he won the Strings Category Final performing works by Lutoslawski, Brahms and Stravinsky.

Highlights this season include a performance of Brahms' Double Concerto in Cadogan Hall, London with Tianyou Ma, finalist of the International Menuhin Violin Competition 2018, and recitals throughout the UK and Guernsey. Maxim has performed at Wigmore Hall, the Royal Festival Hall and BOZAR (Brussels). Festival appearances include the Gstaad Menuhin Festival in Switzerland, Southwold Arts Festival and the Wimbledon International Festival, where his performance of Delius' cello sonata was singled out for its 'depth of tone and passionate intensity' (Planet Hugill, 2014).

Maxim studies at the Royal College of Music with Professor Melissa Phelps, where he is proud to be the Hargreaves and Ball Trust Scholar supported by a Herbert Howells & Thomas Fielden Scholarship. Maxim was previously a pupil at the Yehudi Menuhin School where he studied with Thomas Carroll for ten years. He has participated in masterclasses with leading cellists including Steven Isserlis, Heinrich Schiff, Julian Lloyd Webber, Paul Katz and Guy Johnston.

Maxim is grateful to the Young Classical Artists Trust (YCAT) for their generous support in their aftercare scheme for BBC Young Musician Finalists. Maxim plays an Alberto Aloysius Bianchi cello, dated 1906.

Born in 2002 in El Puerto de Santa Maria (Spain), **Gorka Plada-Giron** showed his interest in music at a very early age. He began teaching himself the piano from the age of five, before joining the local music school three years later where he received piano tuition from Maria Jesus Duran. In 2016, Gorka joined the Yehudi Menuhin School where he studies piano with Marcel Baudet and was awarded a scholarship by the UK's Music and Dance Scheme.

Gorka has performed throughout Spain, UK, Germany and Holland participating in festivals including the Wimbledon Festival, Segovia Music Festival and Maryat Players Festival. He has had considerable success in numerous competitions, concerts and festivals as both soloist and chamber musician. He was awarded 1st prize and Chopin prize in the Julio Casas International Piano Competition, 2nd prize in Enschede Piano Competition 1st prize and audience prize in Lorenzo Palomo chamber music competition, 3rd prize in the Intercollegiate Beethoven competition and 1st prize in Santa Cecilia Piano Competition. Gorka has received masterclasses from Robert Levin, Cordelia Hoffer, Paul Roberts, Claudio Martinez Menher and Angel Sanzo, among many others.

**We hope that you will join us for our concerts next year - on 5 and 19 April, 10 May 2020**