George Work, cello
Mei-Hsuan Huang, piano

Thursday, April 14, 2016
7:30 pm
Martha-Ellen Tye Recital Hall
Program

Suite #6 in D Major, BWV 1012
Prelude
Allemande
Courante
Sarabande
Gavottes I and II
Gigue

Sonata for Solo Cello
Dialogo
Capriccio

Intermission

Fantasy Pieces, Op. 73
Zart und mit Ausdruck
Lebhaft, leicht
Rasch und mit Feuer

Sonata in A Major, Op. 69
Allegro, ma non tanto
Scherzo: Allegro-molto
Adagio cantabile—Allegro vivace

Johann Sebastian Bach
György Ligeti
Robert Schumann
Ludwig van Beethoven
Johann Sebastian Bach's unaccompanied works for violin and cello represent one of the great achievements in compositional technique. With only the limited resources for the execution of chords and independent simultaneous melodic lines available to a single string instrument, Bach nonetheless creates full-scale musical structures with rich harmonic and contrapuntal textures.

The six Suites for solo cello were probably composed while Bach lived at Cöthen, between 1717 and 1723. The D major Suite resembles the other five in that it begins with a weighty Prelude, followed by a standard arrangement of contrasting dance movements in binary form, on the model of the French suite. This last of the six suites differs from all the others, however, in that it was not originally written for the modern cello, but for a five-stringed instrument, possibly the viola pomposa said to have been invented by Bach. The addition of an E string a fifth higher than the standard cello's highest (A) string permitted Bach to expand the range of the tessitura and add additional voices to his chords, which gives rise to formidable challenges in performance on the modern instrument.

Composer Györgi Ligeti is renowned for his avant-garde experiments with unpulsed minimalism and micropolyphony, some of which made unauthorized (and uncompensated) appearances in the Stanley Kubrick films 2001: A Space Odyssey and Eyes Wide Shut. The works used in both movies date from the latter part of Ligeti's life, when he had fled his native Hungary and was living and working in the West. The Sonata, by contrast, comes from the earlier part of Ligeti's career, when he was still living and working in Hungary. Accordingly, it is far more conservative than his later, more famous works, exhibiting marked neo-classical features and recalling the folk-song inspired idioms of Bartok and Kodaly.

Ligeti wrote the first movement of the Sonata in 1948 while still a student at the Liszt Academy in Budapest. It was dedicated to fellow student Annus Virány, with whom Ligeti had fallen deeply in love, but who did not reciprocate his affections. As the title implies, it takes the form of a dialogue between a persistently minor low-register voice, representing the composer, and a freer, more rhapsodic upper voice, representing Annus. The Sonata remained uncompleted until 1953, when Ligeti added the bravura second movement at the request of another young cellist, Vera Dénes, who planned to premier the now-completed work. Despite its comparatively conservative language, however, the piece proved too progressive and anti-proletarian for the Hungarian Composers Union, which denied it the right to be performed in public. It languished in obscurity until 1979, at which point it was finally given its premier performance at the English Bach
Festival by cellist Rohan de Sarem. Since its subsequent publication in 1990, it has been steadily gaining in popularity, and is now beginning to take its rightful place amongst the 20-century masterpieces for solo cello of Britten, Kodaly, Crumb and others.

**Robert Schumann**, while certainly no stranger to the large architecture of major symphonic works, was above all a master of German art song, and, along with Schubert, composed some of the greatest examples of the genre, such as *Dichterliebe* and *Frauen Lieben und Leben*. The *Fantasiestücke Op. 73*, originally for clarinet and piano, were written in just a few days in 1849. Despite a third-movement melody clearly intended for an instrumental rather than vocal performer, the pieces recall the world of the art song rather than that of the symphony. Contrast is the most striking feature of all three, with sudden and mercurial changes of mood, tempi in constant flux, and melodic writing that suggests the same type of depiction of character that makes Schumann's songs so compelling.

Stravinsky claims in his autobiography that the writing of melodies was always the most difficult part of composing for **Ludwig van Beethoven**, a view which is perhaps borne out by the painful process of revision to which Beethoven subjected all of his music before publication. Difficult or not, though, the final products invariably show no signs of strain, and indeed, there are a number of compositions in which Beethoven achieves a sort of Olympian serenity, a smoothness of melodic progression which is utterly unique to him.

The first movement of the *Op. 69 Sonata* is one of the best examples of this. Its opening subject, stated by the cello alone, is surely one of the greatest melodies of all time. Yet, unlike some great melodies, it is also excellently suited for the kind of motivic development Beethoven loves to employ, and the movement proceeds so smoothly and gracefully that it makes Stravinsky's claim seem incredible. An energetic Scherzo follows, and the piece concludes with another sonata-form movement in which Beethoven again features some outstandingly engaging melodies, similar to those in the first movement but lighter and more quickly paced.