

**South Bay Chamber Music Society**  
**January 5 & 7, 2018 Greensmith – Nam Duo**  
Clive Greensmith, cello, Beth Nam, piano  
Program Notes by Dr. Boglárka Kiss

**Cello Sonata in A Major, G.4 (1773)**

Luigi Boccherini (1743-1805)



Luigi Boccherini was an Italian composer and one of the best-known cellists of his time. His father was a singer and double bass player, his sisters were celebrated ballet dancers, and his brother was a librettist who worked with the likes of Calzabigi, Salieri, and Haydn.

Although Boccherini was a prolific composer of chamber music, he was mostly known as a cellist during his lifetime. He toured Europe to great success with his violinist partner Filippo Manfredi. He lived in many of Europe's cultural centers, and spent a considerable amount of time in Spain. The cello sonata on today's program was likely composed there.

The work features two movements (slow, fast), rather than the standard three or four. Being a cellist himself, Boccherini knew how to exploit the capabilities of the instrument. The style is between the late baroque and classical, featuring simple melodies that are intricately embellished. Boccherini marked the work for "violoncello solo" and "basso." Interpretations of the "basso" part have ranged from a second cello or double bass to one or two continuo instruments.

In his later years, a series of tragedies had befallen Boccherini: He had difficulty securing a steady income, and his wife and three of his four daughters passed away. He died of tuberculosis and was buried in Madrid in 1805. In 1927, his remains were taken to his birthplace of Lucca, Italy, and re-buried in the basilica of San Francesco.

To hear a rendition of the work on cello with the "basso" played on cello and guitar, please click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=frTP7WpVGm8>

## Variations for Cello and Piano in E-flat Major on Mozart's "Bei Männern," WoO46 (1801)

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Anecdotal evidence suggests that a young Ludwig van Beethoven met Mozart once, and that Mozart remarked that the young German "would give the world something to talk about." Whether this meeting ever took place remains unclear, but what is for certain is that Beethoven knew Mozart's music quite well, particularly his operas. Beethoven composed four sets of variations on arias from three of Mozart's operas: *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, and *The Magic Flute*.

The work on today's program came about shortly after a performance of *The Magic Flute* in Vienna. The variations are based on a duet between Papageno and Pamina, with the roles of those characters taken up by the cello and piano, respectively. After presenting the main melody, Beethoven retains the equality of the two characters, which are now represented by the two instruments. The seven variations feature witty settings of the opening melody: from pointed accents, dynamic contrasts and changes in tonality and texture, to lyrical writing that recalls the flourishes and emotionality of *bel canto* singing. Beethoven gives a musical nod to Mozart's elegance and humor, while simultaneously adding his own sense of style and mischief to the music. These are most evident in the grand opening of the work as well as the tumultuous *Coda*, which gives way to a light, yet heroic ending.

To listen to the original duet from the opera—with subtitles, please click here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AOLnRcovLaA>

## Sonata in A minor for Arpeggione and Piano, D. 821 (1824)

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)



Invented in Vienna in the early 1800s, the *arpeggione* was a short-lived success. It has been described as a guitar-shaped fretted and bowed cello-like instrument, and is especially well-suited for playing arpeggios, double-stops, and runs in 3rds.

Perhaps the most famous piece written for the instrument is Franz Schubert's 1824 *Sonata for Arpeggione and Piano*, which is in three movements, with the last two played without break in between. How Schubert became acquainted with the instrument is not known, and by the publication of the *Sonata* in 1871, the score contained an alternative cello part. Nowadays, the piece is most often heard on cello and piano or viola and piano. However, the arpeggione part has been arranged for a variety of instruments including flute, clarinet, viola, euphonium, and even double bass.

The arpeggione has six strings and a wider range than the cello or viola thus, arrangements for those instruments are altered somewhat from the original part. Yet, this three-movement sonata lends itself to these transcriptions, as Schubert's composition was far more focused on lyricism and expression typical of a sonata for a string instrument and piano than on exploiting the idiomatic capabilities of the arpeggione itself.

Please click the links below for a performance of this work on arpeggione and fortepiano:

Movement 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=do9UgdfwM5Q>

Movements 2 and 3 (with no break): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JRFQ85SU\\_qs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JRFQ85SU_qs)

### **Sonata for Cello and Piano in D minor, L. 135 (1915)**

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)



The last years of Debussy's life were decidedly difficult. He underwent debilitating treatment for cancer, witnessed the devastation of World War I, and struggled financially. Nevertheless, in 1915, Debussy set out to write *Six Sonatas for Various Instruments*. He completed three of the six works before his death in 1918: the sonata for cello and piano, the sonata for flute, viola, harp, and the sonata for violin and piano. The fourth and fifth sonatas were planned for oboe, horn and harpsichord, and for trumpet, clarinet, bassoon and piano. For the sixth work, Debussy had hoped to combine the instruments used in the first five sonatas.

The *Sonata for Cello and Piano* offers an outstanding example of Debussy's mature style with its brevity, clarity of form, and colorful timbres. The work is in three movements, with the latter two played without a break in between. Throughout the piece, Debussy ventures from traditional harmonies towards atonality while balancing each instrument's acoustical strengths. It is in the first movement that references to French baroque music are heard the most, including an introductory fanfare on the piano and a cello melody reminiscent of French baroque operatic laments. Animated rhythms and percussive sounds provide forward momentum in the second movement, while the lively finale reaffirms Debussy's mastery of moods, colors, and musical architecture.

Please click the link for a live performance of the work:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5aQ6uHT4ILA>

## Sonata for Cello and Piano in C Major, Op. 119 (1949)

Sergey Prokofiev (1891-1953)



Prokofiev (on the left) and Rostropovich

Following a 1948 decree on music by the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, many leading Soviet composers came under fire for “misusing dissonance,” and for their music not serving a larger social purpose—in other words, for being “formalist.” In the wake of the decree, many of the works of Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Khatchaturian, and Miaskovsky were banned. Under immense pressure, Prokofiev acknowledged his alleged artistic errors in two public letters. In spite of this public humiliation, he continued to compose new works, but he never recovered from the psychological and health complications caused by these events.

After hearing Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich and pianist Lev Oborin perform Nikolai Miaskovsky's *Sonata for Cello and Piano, No. 2* in 1949, Prokofiev set out to compose a similar work himself. Rostropovich and pianist Sviatoslav Richter premiered Prokofiev's new sonata after an arduous process that Richter described in his memoirs,

“We gave the first performance of Prokofiev's Cello Sonata. Before playing it in concert, we had to perform it at the Composer's Union, where these gentlemen decided the fate of all new works. During this period more than any other, they needed to work out whether Prokofiev had produced a new masterpiece or, conversely, a piece that was 'hostile to the spirit of the people.' Three months later, we had to play it again at a plenary session of all the composers who sat on the Radio Committee, and it wasn't until the following year that we were able to perform it in public, in the Small Hall of the Moscow Conservatory on March 1, 1950.”

The work is in three movements, and opens with a somber chorale. The middle movement is a *scherzo* with a contrasting lyrical episode in the middle. The third movement revisits material from the first, and brings the work to a melodic yet virtuosic ending. The influence of lyricism found in his ballets *Cinderella* and *Romeo and Juliet* is undeniably present throughout.

To hear a recording of pianist Sviatoslav Richter and cellist Mstislav Rostropovich perform this piece, please click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vHldzZ1P1pg>

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