

UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA

MCINTIRE DEPARTMENT of

music 

presents

A Distinguished Major Recital

Brent Davis
cello

with

John Mayhood, *piano*

Saturday, March 20, 2021

3:30 pm

Old Cabell Hall

University of Virginia

***This recital is supported by the
Charles S. Roberts Scholarship Fund.***

Established in 2004 by the generosity of Mr. Alan Y. Roberts ('64) and Mrs. Sally G. Roberts, the Charles S. Roberts Scholarship Fund underwrites the private lessons and recital costs for undergraduate music majors giving a recital in their fourth year as part of a Distinguished Major Program in music.

Recital Program

Brent Davis, *cello*

Cello Sonata No. 2 in D Major, Op. 58 Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy
(1809–1847)

- I. Allegro assai vivace*
- II. Allegretto scherzando*
- III. Adagio*
- IV. Molto allegro e vivace*

John Mayhood, *piano*

Suite for Cello Solo Gaspar Cassadó
(1897–1966)

- I. Preludio – Fantasia*
- II. Sardana (Danza)*
- III. Intermezzo e Danza Finale*

~ Intermission ~

Suite No. 6 in D Major, BWV 1012 Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685–1750)

- I. Prélude*
- II. Allemande*
- III. Courante*
- IV. Sarabande*
- V. Gavotte I & II*
- VI. Gigue*

About the Performers



Brent Davis is a fourth-year student at the University of Virginia. He will graduate this spring with degrees in Music with a Performance Concentration, Commerce with Concentrations in Marketing and Information Technology on a Business Analytics Track, and a minor in Statistical Analysis of Social Behavior. After graduation, he will join CapTech in the DC Office as a Data Analytics Consultant.

Brent currently studies with Professor Adam Carter at UVA. He is a cellist in the Charlottesville

Symphony and several chamber ensembles at UVA, including Trio Sobrenna, the Jupiter Quartet, and Radio Music Society. He is a Miller Arts Scholar and a recipient of the Undergraduate Award for Projects in the Arts, funding the Music Department's first chamber ensemble fourth year recital for his piano trio, Trio Sobrenna. Brent has also played in masterclasses with Misha Veselov of the Neave Trio, Wesley Baldwin of the University of Tennessee, and László Pólus of the University of Pécs.

Brent has thoroughly enjoyed studying music at UVA, taking courses such as *The Classical Style: Form in Tonal Music; Orchestration; and Studies in 17th- and 18th-Century Music*. He also has pursued his lifelong dream of working in sports as an Undergraduate Recruiting Assistant for the UVA Football Team since his first year.

Brent has made so many unforgettable musical memories while at UVA, but perhaps his favorite is performing at President Jim Ryan's first major speech, *The Hope that Summons Us: A Morning of Reflection and Renewal*, in a string trio with Sophia Park and John Kanu.



John Mayhood enjoys a busy performance schedule that in recent seasons has taken him across North America and Europe in a wide variety of solo and collaborative settings and in repertoire that spans from the English virginalists to music of the present day. His concerts often explore the works of a single composer, combining solo piano and chamber music—he has dedicated complete evenings to the works of Poulenc, Hindemith, Feldman, and Schubert, and to new works by

emerging composers. He has recently given world premieres of works by Matthew Burtner, Daniel Kessner, and James Sochinski, and the US premiere of Bruce Mather's *Doisy Daëne III*. His performances are often featured on NPR, CBC, and SRC radio, and his recordings can be heard on Ravello Records and the EcoSono label.

Also a scholar, he has presented work on 'transformational theory' and 'theory and performance' at the University of Chicago and at the annual meeting of the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Musiktheorie*. His main interest is the philosophy of music, particularly meaning in abstract music and the philosophy of performance.

John holds the Master of Music degree from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he studied with Ian Hobson; his other major teachers are Caio Pagano and Jean-Paul Sévilla. He has taught piano at the University of Illinois and philosophy at Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design. He currently resides in Charlottesville, Virginia, where he is head of the piano faculty at the University of Virginia.

Program Notes



The turn of the 19th Century marked the true emancipation of the cello from its traditional supporting role. J.S. Bach had written his Suites for Unaccompanied Cello 80 years prior, and Luigi Boccherini had composed cello sonatas and concerti in the early 1770s, but Beethoven and his heirs in the Romantic period greatly advanced the cello literature. **Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1809–1847)** may rightly be counted among the most significant of the

composers who defined a new era for the instrument.

Mendelssohn was an extraordinary child prodigy on the piano, making his performance debut at age nine and garnering the attention of distinguished musicians. In his journey to become one of the most prolific German Romantic performers and composers, he went on to dedicate much of his focus to revitalizing Bach's piano repertoire, giving its first performances in almost a century. Mendelssohn's fascination with Bach's music is clear in his own works, including his works for cello.

In December 1842, his beloved mother passed away, a day in which he shared the realization with his younger brother, Paul, a cellist, that "we are children no longer." This sentiment drove the 34-year-old Mendelssohn to establish a conservatory in Leipzig in April 1843—now the Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy University of Music and Theater—in hopes of inspiring young German musicians. In this same year, perhaps the most turbulent of his life, Mendelssohn would compose his **Sonata No. 2 for Piano and Violoncello in D Major, Op. 58**.

In this work, Mendelssohn brilliantly showcases a blend of Classical era form, Romantic era virtuosic keyboard writing and textures, and remembrance of Bach. The first movement, *Allegro assai vivace*, begins with a confident cello melody and sets up an equal relationship between the two instruments as partners, with each having plenty of virtuosic moments. Mendelssohn follows with a whimsical second movement,

Allegretto scherzando, that features spirited echoes between the pizzicato cello and piano, as well as a gorgeous romantic second theme. The slow third movement, *Adagio*, is seemingly one of Mendelssohn's many homages to Bach, with the glorious initial piano arpeggiated chords based on the structure of "Es ist Vollbracht" from Bach's *St. John Passion* in the form of a free chorale. The cello enters with an impassioned melody with an increasingly recitative-like character before retreating into the background while the piano repeats the cello's theme to close the movement. Lastly, Mendelssohn builds the fourth movement, *Molto allegro e vivace*, on material reminiscent of his "Spinning Song," challenging both instrumentalists with lively dialogue and difficult runs.



At the end of the Romantic period, an era of incredible change for the cello began, driven by the revival of J.S. Bach's Suites for Unaccompanied Cello. The Bach suites were not widely known to the public and were seen mostly as technical studies. However, the legendary Spanish cellist Pablo Casals produced the first notable performances and later archival recordings that inspired musicians across Europe.

Among them was the Spanish cellist **Gaspar Cassadó (1897–1966)**, who was one of the most prominent and versatile musicians of the 20th century. As a young phenom, he drew the attention of Casals, who was so impressed with Cassadó's technical skill that he invited him to be his first full-time student in what would eventually become an overwhelmingly successful lineage of Catalan cellists. Cassadó moved to Paris, where he studied for several years under Casals, whom Cassadó considered to be his greatest musical influence.

While in Paris, Cassadó continued to pursue composition as well, becoming an understudy to Maurice Ravel and Manuel de Falla. Cassadó demonstrated their stylistic influence in his Suite for Cello Solo, which he composed in 1926. Inspired by Casals' performances

of Bach's Suites, Cassadó joined a diverse group of major 20th century composers who produced solo cello works, including Zoltán Kodály, Max Reger, Paul Hindemith, and Benjamin Britten.

Cassadó undertook numerous experiments to increase the volume of the cello through modifications of the instrument, which was unusual for his time. In addition to being the first famous cellist to utilize four steel strings, he toyed with wire bow hair, a height-adjustable finger board, and tension-adjustable tailpiece designs. Despite experimenting with the instrument, Cassadó's compositional practices situate him as a Neoclassicist, similarly to Kodály, Reger, Hindemith, and Britten, as he tended to loosely adhere to Baroque and Classical forms, while injecting a dose of Spanish flair into his works.

The Suite for Cello Solo begins with a free prelude, as Bach's Cello Suites do, which develops into a "zarabanda," a Spanish dance that is closely related to the Baroque Sarabande. Cassadó quotes Kodály's Sonata for Cello Solo and even incorporates a motive from the famous flute solo in the ballet *Daphnis et Chloe*, reflecting his studies with Ravel.

The second movement takes the form of a two-part "sardana," which is broken down into two "tiradas." The first tirada is a characteristically slow introductory section, as opening tiradas were typically dances with the arms down in classic sardanas. However, the music quickly bursts into a faster, more rustic dance; the second tirada of classical sardanas was often danced with the arms up. Despite each movement having elements of Spanish dances, this movement is by far the most "danceable" of the three.

Finally, Cassadó bases the third movement on another antique Spanish folkdance, the "jota," which originally included colorful, flamboyant costumes and castanets. The movement opens with a slow intermezzo that features irregular five-beat phrases, then gives way to the vigorous jota. Cassadó alternates between intermezzo and jota sections before unrelentingly accelerating into a classic Spanish whirlwind of a finish.



Despite being performed last on this program, the Bach Cello Suites helped to inspire the vast majority of later cello repertoire, including the works by Mendelssohn and Casadó. During the Baroque Period, the cello was still an instrument of relatively recent origin, first achieving its modern configuration around 1560 as a successor to the viols. For its first 100 years of existence, the cello was primarily confined to playing the bass

line in chamber works. Solo works for the cello did not arise until the 1680s, when several Italian orchestral cellists sought to expose the instrument's uncharted virtuosic potential. As more and more compositions for the cello began to surface, the instrument greatly gained in popularity and gradually overtook the viola da gamba, an instrument similar to the cello that received more soloistic lines in chamber works. However, despite the gradual rise of the cello, there was still little precedent for **Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)** when he composed his Unaccompanied Cello Suites around 1720.

Bach's Solo Cello Suites follow the traditional form of the French instrumental suite. The suites begin with a free *prélude* as an introduction, followed by a series of dances: *allemande*, *courante*, *sarabande*, and *gigue*. Between the final two dances are a pair of *minuets* (Suites I and II), *boureés* (Suites III and IV), or *gavottes* (Suites V and VI).

Bach originally composed his **Sixth Suite in D Major** for an instrument other than the traditional four-stringed cello; however, the exact instrument for which he wrote is widely debated. Anna Magdalena Bach's manuscript of the suite states that the instrument should be "á cinq cordes," with a fifth string tuned to E above the traditional high A string of the cello. This specification has led music historians to believe that the piccolo cello, a slightly smaller instrument with this five-string tuning, was Bach's instrument of choice. However, many researchers struggle to rule out the violoncello da spalla, which also had the five-string tuning and was played on the shoulder like a violin using a strap. Regardless, most modern cellists opt to use the traditional four-stringed instrument, which requires inventive fingerings and a great deal of thumb position technique.

With an extended upper register at his disposal, Bach made the D Major Suite the most overtly virtuosic of the six, with many string crossings and frequent double stops showcasing the cellist's ability. The Prélude is the only movement of any of the suites in 12/8 time, providing unique symmetry with the 6/8 Gigue, and invokes imagery of ascending to heaven with a series of sequential scales climbing into the higher register. The Allemande is the longest movement of any of the suites, lasting about 8 minutes, and emulates a singing voice with a beautifully romantic character. The Courante emanates an ecstatic quality that mirrors the leaping energy of its model dance. The Sarabande is interestingly in 3/2 time, a quality native to the French Sarabande, rather than its 3/4 time German counterpart, and is often regarded as the most difficult movement of the Bach suites, with its serene melody endangered by hefty three- and four-voice chords. The first Gavotte is joyous and stately, while the second actually imitates a musette drone, a small French bagpipe. Finally, the Gigue brings the long emotional journey of the Six Suites – and this wonderful program – to a celebratory close.

Acknowledgements

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Distinguished Major Program

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