

A photograph of a woman with long blonde hair, Laura Metcalf, and a man with glasses and a beard, Matei Varga, sitting together. Laura is on the left, wearing a dark blue dress, and Matei is on the right, wearing a black suit jacket and a black shirt. They are both smiling and looking towards each other. To the left of Laura is a large, glossy red double bass. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

**LAURA METCALF**  
**FIRST DAY**  
**MATEI VARGA**

## First Day

This album represents many firsts, beginnings and youthful sentiments. The title is taken from the phrase “paths of the first day” from the final track on the album, “Les chemins de l’amour” by Francis Poulenc. The pianist Matei Varga was one of my first friends and musical partners when we both moved to New York City in 2004. We played together a great deal in those early years, and, after a decade of pursuing independent musical projects, are thrilled to collaborate again for this recording. The eight works on this album are ones to which we both feel deeply connected, and which we believe complement each other to form a whole that is both exuberant and reflective.

## Graciela y Buenos Aires

José Bragato (b. 1915)

I first heard this piece in my older sister’s attic bedroom sometime during the 1990s. My younger sister (who also played the cello) and I would camp out up there for hours at a time, and the three of us would listen to classical music. This gem by José Bragato was included on a compilation disc of Latin-themed works that

we lifted from our father’s vast CD collection, and we all fell in love with it. My sisters and I grew up and our attic listening parties came to an end, but this piece has become a staple of my repertoire, and I program it as often as I can. Bragato, a cellist himself who was both principal of the Buenos Aires Philharmonic and a member of Astor Piazzolla’s Nuevo Tango ensemble, wrote the piece originally for cello and string orchestra.

## Variations on a Slovakian Theme

Bohuslav Martinů (1890-1959)

My interest in playing works that live outside of the standard canon began when I was a student, and I was thrilled to discover this piece when programming my senior recital as an undergraduate. The theme is a traditional Czech folk song, and its poignant title “If Only I Knew” is highly apropos as it was written during the final year of Martinů’s life. But in the five variations, Martinů balances the theme’s melancholic, halting rubato with ample driving rhythms and impish dancing. In fact, once we hear the theme in the beginning of the piece, Martinů strays from it so immediately and so completely that it’s sometimes

hard to even remember what it is.

## Phantasie

Caleb Burhans (b. 1980)

I first met Caleb Burhans when I joined a cello octet (yes, a cello octet) in 2008, and the group performed and recorded a piece he wrote for us. I was captivated by the strange, fragile beauty of that piece, and have been his friend and fan ever since. This work, written originally for trombone and piano, draws its inspiration from such diverse sources as the indie band Death Cab for Cutie and a chant song by the Bulgarian Women’s Choir. Furthermore, Caleb told me that he wrote much of the piece by improvising on the violin and then transcribing what he played. The result is a contemplative, pulsing meditation that deftly blends the modern with the ancient.

## Pampeana No. 2, Op. 21

Alberto Ginastera (1916-1983)

It was actually through making a rough demo recording of this piece that Matei and I were inspired to make this album. Ginastera wrote this piece during his midlife compositional period as an ode to his land, the Argentinian “pampa,” or lowlands. He employs

characteristics of Argentinian folk melodies without quoting them directly. This work, subtitled “Rhapsody for cello and piano,” traverses many landscapes, from the bravura-rich cello cadenza at the opening to the doleful, expansive middle section to the galloping frenzy at the end. It’s an immensely satisfying piece for that reason; it tells a complete story within its ten-minute duration.

## Sonata in F Minor

George Enescu (1881-1955)

I am extremely thankful to Matei for bringing this piece to us. Enescu is the most prominent composer from Matei’s native Romania, and though he wrote two full cello sonatas that are well-regarded and often played, this single-movement work is virtually unknown, and indeed has only recently been discovered. Enescu wrote it when he was just 17 and studying at the Paris Conservatory. The piece has not yet been properly published; we learned it from a copy of a handwritten manuscript. It is a remarkably tempestuous work for someone so young—it swirls and storms mightily before surrendering at the end.

## Hard-Knock Stomp

Dan Visconti (b. 1981)

Dan is one of those composers whose music is always recognizable as his own. It has a bluesy, pleasantly “dirty” feeling to it and it is such a physical pleasure to play. I perform his music constantly as a member of the string quintet Sybarite5, as we’ve been programming his works for many years. This piece, originally written in 2000 for solo viola, was Dan’s first published work. He uses plenty of double stops, glissandi and a few extended techniques to create the swinging, tumbling feel.

## Variations on “La Folia”

Marin Marais (1656-1728)

*La Folia*, meaning “madness or folly,” is a theme on which a vast number of composers have written sets of variations. Though it originated as a 16th century Portuguese dance, it is believed that the first composer to standardize the theme was the French composer Jean-Baptiste Lully, who also happened to be Marais’ composition teacher. I love this particular set of variations for many reasons, the most notable of which is Marais’ ability to flit effortlessly from epic grandeur to delicate

whimsy and back again.

## Les chemins de l’amour

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)

This song is extremely dear to me. When I was a teenager, my father (the kind of gifted pianist who can play anything by ear upon one hearing) wrote the melody out for me to play on the cello. We

performed it many times, and to this day when I go to my parents’ house this is the one piece he and I can always remember without looking for the music. Poulenc wrote this lilting, lovely waltz to a text by Jean Anouilh, and the title translates to “The Pathways of Love.” It is a beguiling little song, and with good reason is performed

frequently by vocalists and instrumentalists alike. Here, I attempt to be both.

—Laura Metcalf



## Laura Metcalf

cello

Cellist Laura Metcalf, acclaimed for her “gorgeous cello legatos” (Washington Post) and her “sensitive, melodic touch” (Blog Critics Magazine), is known for her compelling solo and chamber music performances both worldwide and in her home of New York City. She has given concerts in over 40 states, as well as Argentina, Australia, Canada, Japan, United Arab Emirates, Austria, Germany, France, Virgin Islands, Mexico, Haiti, England and South Africa. She has appeared as a soloist with the One World, Duluth, and Midland Symphonies; the South Carolina and Laredo Philharmonics; Ensemble 212, and Orquesta Sinfonica Sinaloa. As the cellist of the acclaimed string quintet Sybarite5, winners of the 2011 Concert Artists Guild Competition, she has toured the globe performing to sold-out audiences in Carnegie Hall, the Library of Congress, Lincoln Center and many others. Sybarite5’s debut album reached the Billboard Charts Top 10, and the quintet premiered a concerto written for them by Dan Visconti in 2015.

Laura has performed at the Aspen, Caramoor, Ravinia, Newport, Chautauqua, Taos, Sarasota, Walla Walla, Fontainebleau and IMS Prussia Cove Music Festivals. She performs with her husband, acclaimed guitarist Rupert Boyd, with whom she has toured Australia and the US. Among

other accolades and awards, she has won the Rutenberg Chamber Music Competition and Mannes College’s James E. Hughes Award. Comfortable performing a variety of genres, Laura is a member of the cello and percussion quartet Break of Reality with whom she has given hundreds of concerts and

whose recorded music has a reach of millions worldwide. She has appeared on the David Letterman, Conan O’Brien, and Today Shows, the View, and at the US Open, New York Fashion Week, and in South Africa with legendary rap artist, Nas.





## Matei Varga

piano

Matei Varga's artistry has garnered superlative reviews from critics around the world, who have found his performances "magical" (Süddeutsche Zeitung), as well as "colorful, vivacious [and] engaging" (Le Diapason). A top prizewinner at the Maria Canals and George Enescu piano competitions, Mr. Varga has appeared as a soloist and recitalist in many of the world's leading concert halls, among them Carnegie Hall and Alice Tully Hall, Konzerthaus (Berlin), the Auditorium du Louvre and Salle Gaveau (Paris). He is a graduate of Mannes College of Music, where he studied with Pavlina Dokovska.





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## Laura Metcalf First Day

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