



DEBUSSY: CELLO SONATA  
BRAHMS: CLARINET TRIO

---

BRIAN THORNTON, CELLO

---

AFENDI YUSUF, CLARINET  
SPENCER MYER, PIANO



STEINWAY & SONS

The Cello Sonata marked Debussy's first return to chamber music since the youthful String Quartet of 1893. Debussy was increasingly interested in Baroque music, but here he combined early-music elements with harmonies and playing techniques that were quite modern in 1915.

The piano introduction outlines a firm D minor, and a figure of three rapid notes is an allusion to Baroque music. Yet the gently descending melody by the cello that follows contains a pentatonic, definitively non-classical turn.

The second and third movements—*Sérénade* and *Final*—are played without a pause. Debussy loved serenades; Here it is Pierrot, the unfortunate, moonstruck lover of the *commedia dell'arte* tradition, who plays a serenade, and an unusual one at that. Debussy originally intended to give the sonata the subtitle Pierrot fâché avec la lune ("Pierrot Angry at the Moon"), and the image explains the whimsical mood changes and the panoply of special techniques used by the cellist—*pizzicato*, harmonics, *sul tasto*, *sul ponticello* and more. The last movement alternates between an animated first theme and dreamlike interjections in free rhythm; the final measures place both characters side by side.

As he grew older, Brahms talked about retiring from composition (though he never did so). Almost everything he wrote in his final years has a certain "autumnal"

quality: nostalgia, resignation and leave-taking are written all over his late scores.

At the same time, the "old" master could still get excited about new discoveries — including the clarinet, which he had never used in a chamber work before. It was in 1891 that Brahms met Richard Mühlfeld, principal clarinet in Meiningen, where Brahms's friend Hans von Bülow was music director. He instantly fell in love with "Miss Clarinet," as he playfully called the instrument, and within a short time wrote four major works for it: the present trio, the Clarinet Quintet, and two sonatas.

The combination of clarinet, cello and piano emphasizes the lower, darker register, which suits the emotional character of the work. In spite of the tempo marking "Allegro," the first movement seems to be in no hurry; it is more contemplative than dynamic, except for a brief outburst in the development section.

The second movement is an intense Adagio, with long melodic lines and exquisite figurations. The mood lightens for the last two movements: the gentle lyricism of the "Andante grazioso" turns into a genuine Ländler dance in the middle section. In the last movement, distant echoes of Hungarian Gypsy music are combined with subtle metric changes; the movement exudes great vigor and high energy.

—Peter Laki





BRIAN THORNTON is a multi-faceted musician who has touched the lives of thousands of people through musical outreach programs around the world and through his performances commemorating his teacher, Lev Aronson.

Mr. Thornton began playing the cello in the public school system of Chicago, giving him a passion for teaching young musicians and public school outreach programs. He has traveled from Kolkata, India to Osaka, Japan, influencing young musicians not only to play better cello, but to use music to positively affect the world around them.

Mr. Thornton teaches at the Cleveland Institute of Music (CIM) and performs with the Cleveland Orchestra where he has been part of the cello section for twenty-five years.

Education is also a focus of Mr. Thornton's life, and he spends part of his time teaching at CIM, conducting young musicians, as well as traveling to teach in different parts of the world.

Mr. Thornton is the founder of the Aronson Cello Festival hosted by Southern Methodist University (SMU) in Dallas, Texas, where renowned cellist Lev Aronson taught for many years. Modern music is of particular

interest to Mr. Thornton, and he has premiered more than a hundred new solo cellos works around the world.

Brian Thornton performs on a cello made by Francesco Rugeri in 1695.



Gold Medalist of the 2008 New Orleans International Piano Competition, SPENCER MYER has been soloist with the Cleveland Orchestra, the Indianapolis Symphony, the Cape Town and Johannesburg Philharmonics, and Beijing's

China National Symphony Orchestra. His 2005 recital/orchestral tour of South Africa included a performance of the five piano concerti of Beethoven with the Chamber Orchestra of South Africa. In December 2014 he made his second solo recital appearance at London's Wigmore Hall.

In 2004, he captured First Prize in the 10th UNISA International Piano Competition in South Africa, and won the 2006 Christel DeHaan Classical Fellowship from the American Pianists Association. He was a member of Astral Artists' performance roster from 2003 to 2010.

An avid chamber musician, he has collaborated with the Jupiter and Pacifica string quartets, the Dorian Wind Quintet, cellists Lynn Harrell and Ralph Kirshbaum, and

clarinetist David Shifrin. His growing reputation as a vocal collaborator since winning the 2000 Marilyn Horne Foundation Competition has led to partnerships with Cardiff Singer of the World winner Nicole Cabell and Wigmore Hall Song Competition winner Martha Guth, among others.

Spencer Myer is a graduate of the Oberlin Conservatory, The Juilliard School, and Stony Brook University, and is currently a member of the Piano and Collaborative Piano faculty of Boston's Longy School of Music of Bard College. His two most recent CDs — Piano Rags of William Bolcom and the two Brahms Cello Sonatas with Brian Thornton — were released in 2017 on the Steinway & Sons label.

Spencer Myer is a Steinway Artist.



AFENDI YUSUF joined the Cleveland Orchestra as principal clarinet with the start of the 2017-18 season. Born in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, he has appeared as guest principal with a number of North American ensembles, including the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, Canadian Opera Company, and the Toronto and Cincinnati symphony orchestras. As a guest musician, he has performed with the Los Angeles

Philharmonic, Minnesota Orchestra, and the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, under the batons of Gustavo Dudamel, Edo de Waart, Gianandrea Noseda, Esa-Pekka Salonen, and Yehuda Gilad.

A winner of a variety of concerto competitions, Mr. Yusuf has made solo appearances with the Colburn Orchestra, Royal Conservatory Orchestra, and the Guelph Symphony Orchestra, among others. He has collaborated with performers Charles Neidich, Ronald Leonard, Martin Beaver, and with composers Georg Friedrich Haas, John Adams, and Anders Hillborg. He is an alumnus of the Aspen Music Festival and School, Brott Music Festival, National Youth Orchestra of Canada, and the National Arts Centre's Young Artists Program. He has been a participant of the Marlboro Music Festival since the summer of 2016.

Mr. Yusuf holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Ontario's Wilfrid Laurier University, where he was a student of Ross Edwards, and an artist diploma from the Glenn Gould School in Toronto, where he studied with Joaquin Valdepeñas. He also holds a Master of Music degree and Professional Studies certificate from the Colburn School's Conservatory of Music in Los Angeles, where he was a student of Yehuda Gilad.

Mr. Yusuf holds the Robert Marcellus Endowed Chair.





## CLAUDE DEBUSSY

### Cello Sonata

1. I. Prologue 4:55
2. II. Sérénade 3:33
3. III. Final 3:57

BRIAN THORNTON, cello

SPENCER MYER, piano

## JOHANNES BRAHMS

### Clarinet Trio, Op. 114

4. I. Allegro 7:41
5. II. Adagio 7:54
6. III. Andante grazioso 4:23
7. IV. Allegro 4:53

AFENDI YUSUF, clarinet

BRIAN THORNTON, cello

SPENCER MYER, piano



Steinway & Sons

© 2019 Steinway, Inc.

Steinway and the lyre are registered trademarks.

All rights reserved. Made in the USA.