

# RACHMANINOFF ♦ BARBER

## CELLO SONATAS



Jonah Kim, cello ♦ Sean Kennard, piano



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## CELLO SONATAS

**Sergei Rachmaninoff** (1873–1943)

**Sonata for Piano and Violoncello, Op. 19** (1901)

Lento; Allegro moderato • Allegro scherzando • Andante • Allegro mosso

**Samuel Barber** (1910–1981)

**Sonata for Violoncello and Piano, Op. 6** (1932)

Allegro ma non troppo • Adagio; Presto; di nuovo Adagio • Allegro appassionato

**Jonah Kim**, cello ♦ **Sean Kennard**, piano

Total Playing Time: 52:51

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## CELLO SONATAS

Jonah Kim, cello ♦ Sean Kennard, piano

**Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943)**

**Sonata for Piano and Violoncello, Op. 19 (1901) (33:06)**

1. Lento; Allegro moderato (9:50)
2. Allegro scherzando (6:43)
3. Andante (5:55)
4. Allegro mosso (10:36)

**Samuel Barber (1910–1981)**

**Sonata for Violoncello and Piano, Op. 6 (1932) (19:42)**

5. Allegro ma non troppo (8:51)
6. Adagio; Presto; di nuovo Adagio (5:03)
7. Allegro appassionato (5:47)

Total Playing Time: 52:51



## Notes on the Program

**Sergei Rachmaninoff**, suffering from the critical attacks on his Symphony No. 1 after its premiere in 1897, fell into a deep depression and stopped composing altogether. Fortunately, a few years later he was able to complete his Piano Concerto No. 2, and the critical triumph after its 1901 premiere boosted Rachmaninoff's self confidence and enabled him to write the **Sonata for Piano and Violoncello, Op. 19**. The Sonata, with its expansive melodies and rich harmonies, is musically related to the well-known and well-loved piano concerto.

Rachmaninoff had a special feeling for the cello: Among his earliest works are the *Romance in F Minor* for cello and piano and *Two Pieces for Cello and Piano*, Opus 2. Throughout the Sonata Rachmaninoff spins exquisite melodies—even the repeated notes of some of the motifs sound melodic.

The Sonata was first performed in Moscow in November of 1901 with Rachmaninoff at the piano and his close friend Anatoly Brandukov on cello. With his boundless technique, Rachmaninoff was one of the world's great pianists, and the piano part to the Sonata has been described as "terrifyingly difficult." The roles for cello and piano are well balanced, with the singing

qualities of the cello featured in broad, rhapsodic strokes. Sean Kennard writes, "Rachmaninoff's Sonata has achieved a universal reputation as one of the greatest and most difficult works in its genre."

**Samuel Barber** stands as one of America's most popular composers. In his works, Barber combines many components that could seem contradictory: his "American" voice with the European tradition; his romantic predisposition with musical modernity; and his originality with his knowledge and use of classical forms. The **Sonata for Violoncello and Piano, Op. 6** is a good example of how Barber beautifully balances these elements.

Like Rachmaninoff, Barber is a splendid melodist, partly as a result, perhaps, of his abilities as a singer. (At age 14, Barber was one of the first students at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, where he studied voice as well as piano and composition.)

The Cello Sonata was completed in 1932, while Barber was a student at Curtis, but it is in no way a "student piece." It is the creation of a fully mature master composer. Barber worked on the Sonata with cellist Orlando Cole, who made many suggestions; Cole and Barber gave the first performances of the piece in 1933.

The wide-ranging capabilities of the cello and piano are displayed in the Sonata, which features cadenza-like sections for both instruments. The piece is further characterized by large, romantic gestures and complex rhythmic passages. Barber introduces an innovative variety of a simple ABA form in the middle movement: He places a rapid scherzo within the slow movement, thus combining what would be two separate movements in a four-movement sonata. Cross rhythms characterize the scherzo section, which includes two measures in the unusual time signature of 18/8.

In 1935 Barber's Sonata won a Pulitzer Travel Stipend as well as the Prix de Rome, allowing him to study and compose in Europe.

**Jonah Kim** and **Sean Kennard** have been making music together since they were teenagers at Curtis. The Rachmaninoff Sonata was the first piece they worked on, and together they have played almost every sonata in the standard repertoire. Choosing the Rachmaninoff and Barber Sonatas for their first album on Delos, they write that "these works are greatly beloved among classical music lovers, and particularly in the cello world." And their relationship to these deeply romantic, passionate and virtuosic Sonatas is special. Sean writes, "We had the irre-

placeable chance as teenagers at Curtis to receive extensive coaching from Jonah's teacher, Orlando Cole, the cellist who premiered the Sonata in 1933 with Barber himself at the piano. We have a sense that these pieces are the music of our family. In addition to our personal connection to Barber through Curtis and Jonah's teacher Orlando Cole, Rachmaninoff also had strong ties to Philadelphia and spent a lot of time at Eugene Ormandy's place next door to Curtis."

Born in Seoul, Korea, **Jonah Kim** came to the United States in 1995. By the time he was eight years old he had won a full scholarship to the Juilliard School in New York and soon afterward the renowned cellist Janos Starker invited him to become his student. Starker later remarked, "Jonah is an exceptional talent. He is at the top of his generation."

Jonah is a graduate of both Juilliard and the Curtis Institute of Music. His teachers, in addition to Orlando Cole, include Peter Wiley, David Soyer, Lynn Harrell, Aldo Parisot and Joel Krosnick.

Jonah recently described his experience of studying the Barber Sonata with Cole, one of Barber's oldest and closest friends: "It was one of the highlights of my Curtis experience. The historic context we



seek when learning a new work to form interpretive ideas was there in the flesh in my teacher. Stories of summers at Dover Beach with 'Sammy' or their views on World War I all added to my understanding of this turbulent yet beautifully lyrical Sonata. Stories of times he performed it taught me the meanings and intent of gestures, what colors went together, what feelings to evoke. Through my teacher, who seemed like a walking encyclopedia to me, I became part of the piece and the era by osmosis. All this was very special to me. But the most special lesson was not so much the stories themselves, but the manner in which he told them. There was always a sense of endearment and brotherly love in his delivery. To me, it was testimony to a lifetime of friendship, mutual admiration and respect, and the cultivation of trust in one another as humans and as musicians."

In turn, Cole wrote about Kim while he was his student, "He is one of the most accomplished cellists I have taught in my sixty-five years on the Curtis faculty. He is tops in every way."

Jonah made his debut with Wolfgang Sawallisch and the Philadelphia Orchestra in 2003, and has performed concertos with many orchestras including the New Philharmonia Orchestra, the Philadelphia

Chamber Orchestra, the Symphony of the Americas and Orquestra Sinfônica Nacional in Santo Domingo Dominican Republic. He has appeared at Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, the Wigmore Hall in London, and many other well-known venues. After an appearance with the National Symphony Orchestra, Joseph McLellan of the *Washington Post* called him "the next Yo-Yo Ma."

The winner of two GRAMMY® Awards, Mr. Kim is highly sought after as a chamber musician. He is a founding member of the "hip, unstuffy, and malleable group" Ensemble San Francisco.

For more information, please see Jonah's website, [jonahcello.com](http://jonahcello.com)

**Sean Kennard** was born in San Diego and grew up in Hawaii, where he began to study piano with Ellen Masaki on his tenth birthday. He received a Bachelor of Music Degree from the Curtis Institute of Music in 2004, winning the institute's Sergei Rachmaninoff Award, given to one graduating pianist each year. After subsequent work with pianist Enrique Graf he received a Master of Music Degree from the Juilliard School, where he studied with Jerome Lowenthal and Robert McDonald. He has also studied with Richard Goode and with





Boris Berman at Yale University, graduating with a Doctor of Musical Arts Degree in 2020. Richard Goode noted “[Sean Kennard is] an extraordinary pianist, one of the most gifted I have ever heard.”

Sean has won top prizes in the Queen Elisabeth Competition, the Sendai International Music Competition, the Hilton Head International Piano Competition, the National Chopin Piano Competition of the USA, and the International Chopin Competition of the Pacific, among others.

*The Washington Post* praised Sean’s “powerful and involved music making,” describing him as “a strong, luminous pianist.” His debut album received a rave review in the *American Record Guide*, which pronounced it “a hidden gem,” attesting to the pianist’s “perfect blend of lyricism and romantic passion, huge romantic sound, and bold melodic vision.”

On his debut album for the Delos label, *American Classics*, (DE 3554) Sean performs works by Samuel Barber and Aaron Copland, including Barber’s Sonata for Piano, Op. 26, his Ballade, Op. 46, and *Excursions*, Op. 20, as well as Aaron Copland’s Piano Variations and *Four Piano Blues*.

Sean has performed as soloist with orchestras around the world, including the

Prague Radio Symphony, Osaka Symphony Orchestra, National Orchestra of Belgium, Chamber Orchestra of Frankfurt, Montevideo Philharmonic, Charleston Symphony Orchestra, and the Honolulu Symphony Orchestra. He has appeared in solo recitals and chamber music concerts in such venues as Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, Salle Cortot, Brussels’ Palais des Beaux-arts, Teatro Caio Melisso in Spoleto, Tokyo Opera City Hall, Seoul Arts Center, Hong Kong City Hall and many more.

In 2018 Sean was guest artist and faculty member at the Costa Rica Piano Festival and Competition. He is a Harvey Fellow of the Mustard Seed Foundation and a Steinway Artist. Sean joined the faculty at Stetson University’s School of Music in 2017, where he is chair of the piano department. Sean is the artistic director of the Great Pianists at Stetson recital series and the Stetson Piano Scholars festival.

For more information, please see Sean’s website, [seankennard.com](http://seankennard.com)



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