

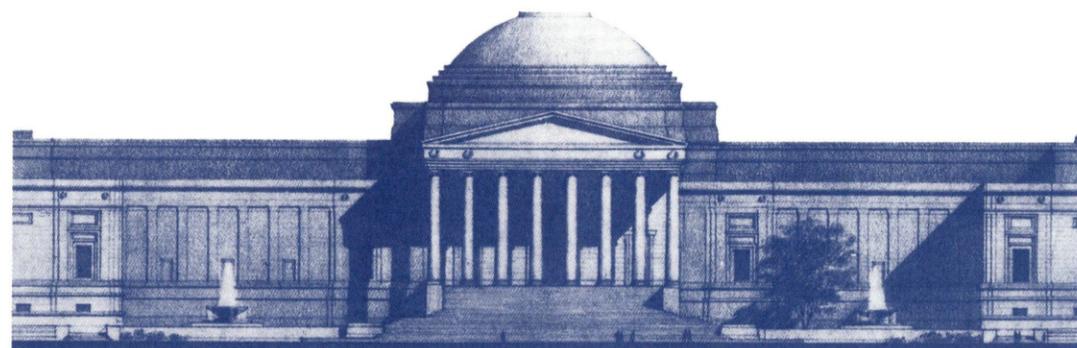
Edvard Grieg's *Sonata in A Minor for Cello and Piano, Op. 36*, is dedicated to his brother John, who was an accomplished cellist and with whom he performed in numerous concerts. It is claimed that John aided Edvard in overcoming the difficulties in writing for the instrument. The first movement (*Allegro agitato*), written in the sonata-allegro format, is cast in a dark hue, reflecting a disconsolate but impassioned Nordic mood. The main theme, stated by the cello, is bold and forceful, while the second is calmer and more melodious. The lengthy but exhilarating development section concludes with the ushering in of a dynamic coda that is marked *presto*, followed by *prestissimo*. The second movement (*Andante molto tranquillo*) projects a mood of placidity, with a melody that found its way into the *Triumphal March* of Grieg's *King Sigurd Jorsalfar Suite for Orchestra*. Noteworthy as well are the colorful chromatic harmonies that Grieg had become adept at using. The third movement (*Allegro molto e marcato*) opens with brief introduction by the cello in solo, imitating the flute of a shepherd. The Norwegian peasant dance tune that follows becomes the main theme for the movement. The kaleidoscopic key changes, particularly in the development section, the rambunctious interplay between the cello and the piano, and its strong nationalistic sense make this movement "one of the very best and strongest in the whole of Grieg's output. [It] fascinates by its imaginative wealth [that is] always kept within the bounds of genuine organic unity, thanks to a real sense of thematic development" (Harry Halbreich).

Programs notes by Elmer Booze

The Sixty-first Season of

THE WILLIAM NELSON CROMWELL and
F. LAMMOT BELIN CONCERTS

National Gallery of Art



2456th Concert

ZUILL BAILEY, cellist

J. Y. SONG, pianist

Sunday Evening, 27 April 2003
Seven O'clock
West Building, West Garden Court

Admission free

music. She received numerous music awards from Stanford, including the Robert Golden Medal for excellence in performance and the prestigious Sudler Prize for outstanding achievement in the creative arts. She completed her doctoral studies at Juilliard under pianist Jerome Lowenthal, has taught at the Oberlin College Conservatory of Music, and recently joined the Hunter College faculty. Zuill Bailey and j. y. song appear at the National Gallery by arrangement with Colbert Artists Management, Inc., of New York City.

Program Notes

Composer and violinist François Francoeur is known less for the two sets of violin and/or cello sonatas he composed than for his long and close affiliation with the Opera of Paris, starting at age fifteen. Shortly after commencing his association with the opera, Francoeur also became a musician in the Parisian royal court, taking the titles of composer in the royal chamber (1727–1756) and member of the chamber musicians to the king (1744–1746). Francoeur wrote several operas and ballets, of which only the operas survive, and the two sets of sonatas appear to be among his few extant instrumental works. The *E Major Sonata* is not often heard in its entirety, since it is a popular custom among cellists to program only the third and fourth movements. Although there is a veiled undercurrent of German and even Italian baroque influences in the work, the unmistakable French element resides in the gavotte movement, which presents a palpable display of subtlety and refinement. In addition to providing an example of the French exactitude in the employment of melodic ornamentation, the sonata offers an emerging refinement of the keyboard accompaniment, which was typically an unrealized *basso continuo* line before Francoeur's time.

Written in the year of his twentieth birthday, Mendelssohn's *Variations concertantes, Op. 17*, is considered a youthful effort, but nonetheless accomplished. Indeed, it must be remembered that he was the same young man who at age sixteen gave the world his *Octet, Op. 20* (1825), and at seventeen his *Overture to a Midsummer Night's Dream* (1826). Mendelssohn apparently wrote his *Variations concertantes* to be

performed by his younger brother Paul. It is an imposing work, full of technical challenges for both the cello and piano. A theme with eight variations, it opens with an extended introduction, followed by the theme marked *Andante con moto*. Each subsequent variation is blazed in a tempo that is quite breathless in its delivery. The tempo markings are as follows: two *prestissimi*, followed by a *più vivace, allegro con fuoco*, and *l'istesso tempo*. Variation six is designated *fortissimo*; the seventh, unrelenting in its power and speed, is posted as *presto ed agitato*. Variation eight reiterates the opening theme but tags on a protracted coda that is freely developed.

Philip Lasser is a member of the faculty of the Juilliard School of Music in New York City. His works have been performed by the Seattle Symphony, the String Orchestra of New York, Bacchanalia, the New York Concert Singers, and the Whitman Quartet. He studied composition at Fontainebleau and in Paris with Narcis Bonet, a close disciple of Nadia Boulanger. His piano teacher was Gaby Casadesus. In 1989 Lasser collaborated with Casadesus on a book for concert pianists entitled *Ma technique quotidienne (My Daily Technique)*. He holds a bachelor of arts degree, summa cum laude, from Harvard College, a master of arts degree from Columbia University, and a doctor of musical arts degree in composition from the Juilliard School, where he studied with David Diamond. Lasser is president of the European-American Musical Alliance, a not-for-profit arts organization that offers a summer program taught in the Nadia Boulanger tradition to young American composers at the historic Schola Cantorum in Paris, France.

Lasser's *Sonata for Cello and Piano* was commissioned in 2002 by Joan and Philip Krone for Zuill Bailey and receives its first public performance in this concert. Cast in three movements, the work begins with a meditative introduction, indicated in the score to be "murmured like a prayer chant" yet "with moments of great expressivity." In a general sense, this struggle for serenity over passion is fought throughout the sonata. The composer's style comes out of his love for both the linear craft of Bach and Brahms and the terse, syncretic, and mosaic structures found in Debussy. It creates a bridge across the unexpectedly large chasm separating the linear and syncretic approaches to composition. Lasser views his compositions as invitations to the listener to journey into a world that can only be explored through the poetry of sound.