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James Wilson, cello

Department of Music, University of Richmond

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October 10, 2001 at 7:30 pm

Modlin Center for the Arts

Camp Concert Hall, Booker Hall of Music

James Wilson, *cello*

“Suites for Unaccompanied Cello”

Suite in G major

J.S. Bach

I. *Prelude* 0:0:36

(1685-1750)

II. *Allemande* 0:3:49

III. *Courante* 0:8:54

IV. *Sarabande* 0:11:43

V. *Menuet* 0:15:10

VI. *Gigue* 0:18:42

Suite No. 1

Ernest Bloch

I. *Prelude* 0:22:16

(1880-1959)

II. *Allegro* 0:25:48

III. *Canzona* 0:28:13

IV. *Allegro* 0:32:43

—Intermission—

Meditation on a Slovakian Hymn

Frantisek Smetana

0:30:54

(b. 1914)

Suite for Violoncello

Gaspar Cassado

I. *Preludio-Fantasia* 0:43:42

(1897-1966)

II. *Sardana (Danza)* 0:51:00

III. *Intermezzo e Danza Finale* 0:56:16

The use of cameras—with or without flash—recorders or other electronic devices inside the theatres is strictly prohibited.

About the Artist

James Wilson, *cello*

Hailed by the *Los Angeles Times* as a “recitalist with something to say, and a commanding way of saying it,” cellist James Wilson is equally distinguished as soloist, chamber musician and educator. Regularly acclaimed for his expressive approach to music and his singing tone, Mr. Wilson has appeared on the world’s most illustrious stages.

Recognized as a superb chamber musician, he regularly collaborates with such celebrated artists as Lydia Artymiw, Eliot Fisk, Ruth Laredo, Arnold Steinhardt and Eugenia Zukerman. For more than a decade, he was a member of the Shanghai String Quartet. His insight into new music has led him to premiere new works by many composers including Alfred Cohen, Joel Hoffmann, Lowell Liebermann, Elena Ruehr, Bright Sheng and Zhou Long. He has recorded for Arabesque, Delos International, Music Masters, National Public Radio, XLNT Music and Access records.



In addition to his work as a cellist, Mr. Wilson is much sought after as a music educator and commentator. He has conducted masterclasses in Hong Kong, Canada, Australia and Mexico, as well as the United States. At home in Richmond, he is currently a faculty member and coordinator of the string department at Virginia Commonwealth University, and is the founder and director of the Arcato School, a chamber music program for middle and high school students. Mr. Wilson has also been a special correspondent for the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, and has given a series of lectures about music at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

A native of Ann Arbor, Mich., he was born into a musical family and began cello studies at age 11. Chamber music became an early focus for him; by seventh grade he was playing in his first string quartet, and in high school was coached by Gustave Rosseels, who had been a member of the well-known Paganini String Quartet. Mr. Wilson went on to graduate from the University of Michigan where, as a student of Jeffrey Solow, he was awarded the School of Music’s highest honor, the Albert A. Stanley Medal. He continued his studies with Stephan Kates, graduating from the Peabody Conservatory.

Program Notes

There simply cannot be a more appropriate start to a recital of unaccompanied works for cello than one of the six suites by **Johann Sebastian Bach** (1685-1750). They were written during the period of time in the 1720s when Bach was employed as Kapellmeister in the Palace of Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen, a time when the composer experimented with various forms of small instrumental music. The interests of the Prince, who was an accomplished musician himself, and the high level of musical resources available in the Cöthen estate, must have encouraged Bach. It was here that he wrote the gamba sonatas, the violin sonatas, the flute sonatas and wonderful unaccompanied pieces for violin and cello. The choice of cello was rather unusual since it was then used most often as a supporting instrument for other more brilliant instruments such as viola da gamba and violin. Yet in the cello suites, Bach exploits what makes the cello attractive; its rich sound, its range and its versatility for playing both solo and bass lines.

The first of the six suites is in many ways the most sunny and agreeable. By setting the suite in the key of G major, Bach was able to emphasize the sound of the open strings, giving the piece (especially in the famous opening bars) a characteristic ringing quality. In a way, the entire suite can be seen as a transition from the cerebral "art music" of Bach's time to an earthy dance suite. Introduced by a highly stylized *Prelude*, the suite continues with an equally fantastic *Allemande*. Although this second movement is technically a dance piece, the phrases stretch and bend rather capriciously. The dance movements that follow (the *Courante*, *Sarabande* and *Minuet*) become increasingly more structured and regular. That only leaves the robust *Gigue*, a movement that is as charming in its rustic simplicity as the open *Prelude* is in its high Baroque ornament.

Following Bach's lead, many nineteenth and twentieth century composers, including Max Reger and Benjamin Britten, have written their own Baroque-inspired suites for solo cello. One of the most individual voices in the literature is that of **Ernest Bloch**, who used the cello as a vehicle for intense personal expression in pieces like *Schelomo* and the three Suites for unaccompanied cello. World-weary and emotive, the Suite No. 1 not only emphasizes the cello's inherently beautiful sound, but also taxes the performer's ability to convey private emotion in a public way. Like Bach, Bloch begins his suite with a loosely formed *Prelude*: but that is the only similarity. In this music, form and structure seems to be replaced with colorful harmonies and ecstatic sweeps. The *Canzona* is the longest movement and the emotional core of the suite. It combines several gentle melodies that return in the closing *Allegro*.

Meditation on a Slovakian Hymn was written in 1949 by **Frantisek Smetana**,

a world-renowned cellist and longtime Richmond resident, who moved back to his native Czech Republic last spring. Being a fierce Czech patriot, Mr. Smetana gave a copy of this piece to me several years ago, remarking that the tune helped give him solace during the period when he was interned for political dissent by the Soviet government. The *Meditation* is an uncomplicated set of variation on an elaborate hymn tune. It begins rather softly, arching through a majestic strummed passage and returning back to a simple statement of the theme. On a personal note, I began practicing this haunting piece on September 12, the day after the tragic terrorist attacks in New York and Virginia. Before that day, I had found it difficult to practice this simple and emotive piece, especially after working through the rich ornament of Bach or the technical wizardry of Cassado. But as in many of history's most famous works of music, I've discovered that the *Meditation's* simplicity can convey an entire world of emotion.

Another famous cellist, **Gaspar Cassado**, wrote this evening's most colorful suite. Born in Barcelona, Cassado was a student of Pablo Casals and a prolific composer of original works for cello. His *Suite for Violoncello*, written in 1926, combines virtuosity with a fiery, flamenco style. The opening movement is once again a whimsical *Prelude* that quickly establishes the passionate mood of the entire suite. Although some of the material is austere, Cassado enriches the sound of the lone cello by using several kinds of chordal writing, arpeggios, harmonics and pizzicato. The *Sardana* begins with an imitation of a flute melody, but quickly turns into a raucous Catalonian dance where almost every note is part of a chord. The multi-layered finale starts with a slow, serious introduction that leads to a simple folk-like melody. Alternating between these slower sections and a rhythmic dance, the finale accelerates uncontrollably to the end.

Program notes by James Wilson

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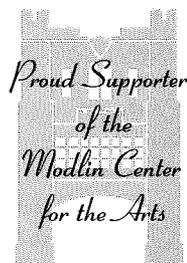
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U p c o m i n g E v e n t s

Bangarra Dance Theatre: "Dance from Down Under"

Tuesday, October 16, 2001, 7:30 pm

Wednesday, October 17, 2001, 7:30 pm

Alice Jepson Theatre

Breaking new ground, Bangarra fuses the traditional aspects of Aboriginal and Islander life with contemporary movement. The result is an electrifying new style of dance, completely innovative and authentically Australian. Most of the 14 performers bring their personal heritage into the creative process. Founded to promote an appreciation of the Aboriginal and Islander culture, Bangarra is today's hottest dance company, touring to exceptional critical acclaim and rave reviews from the public both "down under" and abroad. This performance is presented in conjunction with the Marsh Art Gallery's "Origin Stories: Creation Narratives in Australian Aboriginal Art" exhibition. *Tickets: \$18 adults, \$16 seniors. On sale now.*

Bang on a Can All-Stars

Wednesday, November 7, 2001, 7:30 pm

Camp Concert Hall, Booker Hall of Music

Out of the energy and excitement of New York's Bang on a Can Festival, six of the most brilliant and provocative performers in America have come together—performers who are adventurous, virtuosic, dynamic and intense, who are equally at home in all of the diverse styles that exist within music today. Together they are unstoppable, sexy and loud. They are the Bang on a Can All-Stars. Part classical ensemble, part rock band, part jazz sextet, this group has a flexibility that doesn't fit into any recognizable category. Each concert is an electric supermix—the music they play comes from uncharted territories, breaks new ground and defines music that as yet has no name. *Tickets: \$16 adults, \$14 seniors. On sale now.*

Mickey Hart and Bembé Orisha

Monday, November 12, 2001, 7:30 pm

Carpenter Center for the Performing Arts

Mickey Hart is best known for his nearly three decades as an integral part of an extraordinary expedition into the soul and spirit of music, disguised as the rock and roll band The Grateful Dead. As half of the percussion tandem known as the Rhythm Devils, Hart transcended the conventions of rock drumming. His extended polyrhythmic excursions were highlights of Grateful Dead shows, introducing the band's audience to an ever-growing arsenal of percussion instruments from around the world. Exposure to these exotic sounds fueled Hart's desire to learn about the various cultures that produced them. It is in the spirit of this passion for world music that Hart is presenting this evening of Bembé (Afro-Cuban) music traditionally in praise of African deities known as *Orisha*.

Tickets: \$21 adults, \$19 seniors. On sale through TicketMaster after October 15.

Box Office/Info Line: (804) 289-8980