

Brahms & Strauss

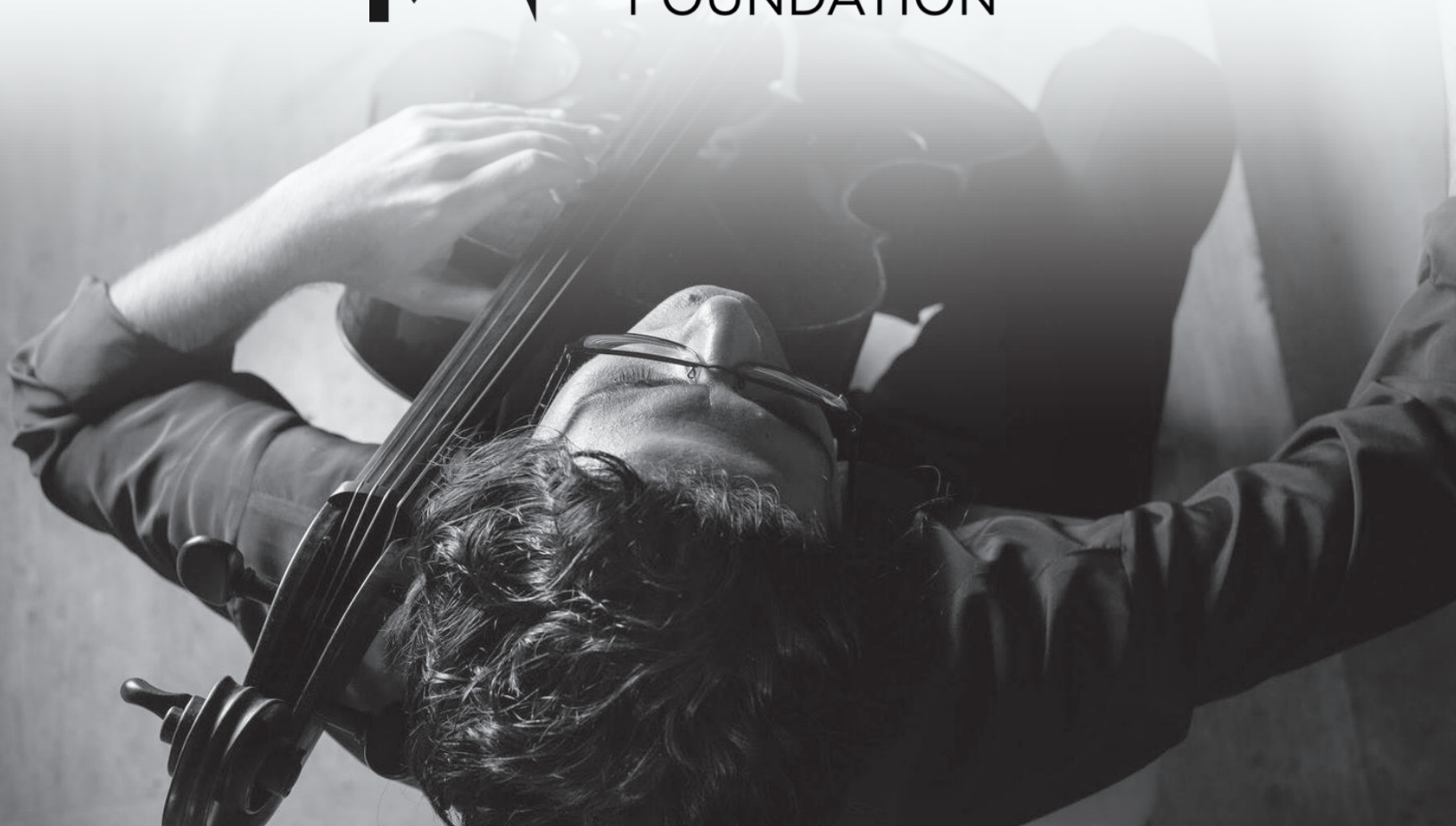
Cellist **Amit Peled** with
Pianist **Bethel Balge**

April 27 at 4:30pm

Trinity Chapel | Bethany Lutheran College | Mankato

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: The proceeds from this recital will support :
: MSO's 2026 Young Artist Competition. :
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Brahms & Strauss

Sunday, April 27 at 4:30pm
Trinity Chapel, Bethany Lutheran College

Sonata for Cello and Piano in Major, Op. 6 (1883)

Richard Strauss | 25'

Allegro con brio

Andante ma non troppo

Finale - Allegro vivo

Intermission

Sonata No. 2 for Piano and Cello in F Major, Op. 99 (1886)

Johannes Brahms | 28'

Allegro vivace

Adagio affettuoso

Allegro passionato

Allegro molto

Amit Peled, cello

Bethel Balge, piano

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The proceeds from this recital will support MSO's 2026 Young Artist Competition.

For the past three years, funding came through the Mankato Area Foundation from the Marian Anderson Fund and from the Mary E. Suedbeck fund for the Advancement of the Arts. These funds provided seed money to test new ideas and encourage the arts for young people. The contest has been a resounding success, but the funding runs out after this year. 100% of your ticket will support our 2026 Young Artist Competition and our rising young stars. Thank you for your support!

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Internationally renowned cellist, conductor and pedagogue **Amit Peled** is acclaimed as one of the most exciting and virtuosic instrumentalists on the concert stage today. Having performed in many of the world's most prestigious venues, including Carnegie Hall and Alice Tully Hall at the Lincoln Center in New York, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington D.C., Salle Gaveau in Paris, Wigmore Hall in London, Seoul Arts Center in Korea and the Konzerthaus Berlin, Germany. Peled has released over a dozen recordings on the Naxos, Centaur, Delos, and CTM Classics labels.

He is a cello professor at the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, and has performed in and presented master classes around the world, including at the Marlboro and Newport Music Festivals and the Heifetz International Music Summer Institute in the US, the Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival in Germany, International Musicians Seminar Prussia Cove in England, and Keshet Eilon in Israel.

Embracing the new online era, Peled has established the Amit Peled Online Cello Academy reaching out to hundreds of cellists all over the world. Peled is the Founder and Artistic Director of the Mount Vernon Virtuosi, former Music Director of CityMusic Cleveland and enjoys a growing international conducting career with orchestras all across the globe. He is represented worldwide by CTM Classics.



Winner of the Louis B. Sudler Prize in the Arts, pianist Bethel Balge has performed in Germany, including at Frankfurt's Alte Oper, in Russia as soloist with the Voronezh Philharmonic, as well as in various American venues. Bethel's "highly concentrated, technically secure and captivating interpretation" of Ravel's Gaspard de la Nuit attracted notice from a reviewer at the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung after a performance at the Alte Oper.

Since moving to Minnesota, She has taught piano, music history, and piano pedagogy courses at Bethany Lutheran College (Mankato, MN) and at Martin Luther College (New Ulm, MN). She became founding Artistic Director of the ProMusica Minnesota Chamber Music Series in 2016 and of the ProMusica Minnesota Chamber Music Festival in 2019. In 2020 Bethel became Executive Director of the Mankato Symphony Orchestra and completed the League of American Orchestra's Essentials in Orchestra Management course from the Juilliard School of Music.

As a doctoral student of Lydia Artymiw at the University of Minnesota, Bethel performed in a Minnesota Public Radio live broadcast in the Bach Birthday concert organized by MPR host Michael Barone. Since then, her performances have been featured numerous times on American Public Media's program "Performance Today" and on Minnesota Public Radio.

PROGRAM NOTES | Prof. Joel Fredrich

Sonata for Cello and Piano in F Major, Op. 6 (1883) | Richard Strauss (1864–1949)



Many listeners who enjoy the music of Richard Strauss got their first taste through one of his orchestral tone poems, perhaps *Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks*, or the opening measures of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, a passage later popularized by the film *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Since we are hearing a cello program today, let us recall two more of Strauss's tone poems. At the beginning of *A Hero's Life* (1898), the cellos are prominent as we hear the soaring theme associated with the hero. A year earlier, when Strauss depicted a rather different type of hero in his *Don Quixote*, he made extensive use of a solo cello to create a vivid portrait of the title character. We might wonder what prepared him for his work as a master orchestrator and perceptive composer for the cello.

Strauss never attended a conservatory or school specializing in music. But his father was the principal horn player in the Munich Court Orchestra, and Richard grew up hearing his father practice horn music at home. The parents decided that their son should receive private lessons in piano, violin, and composition from highly qualified teachers. Before Richard was twenty, he could perform challenging piano works and play in the violin section of a local orchestra. He also had composed about 150 pieces in various genres.

One of them was his cello sonata. He wrote the first version in 1881 and then revised it. By the time he was finished (1883), he had replaced the third movement with a completely new one. Some of his insights into the capabilities of the cello came from Hanuš Wihan, the principal cellist of the Munich Court Orchestra and thus a colleague of Richard's father. Richard wanted to understand the cello well enough to make his sonata a demonstration of virtuosity, just as he chose to make his contemporaneous horn concerto a virtuoso piece for his father to play.

His father had always been outspoken in his admiration of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, so it is not surprising that Richard's early tastes favored established classics over living composers. Mendelssohn was one of the recognized masters whose influence has been detected in Strauss's cello sonata. Conservative ideals also show up in Strauss's inclusion of a fugue in the sonata's first movement. As he had written to a friend, a good fugue is "the pinnacle towards which all counterpoint aspires."

Early performances of the sonata, including ones in which Richard played the piano part, were great successes. Fellow musicians congratulated his father, and even Joseph Joachim, a leading violinist known for his lofty standards, praised Richard's composition.

In later life, after he had scaled greater heights, Strauss was somewhat dismissive of his early pieces. But more than one authority has suggested that Strauss's cello sonata is the best of his youthful works.

Sonata No. 2 for Piano and Cello in F Major, Op. 99 (1886) | Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)



When Strauss finished his cello sonata in 1883, he was just beginning his public career. But Brahms was already a mature and long-celebrated composer when he came home from his summer vacation in 1886 with three new masterpieces of chamber music: his second cello sonata, his second violin sonata, and his third piano trio.

As the eminent musicologist Donald Francis Tovey observed, Brahms never repeated himself exactly in his use of musical forms from one composition to another, and he did not limit himself to conventional patterns. His second cello sonata has its surprises for professionals in the progression of keys he uses, and that is because Brahms, who knew the standard formulas as well as anyone, was willing to abandon formulas if he could achieve the desired effect through unconventional means.

But one doesn't need a professional's grasp of music theory to notice something else that commands our attention from the first moments of the piece. Brahms has decided to experiment with sonority by highlighting a tremolo effect in the piano as we hear the first theme in the cello. Beethoven had done something similar in his "Waldstein" Sonata for piano, but there the melody slowly emerges over the vibrating bass and follows a simple stepwise progression at first. Brahms by contrast has a jagged, leaping melody in the cello right away. That combination was a shock for Brahms's audience to take in. But Brahms is not done with this piano tremolo. Since the notes are not a random buzz but a carefully counted pattern, their rhythm is integrated with the rest of the piano part, and when the time is right, Brahms hands off the tremolo to the cello. The tremolo is not a momentary special effect but part of the fabric of the movement.

Variation in sonority comes to our attention in two other ways. One is that in the second movement of this sonata, Brahms immediately confronts us with pizzicato, or as we might say, plucked cello notes that soon give way to bowed phrases. Pizzicato passages return, and to make the most of one of these returns, Brahms's friend and collaborator, the cellist Robert Hausmann, suggested underscoring a pizzicato crescendo with a marked acceleration in tempo. Brahms gave his approval to this interpretive choice. The other issue in sonority is that as compared with the first sonata, the second makes more use of the upper register of the cello, often with dramatic effect.

The two cello sonatas make a fine pair, one more introspective, the other more agitated. We are fortunate to have them both.

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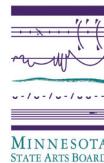
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