

*Faculty Recital*

**Kirsten Smith, piano**  
with  
**Brinton Smith, cello**

FRIDAY, 7:00 P.M.  
MAY 10, 2024  
CAPISTRANO CONCERT HALL



Mr. Smith's engagements have included performances at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, and recital and concerto appearances internationally and throughout the United States. His broadcast performances include CBS's Sunday Morning and regular appearances on NPR's Performance Today and Symphonicast, while his live performances have been viewed over one million times on youtube. As a chamber musician, Smith has collaborated with cellists Yo-Yo Ma and Lynn Harrell, pianists Yefim Bronfman, Emanuel Ax, Jeffrey Kahane and Kirill Gerstein, violinists Gil Shaham, James Ehnes, Cho-Liang Lin and Sarah Chang, soprano Dawn Upshaw, and members of the Guarneri, Emerson, Juilliard, Cleveland, and Berg quartets. In addition to his long held position as Kirsten's younger brother, Smith was previously a member of the New York Philharmonic and the principal cellist of the San

Diego and Fort Worth symphonies. Mr. Smith has been the principal cellist of the Houston Symphony since 2005, and is also a faculty member of the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University and the Aspen Music Festival. The son of a mathematician and a pianist, Mr. Smith was admitted to Arizona State University at age 10, where he took courses in mathematics and German and, at age 17, completed a B.A. in mathematics. As a student of Eleonore Schoenfeld at the University of Southern California, he was also a teaching assistant in the mathematics department, and completed work for an M.A. in mathematics at age 19. He subsequently studied with the legendary cellist Zara Nelsova at The Juilliard School and received a Doctor of Musical Arts degree, writing on the playing of Emanuel Feuermann. Mr. Smith resides in Houston with his wife, the pianist Evelyn Chen. Their daughter, Calista, is a soprano studying at Northwestern University. His cello was recently identified as the work of Gaetano Pasta, Brescia, c.1710.

A passion for learning led American pianist **Kirsten Smith** to begin part-time studies at Arizona State University at the age of thirteen, studying sociobiology, history, mathematics and foreign languages. She completed her undergraduate and graduate degrees in piano performance at the ASU School of Music under the tutelage of Steven De Groote, Gold Medalist of the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. A winner of many competitions herself, Ms. Smith has been the recipient of awards,

It is always a special privilege to be able to make music with family. Kirsten and I have been playing together since we were young, whenever we could find the opportunity, but as our careers took us to different parts of the country and we became busy raising children, the chances were far and few between. In more recent years, we have made a concerted effort to carve out time to play together, and it is always a joyful experience for two people who know each other so well to make music together.

While this explains the motivation for this recital, you might still be wondering why, in a recital for cello and piano, are four of the five works originally written for violin? This is largely a result of my own obsession with expanding the cello repertoire. The repertoire for cello and piano is comparatively limited, and already well covered by many accomplished cellists. The cello and piano music we have is wonderful, but Kirsten and I have already played much of it in the past. The repertoire for violin and piano is incredibly rich and, in looking to expand the cello repertoire, it is the most natural place to 'steal'. I am far from the first to come to this conclusion- ambitious cellists have been pilfering violin repertoire since the early 19th century, at least. The Chausson and Strauss-Prihoda transcriptions are my own, but the Beethoven and Brahms transcriptions were first made by cellists over a century ago. Most often, we play the violin notes down an octave, but since the violin is pitched an octave and a fifth above the cello (as well as being smaller and far more maneuverable) this still creates some significant technical challenges. In the end, however, we programmed these pieces for the same reason we program any recital: because we love these works, and we believe in them. As I tell my cello students "We play the best instrument. Why shouldn't we use it to play the best music?" (Pianists might contend we merely play the best *string* instrument!)

Beethoven's Sonata for Piano and Violin, Op. 30, No. 3 dates from 1802, a pivotal year in Beethoven's life during which his hearing began to seriously deteriorate, and he contemplated suicide in his Heiligenstadt Testament. But, despite his personal sense of gloom, this third sonata of an opus that marks the emergence of his 'middle period' style, brims with lively, sparkling wit and buoyant vitality. In his Heiligenstadt Testament Beethoven wrote that he endured the unhappiness of his life only for his

art, but in this sonata, we see him still able to compose music of perfect simplicity and joy. This transcription for cello was made by the 19th-century French cello virtuoso Auguste Franchomme (1808-1884).

Brahms' Sonata for Violin and Piano, Op. 78, was influenced by the death of Robert and Clara Schumann's beloved son (and Brahms' godson), Felix. The outer movements quote heavily from Brahms' *Regenlied* (Rainsong), Op.59. It sets a wistful and melancholy mood that pervades the whole sonata. The work was transcribed for cello by Paul Klengel shortly after Brahms' death, in an arrangement that moved the key to D major, transposed the violin and piano lines in several sections, and frequently changed the octave of the melody. Brahms had no reservations about creating and authorizing transcriptions during his lifetime, and would almost certainly have authorized such a transcription, but tonight's version is a world premiere of a new arrangement by Yuri Leonovich which maintains Klengel's D major key, but otherwise follows Brahms' original violin version exactly.

Ernest Chausson's *Poème* was originally written for violin and orchestra. Like the sensible-minded parents of so many composers, Chausson's parents insisted he study law, but, after graduating at age 24, Chausson (like Handel, Schumann, Tchaikovsky and so many other would-be lawyers) found music too alluring, and enrolled at the Paris Conservatoire to study composition. Known for a deeply personal romantic style, Chausson's compositions bridge the evolution of French composition style from the Wagnerian romanticism of Franck to the later impressionist school of Debussy and Ravel. His output was limited by his late start and tragic early death at age 44 in a bicycle accident, but *Poème* remains perhaps his best known and most beloved work. Premiered by Eugene Ysaÿe in 1897, it remains a staple of the violin repertoire in both his orchestral and violin and piano versions. To the best of my knowledge, I am the first cellist that has transcribed and performed this violin showpiece. Probably that should have given me pause, but fools rush in... and this piece has a special mystical beauty that I can't resist.

Samuel Barber's Cello Sonata dates from 1932, his last year as a student at Curtis. The sonata is written in a style that, though full of modern and

personal elements, is clearly the legacy of the compositional style of Brahms and Strauss. Despite being at odds with the modernist aesthetic preferences of the age, the sonata found great success. It was taken up by prominent cellists in performance around the world and has remained a staple of the cello repertoire ever since. The sonata helped to launch Barber's career and the American neo-Romantic school. I remember our family friend Sammy Mayes describing Barber's regular intrusions into his lessons with Felix Salmond at Curtis. Sammy said he remembered that each week when Barber came in, he had more of the sonata completed, and less hair!

Several years ago, I fell in love with Czech violin virtuoso Vasa Prihoda's (1900-1960) arrangement of Waltzes from Strauss' opera *Der Rosenkavalier* and felt compelled to try to play it on the cello. I knew I was in for a significant challenge when a violinist friend who possesses an impressive technique told me he thought this was the hardest piece he had ever played on the violin! Nevertheless, Prihoda manages to capture so much of the spirit and *joie de vivre* of the opera in these six minutes, that it seemed a fitting dessert to end our program.

If you would like to talk to the parties who instigated all of this, you can meet our parents after the concert, and celebrate with us at the reception in room 143 with light beverages and snacks. Thank you for sharing this music with us tonight.

Critics have hailed cellist **Brinton Averil Smith** as a "virtuoso cellist with few equals," describing him as "a proponent of old-school string playing such as that of Piatigorsky and Heifetz." Reviewing his recent live recording of the revival of Castelnuovo-Tedesco's Cello Concerto, *BBC Music* magazine wrote "his is a cast iron technique of verve and refinement put entirely at the service of the music. The artistry on display here is breathtaking..." His debut recording of Miklós Rózsa's Concerto with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra won similar international acclaim, with *Gramophone* praising Smith as a "hugely eloquent, impassioned soloist," while the *American Record Guide* praised his recording of chamber music of Fauré with Gil Shaham as "Stunningly beautiful."