

William Swett
double bass

Recital in partial fulfillment of the
Master of Music degree, 2023
Student of Thomas Van Dyck

Monday, May 8, 2023
4:00 p.m.
Williams Hall

PROGRAM

Sofia Gubaidulina

(b. 1931)

from *Eight Studies for Solo Double Bass*

(1974, rev. 2009)

I. Staccato – Legato

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

(1756–1791)

Per questa bella mano, K. 612 (1791)

Saman de Silva, baritone

Soyoung Sarah Yang, piano

Sofia Gubaidulina

from *Eight Studies for Solo Double Bass*

II. Legato – Staccato

Édouard Lalo

(1823–1892)

from *Concerto for Cello in D Minor* (1876)

I. Prelude – Lento – Allegro maestoso

Soyoung Sarah Yang, piano

Sarian Sankoh

everythingfeelsthesame (2020)

Georg Philipp Telemann
(1681–1767)

Fantasy No. 11 (1735)
Un poco vivace
Soave
Allegro

Matthew Aucoin
(b. 1990)

Dual (2015)

Camden Archambeau, cello

Devon Gates
William Swett

Duet

Devon Gates, double bass

Sofia Gubaidulina originally wrote *Ten Preludes for Solo Cello* in 1974, before arranging them in 2009 as *Eight Studies for Solo Double Bass*. She dedicated them to the Russian bassist Alexander Suslin, who was a member of her improvising ensemble, Astraea. These studies, she explained, are little scenes in which the heroes are timbre, bowings, and sound production. The musicologist Phillip Ewell has suggested that one might think of certain kinds of sound production requested by Gubaidulina, such as legato, as consonant, and others, such as staccato, as dissonant. In this first scene, the discordant foe—a rough staccato—is defeated by a legato, which is light and brushy, much like the articulation used by the bassist in W.A. Mozart's *Per questa bella mano*.

Per Questa Bella Mano is a concert aria, which means it was written as a stand-alone piece and not as part of a larger work like an opera. The score calls for a bass singer, a double bass *obligato* part (literally meaning it was obligated, and couldn't be taken up by any other instrument), and orchestra (though this performance will include piano in place of an orchestra). The singer, in the unhurried *Andante* opening, swears to his love, by her fair hand (“per questa bella mano”), that he will love her and only her. He speaks of the “breezes,” the “plants” and the “stones,” which know his “sighs” so well. In other words, he is patient. The double bass, whoever that is supposed to be, is not. The bass *obligato*, albeit brushy and smooth, is pushing forward right from the start, perhaps belying the singer's own impatience. Only at the end are the singer and bassist joined together in this quality, the singer speaking frankly and eagerly of the desire which dwells within him (“Quel desio che vive in me”). The double bass externalizes the singer's internal monologue, telling you what he's really thinking. Here, we might be reminded of a scene from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, when the magical spirit Ariel announces a trespasser's intentions by creating thunder (“that deep and dreadful organ-pipe”). As the character puts it: “[Ariel] did *bass* my trespass.” The bass announces the singer's intentions. Or we might think of a sketch from the series *Key and Peele*, in which Keegan-Michael Key imitates Obama's mannerisms, while Jordan Peele lets loose as his anger translator. The bass tells you what the singer really means. (text and translation appear at the end of the program)

The opening of **Édouard Lalo's** *Cello Concerto* has drawn comparisons to the recitative played by the low strings in the final movement of Ludwig Van Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*. Beethoven wrote his recitative for cellos and basses—why shouldn't this concerto be played by cellos *and* basses? In attempting to resolve some of the technical challenges of playing in the cello range on the bass, I have, for much of the piece, opted to bring the solo part down an octave. While the D minor arpeggios (the primary theme) sound almost tossed off on the cello, playing them on bass an octave lower and slightly slower adds a nobility and richness to them. The dolce counter theme which follows the D minor arpeggios, meanwhile, sounds quieter and more searching on bass.

Sarian Sankoh's background in singing and steel-pan come through quite clearly in *everythingfeelslikesame*, which opens and closes by using the bass as a percussive instrument and asks the bassist to use their voice to provide a melodic line on top. Occasionally, the voice and bass join in unison, creating that warm texture that only the bass and voice can create. But those moments of unison are quite brief. As with the Mozart, one gets the sense, given the ferocity of some of the bass lines and percussion parts, that the lullaby-like melodies of the vocal line are not saying everything. Sankoh wrote this piece in Summer 2020, when, she said, everything felt the same. This feeling of monotony did not only stem from quarantine life; although the Black Lives Matters protests offered hopeful signs of change, the issues they were addressing were so basic, so familiar, that she could not help but feel that everything was more or less the same. "The malady of the quotidian," Wallace Stevens wrote, referring to the terrible banality of everyday life. In *everythingfeelslikesame*, Sankoh captures that idea and its converse: that malady is quotidian.

Georg Philipp Telemann's *Fantasies*, originally written for violin, the composer's own instrument, are rare among his massive oeuvre of nearly 6,000 pieces in that they are written for a solo instrument without accompaniment. Typically, solos would have been accompanied by a basso continuo part, usually played by a harpsichord and a low string instrument. This transcription, which takes advantage of the bass's harmonics and open strings, was created by Nicholas Rescuber, Assistant Principal Bass for the Colorado symphony. Whereas on the violin, *Fantasy No. 11* is non-stop and exhilarating, on bass it swings more, almost like a pirate's waltz.

Emily Dickinson wrote that "musicians wrestle everywhere," and though I have not found this to be the case (musicians tend to prefer sports that preserve their hands — running, biking, swimming), this piece requires some of the same levels of perspiration, hand strength, and bruising that a wrestling match does. Indeed, **Matthew Aucoin** suggests in the Performance Note for *Dual* that one should think of this "dual effort" as a "duel." At the end he instructs the musicians to play as if they are "panting." And although the sports metaphor Aucoin urges on the performers in the Performance Note is fencing and not wrestling, the piece ends with what can only be considered a pin. Just to avoid any confusion about who gets the last word (note): the bass wins.

Devon Gates (bass, voice) and I will improvise a *Duet* based on the melody from *Per questa bella mano*, combining it with some of the harmonic and rhythmic material from the rest of the recital. As with the Sankoh and the Mozart, we will play with the relationship between what is voiced and what is only implied (by the bass).

Per questo bella mano

*Per questa bella mano,
Per questi vaghi rai
Giuro, mio ben, che mai
Non amerò che te.
L'aure, le piante, i sassi,
Che i miei sospir ben sanno,
A te qual sia diranno
La mia costante fé.
Volgi lieti o fieri sguardi,
Dimmi pur che m'odi o m'ami,
Sempre acceso ai dolci dardi,
Sempre tuo vo' che mi chiami,
Né cangiar può terra o cielo
Quel desio che vive in me.*

Anonymous

Because of this beautiful hand,
because of these charming eyes
I swear, my beloved, that I will never
love anyone but you.
The breezes, the plants, the rocks,
That know well my sighs,
They will tell you
Of my constant fidelity.
Grant me either happy or cruel glances,
Tell me if you hate me or love me.
Always enflamed by your sweet glances
I want you to say that I am yours forever.
Neither heaven nor earth can change
The desire that I feel in me.

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