

Friday, May 15, 2009, 8pm  
First Congregational Church

# Yo-Yo Ma, *cello*

## PROGRAM

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) Suite No. 1 for Unaccompanied Cello in G major,  
BWV 1007

Prélude  
Allemande  
Courante  
Sarabande  
Minuets I and II  
Gigue

Bach Suite No. 5 for Unaccompanied Cello in C minor,  
BWV 1011

Prélude  
Allemande  
Courante  
Sarabande  
Gavottes I and II  
Gigue

*INTERMISSION*

Bach Suite No. 3 for Unaccompanied Cello in C major,  
BWV 1009

Prélude  
Allemande  
Courante  
Sarabande  
Bourrées I and II  
Gigue

*This performance is made possible, in part, by Liz and Greg Lutz*

*Yo-Yo Ma records for Sony Masterworks.*

*Exclusive Management:*

*Opus 3 Artists, 470 Park Avenue South, Ninth Floor North, New York, New York 10016.*

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**Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)**  
**Suites for Unaccompanied Cello, BWV 1007,**  
**1009 and 1011**

*Composed around 1720.*

In 1713, the frugal Friedrich Wilhelm I of Prussia dismissed his household musical establishment in Berlin. The young, cultured Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen took the opportunity to engage some of the finest of Friedrich's musicians, and provided them with excellent instruments and established a library for their regular court performances. In December 1717, Leopold hired Johann Sebastian Bach, then organist and *Kapellmeister* at Weimar, as his director of music. Inspired by the high quality of the musicians in his charge and by the Prince's praise of his creative work, Bach produced much of his greatest instrumental music during the six years of his tenure at Cöthen, including the *Brandenburg Concertos*, the Suites for Orchestra, the Violin Concertos, *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, many chamber and keyboard compositions, and the works for unaccompanied violin and cello. The six Suites for Solo Cello were apparently written for either Christian Ferdinand Abel (whose son Carl Friedrich became the partner of Sebastian Bach's son Johann Christian in an important London concert venture in the 1760s) or Christian Bernhard Linigke, both master cellists in the Cöthen court orchestra.

The cello in Bach's time was still an instrument of relatively recent origin. It was the Cremonese craftsman Andrea Amati who first brought the violin, viola and cello to their modern configurations around 1560 as the successors to the old, softer-voiced family of viols. (The modern double bass, with its tuning in fourths and its sloping shape—compare its profile with the square shoulders of the other orchestral strings—is the only survivor of that noble breed of earlier instruments.) For the first century of its existence, the cello was strictly confined to playing the bass line in concerted works; any solo passages in its register were entrusted to the viola da gamba. The earliest solo

works known to have been written specifically for the instrument, from the 1680s, are by Domenico Gabrieli, a cellist in the orchestra of San Petronio in Bologna (not to be confused with the Venetian Gabrieli); notable among them are his *Ricercare* for Unaccompanied Cello of 1689. The first concerto for cello seems to be that composed by Giuseppe Jacchini in 1701. The instrument gained steadily in popularity as it displaced the older gamba, a circumstance evidenced by the many works for it by Antonio Vivaldi and other early 18th-century Italian composers. When Bach proposed to write music for unaccompanied cello sometime around 1720, however, there were few precedents for such pieces. The examples with which he was most familiar were by a tiny enclave of composers (Westhof, Biber, Walther, Pisendel) centered around Dresden who had dabbled in compositions for solo violin, and it was probably upon their models that Bach built his six Sonatas and Partitas for Violin and the half-dozen Suites for Cello. In comparing these two series of Bach's works, 19th-century German music historian Philipp Spitta wrote, "The passionate and penetrating energy, the inner fire and warmth which often grew to be painful in its intensity [in the violin works], is here softened down to a quieter beauty and a generally serene grandeur, as was to be expected from the deeper pitch and fuller tone of the cello."

Bach's Solo Cello Suites, like his contemporaneous English Suites for Harpsichord (BWV 806–811), follow the traditional form of the German instrumental suite—an elaborate prelude followed by a fixed series of dances: *allemande*, *courante*, *sarabande* and *gigue*. Between the last two movements of the cello works are inserted additional pairs of *minuets* (Suites Nos. 1 and 2), *bourrées* (Nos. 3 and 4) or *gavottes* (Nos. 5 and 6).

The First Suite (G major) opens with a fantasia-like *Prélude* whose steady rhythmic motion and breadth of harmonic inflection generate a sweeping grandeur that culminates magnificently in the heroic gestures of the closing measures. The ensuing movements follow the old custom of pairing a slow dance with a fast one: an *Allemande* (here marked by wide-ranging figurations and swiftly

flowing rhythms) is complemented by a *Courante*, a dance type originally accompanied by jumping motions; a stately *Sarabande* is balanced by a pair of *Minuets* (the second of which, in G minor, exhibits a delicious, haunted languor) and a spirited *Gigue* of vibrant character.

The Suite No. 5 (C minor), often characterized as the most profound and austere of the set, begins with a *Prélude* reminiscent of a French Overture: a slow, deeply melancholic opening section with dotted rhythms is followed by quickly moving music whose subtle shifts of register imply the intertwining of fugal voices. The ensuing movements use the forms and styles of the traditional dances, though their expressive state is not one of lighthearted diversion but of sadness in the slow movements

(*Allemande*, *Sarabande*) and firm determination in the fast ones (*Courante*, *Gavottes*, *Gigue*).

The Third Suite (C major) opens with a *Prélude* that exploits the rich scales and arpeggios of the instrument's middle and low registers. The *Allemande's* elaborate quick figurations make its tempo seem faster than a metronome would allow. The *Courante* is light and animated. The stately *Sarabande* is balanced by the twin *Bourrées* (the second of which slips into C minor) and the spirited *Gigue*, whose few measures of implied bagpipe drone are among the most novel tonal effects in Bach's instrumental catalog.

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Michael O'Neill / Sony

The many-faceted career of cellist **Yo-Yo Ma** is testament to his continual search for new ways to communicate with audiences, and to his personal desire for artistic growth and renewal. Whether performing a new concerto, revisiting a familiar work from the cello repertoire, coming together with colleagues for chamber music or exploring musical forms outside of the Western classical tradition, Mr. Ma strives to find connections that stimulate the imagination.

Yo-Yo Ma maintains a balance between his engagements as soloist with orchestras throughout the world and his recital and chamber music activities. He draws inspiration from a wide circle of collaborators, each fueled by the artists' interactions. One of Mr. Ma's goals is the exploration of music as a means of communication and as a vehicle for the migrations of ideas across a range of cultures throughout the world. Expanding upon this interest, in 1998 Mr. Ma established the Silk Road Project to promote the study of the cultural, artistic and intellectual traditions along the ancient Silk Road trade route that stretched from the

Mediterranean Sea to the Pacific Ocean. By examining the flow of ideas throughout this vast area, the Project seeks to illuminate the heritages of the Silk Road countries and identify the voices that represent these traditions today. The Project's major activities have included the 2002 Smithsonian Folklife Festival, which included more than 400 artists from 25 countries and drew more than 1.3 million visitors, concerts at the 2005 World Expo in Aichi, Japan, and Silk Road Chicago, a city-wide year-long residency in partnership with the Art Institute of Chicago, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the City of Chicago. Mr. Ma and the Silk Road Ensemble performed at the Opening Ceremony of the 2007 Special Olympics in Shanghai. Continuing over the next few years, in collaboration with leading museums in Asia, Europe and North America, the Project will co-produce a series of performance, exhibition and educational events focusing on great works of art from each museum's collections.

Mr. Ma is an exclusive Sony Classical artist, and his discography of over 75 albums (including more than 15 Grammy Award-winners) reflects his wide-ranging interests. He has made several successful recordings that defy categorization, among them *Hush* with Bobby McFerrin, *Appalachia Waltz* and *Appalachian Journey* with Mark O'Connor and Edgar Meyer and two Grammy-winning tributes to the music of Brazil, *Obrigado Brazil* and *Obrigado Brazil: Live in Concert*. Mr. Ma's most recent recordings include *Paris: La Belle Époque*, with pianist Kathryn Stott, and *New Impossibilities*, a live album recorded with the Silk Road Ensemble and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra; he also appears on John Williams's soundtrack for Rob Marshall's film *Memoirs of a Geisha*. Across this full range of releases Mr. Ma remains one of the best-selling recording artists in the classical field. All of his recent albums have quickly entered the *Billboard* chart of classical best-sellers, remaining in the Top 15 for extended periods, often with as many as four titles simultaneously on the list.

Yo-Yo Ma is strongly committed to educational programs that not only bring young audiences into contact with music but also allow them

to participate in its creation. While touring, he takes time whenever possible to conduct master classes as well as more informal programs for students—musicians and non-musicians alike. He has also reached young audiences through appearances on *Arthur*, *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* and *Sesame Street*.

Yo-Yo Ma was born in 1955 to Chinese parents living in Paris. He began to study the cello with his father at age four and soon came with his family to New York, where he spent most of his formative years. Later, his principal teacher was Leonard Rose at The Juilliard School. He sought out a traditional liberal arts education to expand upon his conservatory training, graduating from Harvard University in 1976. He has received numerous awards, including the Avery Fisher Prize (1978), the Glenn Gould Prize (1999), the National Medal of the Arts (2001), the Dan David Prize (2006), the Sonning Prize (2006) and the World Economic Forum's Crystal Award (2008). In 2006, then Secretary General Kofi Annan named him a United Nations Messenger of Peace. In 2007, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon extended his appointment. In January 2009, at the invitation of President-Elect Barack Obama, Mr. Ma played in the quartet performance of John Williams's *Air and Simple Gifts* at the 56th Inaugural Ceremony.

Mr. Ma and his wife have two children. Mr. Ma plays two instruments, a 1733 Montagnana cello from Venice and the 1712 Davidoff Stradivarius.