



presents...

Subscriber and Member Concert

CAMILLE THOMAS | Cello
JULIEN BROCAL | Piano

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 | 7:30pm

Herbst Theatre

CHOPIN **Prelude in E Minor, Opus 28, No. 4 (arr. Thomas)**

FRANCHOMME **Nocturne in E Minor, Opus 14, No. 1**

CHOPIN **Prelude in D-flat Major, Opus 28, No. 15 (arr. Franchomme)**

Sonata in G Minor for Cello and Piano, Opus 65

Allegro moderato

Scherzo: Allegro con brio

Largo

Finale: Allegro

INTERMISSION

CHOPIN **Nocturne in B Minor, Op. Posth. (arr. Maisky)**

Waltz in A Minor, Opus 34, No. 2 (arr. Franchomme)

FRANCHOMME **Air russe varié, Opus 32**

POPPER **Hungarian Rhapsody, Opus 68**

San Francisco Performances' Subscriber and Member Concert is sponsored by Camilla and George Smith.

Camille Thomas is represented by Frank Salomon Associates, Inc.
16 West 36th Street, Suite 1205, New York, NY franksalomon.com

Julien Brocal is represented by Jardin Musical jardinmusical.org

Steinway Model D, Pro Piano, San Francisco

ARTIST PROFILES

San Francisco Performances presents the San Francisco debut of Camille Thomas and Julien Brocal.



Optimism, vitality, and joyful exuberance are elements of **Camille Thomas's** rich and compelling personality. The young Franco-Belgian cellist, who signed an exclusive contract with Deutsche Grammophon in 2017, understands art's power to bring people together, and to unite individuals from diverse cultures, countries, and backgrounds. Her charismatic artistry is driven by a passion for life and a desire to inspire others to open their hearts to the wonder and emotion of classical music. "Music gives hope for the beauty and greatness of the human soul," she says.

Camille's recent debuts with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Paolo Bortolameolli and the Houston Symphony and Gemma New, and recitals in Boston and New York captivated her audiences and inspired standing ovations at all her performances. Her obvious passion for sharing her love of music created a special bond with her listeners.

Camille Thomas's 2023–24 season is set to be another remarkable year. She will kick off the season with a series of concerts at the Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival, followed by recitals in Duzniki, Biarritz, and the Kronberg Festival. In addition, Camille Thomas will make her debut with the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington DC under the baton of Gustavo Gimeno and her recital debut in the Bay Area with San Francisco Performances. She will also showcase her talents at summer festivals across Europe and at Tippet Rise Art Center, and with the

Portland (ME) Symphony Orchestra, Stuttgart Philharmoniker, Sinfonieorchester Aachen, and Philharmonie Zuidnederland.

In addition to her live performances, in June 2023 Camille released a new project with Deutsche Grammophon: *The Chopin Project*, which pays tribute to Chopin's favorite instrument, the cello. It is a trilogy of albums that showcases Camille's deep understanding of Chopin's music and its relationship with the cello.

Ms. Thomas is conquering the world stage at a staggering pace. She has already worked with such conductors as Gemma New, Paolo Bortolameolli, Paavo Järvi, Mikko Franck, Darrell Ang, Kent Nagano, and Stéphane Denève and with the Houston Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, Academia Santa Cecilia, Staatsorchester Hamburg in the Elbphilharmonie, the Orchestre National de Bordeaux, Brussels Philharmonic, RTE National Symphony Ireland, and the Korean Symphony Orchestra in Seoul.

Camille made her highly anticipated U.S. debut at the Brevard Music Festival in 2019 performing the Elgar Concerto under the baton of Keith Lockhart. Her whirlwind season then brought her to a number of other leading series and orchestras, in person and online, including Purdue Convocations, The Cliburn, Houston's Society of the Performing Arts, Interlochen Presents, Wisconsin Union Theatre, Emory University, Peoples' Symphony Concerts (her New York City debut at Town Hall), and the Delaware and Illinois Symphony Orchestras.

Voice of Hope, her second DG album, was released internationally in June 2020 to great acclaim. At its heart is the world premiere recording of Fazil Say's Concerto for Cello and Orchestra *Never Give Up*, the composer's response to terrorist attacks on Paris and Istanbul, written expressly for Thomas, who gave its world premiere performance in Paris in April 2018. It is the first classical album recorded in partnership with UNICEF, reflecting the cellist's desire to help others through her music.

Camille studied in Frans Helmerson's and Wolfgang-Emmanuel Schmidt's classes at the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler in Berlin, after working with Marcel Bardon and Philippe Muller in Paris and Stephan Forck in Berlin.

Camille plays the "Stradivarius Feuermann" (1730) cello thanks to the generosity of the Nippon Music Foundation and uses a bow by Eugène Sartory kindly on extended loan from the Fondation Roi Baudouin—

Fonds Bollansee.

Camille Thomas records exclusively for Deutsche Grammophon

Follow Ms. Thomas online at:

Facebook: @CamilleThomasCellist

Instagram: @camillethomascellist

YouTube: @CamilleThomasCello

X: @CamilleThomasOF

Visit her web site at camillethomas.com for additional information about touring, recordings, and special projects.



Named *BBC Music Magazine's* 2018 Revelation of the Year, **Julien Brocal** began learning the piano at the age of five and performed for the first time at the Salle Cortot (Paris) at the age of seven. He was trained by Erik Berchot at the Conservatoire National de Région de Marseille and Rena Shereshevskaya at the École Normale de Musique de Paris Alfred Cortot. He was supported by the Zaleski Foundation, the Assophie Association and the Fondation Safran during his training.

He was spotted in January 2013 by Maria João Pires during an advanced course at the Cité de la Musique (Paris). She then invited him for an artistic residency at the Chapelle Musicale Reine Elisabeth in Belgium.

He has given numerous recitals around the world, including Wigmore Hall (London), New York Town Hall, the Flagey Piano Days, the Festival Classique au Vert, Piano aux Jacobins, the Chopin Festival in Nohant and the Tippet Rise Art Center in the USA (Montana), the Cambridge Music Festival, the Chopin Society (London) and the NCPA (Beijing), replacing at short notice the famous pianists Fazil Say and Nelson Goerner.

Highlights of the 2023–24 season include the release in the fall 2023 of his third solo album *Here* dedicated to his compositions

recorded at the Tippet Rise Art Center prior to the pandemic, a tour of the United States, and the release of a triple album by Deutsche Grammophon dedicated to Chopin with cellist Camille Thomas.

Julien is also a regular chamber music partner of cellists Lidy Blijdorp, Camille Thomas and violinist Rosanne Philippons, co-organizing with pianist Julien Libeer the chamber music festival “Pause Festival” in La Donaira, Andalusia.

Julien also works to bring music and the arts to unusual places, to organize workshops to introduce classical music, and educational projects for children in difficulty. He has contributed to the development of the children’s choir Equinoxe created by Maria João Pires and is involved as a conductor in the children’s choir Singing Molenbeek, which works in the schools of Molenbeek in Brussels.

His first album published in 2017 is dedicated to the repertoire of Frederic Chopin with the *24 Preludes Op. 28* and the *Sonata No. 2 Op. 35*. The recording was unanimously praised by the international press, the *BBC Music Magazine* said that it is a “Chopin bewitching,” giving it five stars and presenting it as its best instrumental album of the month.

His second album, consisting of works by Ravel and Mompou, was released in 2018 and was received with equal enthusiasm by the international press: *Gramophone* magazine editor Patrick Rucker wrote “I implore you not to miss the opportunity to hear this singular talent.”

In addition to traditional concert halls, Julien has created in his studio the “Jardin Musical,” a creative ecosystem reflecting the principles of permaculture by providing a space to produce live performances, recordings and residencies.

Julien Brocal records for Rubicon. Follow Mr. Brocal online at Facebook (@julienbrocal), Instagram (@julienbrocal), and Twitter (@JulienBrocal). Visit his web site (julienbrocal.com) for additional information about touring, recordings, and special projects.

PROGRAM NOTES

“I love you and that’s all I can say since I’m falling into sleep and weakness.”

The last letter that Chopin wrote was destined for Franchomme, and these were his words.

In the twilight of his life, Frederic Chopin composed his sonata for cello and

piano and dedicated it to his dear friend Auguste-Joseph Franchomme. This was the last work published during Chopin’s lifetime. On the evening before his death, Chopin asked to hear it and Franchomme, at his bedside in a salon in the Place Vendôme, played the second and third movements. Like a tribute to a life that ended in beauty, each note of the sonata reflects the tremendous personal and artistic friendship between the two men. Through the music, a transparent separation between their hearts and the heart of the world, they became immortal. This eternity still resonates today through the instrument of Auguste-Joseph Franchomme, a Stradivarius cello from 1730 known as the “Stradivarius Feuermann.” A mythic cello that I have had the immense honor to play for several years. The final letter of Chopin was dedicated to Franchomme, and outside of his repertoire for the piano, Chopin composed almost exclusively for the cello. He even said that this was his favorite instrument (except for the piano!), and he added that he had no objection to his piano pieces being transcribed for other instruments, as long as they were tastefully arranged. Franchomme didn’t hesitate, and it is thanks to the work of these two men that I am happy to give life to this program.

© Camille Thomas

Translated from French by Melanie Smith

Prelude in E Minor, Opus 28, No. 4 (arr. Thomas)

FREDERIC CHOPIN

(1810–1849)

As a small boy in Poland, Chopin fell in love with the keyboard music of Bach. Like Beethoven before him (and Rachmaninoff and Shostakovich after him), Chopin was particularly drawn to *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, Bach’s two sets of 24 preludes and fugues in all the major and minor keys of the chromatic scale. Haunted by Bach’s achievement, Chopin wished to try something similar, and in 1836 he began to compose a series of short preludes, but it would take him three years to complete the entire set of 24. In the fall of 1838, Chopin sailed with George Sand to Mallorca, taking with him a number of Bach scores. On the island, living in an abandoned monastery high in a mountain village that was alternately bathed in Mediterranean sunlight and torn by freezing rainstorms, he completed the *Preludes* in January 1839.

The entire set of 24 preludes lasts about 45 minutes, so these are concise essays in all the keys, and they encompass an enormous variety of technique, ranging from very easy preludes to numbingly difficult ones, playable by only the most gifted performers. They cover an unusual expressive range as well, from the cheerful sunlight of some to the uneasy darkness of others. The *Prelude No. 4 in E Minor* has been played by every pianist on the planet, but—however over-familiar it has become—it remains some of the most beautiful and hauntingly expressive music ever written. This recital opens with Camille Thomas’ arrangement of it for cello and piano.

Nocturne in E Minor, Opus 14, No. 1

AUGUSTE-JOSEPH FRANCHOMME

(1808–1884)

Auguste-Joseph Franchomme was the outstanding French cellist of the nineteenth century. He learned the instrument as a boy in Lille, then went on to study at the Paris Conservatory at age 17. Franchomme quickly established himself as the finest cellist in Paris, playing in orchestras, at the Paris Opera, and for the royal chamber music concerts. In 1843 he became the principal cellist at the Paris Conservatory, a position he held for the rest of his life. Franchomme was known particularly for developing a light bowing technique, in contrast to the previous style of heavier bowing. He composed a number of works, almost all of them for cello.

Franchomme met Chopin soon after the latter’s arrival in Paris in 1831, and they remained close friends until Chopin’s death. They jointly composed the work known as Chopin’s *Gran Duo Concertante*, and Chopin composed his *Cello Sonata*, heard later on this program, especially for Franchomme. Chopin and Franchomme performed the final three movements of the *Cello Sonata* at Chopin’s final public performance in February 1848, and Franchomme was one of the pallbearers at Chopin’s funeral the following year. At this evening’s concert, Ms. Thomas plays the De Munck Stradivarius of 1730, a cello that was owned by Franchomme. This is the instrument that the great cellist Emanuel Feuermann played during the latter stages of his career, and more recently it has been the instrument of Aldo Parisot and Steven Isserlis.

Franchomme published his three *Nocturnes, Opus 14*, for cello and piano in 1837.

The first of these, in E minor, is marked *Andante*. It opens with a flowing, rocking melody in 9/8 that Franchomme specifies should be performed *dolce*. The music grows somewhat agitated in its middle section but quickly returns to the mood of the opening and draws to a most gentle conclusion.

Prelude in D-flat Major, Opus 28, No. 15 (arr. Franchomme)

FREDERIC CHOPIN

Chopin's *Prelude in D-flat Major* has been cursed with an inescapable nickname, the "Raindrop" (that nickname that did not originate with the composer, who hated it). Longest of all the preludes, this piece begins with the section that brought the nickname, but the central episode, march-like in its inexorable rhythm, builds to several powerful climaxes; at the end Chopin offers only the briefest recall of the opening material. It is heard on this recital in August Franchomme's arrangement for cello and piano.

Sonata in G Minor for Cello and Piano, Opus 65

FREDERIC CHOPIN

Chopin's *Cello Sonata* (1845–46) dates from the troubled final years of his life; it was in fact his last published work. Chopin wrote little music for instruments other than piano, but he appears to have had a special fondness for the cello, for he wrote three different works for cello and piano. Composing the *Cello Sonata* was particularly difficult for a composer unaccustomed to writing for anything but piano. In a letter to his sister, Chopin said: "I write a little and cross out a lot. Sometimes I am pleased with it, sometimes not. I throw it into a corner and pick it up again." The *Cello Sonata* has not won a wide following, and one of Chopin's biographers had gone so far as to describe it as nothing but "immense wildernesses, with only here and there a small flower."

Yet this interesting and rewarding music shows a little-known side of Chopin. The sonata is remarkable for the concentration of its material: much of the music of the first movement grows out of the cello's opening statement, and certain theme-shapes appear in all its movements. Some believe that the *Cello Sonata* suggests the

course Chopin's music might have taken, had he not died at age 39 of tuberculosis.

The sonata is in four movements. The *Allegro moderato* opens with a brief introduction by the piano, and when the cello enters it borrows some of the melodic shape of the introduction for its main theme. The mood of this music is mercurial: it is by turns agitated, noble, dramatic, and gentle. The structure here is unusual as well, for Chopin shortens the recapitulation and drives the movement to the two sharp concluding chords. The *Scherzo*, much lighter in texture, is derived from material in the first movement. It rushes ahead on short phrases that contrast with the long lines of the wonderful trio section: here Chopin's soaring melody rocks along gracefully before the movement concludes with a brief reprise of the scherzo. The *Largo* is relatively short (only 27 measures long), but this gorgeous music is the expressive center of the sonata. The cello's wistful main idea, marked *cantabile* and *dolce*, sings gracefully above the piano's steady accompaniment, grows to a climax, and falls away to the quiet close. The vigorous *Finale* derives much of its energy from Chopin's contrast of triplet and dotted rhythms. A solemn march-like passage provides a measure of contrast before this extended movement comes to its close on a *più mosso* coda.

Nocturne in B Minor, Opus Posth. (arr. Maisky)

FREDERIC CHOPIN

In 1830, the 20-year-old Chopin wrote a piece for his sister. She was about to learn her brother's *Piano Concerto No. 2 in F Minor*, and to help her, he wrote a preparatory piece. He inscribed it to her: "To my sister Ludvika as an exercise before beginning the study of my second Concerto." The piece was not published until 1875, 26 years after Chopin's death, and only then did it acquire the name "nocturne." He himself had never considered it a nocturne.

Chopin simply marked this piece *Lento con gran' espressione*. It falls into several sections: a four-measure introduction, stark and curiously reminiscent of Beethoven, leads to a statement of the haunting first theme. A second subject, a simple rising figure, gives way to a more rhythmic theme derived from the finale of the *Second Piano Concerto*. There is no development. Chopin repeats his opening theme, and a quiet coda built on some of those wonderful rhythmic sprays so typical of

Chopin leads to a cadence that he marks triple *piano*.

This product of Chopin's youth, one that its creator himself virtually forgot, has become a great favorite of pianists. Originally in C-sharp minor, it is heard in this concert in an arrangement for cello and piano by the cellist Mischa Maisky, who transcribed it in B minor.

Waltz in A Minor, Opus 34, No. 2 (arr. Franchomme)

FREDERIC CHOPIN

The *Waltz in A Minor*, despite its relatively high opus number, dates from very early in Chopin's career: he composed it during the difficult year 1831, when—as a 21-year-old—he moved to Paris, the city that would be his home for the rest of his life. The *Waltz in A Minor* is at an unusually slow tempo—the marking is *Lento*—and its mood is somber. It opens with a brief introduction that has a dark melody in the left hand and the waltz rhythm in the right; the arrival of the main waltz theme puts things back in the expected order. The lengthy center section is full of unusual modulations, and the opening waltz even intrudes briefly here. The closing moments bring a surprise: a new waltz-tune—sparkling and light—seems to flicker to life momentarily, then the music subsides into the somber left-hand melody from the very beginning.

Air russe varié, Opus 32

AUGUSTE FRANCHOMME

Among Franchomme's approximately 55 compositions are a number of sets of variations. These include variations on themes by other composers, themes that Franchomme wrote himself, themes from operas, and themes from songs of different countries. In 1845 he published his *Air russe varié*, a set of concise variations on the Ukrainian song *Ikhav Kozak za Dunaj* ("The Cossack Rode beyond the Danube"). This song, known in German as *Schöne Minke*, has attracted many composers: Beethoven, Weber, and Hummel are among the many who have written variations on it.

The *Air russe varié* is scored for cello with the accompaniment of either piano or a small string ensemble. Franchomme

continues on page 5

begins with the theme, marked *Andante sostenuto* on its first statement, and then provides a series of very brief variations in different tempos and moods across the 11-minute span of the piece. The individual variations require no comment. They give some indication of how good a cellist Franchomme must have been, and they provide the opportunity for some very elegant music-making before the set is rounded off with a bravura final variation.

Hungarian Rhapsody, Opus 68

DAVID POPPER
(1843–1913)

David Popper was one of the finest cellists of the late-nineteenth century. After

study at the Prague Conservatory, he embarked on a distinguished career that saw him serve as principal cellist of both the Vienna Court Opera Orchestra and the Vienna Philharmonic, tour throughout Europe as a soloist, and play chamber music with Brahms. As might be expected, Popper wrote primarily for cello, and though he composed such large-scale works as four cello concertos and a *Requiem* for three cellos and orchestra, most of his pieces are short. Virtuoso, melodic, and agreeable, these works were intended for his own use during recitals, allowing him to show off his skill as both performer and composer. As such, this music represents a vanished tradition: the notion of the virtuoso performer who also composes has unfortunately pretty much been lost.

Popper's *Hungarian Rhapsody* remains one of his most frequently performed

works. In musical usage, “Hungarian” has inevitably come to mean “gypsy,” and Popper suffuses this music with that exotic flavor. Episodic and mercurial, this music is by turns fiery, soulful, impassioned, and playful. A brief introduction gives way to a solo cadenza for the cello before the *Rhapsody* whirls off on its exciting way. And, as it should, this music gives cellists ample opportunity to demonstrate their skill.

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger