FACULTY RECITAL

THE FISCHER DUO

NORMAN FISCHER, cello
JEANNE KIERMAN, piano

Wednesday, October 27, 1999
8:00 p.m.
Lillian H. Duncan Recital Hall
PROGRAM

Nocturne et Scherzo (1882)  
Claude Debussy  
(1862-1918)

Chant for cello and piano  
(in two movements) (1991)  
Augusta Read Thomas  
(b. 1964)

Sonata-Aria for cello and piano (1992)  
George Rochberg  
(b. 1918)

Molto lento – Agitato, ma molto rubato –  
Molto calmo – Ardentemente – Molto grave –  
Tranquillo e cantabile – Poco andante, con gran espressione e nobilita – Tempo di molto lento

INTERMISSION

Sonata in G minor, Op. 65 (1845-46) *  
Frédéric Chopin  
(1810-1849)

Allegro moderato  
Scherzo  
Largo  
Finale: Allegro

* This performance commemorates the 150th anniversary of Chopin's death on October 17, 1849.

In consideration of the performers and members of the audience, please check audible paging devices with the ushers and silence audible timepieces. The taking of photographs and use of recording equipment are prohibited.
Program Notes

Nocturne et Scherzo

Claude Debussy

In May of 1882 Debussy made his first public appearance as a composer. The occasion was a Soirée Musicale given by violinist Maurice Thieberg and included some of Debussy's songs and a Nocturne and Scherzo for violin and piano. The violin work has been lost, but a more recent version for cello and piano, dated June 1882, survives (and has only been available for performance since 1995). The title implies two pieces, but in fact, it is a combination of an interesting type. Starting with the D major Scherzo (with the G major trio section), it folds directly into an A-flat major Nocturne and then repeats the Scherzo with a coda. In the Romantic tradition of works like Chopin's Polonaise-Fantasie, Debussy's own "Scherzo-Intermezzo" from the Piano Trio (1880), or even Rochberg's Sonata-Aria on tonight's program, the scherzo is imbued with nocturnal characteristics. The nocturne is similarly affected by its proximity to the scherzo, making it a bit hazy as to where the lines are drawn between the two.

—Note by Norman Fischer

Chant

Augusta Read Thomas

Chant was commissioned by and is dedicated to the Fischer Duo, who premiered the work in Houston on January 21, 1992. The work is in two movements, the first of which is a quasi-scherzo that has a slow and lyric middle section. The second movement is a molto cantabile cello tune from which the piano spins a complex web of sounds offering a harmonic representation of the cello's melodic song and thereby completing the entire multidimensional space that I was working to create in this composition.

—Note by the composer

Sonata-Aria

George Rochberg

A century-long struggle has been going on between tonality and atonality, and, from my point of view as an initiator and participant in that struggle, I see a fierce and unrelenting spiritual confrontation between life-confirming concreteness and life-constricting abstraction.

This inescapable confrontation lies at the root of my own work and has been the "to be or not to be" — the push of abstraction on the one hand, the pull of concreteness on the other — in almost every piece of music I've written for the last twenty years or more.

Writing the Sonata-Aria cello and piano duo was, for me, a new-old experience of reawakening to the elemental fact that life — and its expression in music — is concreteness personified. It was again a reminder that I am bounded by human realities and that the boundedness of those realities demands of me the discipline of trying to make precise judgments and inevitable choices in satisfying the requirements of ear, heart, soul, and brain in the music I write. This, as I see it, is the moral imperative that has arisen out of the struggle between the tonal and the non-tonal, between music as melodic/harmonic thought and music as mere patterns of sounds.
These kinds of thoughts were my daily companions paralleling the writing of what I wished to be a fitting tribute to Gerald Fischer and would provide my dear friends Norman and Jeanne Fischer the vehicle for projecting this personal tribute.

I chose the title Sonata-Aria to convey something of the overall sense of the structure and attitude of the work: a formal design expressed lyrically, passionately, dramatically. In another sense, it is a kind of spiritual reflection on the minor triad and its inevitable other Janus-face, the major triad. In still another and different sense, because it purposely avoids the obviously virtuosic, it requires superior artists like the Fischer Duo to bring it to life. And so, it is with admiration and great affection that I dedicate Sonata-Aria to Norman and Jeanne Fischer.

— Note by the composer

Sonata-Aria was commissioned by the Fischer Duo in honor of Gerald J. Fischer (1917-1987) with assistance from Abigail, Beth, Catherine, David, Erika, Gerald, Kenneth, Martha, Matthew, Penelope, and Rebecca Fischer; Katherine, Nathaniel, and William Lutes; and Stanley and Carmen Thornton.

Sonata in G minor, Op. 65

Frédéric Chopin

Fourteen years after Chopin arrived in Paris and wrote the Duo Concertante, he turned again to writing for his friend, cellist August Franchomme. Instead of composing a work that showcased the virtuosic element of the two instruments in a salon-type work, Chopin chose the most serious idiom—a four-movement sonata. A lot had transpired in those years, a deteriorating love affair and much illness and suffering, but Franchomme’s friendship was steadfast. Little did Chopin know that this Sonata in G minor was to be the last work he would write (1846), the last work he would play in public (1848), and the last work he would hear at his deathbed (1849). The first movement is an extensive sonata form that integrates the two instruments seamlessly both in melodic and accompanimental figurations. The second movement is an energetic Scherzo with a glorious cello melody in D major as its Trio counterpart. Contemporary writers have spoken about Franchomme’s beautiful legato playing. Obviously, Chopin had this as his inspiration when he composed the slow movement—a Nocturne in B-flat major. The culminating movement starts in G minor and is brilliantly complex and rhythmically propelling. In the coda, Chopin changes the key to G major, only to surprise us at the very end with a Plagal cadence, as if to say “Amen.”

† The Marquis de Custine, a Parisian nobleman and long-time friend and supporter of Chopin, wrote to Chopin after he heard the composer’s final performance: “You have gained in suffering and poetry; the melancholy of your compositions penetrate still deeper into the heart; one feels alone with you in the midst of a crowd; it is no longer a piano, but a soul, and what a soul! Preserve yourself for the sake of your friends; it is a consolation to be able to hear you; in the hard times that threaten, only art as you feel it will be able to unite men divided by the realities of life; people love each other, people understand each other, in Chopin. You have turned a public into a circle of friends; you are equal to your own genius; that says it all.”

— Note by Norman Fischer
The 1999-2000 season marks the 28th year of the FISCHER DUO, and the group continues to explore the rich repertoire for cello and piano. The Washington Post has described the Fischer Duo's all-French programming as "intense and totally committed, with a solid understanding of the subtleties of the French style"; The New York Times has commented on "a real sense of dialogue in this duo's ensemble" as well as "a salon-like intimacy and warmth"; and The Boston Globe has heralded Norman Fischer's "boldly imaginative and technically assured skills" and Jeanne Kierman as "equally impressive." In addition to featuring works by the masters, the Fischer Duo has become known for their thematic approach to programming, have performed neglected pieces by composers such as Franz Liszt, Victor Herbert, Nadia Boulanger, and Ferruccio Busoni, and have commissioned new works by American composers George Rochberg, Samuel Jones, Robert Sirota, David Stock, Augusta Read Thomas, Richard Lavenda, and Pierre Jalbert, among others. Their compact disc of French masters on the Northeastern label (NR 238-CD) has received rave reviews. Selected as Artistic Ambassadors for the United States Information Agency, the Fischer Duo completed tours of South America in 1996 and South Africa in 1997.

NORMAN FISCHER is one of this country's foremost exponents of the cello. After completing instrumental study with Richard Kapuscinski, Claus Adam, and Bernard Greenhouse, he first graced the international concert stage as cellist with the Concord String Quartet, a group that won the Naumburg Chamber Music Award, an Emmy and several Grammy nominations, and recorded over forty works on RCA Red Seal, Vox, Nonesuch, Turnabout, and CRI. The New York Times recently said, "During its sixteen years, the supervirtuosic Concord String Quartet championed contemporary work while staying rooted in the Western tradition. "In addition to performing the major concerti, Mr. Fischer has premiered and recorded many new scores for cello and orchestra. Recitals of unaccompanied cello works have received rave reviews such as "Inspiring" (The New York Times) for his New York debut recital of the complete Bach Suites in one evening, and "Coruscating" (Boston Globe) for his performance of Golijov's Omaramor at the opening of the 1998 Tanglewood Festival. His chamber music expertise has led to guest appearances with the Juilliard, Cleveland, Emerson, Blair, Schoenberg, Chester, and Audubon string quartets, Da Camera of Houston, and the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival. He is also a member of the Concord Trio and Ensemble Pierrot. A devoted teacher and mentor to younger players, Mr. Fischer has taught at Dartmouth College and the Oberlin Conservatory and is currently Professor of Violoncello at The Shepherd School of Music. Since 1985 he has taught at the Tanglewood Music Center, summer home of the Boston Symphony, in Lenox, Massachusetts, and currently holds the Barbara LaMont Master Teacher Chair.
JEANNE KIERMAN is a leading advocate of the piano as a collaborative instrument. A graduate of Oberlin, the Dalcroze School, and the New England Conservatory, she studied with master pianists William Masselos, Miles Mauney, Victor Rosenbaum, and Menahem Pressler. Ms. Kierman is equally adroit as a collaborator with voice or instrument and is in great demand as a recital partner. For ten years she was the pianist with the New England-based Alcott Ensemble, performing a broad range of chamber music and developing a virtuosity she frequently demonstrates both on stage, as resident and guest artist with various ensembles, and in the studio with her students. Formerly on the faculty of the Oberlin Conservatory, Ms. Kierman is now Artist Teacher of Piano at The Shepherd School of Music. Ms. Kierman has recorded for Northeastern Records.