

Senior Recital - Chen Pei-Yi

25 April 2026 3:10pm

Richard Strauss

Cello Sonata in F major, Op. 6 (1883)

Movements:

I. Allegro con brio

II. Andante ma non troppo

III. Finale: Allegro vivo

Composed in 1883, when Richard Strauss was only nineteen years old, the cello sonata in F major, Op. 6 is one of his earliest large-scale chamber works. Written before his later move toward tone poems and opera, the sonata reflects a strong influence of the German Romantic tradition, particularly composers such as Johannes Brahms and Felix Mendelssohn.

I. Allegro con brio is bold and heroic, beginning with powerful four-note chords that introduce the lyrical theme which follows. Strauss makes full use of the cello's upper register, incorporating wide leaps that present both technical and expressive challenges for the performer. This writing not only showcases the instrument's range but also adds a sense of intensity and brilliance to the musical line.

II. Andante ma non troppo, provides a lyrical contrast. The cello sings with warmth and expressive depth, supported by a flowing piano texture. This movement highlights Strauss's gift for long melodic lines.

III. Finale: Allegro vivo, is energetic and brilliant. Driven by rhythmic vitality and virtuosic interplay between the instruments, it brings the sonata to a confident and spirited conclusion.

Francis Poulenc (1899–1963)

Cello Sonata, FP 143 (1948)

Movements:

I. Allegro – Tempo di marcia

II. Cavatine

III. Ballabile

IV. Finale

Composed in 1948, Francis Poulenc's cello sonata stands as one of his most substantial chamber works and reflects a mature synthesis of his distinctive musical voice. Written in memory of the Spanish cellist Pierre Fournier (who later premiered the work), the sonata reveals Poulenc's characteristic balance between elegance, wit, and emotional depth.

I. Allegro. Tempo di marcia opens with a dramatic and declamatory gesture, immediately establishing a sense of urgency. Unlike the transparent textures often associated with French chamber music, Poulenc employs a denser, more contrapuntal style, giving equal importance to both cello and piano. Moments of lyricism appear amidst rhythmic vitality, highlighting the composer's gift for melodic expressivity.

II. Cavatine forms the emotional core of the sonata. Here, Poulenc writes one of his most intimate and introspective melodies. The cello line unfolds in a vocal, almost operatic manner, supported by a harmonically rich yet restrained piano accompaniment. This movement reflects Poulenc's deep sensitivity and his ability to convey sincerity without excess.

III. Ballabile, introduces a lighter and more playful atmosphere. Its dance-like character and rhythmic vitality reflect Poulenc's characteristic wit and elegance.

IV. The Finale brings the work to an energetic and brilliant conclusion. Rapid exchanges between the instruments, unexpected harmonic turns, and virtuosic writing create a sense of spontaneity and excitement, while maintaining structural clarity.