

Luka Coetzee with Jon Kimura Parker

Friday, February 20, 2026 at 8pm

This is the 1,501st concert in Koerner Hall

Luka Coetzee, cello

Jon Kimura Parker, piano

PROGRAM

Omar Daniel: Duo for Violoncello and Piano

- I. Vivace
- II. Andante
- III. Allegro barbaro

Johannes Brahms: Cello Sonata No. 2 in F Major, op. 99

- I. Allegro vivace
- II. Adagio affettuoso
- III. Allegro passionato
- IV. Allegro molto

INTERMISSION

George Gershwin: Three Preludes

- I. Allegretto ben ritmato e deciso
- II. Andante con moto e poco rubato
- III. Allegretto ben ritmato e deciso

Sergei Rachmaninov: Cello Sonata in G Minor, op. 19

- I. Lento - Allegro moderato
- II. Allegro scherzando
- III. Andante
- IV. Allegro mosso

THE MICHAEL AND SONJA KOERNER FUND FOR CLASSICAL PROGRAMMING

The Royal Conservatory's mission to develop future generations of musicians and to bring the world's greatest performers to Toronto has been made possible, in large part, due to the generosity of Michael and Sonja Koerner. In 2022, the Koerners invested \$10 million to create The Michael and Sonja Koerner Fund for Classical Programming, securing the future of the finest classical music concerts at Koerner Hall and our other performance venues. This latest investment, along with the naming of Michael and Sonja Koerner Hall, support of Glenn Gould School students through The Michael & Sonja Koerner Scholarships, the donation of The Michael and Sonja Koerner Early Instrument Collection, the naming of The Alexandra Koerner Yeo Cello Program and The Alexandra Koerner Yeo Chair in Cello, and support of the annual 21C Music Festival, underscores the Koerner family's dedication to music and to the RCM.

Omar Daniel

Born in Toronto, ON, in 1960

Duo for Violoncello and Piano (2018)

“My compositional style is based fundamentally on the concept of drama,” says Toronto-based composer Omar Daniel. “It is a concept that believes that everything is linked and has cause and effect to the unfolding of time. Something might appear the same from one minute to the next – but it is not, because everything else is changing around it. Things grow and transform on an ongoing basis. I try to get that across musically, so that musical ideas are never stationary. Everything is organic. Everything is always in a process of development and affecting other things around it.”

Speaking of his 2018 Duo for Violoncello and Piano, Daniel, who has been Associate Professor at the Don Wright Faculty of Music, Western University since 2000, pinpoints his aims in the piece: “Over the last decade, I have been less interested in the exploration of instrumental colour and more in clarity of counterpoint and structure. As well, architecture based on harmony rather than sonority (both on a small and large scale) is a fundamental principle in this work. I attribute this to my ongoing interest in Estonian folk music, as well as the music of Béla Bartók and Galina Ustvolskaya. But, that being true, the act of performance figures significantly into the design and inspiration for this work. For me, chamber music is one of the most intimate and profound artistic forums. Where else can you find out so much about someone (the performer) in so short a time? The rich history of music for cello and piano, the level of skill and artistry of [the performers], and the respect I have for the tradition and legacy of classical musicians was always present during the conception of this work.”

Johannes Brahms

Born in Hamburg, Germany, May 7, 1833; died in Vienna, Austria, April 3, 1897

Cello Sonata No. 2 in F Major, op. 99 (1886)

21 years separate tonight’s passionate F Major Sonata (August 1886) from the earlier, elegiac E Minor Sonata for the same instruments. In both, Brahms was acutely aware of the influence of Beethoven. “You do not know what it is like, hearing Beethoven’s footsteps constantly behind me,” he famously wrote. In the tradition of Beethoven, Brahms titled both works ‘Sonata for piano and cello,’ long after the convention of putting the piano first in duo sonatas went out of fashion.

The sonata plunges headlong into the bold, sweeping main theme. It is quite fragmentary and unusual for its day. “Nothing is repeated without promoting development,” Arnold Schoenberg wrote a half century later – adding that many, himself included, had difficulty grasping the unusual rhythm, the syncopations, and such intervals as the ninths in the fifth bar. Brahms builds this opening movement from two terse motives – the jump of a fourth and fall of a second, heard at the very opening from the cello over piano tremolos. The texture here mirrors the jagged peaks of the Swiss alps and the calmer shores of Lake Thun, in the idyllic setting where Brahms composed the work. “It is so masterly in its compression,” Elisabet von Herzogenberg wrote to Brahms as one of his most trusted advisors, “so torrent-like in its progress, so terse in the development, while the extension of the first subject on its return comes as the greatest surprise.”

The slow movement begins in the strikingly remote key of F sharp, an effect that gives a distant, other-worldly feeling to the movement. This mood is enhanced by the unusual use of plucked cello strings, in both low and high registers. The third movement is a dynamic scherzo. Its rugged, demanding piano writing is often reminiscent of the more turbulent piano writing of the youthful Brahms. After the tension of these three movements, the finale offers some respite, being untroubled by weighty matters, yet substantial enough.

“In the sonata, passion rules, fiery to the point of vehemence, now defiantly challenging, now painfully lamenting,” the Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick wrote, perceptively, after the first performance of this F Major Sonata. “How boldly the first Allegro theme begins; how stormily the Allegro flows. It is true that the passion subsides into quiet mourning in the Adagio and fades away, reconciled in the finale. But the beating pulse of the earlier section still reverberates, and pathos remains the determining psychological characteristic of the whole.”

George Gershwin

Born in Brooklyn, NY, September 26, 1898; died in Hollywood, CA, July 11, 1937

Three Preludes (c. 1923-6)

“On Saturday afternoon the musical smart set clustered at the Hotel Roosevelt to hear George Gershwin play his five new preludes for piano. It was the first public performance of these pieces, which are still in manuscript, and which are to be joined with others as yet unwritten in a series called *Melting Pot*. They proved brief and glowing little vignettes of New York life.” So ran the *New York Evening World* review of December 4, 1926. Almost two years earlier, *Vanity Fair* writer Carl Van Vechten had predicted that “some of Gershwin’s finest inspirations have not as yet been either published or publicly performed. It is probable that the production of his 24 piano preludes [...] will award him a still higher rank in the army of contemporary composers.”

But Gershwin’s ambition to emulate Bach and Chopin with a set of 24 preludes – one in each key – was never realised. A 1924 sketchbook already hints at the plan, while another, headed *Preludes, Jan. 1925*, shows that his thoughts were turning to a jazz-inspired idiom. A surviving G minor fragment captures this new direction.

By the time of the 1926 New York premiere and a repeat performance in Boston two weeks later, Gershwin performed only three written-out pieces, also improvising around two or three existing pieces and playing excerpts from *Rhapsody in Blue*. The *Evening World* reported five preludes, but only three reached publication in 1927. These Three Preludes form a compact suite: two rhythmically charged, syncopated movements flank a slow, blue-hued middle piece built on a 12-bar blues pattern. Gershwin described it as “a sort of blue lullaby” – a dreamy intersection of concert hall poise and a glimpse of the Twenties Harlem jazz club atmosphere.

They may be brief, but these preludes are Gershwin distilled – urbane, jazz-inflected, and unmistakably alive to the sounds of the 1920s New York he knew so well.

Sergei Rachmaninov

Born in Semyonovo, Russia, March 20/April 1, 1873; died in Beverly Hills, CA, March 28, 1943

Cello Sonata in G Minor, op. 19 (1901)

Written in the summer of 1901, Rachmaninov’s G Minor Cello Sonata stands as his finest large-scale chamber work. It followed three short salon pieces for cello written for his friend Anatoly Brandukov, who joined him for the premiere on December 2, 1901. The sonata marked a triumphant return to composition after years of self-doubt. A little over three years earlier, his First Symphony had collapsed in a disastrous premiere, followed by a brutal press that plunged the composer into a long depression. Harsh words about his music from Tolstoy were the final straw. As the 20th century began, under the care of neurologist and amateur cellist Dr. Nikolai Dahl, Rachmaninov began a program of daily hypnosis and positive suggestion that was to eventually lift the depression and, after a three-year fallow period, restore his creative confidence. Out of this recovery came three major works. First, in the late summer and fall of 1900, came the triumphant Second Piano Concerto, which went on to become his most popular piece. Then, the following year, the Second Suite for Two Pianos, and the Cello Sonata, his final chamber work – written when Rachmaninov was just 28.

The sonata unfolds in four highly contrasted movements. The cello opens alone with a wistful sigh – one of its few unaccompanied moments – setting the reflective tone of the introduction. Its yearning theme reemerges as the first movement expands in scope and passion. Like Chopin in his Cello Sonata, Rachmaninov places a scherzo before the slow movement and demands the most virtuosity from the cello. Given that Rachmaninov was one of the great virtuoso pianists of the century and better known in his lifetime as a pianist than a composer, it is surprising how well laid out the sonata is for both instruments. Where the cello has to compete with the keyboard, it adds to a feeling of heroic struggle in the piece.

In the broad slow movement, in some of the composer’s most expressive duo music, the soulful, warmly lyrical singing tone of the cello complements the powerful sonority of the piano. The only comment Rachmaninov is known to have made about the work is that the cello is not to dominate the performance – that cello and piano are to be viewed as equal partners. Together, the duo concludes the sonata with a mostly optimistic finale, punctuated by more reflective moments. The Cello Sonata is an eloquent summation of renewal – the voice of a young composer who had reclaimed his confidence and, with it, his future.

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Luka Coetzee

Cello

Canadian South African cellist Luka Coetzee (b. 2004) is quickly establishing herself as one of the most compelling voices in the next generation of leading classical musicians. Expressive depth, fearless musical conviction, and authenticity infuse her performances and blossoming international career.

Luka earned numerous awards including First Prize at the 2023 International Paulo Cello Competition; First Prize at the 2022 Pablo Casals International Award; the Frans Helmerson Promotional Award at Kronberg Academy; and First Prize in the Johansen International Competition in Washington, DC, garnering further recognition as an international soloist.

2025-26 is brimming with solo concerto debuts, including performances across Germany, Switzerland, Finland, Czech Republic, Spain, France, Italy, US, Canada, Mexico, and more. As a recitalist, Luka appears with pianist Frank Braley at the Casals Festival in Spain, and debuts with pianist Jon Kimura Parker in Mexico, the US, and Canada - including at Toronto's Koerner Hall – championing her own arrangements of Gershwin and Amy Beach alongside masterworks by Beethoven, Brahms, Franck, Rachmaninov, and Ravel.

Her 2020 debut recording on Naxos, *Beethoven Recomposed*, with the LGT Young Soloists, features Luka's performance of Beethoven's A Major Cello Sonata. The album soared to No. 1 on the Apple Music Classical Charts in over 40 countries, positioning her amongst the most widely streamed young classical musicians that year.

Luka's artistic development has been shaped through masterclasses with some of the most distinguished artists, including Steven Isserlis, Gidon Kremer, Frans Helmerson, Martti Rousi, Richard Aaron, David Geringas, Laurence Lesser, and the Calidore, Kronos, and Schumann quartets. She started playing piano at the age of three and finished The Royal Conservatory of Music ARCT piano exam with First Class Honours. She currently studies at the Kronberg Academy in Germany with Wolfgang Emanuel Schmidt.

Luka Coetzee is represented worldwide by Sheldon Artists. She plays on a c. 1712-15 Giuseppe Guarneri 'filius Andrea' cello, with a bow by François Nicolas Voirin, both graciously provided by Canimex Inc., from Drummondville (Quebec), Canada. Luka is a Violin Channel Artist and an Endorsing Artist for Thomastik-Infeld strings (Vienna).

Jon Kimura Parker

Piano

Pianist Jon Kimura Parker is known for his charisma, infectious enthusiasm, and dynamic performances that celebrate the joy of musical expression. A veteran of the international stage, Parker has performed in major venues including the Berlin Philharmonie, Carnegie Hall, London's South Bank, Sydney Opera House, and Beijing Concert Hall.

He currently serves as Creative Partner for the Minnesota Orchestra's Summer at Orchestra Hall, Artistic Director of the Honens International Piano Competition, Artistic Advisor for the Orcas Island Chamber Music Festival, and chairs the keyboard faculty at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music.

An eclectic and collaborative artist, Parker has performed with Yo-Yo Ma, Cho-Liang Lin, Frederica von Stade, Susan Graham, and Lynn Harrell, as well as Doc Severinsen, Audra McDonald, Bobby McFerrin, and Dessa. He co-founded the Montrose Trio and toured *Off the Score* with Police drummer Stewart Copeland, performing his own arrangements of Prokofiev, Ravel, and Stravinsky.

The 2025-26 season includes engagements with Chamber Music Tulsa, Fort Wayne Philharmonic, Fresno Philharmonic, Richardson Symphony, Meany Center, and The Royal Conservatory of Music.

A Gold Medalist at the 1984 Leeds International Piano Competition, Parker studied with Edward and Keiko Parker, Lee Kum-Sing, Marek Jablonski, and Adele Marcus at Juilliard. He is an Officer of the Order of Canada and holds honorary doctorates from the University of British Columbia and The Royal Conservatory of Music.

Parker, affectionately known as "Jackie," lives with his wife, violinist/violist Aloysia Friedmann. Their daughter, Sophie, is an artist. More at jonkimuraparker.com.

Jon Kimura Parker made his Royal Conservatory debut on November 8, 2009, during Koerner Hall's inaugural concert season, and tonight marks his seventh appearance in Koerner Hall. Luka Coetzee is making her Conservatory debut.