Vive la France!

March 28, 2026

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Nicholas Canellakis, Cello

Maurice RAVEL (1875-1937)	*Ma mère l'Oye* *Pavane de la Belle au bois dormant* *Petit Poucet* *Laideronnette, impératrice des pagodes* *Les entretiens de la belle et de la bête* *Le jardin féerique*
Camille SAINT-SAËNS (1835-1921)	Concerto for Cello No. 1 in A minor, Op. 33

INTERMISSION

Claude DEBUSSY (1862-1918)	*La Mer* *De l'aube à midi sur la mer* *Jeux de vagues* *Dialogue du vent et de la mer*
Maurice RAVEL (1875-1937)	*Bolero*

As a pianist, **Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)** wrote many solo piano pieces and two concertos, and he arranged many of his instrumental pieces for piano. ***Ma mère l'Oye*** (literally "My Mother the Goose") was originally composed in 1910 as an easy piano duet, described by the composer as "five children's pieces." Ravel, a master orchestrator, transcribed it for orchestra the following year. The **Mother Goose Suite** begins with a slow dance, a **Pavane for Sleeping Beauty**. An ethereal, dream-like state is suggested by a desultory phrase that is quietly repeated in winds and muted violins. The main theme in **Little Tom Thumb** is played by a solo oboe and later English horn. In the French fairy tale, the diminutive Tom leaves a trail of bread crumbs that is eaten by birds. You can't miss their shrieking-ascending glissandos in the violins. Next, a piccolo melody based on the pentatonic scale creates the sound of Asia in the politically incorrect **Little Ugly Girl, Empress of the Pagodas.** Ravel's colorful touches incorporate Glockenspiel, celeste, and, of course, a gong. In **Conversation of Beauty and the Beast**, Beauty's voice is created by the upper winds, and the contrabassoon is the Beast. Naturally this is "in waltz time." Ravel concludes his fairy tale suite with **The Fairy Garden**, a poignant, long-breathed love theme for strings that ends in a party of joyful percussion instruments that announce the emotional awakening of Sleeping Beauty. Clearly there is a Happily Ever After.

DID YOU KNOW?
In 1974 popular guitarist Joe Walsh (Eagles) recorded the Pavane from Ravel's Mother Goose Suite as a solo for synthesizer.

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921) was only ten when he performed Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 15 and the first movement of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 with orchestra, and he gave his last public performances as a pianist and conductor just months before his death at age 86. Saint-Saëns, who was reading at age three, was also extremely gifted in many intellectual disciplines, including botany, mathematics, languages, and literature. He became good friends with Franz Liszt, who called him "the greatest organist ever" (Liszt considered himself the best pianist!), and he was Gabriel Fauré's piano teacher. (Fauré in turn taught Ravel). Saint-Saëns' best-known works include his five concertos for piano, three for violin, and two for cello; the opera *Samson et Delila*; the ever-popular *Danse Macabre*; and Symphony No. 3, which includes an organ in the final movement. *Carnival of the Animals* (my own favorite experience of performing with orchestra) is a witty musical depiction of such exotic creatures as The Cuckoo, Characters with Long Ears, and of course, The Pianists!

Cello Concerto No. 1, written in 1872, dispenses with the tradition of the orchestra introducing the themes before the soloist enters. Here, the cellist's initial declamatory outburst immediately places the attention on the solo instrument. The secondary theme, also introduced by the cello, is a contrast of mood and dynamics. Another classical convention that Saint-Saëns discards is the break between movements. Although one hears three distinct sections, with tempo markings of Allegro non troppo (fast, but not too much), Allegretto con moto (fast with movement), and Tempo primo, there are no pauses between them. After the first two themes are developed and repeated, the concerto moves into a courtly dance that hearkens back to the 18th century. Instead of the expected Trio sandwiched between two Minuet sections, Saint-Saëns offers a brief cadenza for the solo cellist. (Did you notice there was no cadenza at the end of the first "movement"?) In the third section, the declamatory theme from the first segment returns to demonstrate the composer's skill at borrowing his friend Liszt's compositional tool of "thematic transformation." [See notes for 2 May 2026] The result is a self-contained, cyclical composition that showcases the soloist without overdoing the virtuosic excesses of Romanticism.

A student at the Paris Conservatory from age ten to age twenty-two, **Claude Debussy (1862-1918)** was considered a rebel by many teachers and fellow students because of his treatment of dissonance and his disdain for established forms. He reputedly turned to a friend during a performance of Beethoven, saying, "Let's go. He's starting to develop." At age twenty-two Debussy won the Prix de Rome, the highest honor for French composers that paid for three years' study in Rome; however he came home after only two years because he missed the musical inspiration he derived from Paris. Also profoundly influenced by Javanese gamelan music at the International Exposition in Paris in 1889, the composer began incorporating the Asian (and African) pentatonic scale as well as the whole-tone scale into his music, deliberately obscuring traditional Western tonality. He was quoted as saying, "One must drown the sense of tonality." Debussy eschewed the customary formal outlines as well, and often his music consists of fragments that cannot really be considered melodies. He explained, "I am more and more convinced that music is not, in essence, a thing which can be cast into a traditional and fixed form. It is made up of colors and rhythms." His orchestral palette was generally muted with string tremolos, harp effects, and an emphasis on the woodwinds, which often have cameo solos. Although Debussy did not like the

term, his music was considered "impressionistic," a label borrowed from the late nineteenth-century French Impressionistic painters who played with light and color and avoided literal depictions of reality. Debussy achieved a similar effect in his music, with misty, atmospheric sounds as in the opening of *La Mer*. It is rare that the entire orchestra plays at the same time in his works, which means that the endings of the first and third movements of *La Mer* are noteworthy and stunningly effective. Debussy's music emphasizes sonority, sound for sound's sake, with little attention paid to traditional forms, key relationships, phrasing, or balanced melodic phrases. His musical ideas were far-reaching, and it is no exaggeration to say that he influenced virtually every composer who came after him.

La Mer was composed between 1903-05, premiered in October 1905 in Paris, and soon thereafter was performed in London and the U. S. The work was not well received. A Boston critic wrote, "We clung like a drowning man to a few fragments of the tonal wreck, a bit of theme here, a comprehensible figure there, but finally this muted-horn sea overwhelmed us." In three movements, each with a descriptive subtitle (Debussy's manuscript calls them "three symphonic sketches"), the work is cyclical, with melodic fragments from the first movement returning in the last. An oboe emerges from the opening mist of **"From Dawn to Noon at Sea"** and is quickly followed by a brief idea played by English horn and muted trumpet; within these fragmentary themes lies the bulk of the material from which Debussy created an entire composition. There are repetitive, undulating figures in the strings that seem to imitate gently rocking waves. At other times the ocean swells and subsides repeatedly. Notes tied over the bar lines create a sense that the music is meter-less. With flutes and harps fluttering like high-soaring gulls, a brass chorale provides a glorious climax. Cymbals, gong, and tremolos in the timpani depict the roaring waves at the end of the first movement. In contrast, **"The Play of the Waves"** is delicate and wispy, with melodic fragments in the winds and muted brass. The rapidity with which soloistic instruments appear and disappear contributes to this movement's scherzo-like quality. Glockenspiel and harp create light and color on the waves at the end. The final **"Dialogue between Wind and Sea"** begins with churning waves in the cellos and basses, the depiction of an angry sea intensified by the rolling sounds in the percussion. Gong and cymbals again imitate crashing waves. A solo trumpet reminds us of the brass theme from the first movement, which is expanded through multiple repetitions in various sections of the orchestra. Debussy continues to build upon earlier thematic fragments, often altering the rhythm by lengthening the notes' duration (augmentation) or shortening their length (diminution). The tempo increases as does the texture, with layers of instruments and repetitive patterns. At the conclusion, the entire ensemble revisits the climactic moment from the first movement. Pounding timpani and bass drum illustrate the full force of the sea's grandeur. Debussy requested that the cover of the published score of *La Mer* include the image of *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, the famous color woodblock by the early eighteenth-century Japanese artist Hokusai.

Tonight's program ends with Ravel's arguably most famous work, ***Bolero***, which Ravel called "an experiment in one long, very gradual crescendo." Dance rhythms inform much of his compositional style, and Ravel set this 1928 ballet in triple meter and "tempo di bolero" (the tempo of the dance known as a bolero). The music consists of multiple ostinatos (stubbornly repeated rhythmic or harmonic patterns) starting with the simple rhythm played almost imperceptibly on the snare drum at the very beginning of the piece; it does not quit until the very end. It is joined by another ostinato—a bass line with only three notes. Instead of a typical theme and variation form in which a melodic line is embellished, rhythmically altered, or varied by mode (major vs minor), Ravel's changes of instrumentation create the variations. The composer demonstrates his mastery of orchestration by changing the timbre for every repetition of his melodic phrases.

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DID YOU KNOW?
In 1979, the actress Bo Derek made history with the movie "10." She started a fashion trend with her silky blond hair braided in tiny corn rows. Oprah later laughingly commented about how many white women flocked to hair salons to get this traditional African hairstyle. In addition, record sales of Ravel's *Bolero*, which accompanied the film's romantic scenes, generated over $1 million for Ravel's estate. Hoping to capitalize on the name, Derek appeared in a subsequent film entitled *Bolero*.

Guest Artist

Nicholas Canellakis has become one of the most sought-after and innovative cellists of his generation and has been praised as a "superb young soloist" (*The New Yorker*) and for being "impassioned…the audience seduced by his rich, alluring tone" (*The New York Times*). A multifaceted artist, Canellakis has forged a unique voice combining his talents as soloist, chamber musician, curator, filmmaker, composer/arranger, and teacher.

Recent concert highlights include concerto appearances with the Virginia, Albany, Delaware, Stamford, Richardson, Lansing, and Bangor Symphonies, the Erie Philharmonic, The Orchestra Now, the New Haven Symphony as Artist-in-Residence, and the American Symphony Orchestra in Carnegie Hall. He performs recitals throughout the U.S. with his longtime duo collaborator, pianist-composer Michael Stephen Brown, and recent appearances have included Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall, the Society of the Four Arts in Palm Beach, New Orleans Friends of Chamber Music, the Saratoga Performing Arts Center, and Wolf Trap near Washington D.C. Canellakis was recently appointed to the cello faculty of the prestigious Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, his alma mater.

Canellakis is an artist of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, with which he performs regularly in Alice Tully Hall and on tour internationally, including London's Wigmore Hall, the Louvre in Paris, the Seoul Arts Center in Korea, and the Shanghai and Taipei National Concert Halls. He is also a regular guest artist at many of the world's leading music festivals, including Santa Fe, Ravinia, Music@Menlo, Bard, Bridgehampton, La Jolla, Moab, Chamberfest Cleveland, and Music in the Vineyards. In 2018, he was named artistic director of Chamber Music Sedona in Arizona, where he has made a significant impact through his dynamic programming and educational and community outreach.

Canellakis's latest album, *(b)romance*, featuring some of his original compositions and arrangements, was released by First Hand Records in 2024 and has received over one million streams on Apple Music. A graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music and New England Conservatory, his teachers included Orlando Cole, Peter Wiley and Paul Katz, and he was a student of Madeleine Golz at Manhattan School of Music Pre-College. He began his Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center career as a member of the Bowers Program (formerly CMS Two), and he has also been in residence at Carnegie Hall as a member of Ensemble Connect.

Filmmaking and acting are special interests of Canellakis. He has produced, directed, and starred in several short films and music videos, including his popular comedy web series Conversations with Nick Canellakis. His latest films, *Thin Walls* and *My New Cello*, were nominated for awards at many prominent film festivals and are currently available to stream online.

Canellakis plays on an outstanding cello by Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume, from 1840.