Valley Classical Concerts

In Association with the Smith College
Department of Music, presents

Camille Thomas, cello
and
Julien Brocal, piano

Saturday, March 7, 2026, at 3:00 PM
Sweeney Concert Hall / Sage Hall
Smith College, Northampton, MA

Camille Thomas, cello
and
Julien Brocal, piano

Program - "Rendez-vous"

GRACE

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
Ave Maria (arranged by Charles Gounod (1818-1893))

Julien Brocal (b. 1987) and Camille Thomas (b. 1988)
Reflection No. 1 (Paix - Shanti)

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
Viola da Gamba Sonata No. 3, BWV 1029
I. Vivace
II. Adagio
III. Allegro

WITH SURPRISES

Eric Satie (1886-1921)
Gymnopedie No. 3 in A minor

Julien Brocal/Camille Thomas/Radiohead
Reflection No. 4

Intermission

CHIMERA

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921)
The Swan

Eric Satie
Gymnopedie No. 1 in D major

Julien Brocal
Reflection No. 2

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)
Cello Sonata in A minor, Opus 36
I. Allegro Agitato
II. Andante molto tranquillo
III. Allegro molto e marcato

Camille Thomas and Julian Brocal appear by arrangement
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Please, no audio or video recording of this concert is allowed.

About Today's Concert

John Montanari, VCC Artistic Director

Two of the most famous musical bonbons in all of classical music, both on today's program, were tossed off as larks by their famous composers. Camille Saint-Saëns, best known for his numerous symphonic, chamber, and operatic masterworks, wrote his humorous zoological suite "The Carnival of the Animals" while taking it easy in an Austrian village in 1883. At his own request, it remained unpublished and unperformed in public settings until after his death in 1922. The graceful cello solo "The Swan" remains its best-known movement.

Charles Gounod, celebrated for such operatic hits as Faust and Roméo et Juliette, was introduced to the music of J.S. Bach by Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn. During a musical soirée at his Paris home, Gounod played the famous Prelude in C Major from Bach's "The Well-Tempered Clavier" while improvising a melody over its rolling chords. Impressed, his father-in-law wrote down the melody, which appeared in print in 1853 as a purely instrumental "Meditation on the First Prelude of Sebastian Bach." Vocal versions eventually followed, the best-known of which employs the Latin "Ave Maria" ("Hail Mary") text, making it a staple of weddings, funerals and Christmas albums.

About Today's Concert (cont.)

Though by Bach's time the viola da gamba had been mostly supplanted by its upstart cousin the cello, he occasionally employed the older instrument to magical effect in his orchestral and sacred choral works – think of the Brandenburg Concerto No. 6 or the St. John and St. Matthew Passions. In his three Sonatas for viola da gamba and keyboard, Bach imitates the three-line texture of the Trio Sonata, the most common chamber genre of his time, by employing the solo string and the keyboardist's right hand as the Trio Sonata's two melody instruments. The keyboardist's left hand stood in for the basso continuo, the standard baroque accompaniment, which typically consisted of a bass melody instrument (e.g. cello, viola da gamba or bassoon) along with a chordal instrument (e.g. harpsichord, organ or lute).

The viola da gamba Sonatas have long been standard works on cello & piano programs, the transfer from old instruments to new not damaging the integrity of the music in any way. More than those of any other composer, Bach's works not only survive but thrive on performances with forces other than originally intended – check out, for instance, the YouTubes of the famous Chaconne for solo violin played on guitar, harp, marimba, nyckelharpa, banjo and probably some I haven't yet discovered.

Erik Satie is best-known for his numerous piano miniatures, many with quirky, even nonsensical titles such as "Véritables Préludes flasques (pour un chien)" ("True Flabby Preludes (for a Dog))" and "Croquis et agaceries d'un gros bonhomme en bois ("Sketches and Exasperations of a Big Wooden Man"). His spare, often hypnotic style has led to him being credited in some quarters as a prophet of such later musical trends as neo-classicism and minimalism. The Trois Gymnopédies, completed by 1888, take their name from the ancient gymnopaedia, annual festivals featuring naked, heavily-oiled young men dancing ritualistically in simulation of the movements of Spartan warriors – try not to think of that as the haunting melodies of the 1st and 3rd Gymnopédie sing out from the stage.

A miniaturist at heart, Edvard Grieg gifted the world with only seven works in the large classical forms – or eight, if you count the youthful Symphony he subsequently disavowed, though it

has been revived since. The Cello Sonata, composed in 1882-83, was introduced in Leipzig by Grieg and cellist Julius Klengel, the teacher of such notable cellists as Emanuel Feuerman and Gregor Piatigorsky. It was taken up by many of history's most notable cellists, including Pablo Casals (who played it with both Grieg himself and Arthur Rubinstein), Leonard Rose, Pierre Fournier and Mstislav Rostropovich (whose performance with Sviatoslav Richter at the 1964 Aldeburgh Festival is available on YouTube). Devoted Grieg lovers will detect his self-quotation in the Sonata of his "Funeral March in Memory of Rikard Nordrak" and the "Wedding March" from his incidental music for the play "Sigurd Jorsalfar."

About the Artists

Camille Thomas
Born in Paris in 1988, cellist Camille Thomas has emerged as one of the most compelling musical voices of her generation, recognized for an artistic philosophy that balances technical mastery with a profound humanitarian spirit. Her musical journey began at the age of four, an early start that allowed her to develop a natural, almost vocal relationship with the cello. Her formative years were spent at the Conservatoire National de Région de Paris, where she studied under Marcel Bardon. This early French schooling instilled in her a focus on elegance and the "bel canto" style of string playing. However, Thomas sought to broaden her musical horizons by moving to Germany at the age of seventeen. She immersed herself in the rigorous German pedagogical tradition at the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler in Berlin with Stephan Forck and the legendary Frans Helmerson, later completing postgraduate work with Wolfgang-Emanuel Schmidt at the Hochschule für Musik Franz Liszt in Weimar. This dual education created a unique artistic identity, blending the fluid lyricism of the French school with the structural depth and technical precision of the German tradition.

In 2017, Thomas made history as the first female cellist in over forty years to sign an exclusive contract with Deutsche Grammophon. This partnership has allowed her to curate projects that reflect her deep-seated belief in the power of music to unite people across borders. Her 2020 album, Voice of Hope, recorded in partnership with UNICEF, featured the world premiere of Fazil Say's Cello Concerto "Never Give Up," a work

About the Artists (cont.)

composed as a response to global conflict. This commitment to contemporary relevance is a hallmark of her career; she frequently commissions new works and seeks out repertoire that resonates with modern global challenges, ensuring that the classical tradition remains a living, breathing entity.

Beyond her work as a soloist, Thomas is a prolific chamber musician and a frequent guest at the world's most prestigious festivals, including Verbier and Schleswig-Holstein. Her orchestral engagements have seen her collaborate with ensembles such as the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen and the Warsaw Philharmonic, and have consistently earned praise for her intense emotional vulnerability and rich, signature tone. The physical foundation of Thomas's artistry is the "Feuermann" Stradivarius, a 1730 instrument on loan from the Nippon Music Foundation. The history of this cello provides a direct link to the golden age of romanticism, having been played by the virtuoso Emanuel Feuermann and Auguste Franchomme, a close friend and collaborator of Frédéric Chopin.

Julien Brocal
French pianist and composer Julien Brocal is widely celebrated for his poetic insight and his innovative approach to the piano repertoire. His musical journey began at age five, leading to a debut at the Salle Cortot in Paris only two years later. He received his formal training at the Conservatoire National de Région de Marseille under Erik Berchot and later at the École Normale de Musique de Paris with Rena Shereshevskaya. A defining moment in Brocal's career occurred in 2013 when he was discovered by the legendary pianist Maria João Pires. This meeting resulted in an invitation to join the Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel in Belgium and led to several years of international touring and mentorship alongside Pires. Under her guidance, Brocal developed a philosophy of performance that prioritizes the human element over mere technical display, focusing on the organic connection between the performer, the score, and the audience.

Brocal's recording career has been met with significant critical acclaim, including being named "Newcomer of the Year" by BBC Music Magazine in 2018. His debut solo album, featuring Chopin's 24 Preludes and Sonata No. 2, was praised for its

structural clarity and a sense of spontaneity that made the well-known works feel newly discovered. His subsequent album, Reflections, showcased his dual identity as a performer and creator by pairing works by Maurice Ravel and Federico Mompou with his own original composition, Nature Morte.

In recent years, Brocal has focused on projects that integrate music with environmental consciousness and the concept of "musical permaculture." He is the founder of "Jardin Musical" in Brussels, an artistic residency and performance space designed according to the principles of sustainability and community. This venue serves as a laboratory for multidisciplinary collaboration, reflecting Brocal's belief that music should exist within a holistic ecosystem of creativity. His interest in the environment is also reflected in his book-album Here, recorded at the Tippet Rise Art Center in Montana, featuring compositions inspired by the natural world.

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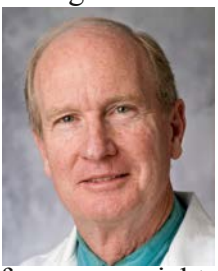
From the Valley Classical Concerts Vice President

It is March and possibly moving towards spring and crocuses popping up in the garden. No matter what today's weather brings, I am looking forward to hearing today's concert of cello and piano music. Camille Thomas and Julien Brocal are in the vanguard of exciting young soloists coming from Europe.

With great sadness, I regret to inform you that our beloved Board



President, William Harbison, passed away on February 21st after an incredible 5-month fight to live. His leadership and guidance to our Board was exceptional. Bill was a devoted music lover who worked tirelessly on behalf of VCC, the Springfield Symphony, and the cultural life of the region, as well as a good friend to all. He will be sorely missed. Look for a memorial tribute at a future concert.

The board is grateful to all of you who have sent generous donations. We encourage those of you who have yet to give to contribute as well. Your gifts help us bring top quality musicians to Northampton, as well as offer free tickets to young students and Card to Culture patrons, who otherwise could not enjoy these concerts.

Thank you again for attending today. On reflection, I'm impressed by the variety of ensembles we've presented this season. I look forward to seeing each of you at our final concert for this year on Saturday, March 21st, 3:00 pm for the Boston chamber orchestra "A Far Cry" – performing works by Shelley Washington, Copland and Beethoven.

Laurel Rogers, Vice-President

From another great cellist: "Music is the divine way to tell beautiful, poetic things to the heart." — Pablo Casals

Be a VCC Volunteer

Valley Classical Concerts (VCC) is an all-volunteer organization dedicated to presenting world-class chamber music to the Pioneer Valley. Being a volunteer organization helps keep ticket prices affordable and provides access to many who would otherwise not be able to attend our performances.

Help is needed for bookkeeping, managing correspondence, editing concert programs, and designing promotional materials. As a volunteer, you'll enjoy access to concerts and gain an insider's view of our behind-the-scenes operations.

VCC is a virtual organization, so there is no office to commute to. Just bring your own computer! If you are interested in volunteering, write us at office@valleyclassicalconcerts.org or leave a message at (413) 239-0417.

The Valley Classical Concerts 2025-2026 Season

The Harlem Quartet, Sunday, October 12, 2025

Quartetto di Cremona, with David Shifrin, clarinet
Sunday, October 26, 2025

Winds of the Boston Symphony Orchestra with Jiayan Sun, piano, Sunday, November 16, 2025

The Isidore String Quartet, Sunday, February 1, 2026

Camille Thomas, cello, with Julien Brocal, piano
Saturday, March 7, 2:00 PM *preconcert discussion, 3:00 PM performance

"A Far Cry" Chamber Orchestra Saturday, March 21
2:00 PM *preconcert discussion, 3:00 PM performance

*A lively and informative Q&A with artistic director John Montanari, ensemble members, and you. Beat the parking and ticket rush too!

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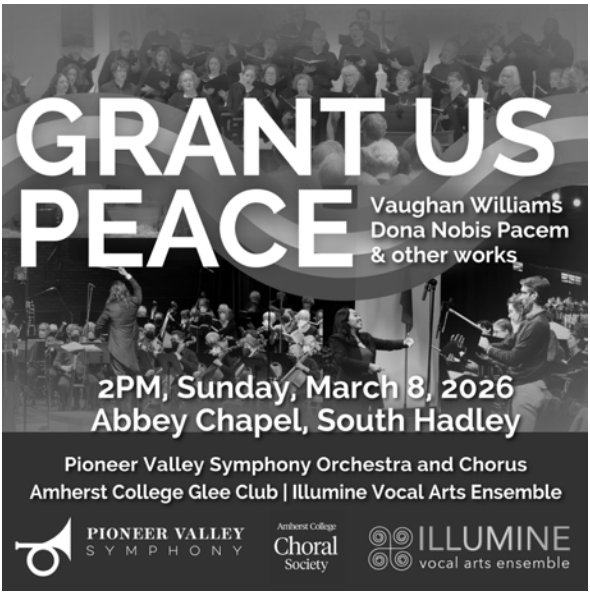

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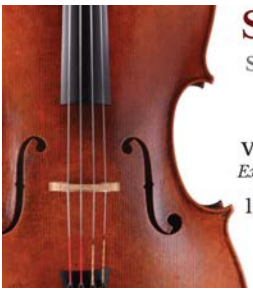

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