



World Premiere of Composer Robert Sirota's *Sonata No. 2 for Cello and Piano*

Presented by Concerts on the Slope

Sunday, March 17, 2019 at 3pm
St. John's Episcopal Church
139 St. John's Place | Brooklyn, NY

Admission is free; Suggested donation \$20. More information at
www.concertsontheslope.org

“a compelling musical voice of our time” – *The American Organist*

www.robertsirota.com

Photo by Ryuhei Shindo available in high-resolution at www.jensenartists.com/robert-sirota

Brooklyn, NY – On **Sunday, March 17, 2019 at 3pm**, the world premiere of **Robert Sirota's Sonata No. 2 for Cello and Piano** (2018) is presented by **Concerts on the Slope** at **St. John's Episcopal Church** (139 St. John's Place). Written for the **Larsen-Choi Duo**, cellist Benjamin Larsen and pianist Hyungjin Choi will give this premiere on a program with Schumann's Five Folk Songs, Op. 102 and Grieg's Cello Sonata in A minor, Op. 36.

Of the piece, Sirota notes, “I conceived of my *Sonata No. 2 for Cello and Piano* as a companion piece to my first cello sonata, composed thirty years earlier, and there are parallels between the two works: *Sonata No. 1*, completed in 1988, was commissioned by the (then young) gifted husband and wife duo of cellist Norman Fischer and pianist Jeanne Kierman, who have played it many times, have recorded it, and are still performing the work. *Sonata No. 2*, completed 30 years later, was commissioned by the gifted young husband and wife duo of cellist Benjamin Larsen and pianist Hyungjin Choi, who present its first performance on March 17.

Though the second sonata is shorter, its architecture mirrors and refracts the earlier piece. Each begins with a rhythmically driving and relentless first movement. In the first sonata this is followed by a substantial scherzo movement; there is scherzo music in the second sonata, but it does not appear until the final movement. Here I have composed a second movement which, characteristic of my slow movements, is not very restful or serene, but becomes increasingly active. The third and final (and longest) movement begins with the scherzo, morphs into material from the first movement, and concludes with a sustained cello melody.”

About Robert Sirota: Over four decades, composer Robert Sirota has developed a distinctive voice, clearly discernible in all of his work – whether symphonic, choral, stage, or chamber music. Writing in the *Portland Press Herald*, Allan Kozinn asserts: “Sirota's musical language is personal and undogmatic, in the sense that instead of aligning himself with any of the competing contemporary styles, he follows his own internal musical compass.”

Robert Sirota's works have been performed by orchestras across the US and Europe; ensembles such as Alarm Will Sound, Sequitur, yMusic, Chameleon Arts, and Dinosaur Annex; the Chiara, American, Telegraph, Ethel, Elmyr, and Blair String Quartets; the Peabody, Concord, and Webster Trios; and at festivals including Tanglewood, Aspen,

Yellow Barn, and Cooperstown music festivals; Bowdoin Gamper and Bowdoin International Music Festival; and Mizzou International Composers Festival. Recent and upcoming commissions include Jeffrey Kahane and the Sarasota Music Festival, Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, Palladium Musicum, American Guild of Organists, the American String Quartet, Alarm Will Sound, the Naumburg Foundation, Concert Artists of Baltimore, and yMusic.

Recipient of grants from the Guggenheim Foundation, United States Information Agency, National Endowment for the Arts, Meet the Composer, and the American Music Center, Sirota's works are recorded on Legacy Recordings, National Sawdust Tracks, and the Capstone, Albany, New Voice, Gasparo and Crystal labels. His music is published by Muzzy Ridge Music, Schott, Music Associates of New York, MorningStar, Theodore Presser, and To the Fore.

A native New Yorker, Sirota studied at Juilliard, Oberlin, and Harvard and divides his time between New York and Searsport, Maine with his wife, Episcopal priest and organist Victoria Sirota. They frequently collaborate on new works, with Victoria as librettist and performer, at times also working with their children, Jonah and Nadia, both world-class violists. For complete information, visit www.robertsirota.com.

About Benjamin Larsen: Known for the energy he brings to the stage, cellist Benjamin Larsen has forged a reputation as an avid chamber musician in the New York City area. His knack for adventurous programming comes through in his work as Artistic Director of the series, Concerts on the Slope, and in the projects that he spearheads, working with some of today's most notable composers, including Robert Sirota, Reena Esmail, Tania Leon, Ke-Chia Chen and many others. In 2016, Larsen launched a project with flutist Martha Cargo, "Pieces of Eight," which is comprised of eight commissioned works by eight different composers for Flute-Cello duo. The project promotes the genre, and provides the opportunity to work closely with composers of various generational and cultural backgrounds. He has also performed alongside members of the Emerson, American, Chiara and Tokyo quartets, as well as Daniel Epstein, Vicky Chow, Ian Rosenbaum, Eriko Sato and Linda Chesis.

Larsen is a graduate of Manhattan School of Music, where he was the recipient of the Hans and Klara Bauer Scholarship, as well as the 2011 Pablo Casals Award. His past mentors have included Julia Lichten, David Finckel and Eric Dahlin, as well as lessons with Marta Istomin and Bonnie Hampton. He spent a year playing with the band, The Left Banke, and attended summer festivals including Pacific Music Festival, Norfolk Chamber Music Festival, Music@Menlo, and Castleman's Quartet Program. Along with his wife, pianist Hyungjin Choi, he actively performs in the Larsen-Choi Duo, which champions new music, original compositions and sonata literature. In addition to his busy performance schedule, he holds a private teaching studio in addition to faculty positions at Music School of Westchester, DZ Strad Violin Shop and Florentine Music School. He plays on a 19th century anonymous cello.

About Hyungjin Choi: After training as a classical pianist from her early age, Choi graduated from the prestigious Seoul Institute of the Arts in 2006 and moved to New York in 2008 to attend the New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music where she earned a BFA degree in performing arts in 2010 with a jazz scholarship and the Noah Osnos scholarship. There, Choi received the finest jazz education from such jazz masters as Sam Yahel, Reggie & Workman, Charles Tolliver, Jimmy Owens, Charlie Persip and Kevin Hays, and also became involved in many projects including that of the great Billy Harper.

She has recorded and performed actively in many venues across the United States both as a sideman and a band leader. She worked as a music director at Onnuri In2 Church in Manhattan and currently a faculty of the Music School of Westchester.

About Concerts on the Slope: Since March 2012, Concerts on the Slope has presented talented musicians, a wide variety of repertoire, and remarkably diverse musical styles to historic St. John's Church, located in one of the most scenic and culturally active neighborhoods in the city—Park Slope, Brooklyn. The monthly series aims to enrich the classical music culture in Brooklyn by presenting top-quality chamber music concerts with accomplished and emerging young artists from New York and around the world. Admission is free; Suggested donation \$20 with proceeds going directly to the artists.