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MUSIC Amit Peled takes Casals cello on the road

Through a set of fortuitous introductions, Peled has actually gained use of Pablo Casals' own cello, a noble Matteo Gofriller, built in 1733.

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Amit Peled, shown in this painting by Jon Friedman, will perform Sunday in Wellfleet.

By Keith Powers
Contributing writer
Posted Feb. 6, 2015 @ 5:34 pm
Updated Feb 7, 2015 at 4:14 PM

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Inspiration takes many forms. Musicians, trying to bring simple black notes on a white page to life, often look back to their forebears. Pianists boast that they studied with Fleisher, who studied with Schnabel, who studied with Leschetizky, who studied with Czerny, who studied with Beethoven.



Zoom
Amit Peled, shown in this painting by Jon Friedman, will perform Sunday in Wellfleet.

For cellists, one great figure from the past stands out: the virtuosic Spaniard (1876-1973) transformed the cello into a vehicle for creating existing repertory and composing a generation of new music.

Peled appears Sunday at the church in Wellfleet with pianist Noreen Cassidy-Polera, is too young to be considered a peer: he has his own lineage of cellists, beginning with the renowned Pablo Casals, who himself did study with the great teacher.

Peled's lineage is one step removed from that of fortuitous introductions, which have led him to

Peled has actually gained use of Casals' own cello, a noble Matteo Gofriller, built in 1733.

Peled was introduced to Marta Casals Istomin, Casals' widow, in 2012, and she was so impressed with Peled's playing that she wanted him to use her late husband's instrument. After



Where: First Congregational Church, 200 Main St., Wellfleet

Casals made famous.

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"Casals played this cello from 1913 until his death," Peled says from his home in Baltimore, where he teaches at Johns Hopkins. "He was a wealthy man and could have had any instrument he wanted. He chose this one. He did all his great

recordings on this cello.

"It's a beautiful instrument. It has an earthy, human voice, very masculine, I think."

The cello is more compact than some – "In those days cellos were cut down so they could be more playable," he says – and looks small next to the 6-foot-5 Peled. But it's not the size, it's the sound.

"I was drawn to that sound," Peled says, "when I was only 5, before I even learned the instrument. When I heard Casals' recordings. I have to thank my parents, who let me listen to the little guy inside of me, that sound that I was drawn to. That kept me going, the search for that sound."

When Peled first tried out Casals' instrument, it had suffered some neglect and wasn't up to concert standards. Among other things, the fingerboard had slipped about a quarter inch toward the body. It took months to repair, but now Peled can use it not only for recitals like this upcoming program in Wellfleet, but also for concertos on the largest orchestral stages.

"I got it back last September," he says, "and I've already been to Russia, to Turkey, all over Europe, and across the Midwest. A lot of people want to hear it, and I'm definitely going to use it over the next few years. I believe that we have events scheduled until 2017."

Like most priceless stringed instruments, the Gofriller is only on loan (Peled also performs on a 1689 Guarneri, so he has a suitable backup, to say the least). Not only is he bringing Casals' instrument back to concert stages, but he's also re-creating the exact recital that Casals performed a century ago.

"Casals toured America in 1915," he says. "Someone found that original program, and that's what we're playing."

Audiences accustomed to the usual recital approach – often three or four major sonatas, each demanding and long – will be surprised to hear this concert.

"Times have changed," Peled says. "Back then recitals were more like an excellent meal, with an appetizer, then a big steak, and then some dessert after intermission. Nowadays we serve big steaks all the time.

"I think it was more entertaining back then. We will start with a Handel appetizer (the G minor sonata), then the big dish (No. 3 from the Bach Cello Suites, in C). Then the second half is all desserts.

"We're going to play this concert 15 or 20 times around the world, and then I hope we can record it."

Returning to the Cape is a homecoming for Peled, who left the prestigious music program at Yale to move here and study with Greenhouse, on a whim, almost 20 years ago. Since then, he has made multiple appearances here, both with the Cape Symphony and at the Cape Cod Chamber Music Festival.

"It's like a second home for us," he says, referring to his wife, Julia, and his three children. "I hope that maybe I can repeat what Greenhouse did and buy a little house on the Cape some day, to keep the fire going there."

Sounds like Amit Peled would be just the person to do that.

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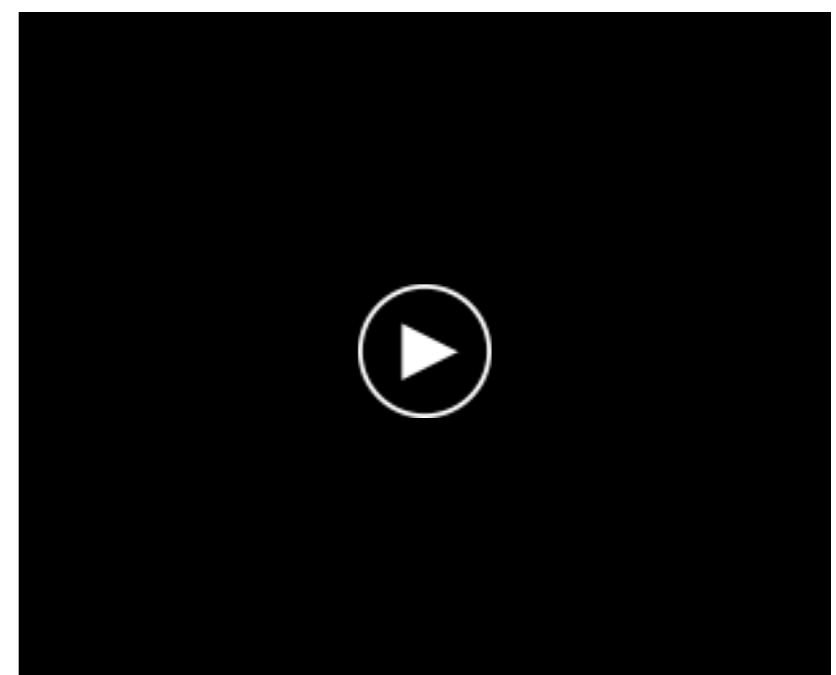
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