

Cello Society: *i Cellisti!* 2026 features Cello Plus One

By Mike Telin



Since its founding, the Cleveland Cello Society has been a valuable community resource for cultivating the appreciation for and enjoyment of all things cello.

On Friday, March 20 at 7:00 pm at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Cleveland Heights, the organization will hold its

annual signature event, *i Cellisti!*. This year's theme, Cello Plus One, features eight duos composed for cello plus another instrument.

The program will also include the annual cello ensemble extravaganza. 100% of the proceeds will go to the CCS Scholarship Fund. Click [here](#) for tickets and more information.

“The Cleveland Cello Society was formed at my kitchen table in 1997, CCS executive director Ida Mercer said during a Zoom call. “Almost exactly a year later, in November of 1998, we gave our first *i Cellisti!* Concert.”



Mercer said the inaugural program was designed to give an overview of the cello scene in Cleveland. “We invited cellists who wanted to participate to prepare a short solo piece. We had about 15 cellists representing the Cleveland Orchestra, the Ohio Chamber Orchestra, and cello faculty from Oberlin, the Cleveland Institute of Music, Baldwin Wallace, Kent State, the University of Akron, and Cleveland State.”

In addition to showcasing what was happening in the greater Cleveland area's cello scene, a second objective was to raise money. “We had this dream of sponsoring a scholarship

competition,” Mercer said, and the *i Cellisti!* concert helped generate the funds that were needed to make that happen.

“For the second year, we started featuring ensembles on these programs and we added the tagline ‘*i Cellisti!*, a Cello Ensemble Extravaganza.’” Over the years CCS has commissioned works especially for the *i Cellisti!* concerts. “We gave the world premiere of Dave Brubeck’s *Cello Octet* in 2003. He came out for the performance, and that was an extremely exciting moment in our life.”

Mercer noted that *i Cellisti!* concerts had been a benefit for the organization’s scholarships and from the beginning, all of the performers have donated their services. To date, CCS has given over \$90,000 in scholarships. “In the beginning we offered very modest prizes in three categories. Over the years, the program has expanded to include elementary, junior, senior, and collegiate divisions. We have three prizes in the collegiate division — gold, silver, and a Bach prize — and it continues to grow.”



During the same Zoom call, Cleveland Orchestra cellist and *i Cellisti!* 2026 artistic director Bryan Dumm said that the impetus behind the first Cello Plus One concert can be traced back about ten years. “I had a dream of putting together a program that focused on the history of the cello through the eyes of cellist composers. And I asked my colleagues from the Cleveland Orchestra to play for the 2024 *i Cellisti!* program at Harkness Chapel.”

Dumm said that when he was approached by Mercer to help bring this year’s concert to life he saw an opportunity. “I thought, it’s been ten years, and I don’t think that the Cleveland Orchestra cello section has changed since then. So let’s get the band back together. I put the idea out to my colleagues that a Cello Plus One program might be the right ticket. I came up with some ideas for pieces and offered them to my colleagues. Some were accepted while others suggested different pieces.”

Much to Dumm’s surprise, each of his cello colleagues recruited a Cleveland Orchestra member. “That wasn’t necessarily the intent. I didn’t know where this would go, I just threw out the idea to my colleagues to see where they would go with it.”

Friday’s program includes:

Mozart’s *Sonata in B-flat*, K. 292: Richard Weiss, cello and Gareth Thomas, bassoon.

Mark O'Connor's *F. C's Jig*: Martha Baldwin, cello and Katherine Bormann, violin.

Heitor Villa Lobos's *Assobio a Jato* (The Jet Whistle): Ralph Curry, cello and Mary Kay Fink, flute

Rossini's *Duetto* in D: Tanya Ell, cello and Charles Paul, bass.

Handel/Halvorsen's *Passacaglia*: Dane Johansen, cello and Jason Yu, violin.

Beethoven's *Duet "Eyeglasses obligato"* WoO 32: Brian Thornton, cello and William Bender, viola.

Cellist Mark Kosower and oboist Frank Rosenwein will play John Corigliano's *The Food of Love*. "I'm not sure it's ever been played in Cleveland," Mercer said. "It was commissioned by Michèle and Larry Corash to celebrate their 50th anniversary.

The program will also include Allison Loggins-Hull's *Patchwork 2024*, performed by Brian Thornton and William Bender.

"Allison Loggins-Hull was the Orchestra's recent composer in residence," Dumm said. "And after I had gotten Brian Thornton involved in this program, he came back to me and said he had made a CD that included this piece by Allison, but they hadn't had a chance to perform it live. So this will be the world premiere performance."

Mercer added that *The Food of Love* and *Patchwork 2024* are both inspired by relationships. "Brian sent me the notes that Allison had written about the piece, and she says that "it reflects the quiet evolution of a long-term relationship with the way it shifts, stretches, and occasionally plays with time. When people grow in new directions, staying connected is a conscious choice."

Dumm said that he looks forward to joining his colleagues for the evening's grand finale. Its genesis goes back to November of 2023 when CCS was asked to put together a cello ensemble for a CelloBello/Cleveland Quartet event at Severance Music Center.

"Mark Kosower came up with the idea of doing the Overture to Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, arranged for four cellos," Dumm said. "It was a pretty big hit so I thought, 'What can we do to conclude this concert with something we actually play in the Orchestra?' So this time it's Mozart's Overture to *The Marriage of Figaro*, in an arrangement for four cello parts, but we'll play it with eight cellos. I think it will be an enjoyable way to end the concert.

In addition to *i Cellisti!* and the scholarship competition, the Cleveland Cello Society also presents guest recitals. “Each year we try to bring in a well-known international cellist. We don’t do that every year, but thankfully we have a great collection of cellists here in Cleveland,” Mercer said. “This past month Mark Kosower gave a fabulous performance of the Kodály solo Sonata, and reflected on his experiences with his mentor János Starker, who had taught him that piece, and who had learned it from the composer himself. That was a historic opportunity for all of us to feel the shoulders we stand on in our evolution as cellists.”

Why is there so much camaraderie among cellists? “I think there is something to that,” Dumm said. “When two cellists cross paths walking down the street carrying a case on their backs that could fit a small human being in it, it’s almost impossible not to look at the other person and somehow connect. We’ve dedicated our lives to schlepping this enormous thing around from place to place.”

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