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MUSIC REVIEW: Cellist Returns to 1948

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Pieces written in the same year may have nothing in common. Such was the deliberately provocative thesis of **Carter Brey**, the powerful principal cellist of the New York Philharmonic, who gave a recital called "1948" at Weill Hall on Sunday night.

Selecting pieces composed in (or around) that year yielded a program of sonatas by Prokofiev, Poulenc and Elliot Carter, with an encore by Lukas Foss. ('Capriccio' was actually written in 1946 but not published until 1948, so it made the cut.) Mr. Brey stated his thesis in remarks he made before Mr. Carter's sonata, a piece that conventional wisdom labels both seminal and difficult.

In fact, as Mr. Brey well knew, the juxtaposition of the pieces made for interesting commonalities as well as contrasts. As different as their languages were, Prokofiev and Poulenc sounded as if they had been posed a similar challenge, which they met in recognizable terms: rapid scherzo movements or lovely melodies, Poulenc's thinner and tangy, Prokofiev's veritably romantic, so much so as to subvert and give poignant color to the 'broad humor of the second movement.

The year 1948 was rough for Prokofiev --his music was denounced by the Soviet authorities -- and his sonata seemed anxious to leave no loose, nonconformist ends: the middle movement a tidy three-part scherzo, the third movement picking up material from the first and lightening its traces of pathos.

Mr. Carter's piece, by contrast, introduced new definitions of the terms of the challenge: salty atonalities and complex rhythmic modulations, illuminated by Mr. Brey's full, easy tone and the solid accompaniment of **Benjamin Pasternack**, whom Mr. Carter assigned a complex and rather pedantic role as the pianist.