

## Cellist Elena Ariza

2026.06.03配信

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特別インタビュー



文字サイズ: Small

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Cellist **有座 エレナ**さん  
Elena Ariza



Cellist Elena Ariza has been attracting attention as a young artist expected to lead the next generation of the classical music world. Having grown up in the Bay Area, she is scheduled to give a recital on June 11—one that could be described as a homecoming performance. Ahead of the recital, we spoke with her about her upbringing that shaped her musicality and her thoughts on performing in her hometown.



Tell us about your background.

I began piano and music lessons with my mother at the age of three, and started playing the cello at four. From the age of ten, I studied seriously in the Pre-College Division at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, where I received private instruction and trained in musicianship and chamber music. At thirteen, I joined the San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra. These experiences became an important foundation for my development as a musician.

After graduating from high school, I enrolled in the Juilliard–Columbia Exchange Program, which allows students to study at both Columbia University and The Juilliard School. While majoring in Computer Science at Columbia University, I also studied cello at Juilliard.

I later continued into Juilliard’s master’s program. Around the same time, the pandemic began, and as performance opportunities disappeared, I came to realize once again how essential music was in my life. In addition, during the Artist Diploma program at Juilliard, I had the opportunity to mentor younger musicians by serving as a teaching assistant to Astrid Schween.



snap in Japanese kimono from my aunt at Hokone Garden in Saratoga



graduation ceremony at Columbia University



performance with Solomon at Marlboro Music Festival

I am currently enrolled in the Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA) program at The Juilliard School, where I continue to refine and expand my work in cello performance and teaching. In addition, as a member of Carnegie Hall’s fellowship program, Ensemble Connect, I perform at Carnegie Hall while also engaging in outreach activities that bring music to public schools and community groups with limited access to classical music.

**You have been active since childhood, but were you able to play well from the very beginning?**

It certainly wasn’t easy from the beginning, but I was drawn from an early age to the sound of the cello, which is often said to be the instrument closest to the human voice. I have always been quite competitive, and growing up in an environment where my older brother and peers were also playing instruments, I think I developed a strong desire to become better.

When I first started, I would practice in tears just to memorize a piece that lasted only about 30 seconds, and I also have a bittersweet memory of my first performance at age six, when I became so nervous that I stopped playing in the middle. However, I feel that both my ability to memorize music and my experience performing on stage developed naturally over time.

Your mother runs a piano studio, but why did you choose the cello?

Actually, it was my mother who chose the cello for me. She had a dream of making music together with her children and was especially drawn to the idea of performing in a piano trio (piano, violin, and cello). Since my older brother had already started learning the violin, I naturally took on the cello.

Now we each lead busy lives, but every holiday season we try to make time to play together, and we treasure those opportunities to perform as a family.

Did coming from what could be described as a family of musicians influence your own career path?

Having someone under the same roof with a musician's ear was an incredibly fortunate environment to grow up in. Of course, there were times when it felt too demanding (laughs), but always having access to honest and perceptive feedback was a tremendous help in learning music. In particular, being able from an early age to rehearse and play ensemble music with a pianist at any time was something truly invaluable.

My mother played a major role in making it possible for me to receive such a rich musical education. Growing up watching her teach many students over the years also naturally shaped the way I think about both learning and teaching music. Perhaps because of that, I came to find familiarity and joy in teaching others, and today educational work has become one of the important pillars of my career.



snap with my brother Yujin after performance with him in cello recital at San Francisco Conservatory of Music



charity concert for support of Ukraine in hand-made blue dress with sunflower corsage

At Juilliard, I serve as a teaching assistant instructing students from the Pre-College to the graduate level, and my doctoral dissertation focuses on practice methodologies for cello works. Additionally, I teach a cello technique class in the Pre-College division and am involved in weekly music education at public elementary schools as part of my fellowship with Ensemble Connect.

You've performed with Solomon Ge before as well, haven't you?

Yes, my first performance with Solomon was at last summer's Marlboro Music Festival, an eight-week chamber music festival. It is a very special summer program where ensembles ranging from duos to octets engage in intensive music-making. I had known that Solomon is a wonderful pianist since my time in the Bay Area, but last summer was the first time we performed together.

After that, at Juilliard, I formed a year-round chamber music group with Solomon and other friends, and we performed Brahms's Piano Quartet No. 1 and No. 2. I look forward to continuing to collaborate with him even more in the coming years.

### What pieces will you perform in your recital?

In this recital, we will perform Brahms's Cello Sonata No. 2 in F major, Beethoven's Cello Sonata No. 4 in C major, and Webern's Three Pieces, together with Solomon Ge. In addition, Solomon will perform Webern's Variations for Piano, Op. 27, as a solo, and I will also perform "Grave" from Ysaÿe's Solo Cello Sonata as a solo piece.

### Could you tell us about your enthusiasm for performing in your hometown, the Bay Area?

Because I usually perform on the East Coast, I am very happy to return to the Bay Area this time and to be able to present the music I have been working on recently to everyone here. The Bay Area is a very important place for me—it supported my growth not only as a musician, but also as a person. That is why I feel a deep sense of joy in being able to return and perform, and to give the local community an opportunity to see my growth, may be even in a small way, through music.

I also feel truly fortunate to be part of the warm and closely connected Japanese and Japanese-American community in the Bay Area. I studied at San'iku Gakuin from kindergarten through sixth grade, and later received Japanese-language education at ENA throughout middle and high school. I also had the experience of attending school in Japan as a visitor student, and Japanese culture and values have had a profound influence on my sensibility and perspective today.

I am deeply grateful for the support I have received so far, and I hope to continue to work hard moving forward. Thank you very much for your continued support.



#### Profile **Elena Ariza**

Born in Cupertino. She holds a Master's degree and an Artist Diploma from The Juilliard School. She is a highly regarded emerging artist who combines outstanding creativity with a deep commitment to society. She is a recipient of the C.V. Starr Doctoral Fellowship. In 2025, she was appointed by Juilliard to perform as a soloist with the Juilliard Orchestra.

She has performed with world-renowned musicians, including appearances in Yo-Yo Ma's "Music Art Life" and NPR's "From the Top," and has participated in numerous prestigious music festivals. She is also actively engaged in social impact initiatives through music.