

violoncelle français

audite



cheng² duo
bryan | silvie cheng



Claude Debussy:

Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano

I. Prologue 4:25

II. Sérénade 3:12

III. Finale 3:41

Gabriel Fauré

Après un rêve from *Trois mélodies*, Op. 7 3:18

Sicilienne, Op. 78 4:01

Élégie, Op. 24 7:10

César Franck / Jules Delsart:

Sonata in A major, CFF 123

I. Allegretto ben moderato 6:02

II. Allegro 8:06

III. Recitativo – Fantasia 7:18

IV. Allegretto poco mosso 6:26

Camille Saint-Saëns

Allegro appassionato, Op. 43 4:11

Le cygne from *Le Carnaval des Animaux* 2:58

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Louis Francœur: Sonata in E major (excerpts)

Duo à la française

The artists are young – audite's youngest artists to date. Silvie and Bryan Cheng, sister and brother, were eighteen and twenty-five years old respectively when this recording was made. She is a pianist, he a cellist, and this CD is their debut recording. They possess what nowadays is taken for granted in internationally performing soloists: perfect mastery of their instruments and the ability to tackle all technical challenges. This is a given with the Canadian duo, who also display an acute, individual and unpretentious sense of style whilst maintaining high standards not only in their performances but also in the design of their programmes. The fresh, youthful approach joins forces with a confident clarity typical of experienced performers.

For their first recording, the duo – who call themselves Cheng² – present no less than a panorama of French chamber music written between 1870 and 1916. It grew out of two strands of tradition: from the salon culture on the one hand, where brilliant, memorable, artistic and moving pieces were particularly appreciated, and from the activities of chamber music societies on the other hand, who focused mainly on the works of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. Amongst the musical elite in Paris, the last composer was regarded as the measure of all things, both in orchestral and in chamber repertoire.

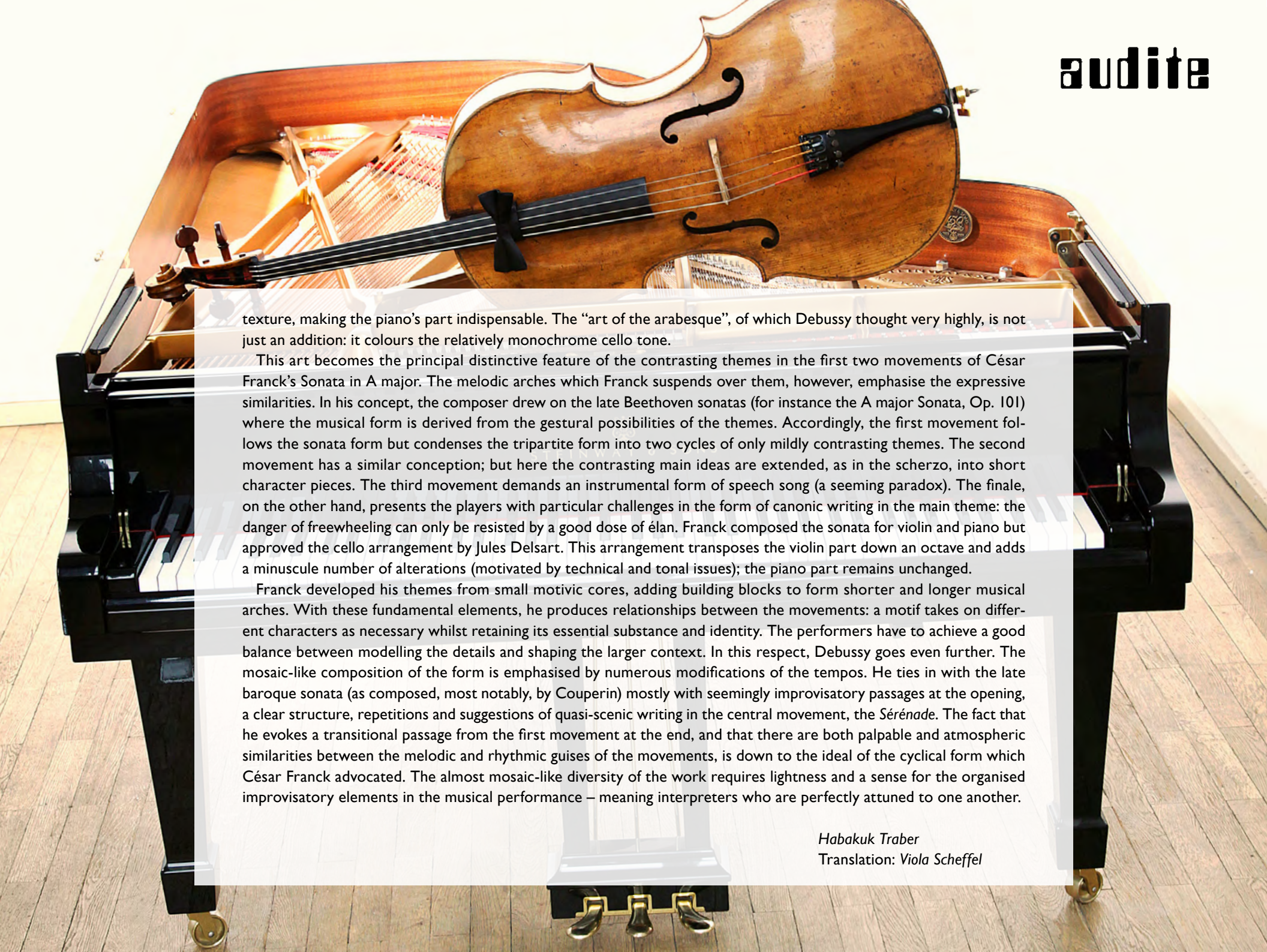
Silvie and Bryan Cheng have recorded sonatas as well as character pieces, thus combining the dominating genres of both musical lines. At the same time, the three major trends characterising French music during its transition from the nineteenth into the twentieth century (and prone to trenchant feuds and polemics) are represented here. Having overcome the painful consequences of a failed *Wunderkind* career, César Franck distinguished himself as a pioneer of the cyclical form which is developed logically and appears convincingly coherent: he regarded it as continuing Beethoven's legacy. Camille Saint-Saëns found these aesthetics too narrow even though he recognisably emulated Robert Schumann in his larger-scale chamber works. Gabriel Fauré was not only his pupil but also became his life-long friend within whose family Saint-Saëns compensated for the breakdown of his own. Like his teacher, Fauré liked to use sonata form following Beethoven's tradition for more extensive compositions, but as the former, he also cultivated the romantic-poetic genre of the character pieces. Saint-Saëns, whose multiple-movement instrumental works certainly reveal classical traits, ran his own salon which Fauré frequented regularly. The different trends – autonomous, elevated aspirations on one hand, sophisticated entertainment on the other – did not exist in strict isolation from one another in France: rather, the boundaries between them were blurred.

A photograph of a cello resting on the lid of an open grand piano. The piano is black with a polished finish, and its lid is propped open, revealing the internal strings and hammers. The cello is positioned diagonally across the piano's lid, with its body resting on the right side and its neck extending towards the left. The background is a light-colored wooden floor.

For Claude Debussy, Franck and Saint-Saëns represented the old guard; nonetheless, when towards the end of his life he wrote his three sonatas, Debussy in turn referred back to the era of great French instrumental music, the period of Jean-Philippe Rameau and François Couperin: authorities in musical history. In doing so, he came closer to the classical references of the older composers whom he had mockingly attacked. He did not want to accept the Belgian-born César Franck as a French composer, and he commented that, with his *Danse macabre*, Saint-Saëns had stirred up hope for a great composer – and then what? However, it is not without astonishment that one realises that, in relation to the works recorded here, these three composers were closer to one another than the controversies during their lifetimes might suggest; this is certainly true of their chamber music. They shared an extended period of time in their creative careers: Saint-Saëns and Fauré were twenty-seven and seventeen years Debussy's senior (thus between a generation and around half a generation older), but survived him by three and six years respectively.

The different musical genres demand different interpretational approaches. This creates a strange paradox: the structure and themes of the great forms, the sonatas, are made up of smaller elements than those of the significantly shorter character pieces. With Fauré in particular, widely curved melodies, growing from the inside, dominate. Songs are well represented in his oeuvre; the piece that the Cheng siblings have chosen as the opening for their debut CD was originally written for voice and piano, almost as a musico-literary dream about a dream. It is effective even without a text. The *Sicilienne* and the *Élégie* are also “chants sans paroles”, songs without words. Here, the cello can savour the role that it is also given in concerto repertoire: in the first instance, its *cantabile* qualities need to come to the fore. Fauré demands consummate instrumental “singing” that should take its interpretational liberties without endangering the internal coherence of the music. Interpreting songs (with or without words) demands the art of using nuances freely and confidently. The same holds true for Saint-Saëns' popular *Swan*, whilst the *Allegro appassionato* belongs to the category of bravura pieces, slightly tinted with foreign, Spanish, or Hungarian hues. Saint-Saëns wrote it immediately after his cello concerto and cello sonata as a “simpler” piece in scherzo form which is also suitable as an encore. Following his original piece for cello and piano, three years later Saint-Saëns also produced an orchestral version. Virtuoso outer sections frame a *cantabile* central segment, giving the soloist the opportunity to demonstrate both agility and lyrical playing.

In all these pieces, the piano's equality with the cello does not manifest itself in the thematic or melodic writing but instead in a capacity which the string instrument possesses only to a limited extent: the colouring and shading of the

A photograph of a black grand piano with its lid open. A cello is placed across the piano's frame, with its body resting on the right side and its neck extending towards the left. The piano's internal strings and hammers are visible. The scene is set on a light-colored wooden floor.

texture, making the piano's part indispensable. The “art of the arabesque”, of which Debussy thought very highly, is not just an addition: it colours the relatively monochrome cello tone.

This art becomes the principal distinctive feature of the contrasting themes in the first two movements of César Franck's Sonata in A major. The melodic arches which Franck suspends over them, however, emphasise the expressive similarities. In his concept, the composer drew on the late Beethoven sonatas (for instance the A major Sonata, Op. 101) where the musical form is derived from the gestural possibilities of the themes. Accordingly, the first movement follows the sonata form but condenses the tripartite form into two cycles of only mildly contrasting themes. The second movement has a similar conception; but here the contrasting main ideas are extended, as in the scherzo, into short character pieces. The third movement demands an instrumental form of speech song (a seeming paradox). The finale, on the other hand, presents the players with particular challenges in the form of canonic writing in the main theme: the danger of freewheeling can only be resisted by a good dose of élan. Franck composed the sonata for violin and piano but approved the cello arrangement by Jules Delsart. This arrangement transposes the violin part down an octave and adds a minuscule number of alterations (motivated by technical and tonal issues); the piano part remains unchanged.

Franck developed his themes from small motivic cores, adding building blocks to form shorter and longer musical arches. With these fundamental elements, he produces relationships between the movements: a motif takes on different characters as necessary whilst retaining its essential substance and identity. The performers have to achieve a good balance between modelling the details and shaping the larger context. In this respect, Debussy goes even further. The mosaic-like composition of the form is emphasised by numerous modifications of the tempos. He ties in with the late baroque sonata (as composed, most notably, by Couperin) mostly with seemingly improvisatory passages at the opening, a clear structure, repetitions and suggestions of quasi-scenic writing in the central movement, the *Sérénade*. The fact that he evokes a transitional passage from the first movement at the end, and that there are both palpable and atmospheric similarities between the melodic and rhythmic guises of the movements, is down to the ideal of the cyclical form which César Franck advocated. The almost mosaic-like diversity of the work requires lightness and a sense for the organised improvisatory elements in the musical performance – meaning interpreters who are perfectly attuned to one another.

Habakuk Traber

Translation: Viola Scheffel



Cheng² Duo

Committed to bringing classical music to 21st-century audiences through innovative programming and engaging presentations, Canadian cellist and pianist Bryan and Silvie Cheng have been making music together for the past 13 years. In 2011, when they were called upon to replace an injured musician for a scheduled recital in Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall, they officially became known as **Cheng² Duo**, pronounced *Cheng Squared Duo*. The duo's New York recital debut was met with an enthusiastic full-house audience, as well as critical acclaim, and they were invited back to Weill Hall for another sold-out recital in 2013.

Named by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC Music) as one of 2015's "30 hot Canadian classical musicians under 30", the sibling duo is formed by 18-year-old cellist Bryan Cheng, a guest soloist with numerous orchestras since his debut at age 10 in Montréal under the baton of Yuli Turovsky and a top prizewinner of several competitions, and pianist Silvie Cheng, a recent graduate from the Manhattan School of Music in New York and the recipient of the Roy M. Rubinstein Award for "exceptional promise in piano performance".

The Cheng² Duo's wide-ranging repertoire for cello and piano has brought them to present recitals in notable venues throughout North America (Canada and the US), Europe (Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy), and Asia (China and South Korea). The duo has performed at the Aspen Music Festival, Trasimeno Music Festival, and Ottawa International Chamber Music Festival, among other festivals, and has also been featured on CBC Radio in Canada and Vermont Public Radio in the United States.

This debut album is the first in a set to be recorded with audite, with each album focusing on the music of a particular country.



Bryan Cheng

is the winner of the 2016 National Arts Centre Orchestra Bursary Competition, 1st-prize winner of the Canadian Music Competition, 1st-prize winner at the Ontario Music Festival Association Competition and winner of numerous prizes and scholarships at local, provincial and national festivals and competitions. Named a CBC Young Artist of the Year in 2014, he has performed as guest soloist with Canada's I Musici de Montréal Chamber Orchestra, National Arts Centre Orchestra, Esprit Orchestra, and Germany's Südwestdeutsches Kammerorchester Pforzheim, among other orchestras.

An avid chamber musician, Bryan Cheng has performed in various ensemble forms, including piano trio, string quartet, violin/cello duo, two-celli duo, cello sextet and cello octet, as well as string octet. Also a champion of new music, he has given several world premieres in Canada and the US.

Formerly studying with cellist and conductor Yuli Turovsky and Hans Jørgen Jensen of Northwestern University, Bryan Cheng is currently enrolled at the Universität der Künste (University of the Arts) in Berlin in the studio of Jens Peter Maintz. He has played at masterclasses with renowned artists including David Geringas, Frans Helmerson, Laurence Lesser, Jian Wang, and Menahem Pressler. Bryan Cheng plays a rare 1754 cello by Bartolomeo Tassini of Venice, Italy.



Silvie Cheng

made her orchestral debut in 2008, followed by her Carnegie Hall solo debut in Weill Recital Hall three years later. She has won top prizes at the Thousand Islands International Piano Competition, Heida Hermanns International Piano Competition, Lillian Fuchs Chamber Music Competition, and numerous national competitions in Canada. Silvie Cheng has performed solo recitals in venues ranging from New York City's Steinway Hall to Ottawa's National Arts Centre to the Remonstrantse Kerk in Alkmaar, Netherlands. A versatile ensemble musician currently based in New York City, she is a Nassau Chamber Music Society artist and the pianist of *sTem Trio*.

Silvie Cheng received diplomas from the Royal Conservatory of Toronto and both her Bachelor's and Master's performance degrees from the Manhattan School of Music in New York, where her main teacher was Jeffrey Cohen. She has performed in masterclasses with Menahem Pressler, Angela Hewitt, Christoph Eschenbach, and Robert McDonald, among other distinguished musicians. Passionate about connecting the next generation with classical music, Silvie Cheng has held a position as a teaching-artist of the Manhattan School of Music's Distance Learning program since 2013.

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audite



**VIDEO auf
YOUTUBE**

hi-res audio
stereo & surround
available at www.audite.de

recording:

February 15-17, 2016

recording location:

**Jesus-Christus-Kirche,
Berlin-Dahlem**

cello:

**Bartolomeo Tassini,
Venice (1754)**

piano:

Steinway D (Gerd Finkenstein)

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Dipl.-Tonm. Ludger Böckenhoff

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photos:

Uwe Arens, Berlin

design:

AB-Design, Detmold

audite

info@audite.de

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