

russian legends

audite



cheng² duo
bryan | silvie cheng

Sergei Prokofiev

Adagio from 'Cinderella' for Cello and Piano, Op. 97a 4:59

Sonata for Cello and Piano in C major, Op. 119 24:36

Alexander Glazunov

Chant du ménestrel, Op. 71 3:52

Dmitri Shostakovich

Sonata for Cello and Piano in D minor, Op. 40 27:09

Piotr Tchaikovsky

Pezzo capriccioso in B minor, Op. 62 6:39

Anton Arensky

Two pieces for Cello and Piano, Op. 12 7:12

Alexander Scriabin

Romance for Cello and Piano 2:02

Sergei Rachmaninov

Lied for Cello and Piano in F minor 2:18

Sonata for Cello and Piano in G minor, Op. 19 37:50

14 Romances, Op. 34, No. 14 'Vocalise' 6:16

Russian Legends

Soulful is an adjective often used to describe the sound of the cello. And the soul is equally reliably called to mind in discussions about Russian literature, art and music. Two realms, therefore, which appear to be made for each other. It was, however, to take some time until they – Russia and the cello – came together. Interest in the cello and its ancestors spread northwards from Italy, reaching France and the German-speaking world. By the nineteenth century, it was German cellists who went to Russia to teach and to give concerts, thereby contributing to the cello's professionalisation. Bernhard Cossmann, for example, previously principal cello of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, established a cello class at the newly founded Moscow Conservatoire in 1866. As professor in Moscow, Cossmann was soon to be joined by Wilhelm Fitzenhagen, for whom Tchaikovsky wrote his *Variations on a Rococo Theme*.

At the St Petersburg Conservatoire, founded four years previously in 1862, cello students were looked after by the man generally regarded as the first great Russian cellist and founder of the Russian cello school: Karl Davidov, born in Goldingen, Courland (today's Kuldīga in Latvia) in 1838. Having studied mathematics (as demanded by his parents), he went on to train as a musician in Leipzig where he subsequently also became principal cello of the Gewandhaus Orchestra.

The second great Russian cellist of the nineteenth century, Anatoly Brandukov (1859-1930), was an early graduate of the still youthful Moscow Conservatoire. He had studied with Cossmann and Fitzenhagen, whereupon he toured Western Europe and stayed in Paris for a longer period of time. Later he returned to Moscow to take up a professorship at the Conservatoire. His students included Gregor Piatigorsky who went on to forge a successful career in the USA and who published one of the most entertaining and revealing collections of anecdotes from the classical music world, entitled "Cellist". Traces of Brandukov's teachings finally lead all the way through to Mstislav Rostropovich, arguably the world's leading cellist of the twentieth century. Leopold Rostropovich, Mstislav's father, had studied with a pupil of Brandukov.

No cello virtuosos meant no music for the cello. However, with the inspiration of the new Russian cellists, Russian composers – who were also increasingly professionalised thanks to the training at the new conservatoires – began showing an interest in the instrument. Anton Arensky, a student of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and a teacher of both Sergei Rachmaninov and Alexander Scriabin, wrote his two Op. 12 pieces for Davidov which not only highlight the melancholy and vocal qualities of the instrument (in the wistful *Petite Ballade*), but also push the limits of virtuosity. In his *Danse capricieuse*, Arensky chases the cello into the highest register, where the sound becomes falsetto-like and tender, almost comical. The *Romance* of his student Scriabin, however, was not originally conceived for the cello: the composer had written it for horn and piano.

The other one, Anatoly Brandukov, stayed in close contact with two composers who would turn out to be amongst the country's most famous: Pyotr Tchaikovsky and Sergei Rachmaninov. Tchaikovsky admired Brandukov's musicianship – the latter was nineteen years his junior – and they stayed in touch even when the cellist went to Paris for a while. Tchaikovsky visited him there in the summer of 1887, travelling from Aachen, where the composer had supported his friend Nikolai Kondratiev who was receiving medical treatment. Spending three months with his mortally ill friend had driven Tchaikovsky to the edge of his mental stability – the short trip to Paris to see Brandukov provided only brief respite, but apparently inspired his *Pezzo capriccioso*, which he wrote in Aachen in August 1887. Against this background, it is hardly surprising that it is not a “capricious” piece as such, but rather a gloomy lament in the *pathétique* key of B flat minor in whose middle section the cellist, nonetheless, has the opportunity to show off his virtuosity. Six months later, in February 1888, Tchaikovsky and Brandukov premiered the work in Paris.

The friendship between Brandukov and Rachmaninov was even closer – when the composer married his cousin Natalia Satina in 1902, the cellist acted as a witness. His cello sonata – the first major Russian work in this genre – was written one year previously. Also composed in 1901, Alexander Glazunov's *Chant du Ménestrel*, on the other hand, is one of numerous shorter pieces for the instrument.

The élan of the sonata, as well as its generous conception, reveal Rachmaninov's mental sense of departure after a severe creative crisis brought about by the unsuccessful premiere of his first symphony. Only once he had been treated by a hypnotist was he able to overcome the writing block which had tormented him for three years. He went on to produce his second piano concerto and, shortly afterwards, the cello sonata which Rachmaninov premiered with Brandukov. The composer did not skimp on the piano part – the keyboard is certainly equal to the cello in this sonata. Another remarkable feature is the tight motivic dovetailing of the four movements. In this, a motif featuring the interval of a second plays a critical role; it is presented by the cello in the introduction to the opening movement as a motto, ascending and sorrowful. This interval appears, both ascending and descending, as a defining element in the wonderfully vocal themes of the first movement, as well as, with hectic acceleration, in the nocturnal storm of the scherzo, in the major-minor shifts of the slow movement (here tensely stretched), and finally as a component of the second, panegyrical theme of the finale. Later on, Anatoly Brandukov arranged Rachmaninov's famous *Vocalise*, which the composer had originally conceived for high voice with piano accompaniment. Whilst still a student at the Moscow Conservatoire, Rachmaninov wrote his first small piece for cello and piano: the melancholy *Lied in F minor*, following the tradition of Felix Mendelssohn's *Songs without words*.

Thirty-two years passed before the next great Russian cello sonata was written – this time by Dmitri Shostakovich. He composed it at the age of twenty-eight, in 1934, after concluding his studies and whilst basking in the success of his opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*. Soon after its premiere in 1934, the piece became an international hit, but the external success was contrasted by private tur-

moil. Shostakovich had married in 1932, but was now newly in love with a student. He and his wife separated; one year later, however, they were reunited. It is possible that the special, romantic tone of the cello sonata originated in the emotional chaos of that time. The intimate first movement features expansive, *cantabile* tunes; the fact that these vocal qualities suddenly stall shortly before the end seems to suggest that Shostakovich tells a very personal story in the garb of a perfectly structured classical sonata. The spinning folk-like scherzo packs a fierce punch and later displays an effective charm, whilst the slow movement reflects the vastness of the Russian countryside. The quirkiness of the finale borders on satire. Two years later, he no longer had any leeway for such witticisms: the Soviet newspaper *Pravda* published an article entitled “Muddle instead of music”, openly threatening Shostakovich, calling him “formalist”. For the composer, a period of fear had begun.

After his return to the Soviet Union in 1936, Sergei Prokofiev also had to face repeated allegations of his music not toeing the party line. Not so, however, with works such as his ballet *Cinderella*, which he wrote between 1940 and 1944, and which met with broad approval. This is confirmed by the “Adagio” which he extracted from the score, initially reworking it for piano, and later for cello and piano. The original also features cellos in the second act love scene between Cinderella and the prince. However, in 1948, three years after the premiere of the ballet, Prokofiev, along with Shostakovich and Aram Khachaturian, was accused of drawing on a style that was “too cosmopolitan and formalist”. It remains unclear to which extent Prokofiev reacted to this creatively. In any case, the cello sonata, written one year after the rebuke, received no complaints. Composed for the 22-year-old Mstislav Rostropovich, it is the third great Russian cello sonata, standing alongside the sonatas of Rachmaninov and Shostakovich. In his memoirs, Sviatoslav Richter, who played the piano part, describes the inspections which the new work needed to undergo before it could be premiered. No fewer than three committees had to pass the sonata, which took almost a year, before permission for an official first performance was granted. Opening as an “Andante grave” with a precipitous monologue from the cello in a low register, the overall character of the piece is a lyrical one. Prokofiev does not follow a linear route in this movement; rather, he presents a succession of ostensibly heterogeneous episodes. A seemingly baroque invention makes an appearance, as well as a waltz and free passages with harp-like, whooshing piano accompaniment. The second movement with its folk-like theme displays an almost ironic sense of humour. The fast finale provides elegance and merriment, but soon also percussive hardness and, at the end, bell-like momentum and magnitude.

Clemens Haustein

Translation: *Viola Scheffel*



Cheng²-Duo

Captivating audiences and critics alike, the **Cheng² Duo** (pronounced Cheng Squared Duo) distinguishes itself with its uncompromising musical integrity, undeniable chemistry, and unparalleled communication with its listeners. The brother-and-sister duo is formed by 21-year-old cellist **Bryan Cheng**, a top prize laureate of the VI International Paulo Cello Competition, and pianist **Silvie Cheng**, recipient of the Roy M. Rubinstein Award for exceptional promise in piano performance.

Named one of *CBC Music's* "30 hot Canadian classical musicians under 30", the young and dynamic Cheng² Duo has been making music together for the past 16 years. Now touring extensively, they have been invited to notable venues throughout North America, Europe, and Asia, including two sold-out recitals at Carnegie Hall and concerts in every Canadian province. International festival appearances include Aspen (USA), Trasimeno (Italy), Usedom (Germany), Ottawa Chamberfest, Toronto, and Festival of the Sound (Canada), as well as broadcasts on major radio and TV stations across North America and in Europe.

In the vanguard of creative programming, Bryan and Silvie are equally committed to presenting both traditional masterworks and the music of their time. Since 2013, they have commissioned nearly a dozen new works and have curated cross-disciplinary concert experiences that meld classical and contemporary music with jazz, poetry, and visual/media arts.

Russian Legends is the third album of a trilogy recorded with audite, following two critically-acclaimed releases: *Violonchelo del fuego* (2018), and *Violoncelle français* (2016). This recording series has received international accolades for its "musical sensitivity", "taste, sure flair for phrasing, and beauty of sound" (*Das Orchester*, Germany), and "passionate, invigorating...masterful performances" (*MusicWeb International*, UK).



Cellist **Bryan Cheng** is hailed internationally for his “absolutely astonishing” (*La Presse*, Montréal) command of the cello, “dreamy beauty” (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*), and “abundant facility, innate musicality, and sense of joy” (*New York Concert Review*). He made his solo debut at age 10 with the Orchestre de chambre I Musici de Montréal, his Carnegie Hall recital debut at 14, and most recently, his Elbphilharmonie solo debut with the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen and conductor Joshua Weilerstein in 2018.

Solo highlights of recent and upcoming seasons include appearances with Finland’s Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, Lahti Symphony Orchestra, and Tapiola Sinfonietta (conducting from the cello), Germany’s Schleswig-Holsteinisches Sinfonieorchester and Südwestdeutsches Kammerorchester Pforzheim, New York’s Adelphi Orchestra, Canada’s National Arts Centre Orchestra, Niagara Symphony Orchestra, Symphony Nova Scotia, and Esprit Orchestra, and collaborations with such esteemed conductors as Susanna Mälkki, Peter Oundjian, David Geringas, Eva Ollikainen, and Alain Trudel. After being awarded the 2017 Canada Council for the Arts Michael Measures Prize, Bryan embarked on a 12-city coast-to-coast tour as soloist with Canada’s National Youth Orchestra and conductor Jonathan Darlington. 2018 distinctions include 2nd-prize and two special prizes at the TONALi Grand Prix in Hamburg, Grand Prize at Adelphi Orchestra International Competition in NYC, and a Sylva Gelber Music Foundation Award.

As the last student of the late Russian-Canadian cellist and conductor Yuli Turovsky – with whom he studied for eight formative years – Bryan is currently pursuing his Bachelor’s degree at the Universität der Künste Berlin in the studio of Jens Peter Maintz. He plays on the ca. 1696 *Bonjour* Stradivarius cello and the ca. 1830 *Shaw* Adam bow, generously on loan from the Canada Council for the Arts Musical Instrument Bank as First Laureate of their 2018 Competition.



Lauded for her “extraordinarily varied palette” (*WholeNote Magazine*) and “purely magical” playing (*New York Concert Review*), pianist **Silvie Cheng** illuminates musical works with her exquisite touch at the keyboard. Since her Carnegie Hall solo debut in 2011, she has performed as both soloist and collaborative pianist across the globe, from New York’s Steinway Hall to Brussels’ Flagey Hall, and Montréal’s Maison Symphonique to Shanghai’s Poly Theatre.

As guest soloist with orchestra, Silvie most recently made her debut with the New Amsterdam Symphony Orchestra in 2018 and will debut with Symphony Nova Scotia in the 2019-20 season. An active recitalist, she regularly presents concerts at the National Arts Club in New York, where she is currently based. 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 her native Canada.

A passionate advocate of new music, Silvie has given over forty world premieres since 2010 in such venues as Carnegie Hall, Cornell University, and the National Gallery of Canada. With an extraordinary ability to connect with the next generation and with audiences both on and off the stage, she is a teaching-artist of the Manhattan School of Music’s Distance Learning program and of the Bridge Arts Ensemble.

Silvie received her ARCT performance diploma from the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto and both her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees from the Manhattan School of Music in New York. Her musical mentors have included Jeffrey Cohen, Menahem Pressler, and Angela Hewitt.

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trailer on



recording:

Oct. 30 - Nov 3, 2018

recording location:

Jesus-Christus-Kirche,
Berlin-Dahlem

cello:

ca. 1696 *Bonjour Stradivarius*
(Canada Council for the Arts)

bow:

ca. 1830 *Shaw Adam bow*
(Canada Council for the Arts)



Conseil des arts
du Canada

Canada Council
for the Arts

piano:

Bösendorfer 280VC
(Gerd Finkenstein)

recording format:

pcm, 96 kHz / 24bit

recording producer:

Dipl.-Tonm. Ludger Böckenhoff

sound & editing:

Dipl.-Tonm. Justus Beyer

editing:

Dipl.-Tonm. Clemens Deller

photos:

Harald Hoffmann

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