

ROBERT DEMAINE &
ANDREW ARMSTRONG

Fauré, Grieg, Rachmaninoff:
Works for Cello and Piano



ROBERT DEMAINE

ROBERT deMAINE is an American virtuoso cellist who has been hailed by The New York Times as "an artist who makes one hang on every note". He has distinguished himself as one of the finest and most versatile instrumentalists of his generation, performing to critical acclaim as soloist, recitalist, orchestral principal, recording artist, and chamber musician. In 2012 he was invited to join the Los Angeles Philharmonic as Principal Cello. DeMaine is the cellist of the highly acclaimed Ehnes String Quartet as well as the newly formed Dieterow-deMaine-Biegel Trio.

A first-prize winner in many national and international competitions, deMaine was the first cellist ever to win the grand prize at San Francisco's Irving M. Klein International Competition for Strings. As soloist, he has collaborated with many distinguished conductors, including Neeme Järvi, Peter Oundjian, Joseph Silverstein, and Leonard Slatkin, and has performed nearly all the major cello concertos with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, where he served as principal cello for over a decade. DeMaine has also served as a guest principal cello of the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, the Toronto Symphony, and the Bergen Philharmonic in Norway.

Robert deMaine has recorded for Naxos, Chandos, Dorian/Sono Luminus, Onyx, CBC, Elysium, and Capstone and has been featured on the BBC, PBS, NPR's Performance Today, the Canadian Broadcasting Company, France Musique, and RAI, among others. In 2015, his recording of the John Williams Cello Concerto (Detroit Symphony) was released on the Naxos label.

DeMaine studied at The Juilliard School, the Eastman School of Music, the University of Southern California, Yale University, and the Kronberg Academy in Germany.



ANDREW ARMSTRONG

ANDREW ARMSTRONG Praised by critics for his passionate expression and dazzling technique, pianist Andrew Armstrong has delighted audiences across Asia, Europe, Latin America, Canada, and the United States, including performances at Alice Tully Hall, Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, the Grand Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, and Warsaw's National Philharmonic.

Andrew's orchestral engagements across the globe have seen him perform a sprawling repertoire of more than 50 concertos with orchestra. He has performed with such conductors as Peter Oundjian, Itzhak Perlman, Günther Herbig, Stefan Sanderling, Jean-Marie Zeitouni, and Stanislaw Skrowaczewski, and has appeared in solo recitals in chamber music concerts with the Elias, Alexander, American, and Manhattan String Quartets,



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Piano: NY Steinway D, Cello: Jean Baptiste Vuillaume, Paris, 1841
Bow: Dominique Peccatte, Mirecourt, 1860

and also as a member of the Caramoor Virtuosi, Boston Chamber Music Society, Seattle Chamber Music Society, and the Jupiter Symphony Chamber Players.

He has released several award-winning recordings with his longtime recital partner James Ehnes, including 3 volumes of the music of Béla Bartók, Prokofiev's Violin Sonatas Nos. 1 & 2 and Five Melodies, Tartini's Devil's Trill and Leclair's Tambourin Sonata, a recital disc of works by Franck and Strauss, as well as an upcoming release featuring pieces by Debussy, Elgar, and Respighi (Onyx Classics). Andrew is devoted to outreach programs and playing for children. In addition to his many concerts, his performances are heard regularly on National Public Radio and WQXR, New York City's premier classical music station. Mr. Armstrong lives happily in Massachusetts, with his wife Esty, their two children, two dogs, two guinea pigs, and two fish.



This recording was made possible by and dedicated to Cecilia Benner, without whom the stars in the sky over the Detroit Symphony and countless other arts organizations would not shine with such brilliance.

NOTES

Gabriel Fauré's lasting influence on French music is tied to the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War—a conflict in which France sought to limit Prussia's bid for German unification. In an age of widespread nationalism, and with the threat of German power at their doorstep, French artists set out to establish a firm national identity of their own. It was under these circumstances that Camille Saint-Saëns co-founded the Société Nationale de Musique to promote the music of young French composers. As a member of that society, Fauré became a centerpiece of the *scène musicale*, and ultimately an artistic model for Claude Debussy and his Impressionist colleagues.

In this context, Fauré's *Elégie* is unusual in its heavy reliance on motivic economy—an oft-cited feature of German music. Yet its unexpected harmonic shifts, particularly at moments of expected cadence, foreshadow the colorful soundscapes of the Impressionists. One can only imagine how these features would have played out in the multi-movement sonata for which the *Elégie* was originally planned, but we can be fairly certain that the piece would not have exhibited what some have called a "crude nationalism." After all, Fauré's relationship to national identity is bound neither by folk music nor by the Orientalist notion of *couleur locale* that characterized Parisian opera. It entails something far more abstract. As the composer himself once noted, "[mine is] a language belonging to a country so far above all others that it is dragged down when it has to express feelings or individual traits that belong to any particular nation."

Edward Grieg's nationalism is perhaps more explicit, but his outlook on nationalist matters resembles Fauré's: "Music that counts, however national it may be, is yet lifted high above the national level." It is fair to say, then, that Grieg—much like his French colleague—did not wear his country on his sleeve, opting instead to internalize and express the sounds of his surroundings in a deeply personal way. This "soft nationalism" is evident throughout the Cello Sonata, which blends folk-inspired melodic tropes with a loosely conceived sonata form, whose middle section relies more on striking changes of tonality than on traditional developmental techniques.

The general applicability of Grieg's nationalist palette reveals itself in the opening movement of his Cello Sonata, which ends with exactly the same motive that ignites his Piano Concerto—a three-pitch descending gesture characteristic of regional folk music. This is no coincidence, for the grand success of the concerto had induced in Grieg a severe lack of inspiration. That he could not escape the influence of his own concerto was a commonly held opinion—one that pointed to the derivative nature of his Cello Sonata, whose outer movements recall the Piano Concerto in harmony, motive, and overall character. Even the sonata's slow movement bears more than a fleeting resemblance to the composer's "Triumphal March" from *Sigurd Jorsalfar*. And yet musicians of the highest calibre continue to champion the work, suggesting that these faults—if they can even be called as such—pale in comparison to the music's infectious passion and idiomatic style.

Much like Grieg, Sergei Rachmaninoff's Cello Sonata bears a strong resemblance to his immensely successful Second Piano Concerto, reprising some of the rhythmic motives that imbue the concerto with momentous drive. This dialogue between works extends even to texture, as in the opening movement's *Allegro moderato*, which features a soaring melody in the cello and busy arpeggios in the piano—clearly analogous to the famous theme of op. 18.

In contrast to his Norwegian counterpart, however, Rachmaninoff did not suffer from the success of his own concerto, and instead enjoyed a period of renewal after its premiere. That is not to say, of course, that the sonata has been immune to critique. Many have noted the piano's overpowering presence at certain points throughout the work—a feature most noticeable in the final two movements, in which the piano escapes the confines of its chamber-music setting and soars into the realm of a concerto idiom. It would not be unreasonable to attribute this imbalance to the composer's dislike of the title "Cello Sonata," which he felt relegated the piano to mere accompaniment. An overcompensation? Perhaps. But either way, this work exemplifies Rachmaninoff's triumphant return to the concert stage as both a virtuoso pianist and a composer.



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Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

[1] Élégie, Op. 24 7:53

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)

Sonata in A Minor, Op. 36

[2] Allegro agitato 9:48

[3] Andante molto tranquillo 6:18

[4] Allegro 12:21

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)

Sonata, Op. 19

[5] Lento – Allegro moderato 12:59

[6] Allegro scherzando 7:09

[7] Andante 6:22

[8] Allegro mosso 11:05



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