

Cello Solo Journey

Albeniz · Brey · De Zia · Diezig · Piazzolla · Prokofiev
Rostropovich · Rozsa · Sollima · Taguell · Tcherepnine

Luciano Tarantino



Cello Solo Journey

Paul Tortelier 1914-1990		Giovanni Sollima b.1962	
Suite Mon Cirque		15 Alone	4'33
1	I. En Piste	0'41	
2	II. Poneys	3'07	
3	III. L'Escamoteur	1'57	Isaac Albéniz 1860-1909
4	IV. Paillettes	2'44	16 Asturia
5	V. L'Hypnotiseur	1'55	
6	VI. Haute voltige	3'39	Astor Piazzolla 1921-1992
7	VII. Dejà fini...	1'39	17 Tango Etude No.3
Sergei Prokofiev 1891-1953		Rogier y Taguella 1882-1956	
8	Sonata Op.134	7'48	18 Suite espagnole No.1
			– Flamenco
Mstislav Rostropovich 1927-2007		Carter Brey b.1954	
9	Study in E flat	3'15	19 Tango para Ilaria
Alexander Tcherepnin 1899-1977		Ilse de Ziah b.1968	
Suite		20 Solace in darkness	5'10
10	I. Quasi Cadenza	1'45	
11	II.	1'17	Sebastien Diezig b.1983
12	III.	1'38	21 Blues Op.1
13	IV. Vivace	1'40	
Miklòs Ròzsa 1907-1995		Giovanni Sollima	
14	Toccata capricciosa Op.36	7'05	22 Lamentatio

The World is my cello

A few years ago, the cellist Luciano Tarantino conceived 'Cello Solo Journey' as a recital for concert performance. He gathered music from across Europe and America with the aim of showing how the possibilities of writing for solo cello continue to develop and expand with the imagination of composers, as they find expressive regions of the instrument opened up, like new continents, through technical innovation.

In concert he opened his recital with the pioneers of solo cello music: not only the great Johann Sebastian but also cellist-composers of the 18th century such as Evariste Felice dell'Abaco. With this album, however, Tarantino focused on the renaissance of the cello during the last century as an instrument sufficient unto itself, not requiring support or accompaniment. Perhaps the signal event in this renaissance was the release in 1939 of the first-ever complete recording of Bach's six cello suites – the Old Testament of the repertoire, it could be said – by the Catalan cellist Pablo Casals. The intensely charismatic musical personalities of Casals and his successors – notable among them Paul Tortelier and Mstislav Rostropovich – have inspired countless composers to follow the example of Bach and turn to the cello as a voice to communicate poetry, sadness, joy and also fun.

Fun? On a cello? Perhaps unexpected, but yes: in *Mon Cirque*, Tortelier celebrated both the fun of the circus and also the joy he found in cello-playing itself. Almost every passage uses hand movements and finger positions that only a virtuoso could execute. Sights and sounds of the circus are vividly brought to musical life with an extraordinary ingenuity given the restricted means at his disposal. The seven movements of the suite depict in turn being 'On Track', ponies, jugglers, sequins, the hypnotist, the high-wire act and – ah, the show is over already.

In a more melancholy way, the same might be said of the solo sonata which Sergei Prokofiev intended to compose for Rostropovich but left unfinished on his death in March 1953 (famously, on the same day as Joseph Stalin). In fact it was the very

Luciano Tarantino *cello*
Carlo Antonio Testore 1736

last piece on which he began work, in the latter half of the previous year, but he did not even complete the first of the sonata's four projected movements: an Andante which makes contrasting play of an elegiac main subject with a more light-hearted second theme (marked *gioiale* in the score), the latter apparently the work in part of Rostropovich. Prokofiev's writing resumes at the beginning of the development section but then breaks off: Alexander Blok effected a completion which was first played by Natalia Gutman in February 1972.

If Tortelier's own music is unfamiliar, the compositions by Rostropovich are hardly known at all. There are precious few of them but they include this E flat major study: a Russian dance with multiple stoppings and stretches which could only have been written by a cellist of unusually large reach.

Tortelier made a recording of the solo suite by Alexander Tcherepnin that assured this most cosmopolitan of composers some toehold in the catalogues when he was all but unknown in Anglophone countries, at least compared to his father Nikolai (1873-1945). A Russian émigré to Paris in the 1920s, Nikolai represented a connection between the Silver-age composers of his homeland and the much drier style of the musicians such as Satie and Auric who gathered around Serge Diaghilev.

With the likes of Liadov, Cui, Rimsky-Korsakov, Prokofiev and Stravinsky as regular visitors to the family home, Alexander grew up immersed in music, and the music of his own time. 'In our home,' Tcherepnin remembered later, 'music was religion.' Like his father, he was a fine pianist and in this capacity he embarked on tours of both America and Asia during the 1920s and 30s. On a visit to China in 1938 he met the young Chinese pianist Lee Hsien Ming (1915-1991), and the two later married in Europe.

The pentatonic melodies (most immediately appreciated in the second-movement *Allegro risoluto*) and oriental flavour of the Suite evidently draw on Tcherepnin's personal experiences of Chinese life, but they are also conceived for performance by expert cellists only. Despite the brevity of each movement and the deft economy of expression, the Suite bristles with technical challenges such as multiple stopping (in

the third-movement lullaby) and ricochet bowing.

Another great cellist of the last century is celebrated by the *Toccata Capricciosa* of Miklòs Rozsa: Gregor Piatigorsky, the Russian-born American cellist who died early in August 1976. In composing this tribute to his memory the following year, Rozsa explained that he had not sought to write an elegy: 'rather does it reflect something of Piatigorsky's incomparable vitality, open-heartedness, buoyancy and bravado.'

Born in 1962 in Palermo, Giovanni Sollima is a cellist-composer in the mould of his compatriot dell'Abaco, one who divides his time between each activity rather than focusing his energies almost exclusively on one or the other. Having absorbed influences from jazz and rock as well as the classical tradition he has been identified as a 'post-Minimalist' composer, but the label matters less than the music, which in the case of the two pieces here is cinematic in its frame of reference. At the heart of Alone lies an obsessively circling toccata of unyielding energy. Near-Eastern tunings and harmonies lend the concluding *Lamentatio* a timeless spirit: here too Sollima's writing does not drift into New-Age contemplation but soon turns to wild, keening expressions of grief.

Tarantino then ventures to Spain for a transcription of *Asturias*, an evocation of a mountainous region of northern Spain by Isaac Albéniz and originally included in his *Suite Espanola* Op.47 for piano. The piece has become much better known in a transcription for guitar by Andres Segovia, and this version for cello sets even greater challenges in its lightning-fast string changes.

Astor Piazzolla originally composed his set of six Tango Etudes for solo flute or guitar but they have been transcribed for several lower instruments since then such as saxophone and clarinet. The third of them also begins with a toccata-like theme which leads into one of Piazzolla's more characteristic tango melodies, coloured by the kind of contemporary classical harmonies he learnt from study with Alberto Ginastera and Nadia Boulanger.

Flamenco comes from the *Suite espagnole* No.1 by the little-known Spanish cellist-composer Rogelio Huguet y Tagell. Originally intending to write a piano trio,

the composer eventually adapted his material for his own instrument. These origins help to explain the multiple stopping and rich chording that run through the piece. Pizzicato passages are reminiscent of flamenco guitar sounds and lyrically lamenting passages in the middle section emphasize the typical flamenco character.

Carter Brey has been principal cellist of the New York Philharmonic since 1996, but in 2013 he found time to write a pair of tangos for his instrument of which *Tango para Ilaria* is the second. This opens with the cellist tapping the side of the instrument before building tension with a punchy repeated motif. Like several other composers on the album he writes for the instrument from the inside, as it were and in his own compositions stays true to his principal as a performer that ‘The first requisite for a good bass line is to have great rhythm.’

The mood changes abruptly with *Solace in Darkness* by the Irish cellist Ilse de Ziah. She writes that ‘*Solace in Darkness* is a strong, intense and exciting piece to play. It is dark, with a powerful surging light shining through. During a dark and intense tropical thunderstorm I was jamming with a tabla player in Sydney. We were working with rhythms that he had learned during his time in India. In the session I created a melody I called ‘Ode to a Tabla’. I have bedded the melody in *Solace in Darkness*, along with a heavy metal-inspired melody and rhythm, and Celtic cello style. The left hand plays pizzicato with the third finger while stopping the melody line with the other fingers. This takes a while to get used to, but with practice it becomes very effective and is an excellent way to strengthen the weaker third finger. I also call the piece *Soilse in Darkness*, which means ‘light in darkness’: Soilse is ‘light’ in Irish and sounds a bit like *Solace*.’

The Swiss cellist Sebastian Diezig wrote these brief but highly evocative *Blues* in 2007 while still a student, following it up five years later with an unabashed hymn to Hollywood in the form of variations on the main theme of *Top Gun*. He is presently co-principal cellist of the Lucerne Symphony Orchestra.

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Born in 1977, Luciano Tarantino began to study the cello at the age of 10 at Bari conservatoire with Giovanni Melisi. At the age of 16 he entered the cello course taught by Franco Maggio Ormezowski at the Toscanini conservatoire in Bologna. Further mentors during his student years included David Geringas,

Ivan Monighetti, Truls Mørk and Mstislav Rostropovich.

At the age of 20 Luciano Tarantino joined the cello section of the RAI Symphony Orchestra, where he worked for seven years. Since then he has played as a principal cellist in orchestras across Europe for conductors such as Gergiev, Maazel, Nosedà, Kirill Petrenko and Sinopoli. His activity as a chamber musician has taken him to prestigious theatres and concert halls including the Kabukiza in Tokyo, the Opéra Garnier in Paris and the Parco della Musica in Rome.

Luciano Tarantino presently teaches cello at the State School of Music in Trani. In May 2014 he founded the ‘Note di Notte’ festival in his home region of Puglia in the south of Italy. He plays a Carlo Antonio Testore cello of 1736 and a bow made by Jacques Poullot.

Thanks to my wife Nica