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MUSIC FOR CELLO & PIANO

MENDELSSOHN, LISZT, HENRYSON
KAPUSTIN & PIAZZOLLA



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cello piano

FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)

Sonata for piano and cello No.2 in D major, Op.58 26:15

1. Allegro assai vivace 7:47
2. Allegretto scherzando 5:33
3. Adagio 5:56
4. Molto allegro e vivace 6:59

FRANZ LISZT (1811-1886)

5. Widmung, S566 after Schumann (Liebeslied) 3:58

SVANTE HENRYSON (B. 1963)

6. Black Run, for solo cello 3:12
7. On a Day Like This, for solo cello 5:33

NIKOLAI KAPUSTIN (B. 1937)

8. Elegy, Op.96 5:41
9. Burlesque, Op.97 3:43
10. Nearly Waltz, Op.98 3:01

ASTOR PIAZZOLLA (1921-1992)

11. Le Grand Tango 12:16

TOTAL TIME: 63:45

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It is difficult to name a more prodigious and more tirelessly prolific musician than **Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)**. His second Cello Sonata in D major, Op.58 (composed in 1843) is one of his most passionate and exuberant works, hiding the draining stresses of that demanding year. With his plans to create Berlin as Germany's new cultural centre (through his directorship of the new Academy of Arts, Royal Orchestra and Cathedral Choir, and fulfilling the position of the composer for the Royal Theatre) jeopardised by an onslaught of court bureaucracy, Mendelssohn was moving back to Leipzig to take the helm of a project very dear to his heart – the creation of the now-famed Music Conservatory, which opened that year in the Gewandhaus. Written for his brother, Paul, Mendelssohn turns to his favourite childhood setting of chamber music to find solace, but also to express his evidently joyful outlook for the future. As the torrents of arpeggios in the piano, which almost overwhelm the soulful lines of the cello, remind us of Mendelssohn's precocious mastery of his instrument; it is the delicate poignancy of the inner movements that remind us of his most far-reaching legacy. As the 'lightfooted' intermezzo gives way to a touching Adagio soliloquy, the strains of Bach's *Es its vollbracht* from the *St John Passion* – a composer revered by Mendelssohn and unfailingly linked with the memory of his beloved grandmother who presented him with his first manuscript of the great master's work – speaks with nobility through the music.

Robert Schumann (1810-1856) had always said he felt he lived not in the real world, but 'in the pages of a novel.' The story of his love for Clara Schumann certainly makes us see why. Although first realising his love for Clara in 1835, it would be four years before the two were finally married. Clara was the

daughter of the famous piano teacher, Friedrich Wieck. As a child prodigy, her successful touring career as a virtuoso pianist was protectively fashioned and zealously guarded by her father. Once Wieck had found out that the feelings between Schumann and his daughter were mutual, he took Clara away and threatened to shoot Schumann if he tried to make contact. Following a lengthy separation and then subsequent court proceedings instigated by Wieck which in the end were slanderous not only against his future son-in-law, but also Clara, he relented. In 1840 the two were finally married – with Clara writing in her diary: *'after oppressively cloudy weather, even the sun came out to bless our union.'* *Widmung* (Dedication) was one of many songs (in the cycle *Myrthen*, Op.25) that poured out of Schumann as a wedding present:

*You my soul, you my heart,
You my bliss, o you my pain,
You the world in which I live;
You my heaven, in which I float,
You my grave, into which
I eternally cast my grief.
You are rest, you are peace,
You are bestowed upon me from heaven.
That you love me makes me worthy of you;
Your gaze transfigures me;
You raise me lovingly above myself,
My good spirit, my better self!*

Moving on from these iconic and highly evocative moments of nineteenth-century Western history, we now move to the twentieth. The political and social turmoil that reflected itself on the minds and hearts of the century's artists has occupied

a dominant part of its perception. It was also, however, a century where stoicism stood side by side with innovation, excitement and an explosion of new entertainment. It is these more quirky moments that the second half of this recital has chosen to illuminate. Of these, **Svante Henryson (b. 1963)** is a perfect embodiment of the amusing conversations of seemingly disparate styles brought together by this Swedish musician. As a classically-trained double bass player still completing his studies in conservatoire, he quickly became a member of the Oslo Philharmonic (under Marris Jansons) in 1983–86, later becoming the orchestra's Assistant Principal Bassist. Subsequently, he became a bass guitarist in the band of Yngwie Malmsteen, then teaching himself the cello before becoming a session player working with Stevie Wonder, Ryan Adams, Elvis Costello and many others. His compositions merge together the eccentricities of all these influences into an unashamedly fun-loving, feel-good mix that speaks across generations.

In a similar way, the Russian composer and pianist **Nikolai Kapustin (b. 1937)** also came steeped in the classical tradition of the Moscow Conservatory (class of the legendary Alexander Goldenweiser), before moving into jazz. Interestingly, however, Kapustin never considered himself as a jazz musician: *'I never tried to be a real jazz pianist, but I had to do it because of composing...'* Standing in the legacy of Russian composers such as Stravinsky who experimented with fusing jazz with virtuoso pianism, it is the whimsical and nostalgic parody of styles, and infectious energy of this set of Three Pieces for Cello and Piano (Elegy, Burlesque and Nearly Waltz) from 1999 which make them impress so vividly on our imaginations today.

For many the name **Astor Piazzolla (1921–1992)** is the ultimate symbol of the twentieth century's verve and perhaps increasing tolerance for challenging boundaries wherever we come across them. Born in Argentina as an only child to Italian immigrant parents, in 1925 Piazzolla moved with his family to one of New York's most violent neighbourhoods which buzzed with a volatile mixture of hard-working immigrants and gangsters. Learning music through his father's collection of tango records and a bandoneon given to him by his father as a present, these were the modest beginnings through which Piazzolla began to explore the escapism that tango promised him. In 1953, after winning an award to study with Nadia Boulanger in Paris, Piazzolla was convinced his destiny lay in classical music. Keenly trying to mold himself into a Western-inspired tradition that hid his tango-inspired past and bandoneon compositions, he was much dismayed at the cool receptions Boulanger gave to his new style. It was not until he played for her his tango *Triunfal* that she finally expressed congratulations and encouragement that he had been chasing after. Embracing this exoticism with a new found confidence, Piazzolla moved forward to become one of the most successful touring musicians of his time whose work was a direct challenge to the canon of classical concert tradition. His *Le Grand Tango*, published in Paris in 1982 and dedicated to Mstislav Rostropovich, is one of his most enduring works. Diverging from the standard Latin harmonies and incorporating complex syncopated counterpoint, it embraces an edgier sound than expected in classical tango. Exceeding expectations and breaking down boundaries in many ways has become a symbol of the aspirations of our own society today.

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Y² has also achieved outstanding success on the world's competition stages, notably 1st Prize in the 2009 Royal Over-Seas League String Competition in London and the Grand Prize and Audience Prize in the 2014 Australian Cello Awards Competition (now amalgamated as the Young Performers Awards) in Sydney.

They recently toured China with performances and live broadcasts in Shanghai Concert Hall, Shanghai Grand Theatre and Wuxi Grand Theatre. Other venues include the Wigmore and Bridgewater Halls as well as venues across Europe, Asia and Australia in major cultural events such as the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, Brighton Festival, Adelaide International Cello Festival and Woodend Winter Arts Festival. In November 2016, they performed in Melbourne with renowned violinist Wilma Smith (ex-concertmaster of Melbourne Symphony Orchestra) which has led to the formation of their trio *Rock, Paper, Scissors* in 2017.

