



Celebrating 35 Seasons



Getting to know you, Bryan & Silvie Cheng

An Interview with our Stockey Young Artists, the Cheng² Duo

Festival of the Sound: You have both had remarkable playing careers individually and as a duo. What has made each of you pursue music with such vigour?

Silvie Cheng: We love music because it is a language that speaks to our souls. I fell in love with music-making from experiencing the emotional connection I have with the music I play, with the composer, and most importantly with the listeners, including myself. There is no better feeling than being connected with your inner self.

Bryan Cheng: I get inspired by Silvie. It is rewarding to play music together with someone you grew up with, and our audience can see this reflected in our playing. There have been countless occasions when audience members have come to me after a concert, and told me how our music made them cry. I have always been taught by my teachers to bring music to life, not just to play like a good instrumentalist. As musicians, our mission is to capture peoples' imaginations. This is why I find pursuing music very meaningful.

SC: Although both of us have been fortunate to have had a lot of experience and opportunities separately, our bond has made our ensemble something we want to continue to pursue seriously. I think it's the love of music and being able to play together. We also feed off the energy of our audiences, and we love meeting people after our concerts. Growing up in Ottawa has helped us to develop a wonderfully supportive musical family in the community, and now that's growing nationally. Affecting the lives of people and touching them with our music gives us great satisfaction.

FotS: You're both pursuing solo and chamber careers, what keeps bringing you back to play together? And with that, what are some of the more unique challenges about being a sibling Duo?

SC: The best decision Bryan made in his life was not choosing to play the piano—when he was 3 he asked when he could start playing an instrument, since he had listened to me play as an infant. I was nine or 10 then. My parents offered him the piano, and he said “NO! I don't want to play what Silvie plays”. Our big age gap (6.5 years) has made me automatically assume the role of a hybrid “sibling-parent”. I started to accompany Bryan from the beginning, and we both loved the experience of making music together from the start!

We've been able to become and stay close because of music, and we interpret and understand things in a similar fashion. Bryan is one of the most amazing people that I have ever known, not just as a musician who has always had deep feeling in what he plays, but also as a person with sometimes completely different personalities. He is very relaxed and fun to be with. I get along with him both musically and personally.

BC: We have a common interest, and we relate to each other through music as a common language. That's how we bonded, and in turn, that bond is reflected in the music we make together, which makes the music become more special...it's like a big circle.

SC: We've been playing together for 12 years now. And for the past five that's been long-distance with me in New York and Bryan in Ottawa during the year. You could say that this is one of the challenges for now, which is why we take full advantage of the summer months to perform and travel together as much as we can. It's the most wonderful time of year!

BC: it's a special partnership –we know each other so well, and I feel at ease playing with Silvie, as I know I can count on her.

SC: Last year we played in a masterclass with cellist Jian Wang in South Korea, and after being stopped for comments we were able to pick up and start again in exactly the same place without speaking—it's like we can read each other's minds. Jian was amazed and asked in front of the audience, “How did the two of you know where to start without saying a word? You must be telepathic!”

BC: People always think it must be challenging to be siblings and play in the same ensemble, but we have never felt that way. In fact, it's very easy for us to communicate our own individual musical ideas and feel comfortable voicing our opinions. We waste very little time arguing, and we always end up saying, “Let's try both ways!” Perhaps this has shaped us into open-minded people.

FotS: You've had a lot of success at a young age. What keeps you grounded?

SC: We're very fortunate to have two non-musician parents who are at the same time supportive of what we choose to do. They raised us as very normal people. We went to regular public high schools growing up, and we were surrounded by positive people our own age who weren't necessarily as involved in music. It gave us the ability to get to know and be able to relate to other people who don't just know music. As individuals, we also chose to minimize the exposure of our musical achievements at school, which allowed us to be just like any of the other students. Much of our audience nowadays are dedicated music-lovers, but growing up surrounded by youth with different interests has helped us to be able to relate to a wider range of audiences who are new to classical music.

We grew up being interested in many things - Bryan is very passionate about outdoor sports such as hiking and biking, and we both played soccer. I also did painting, figure skating, and musical theatre.

BC: At school I have lots of friends from very different special interest groups, such as sports, music, academics, etc. My school has an outdoor education program where we camp, canoe, and bike - it makes me a well rounded person. I have also just finished a co-op program where I worked with chefs in a French restaurant, because I love food and wanted to know what went on behind the scenes in the creation of a great dish. Working with the chefs on a daily basis for months was also a great experience, and it makes you grounded when you are in contact with people from all walks, and learn something new from others.

FotS: What are you most excited about in coming seasons?

BC: Well we're very excited about being at the Festival of the Sound for the first time and being featured as young artists-in-residence this summer. We are honoured to be part of the 35th anniversary celebration of the festival on July 20th and especially excited to give our festival debut recital on July 24th, which will be our last day with the festival. We very much look forward to meeting as many audience members as possible while in Parry Sound.

We're currently participating in the National Arts Centre Young Artists Program at the Summer Music Institute, which runs until the end of June. Then we're flying to Brussels to play recitals for the Canadian ambassador to the EU and his guests before heading to Perugia, Italy to play at pianist Angela Hewitt's festival, the Trasimeno Music Festival. It's celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, and she's invited us to play at the young artists concert that opens the festival. Right after Festival of the Sound we'll be back in Ottawa to play at the Ottawa ChamberFest. Following a sold-out debut recital last summer, we're doing a multimedia concert on August 7th with a brand-new program, aiming to reach out to newer audiences. Then our Toronto recital debut happens August 11th, and that concert is being recorded for CBC Radio Two's "Next!".

SC: And the next big project is that we're making a debut recording for the Cheng² Duo. We hope this will happen very soon!