

Violoncelle Français

Claude DEBUSSY (1862-1918)

Sonata for Cello & Piano [11:18]

Gabriel FAURÉ (1845-1924)

Après un rêve from *Trois melodies*, Op. 7 [3:18]

Sicilienne, Op. 78 [4:01]

Élégie, Op. 24 [7:10]

César FRANCK (1822-1890)

Sonata in A major, CFF 123 [27:52]

(Violin sonata arr. cello by Jules Delsart)

Camille SAINT-SAËNS (1835-1921)

Allegro appassionato, Op. 43 [4:11]

Le cygne from *Le Carnaval des Animaux* [2:58]

Cheng² Duo (Bryan Cheng (cello), Silvie Cheng (piano))

rec. Jesus-Christus-Kirche, Berlin-Dahlem, February 2016

Booklet notes in German & English

AUDITE 97.698 [60:55]



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It should come as no surprise that siblings Bryan and Silvie Cheng, performing as the Cheng² Duo, have chosen a French-themed recital for their debut album, as they hail from Canada, and according to their bios spend a lot of their musical life on the eastern side. Bryan is the cellist and Silvie the pianist, and at ages 25 and 18 when this disc was recorded, they are, on the evidence here, already consummate musicians. While their recital has an emphatically youthful feel to it, and other shadings and insights may inform their readings over time, these are by any measure masterly performances - passionate, invigorating and wonderfully life-affirming.

The opening Debussy sonata establishes the considerable, if slightly nasal, tone of Bryan Cheng's 1754 Bartolomeo Tassini cello. This amplitude seems entirely natural, allowing both players full dynamic expression without compromising balance. Together with the highly realistic recording, close but not overbearing, it makes for very involving listening. If the Debussy sonata seems not as whimsical and enigmatic as, say, the classic Rostropovich/Britten ([review](#)) or more recent Queyras/Tharaud accounts, it instead brings a sense of fresh discovery and re-invention of a timeless masterpiece.

The three Fauré interludes that follow are beautifully projected, with the *Élégie* more urgent than the usual introspective wallow. The recital's centre of gravity, though, is the cello arrangement (by Jules Delsart) of the Franck violin sonata. In this form it is less flighty and extrovert than the original, but the mellowing influence of the cello does not compromise its structure. Indeed, the thematic material is all the more memorable, and the musical dialogue even more intense and muscular. Only in the *Recitativo - Fantasia* third movement does the transition become occasionally earth-bound, not that any blame could be laid at the feet of the Cheng² Duo. Compared with the venerable du Pré/Barenboim recording ([review](#)), Bryan Cheng does at least as well, in richer and more refulgent tone, to float the cello line. The performance as a whole is tremendously ardent and virtuosic, and if the thrilling tension generated by the Cheng² Duo has a touch of sibling rivalry to it, there's no harm in that. If there is a downside, the two Saint-Saëns makeweights then seem a little anti-climactic, if not redundant.

It's curious that given the theme of this recital there is no French translation of the booklet notes. Otherwise, the notes are excellent, and indicate the confidence Audite has in the Cheng² Duo, as the narrative interweaves detail about them with the musicological argument. On the strength of this debut disc, that confidence is well founded.