

# CHOPIN RACHMANINOFF CELLO SONATAS

BRIAN THORNTON CELLO

SPENCER MYER PIANO



STEINWAY & SONS



## CHOPIN RACHMANINOFF CELLO SONATAS

Much of these two sonatas is about partnership; the nature of chamber music lends itself to this reading. And with these works, the idea of partnership occurs not only in their respective histories but in the interplay of the instruments themselves, with piano and cello performing equally. This is unsurprising when the works' composers are known for their catalogue of piano works and their fame as pianists.

For Chopin and Auguste Franchomme — friend, colleague, and dedicatee of the Cello Sonata, Op. 65 — partnership extends beyond this piece. Friends for seventeen years, the pair co-wrote the *Grand duo concertant*, B. 70, and Franchomme reworked the cello part for the *Introduction and Polonaise brillante*, Op. 3. The Cello Sonata emerged from Chopin's late period, towards the end of his life, acting as a bridge between the past and the future. Overflowing with themes, the sonata plays with form. Some hear the opening of "Gute Nacht" from Schubert's *Winterreise* structuring the work, lending to the cello's singing quality in the first movement. Thinking about the sonata through this lens deepens the idea of partnership, where the vocal and piano lines work together to convey an emotion, here perhaps, melancholy. The sonata consists of four movements (*Allegro moderato*, *Scherzo*, *Largo*, *Allegro*) where the majority of the work's motivic and thematic material emerges from the first movement. The movement's sprawling nature and the intimate character of its themes made it difficult and puzzling for listeners, performers, and even Chopin himself, who agonized over its composition. The other three movements, however, perform a more discernible formal unity, making sense of the first. When Franchomme premiered the work in 1848, Chopin's last public concert, only the last three movements were performed. On his deathbed, Chopin asked to hear Mozart and his Cello Sonata, though he could only bear a few measures of the latter. In that moment, Chopin himself was the bridge, ushering in the late Romantic style that was to follow. And in that moment, at his bedside, Franchomme was there.

Partnership is also at the center of Rachmaninoff's Cello Sonata, Op. 19; Anatoly Brandukov, the sonata's dedicatee, was Rachmaninoff's close friend, even the best man at Rachmaninoff's wedding. Much like Chopin's friendship with Franchomme, Rachmaninoff and Brandukov's friendship was also collaborative with the cellist premiering all of Rachmaninoff's chamber works. The Cello Sonata sees Rachmaninoff return to more Romantic compositional techniques and form, such as a four-movement structure (*Lento - Allegro moderato*, *Allegro scherzando*, *Andante*, *Allegro mosso*). Throughout the sonata is the singing lyricism Rachmaninoff was known for, often emerging first in the piano and then taking shape in the cello. The piano and cello work as equals, something Rachmaninoff insisted on, reluctantly calling it a 'cello sonata.' And unlike the melodic material in the Chopin that evokes a Schubertian melancholia, here we see Rachmaninoff working his way out of the depression that followed the disastrous premiere of his First Symphony just a few years prior. Instead of finality, we experience triumph.





## BRIAN THORNTON

Brian Thornton is a distinguished cellist and proud Steinway Recording Artist, performing here alongside his collaborative pianist, Spencer Myer. With over thirty-one seasons as a member of the cello section of the Cleveland Orchestra, he embraces the philosophy of performing with purpose, utilizing music as a transformative tool to celebrate and elevate exceptional artists.

His debut album, *Kol Nidrei and Beyond - Lev's Story*, highlights the lyrical qualities of the cello and serves as a heartfelt tribute to the memory of Mr. Aronson. Brian has released four other albums that explore the rich vocal textures of the cello, featuring compositions ranging from the timeless works of Schumann and Brahms to contemporary pieces by modern female-identifying composers from Iran.

Education and mentorship are central to Brian's mission. He is passionate about teaching and conducting young musicians, traveling worldwide to share his expertise and inspire the next generation of cellists. His journey began in the public school system of Chicago, which ignited his commitment to outreach programs that empower young musicians.

Brian's influence knows no borders; he has traveled from Kolkata, India to Osaka, Japan, encouraging young musicians to not only refine their craft but also to harness the power of music to create a positive impact within their communities. With a keen interest in contemporary music, Brian has premiered over one hundred new solo cello works globally, continually pushing the boundaries of the instrument and its expressive potential.



A photograph of pianist Spencer Myer in profile, seated at a grand piano. He is wearing a dark suit jacket over a white collared shirt. His hands are positioned on the keyboard, and he appears to be in the middle of a performance. The background is a dark, wood-paneled wall.

## SPENCER MYER

Lauded for "superb playing" and "poised, alert musicianship" by the *Boston Globe*, and labeled "definitely a man to watch" by London's *The Independent* after his 2012 Wigmore Hall recital debut, American pianist and Steinway Artist Spencer Myer is one of the most respected and sought-after artists on today's concert stage.

Spencer has been soloist with the Cleveland Orchestra, the Cape Town and Johannesburg Philharmonics, and the Indianapolis and New Haven Symphonies, among others. His 2005 tour of South Africa included a performance of Beethoven's five piano concerti with the Chamber Orchestra of South Africa, followed by six subsequent return tours. An in-demand chamber musician, his artistic partners have included cellists Lynn Harrell and Ralph Kirshbaum, clarinetist David Shifrin, soprano Nicole Cabell, and the Jupiter, Miami and Pacifica String Quartets.

Spencer's career was launched with three important prizes: First Prize in the 2004 UNISA International Piano Competition in South Africa, the 2006 Christel DeHaan Classical Fellowship from the American Pianists Association and the Gold Medal from the 2008 New Orleans International Piano Competition. He is also a laureate of the 2005 Cleveland and Busoni International Competitions. He was a member of Astral Artists' performance roster from 2003-2010.

Previously on the piano faculty of Boston's Longy School of Music, Spencer is currently Associate Professor of Piano at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, where he received the 2024 Trustees

Teaching Award. He has released five albums on the Steinway & Sons label — *Piano Rags of William Bolcom*, three CDs with cellist Brian Thornton, and most recently *Four Chopin Impromptus*.

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Recorded June 17-19, 2024 at Severance Hall, Cleveland, Ohio.

Producer: Elaine Martone

Recorded, Edited, Mixed and Mastered by Robert Friedrich, Five/Four Productions, LLC.

Recorded, Mixed and Mastered using REVEAL SDM Technology.

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Executive Producers: Eric Feidner and Jon Feidner

Art Direction: Jackie Fugere

Design: Cover to Cover Design, Anilda Carrasquillo

Project Coordinator: Renée Oakford

Photos: Roger Mastroianni



**BRIAN THORNTON**, CELLO | **SPENCER MYER**, PIANO

**FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN** 1810-1849

**CELLO SONATA IN G MINOR**, OP. 65

1 I. ALLEGRO MODERATO 11:04

2 II. SCHERZO 5:24

3 III. LARGO 4:40

4 IV. ALLEGRO 6:39

PLAYING TIME: 63:58

**SERGEI RACHMANINOFF** 1873-1943

**CELLO SONATA IN G MINOR**, OP. 19

5 I. LENTO - ALLEGRO MODERATO 10:37

6 II. ALLEGRO SCHERZANDO 6:58

7 III. ANDANTE 6:52

8 IV. ALLEGRO MOSSO 11:14



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