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The WFISC is held biennially in spring, in the unique surroundings of Windsor Castle, by gracious permission of Her Majesty The Queen, and seeks to find exceptional string soloists from all around the world, providing an opportunity for the winner to perform a concerto with the renowned Philharmonia Orchestra during the Windsor Festival the following autumn and a number of other important prizes.

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FAURÉ & SAINT-SAËNS

WORKS FOR CELLO & PIANO



Brian O’Kane *cello*
Michael McHale *piano*

TRACK LISTING

- | | | |
|----|---|-------|
| 1 | ROMANCE, Op.69 GABRIEL FAURÉ (1845–1924) | 03'43 |
| | CELLO SONATA No.1 IN D MINOR, Op.109 GABRIEL FAURÉ | |
| 2 | <i>i</i> Allegro | 05'11 |
| 3 | <i>ii</i> Andante | 07'07 |
| 4 | <i>iii</i> Final - Allegro comodo | 05'56 |
| 5 | ROMANCE, Op.36 CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS (1835–1921) | 03'04 |
| 6 | AU BORD DE L'EAU, Op.8 No.1 GABRIEL FAURÉ | 02'04 |
| 7 | ROMANCE, Op.51 CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS | 03'31 |
| | CELLO SONATA No.2 IN G MINOR, Op.117 GABRIEL FAURÉ | |
| 8 | <i>i</i> Allegro | 06'16 |
| 9 | <i>ii</i> Andante | 07'48 |
| 10 | <i>iii</i> Allegro vivo | 05'02 |
| 11 | APRÈS UN RÊVE, Op.7 No.1 GABRIEL FAURÉ | 03'11 |
| | SONATA No.1, Op.32 CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS | |
| 12 | <i>i</i> Allegro | 09'14 |
| 13 | <i>ii</i> Andante tranquillo sostenuto | 05'07 |
| 14 | <i>iii</i> Allegro moderato | 06'22 |
| 15 | THE SWAN CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS | 03'05 |

Total playing time: 76'44

Produced, engineered, edited and mastered by Andrew Walton
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 Executive Producer for Champs Hill Records: Alexander Van Ingen
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 Image of Brian O'Kane – Kaupo Kikas
 Image of Michael McHale – Frances Marshall

FOREWORD

Gabriel Fauré is a composer who seemingly divides opinion. For me, his writing is fascinating and timeless and I unashamedly adore it. His two cello sonatas in particular display Fauré's unique and intriguing voice, and their divine and unending melodies celebrate the cello's best registers.

The making of this disc was primarily inspired by those works, as well as some of Fauré's own influences and inspirations, which came in no small part from his mentor and teacher Camille Saint-Saëns. The evident connections in style, structure, phrasing and melody make for a fascinating comparison.

The songs, romances and sonatas on this disc contain arguably some of the most beautiful repertoire for cello and piano, and because of their connections, offer an insight into how teacher and student can inspire one another.

It was a pleasure making this disc for Champs Hill with Michael McHale and Andrew Walton, and it would not have been possible without the wonderful support of David and Mary Bowerman.



Opposites can often attract, which may to some extent explain the enduring friendship between Camille Saint-Saëns and Gabriel Fauré. They first met as master and pupil at the Niedermeyer School in Paris (the *École de Musique Classique et Religieuse*, to give it its official title); Fauré had been sent there by his father in the hope that Gabriel's budding musicianship could be trained towards a sensible career, such as an organist or choirmaster. Saint-Saëns, 25 years old when he became Gabriel's piano teacher in 1861, was just ten years older than his pupil. Though notoriously prickly as a character, Saint-Saëns could be generous towards those he believed genuinely talented, and rapidly became fond of his softly spoken but highly gifted and witty student. He not only developed Fauré's skills as a pianist, but also encouraged him in his early efforts in composition, introducing him to the music of such leading modern composers as Schumann, Liszt and Wagner.

In many ways their compositional styles were complementary in temperament – Saint-Saëns's the more forthright yet urbanely classical, Fauré's more subtle and reflective, yet ultimately the more forward-looking in its expressive range of harmonies. Yet their music has several qualities in common, including grateful and idiomatic writing for the piano, and, rather less predictably, a shared sensitivity for the expressive potential of the cello. Fauré showed his affinity for the violin relatively early, composing his A major Violin Sonata in 1875–76, but took some time to refine his style for its close baritone brother. As early as 1880 he attempted to write a cello sonata, of which the single-movement *Élégie* was the result. Other single-movement pieces followed, including the soulful and meditative *Romance*, which he originally composed for cello and organ. He ultimately rewrote this, transferring the organ part to piano, and performing this version himself in Geneva on 14 November 1894. In transferring the accompaniment from organ to piano, Fauré reworked the original crotchet chords as semiquaver figuration. The cello's part remains unchanged, but for the very end where the soloist sustains the final high A instead of making, as in the original version, a two-octave descent to echo the two-octave fall heard in the grave and richly expressive introductory bars.

Several of Fauré's songs from the 1870s were also transcribed, with the voice part – Fauré being particularly fond of warm timbres of relatively low *tessitura* – sounding at home in the new medium, the cello's range at the same time working advantageously for the (uncharacteristically for Fauré) wide vocal compass required for both *Au bord de l'eau* (composed in 1875) and *Après un rêve* (composed in 1877).

Saint-Saëns meanwhile, with his ten years seniority over Fauré, enjoyed something of a head start, composing his First Cello Sonata in C minor in 1872. This was for the newly formed Société National de Musique, founded on 25 February 1871 of which Saint-Saëns, then aged 36, was a chief instigator. Created following France's humiliating defeat in the Franco-Prussian war, and just days before the Prussian army marched down the Champs-Élysées, the Société was consciously an act of defiance, one which appears to be reflected in the turbulent character of Saint-Saëns's Sonata. It is therefore, perhaps, ironic that the composers it so patently echoes include Beethoven in its gruff and sometimes stormy first movement, while the chorale-like theme that dominates the second movement reflects Saint-Saëns's admiration for Bach. The opening theme also recalls Schumann's *Wehmut* from *Liederkreis*, Op.39, which, if intentional, may well have reflected a sense of grief Saint-Saëns felt, paying tribute to musical heroes close to his heart even as he attempted to galvanise French pride through his music.

Several sources tell the story that Saint-Saëns's domineering mother disapproved of the Sonata's original finale; whereupon the composer confined himself to his room for eight days, only emerging for meals, finally presenting the entirely new finale. To the dismay of several cellists, and even musicologists, the piano in this movement is given "too preponderant" a part (to quote Martin Cooper): indeed, through much of the Sonata an insensitive pianist could sound as if they were storming through a concerto rather than being a partner in a chamber work. Yet Saint-Saëns's First Sonata was much admired by Fauré; in 1917, having completed his own First Cello Sonata, Fauré wrote to his wife Marie: "Among modern French or foreign sonatas for cello there is only one of importance: that by Saint-Saëns. It is a masterpiece that is

heard too rarely and that is because cellists pretend that their part is less brilliant than that of the piano! As if, in a combined work, the total effect does not result from the combination of different instruments.”

Saint-Saëns's *Romance* in F, Op.36, composed in 1874, was originally intended for horn rather than cello, and was dedicated to the horn player Henri Garigue, who had won first prize at the Paris Conservatoire in 1862. Yet its mellow *cantabile* line, a worthy challenge for a great horn player, well suits the cello's naturally singing tone. The *Romance* in D, Op.51, followed three years later: initially light-hearted and even playful in character, the piece reveals an increasingly impassioned character, but finally ends in serene mood with the cello playing harmonics. Most beautiful of all and deservedly well known of all his cello works is *The Swan*, composed in 1886. Originally written for cello and two pianos, Saint-Saëns presented this as a gift to the cellist Charles Lebouc, who was then on the point of retirement. Given the satirical nature of the piece's original context, *Carnival of the Animals*, Saint-Saëns perhaps intended it, mischievously if affectionately, as a “swan song” for Lebouc!

With Fauré's two sonatas, we encounter two of the very greatest yet among the most underestimated works of the cello repertory. Fauré's admiration of Saint-Saëns's First Sonata has already been mentioned, and one can only assume that it was with a particular feeling that he faced yet again the prospect of invading German armies during the First World War. The turbulent style of the opening movement, with piano and cello battling in the bass, to an extent echoes Saint-Saëns's work; yet this is very much in a new style forged from Fauré's subtle and harmonically more advanced tonal language. At the same time, the music – certainly the opening theme which dominates the first movement – is far more edgy and belligerent than is typical of Fauré's work, with martial-like dotted rhythms and wide-leaping themes. More recognizably his style is the optimistically rising second theme, though soon the cello faces the battering, almost percussive rattle of the piano part. The slow central movement, with the piano's hints of chiming bells, offers respite, though something,

too, of a mournful processional; a particularly poignant lullaby-like theme, introduced by the cello at the movement's centre, builds to a climax similar to that of the *Passacaille* in the wartime Piano Trio by Fauré's pupil, Ravel. The genial finale – at times recalling the hopeful conclusion of Fauré's song cycle *La bonne chanson* – looks forward to a more positive prospect.

Cello Sonata No.2 was composed between March and November 1921. In October 1920 Fauré had been pressured to retire as head of the Paris Conservatoire, due to his deafness and failing health. Insult was added to injury when the state attempted to refuse him a pension on the grounds that he had only been employed 28 of the required 30 years to qualify; intervention by the director of the Beaux-Arts and the Conseil d'État finally secured financial support, as a special favour, for the composer. Fauré's son, Philippe, claimed his father “suffered deeply but silently”, yet Fauré himself put a brave face on the matter and wrote to Marie: “I must bless the good fortune which relieves me of a great weight.”

The Second Sonata starts as if in mid-flow, with the cello following the piano in rough canon (rather in the manner of the finale of Franck's Violin Sonata). The music generally has a twilight wistfulness and beauty, akin to the ‘Pastorale’ movement to *Masques et bergamasques* Fauré completed in 1919, albeit in rather more lively tempo. The following *Andante* movement is based, unexpectedly, on a commemorative wind-band piece Fauré composed for the centenary of the death of Napoleon I. Gravely processional, the movement recalls both Fauré's earlier *Élégie* and *Mort de Mélisande* from his 1898 incidental music to *Pelléas et Mélisande*. The finale, though initially in the home key of G minor, is so sparkling and mercurial in character that one is impressed most by the music's exuberance, even before the final *coda* in unambiguous G major. Vincent d'Indy wrote to Fauré after the Sonata's premiere on 13 May 1922: “I want to tell you that I'm still under the spell of your beautiful Cello Sonata... The *Andante* is a masterpiece of sensitivity and expression, and I love the finale, so perky and delightful... How lucky you are to stay so young!”

Irish cellist Brian O'Kane enjoys a busy career as both soloist and chamber musician. Since winning first prize at the Windsor International String Competition in 2008, he has made his debuts with the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, the Philharmonia Orchestra under Ashkenazy and in recital at the Wigmore Hall. Brian is a former 'Rising Star' of Ireland's National Concert Hall and has performed at Seoul's Performing Arts Centre and with a cello ensemble at the BBC Proms.

Brian enjoys playing chamber music as a member of the Cappa Ensemble and the Navarra Quartet. He has collaborated with a wide variety of artists such as Michael Collins, Aleksandar Madzar, Anthony Marwood, Pekka Kuusisto, Lawrence Power, Antoine Tamestit and Sir James Galway. Brian has also performed at concert halls and festivals throughout the world such as Sydney Opera House, Suntory Hall Tokyo, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, West Cork, Radio France–Montpellier, Lockenhaus and the Weesp Chamber Music Festival, Holland, where his quartet are the artistic directors.

A graduate of both the Royal Academy of Music and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, Brian's biggest influences have come from Louise Hopkins and at Prussia Cove, Aldeburgh and Chamber Studio from studies with Ralph Kirshbaum, Steven Isserlis, Ferenc Rados and Eberhard Feltz. Brian plays a Rugieri cello made in Cremona c. 1690.



Winner of the Terence Judd / Hallé Award in 2009, Belfast-born Michael McHale has established himself as one of Ireland's leading pianists.

He has performed as a soloist with the Minnesota, Hallé, Moscow Symphony and Bournemouth Symphony orchestras, the London Mozart Players, City of London Sinfonia and all five of the major Irish orchestras, and performed at the Tanglewood Festival, Wigmore Hall (London), Berlin Konzerthaus, Suntory Hall (Tokyo), Lincoln Center (New York), Symphony Hall (Boston) and Pesti Vigadó in Budapest.

His critically acclaimed debut solo album, *The Irish Piano*, was released in 2012 by RTÉ lyric fm and selected as 'CD of the Week' by the critic Norman Lebrecht. More recent solo releases include *Schubert: Four Impromptus* on Ergodos, *Miniatures and Modulations on Grand Piano*, and a first orchestral album *Irish Piano Concertos*, featuring works by John Field and Philip Hammond with the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra and conductor Courtney Lewis. His discography also includes releases on Delos, Nimbus Alliance, Lorelt, and six duo recital albums on Chandos with clarinetist Michael Collins.

A graduate of Cambridge University and the Royal Academy of Music, Michael's teachers and mentors include John O'Connor, Christopher Elton and Barry Douglas. He collaborates regularly with Sir James Galway, Michael Collins, Dame Felicity Lott and Camerata Pacifica.

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