01. **CLAUDE DEBUSSY** (1862-1918) *Nocturne et Scherzo* 5:57

02. **CLAUDE DEBUSSY** *Clair de Lune* from *Suite Bergamasque* for Cello and Piano in A Major 5:28

CLAUDE DEBUSSY Sonata for Cello and Piano
03. **I.** Prologue: *Lent, sostenuto e molto risoluto* 5:01
04. **II.** Sérénade: *Modérément animé* 3:49
05. **III.** Finale: *Animé, léger et nerveux* 4:18

06. **GABRIEL FAURÉ** (1845-1924) *Élégie*, Op. 24 ..... 6:51

CÉSAR FRANCK (1822-1890) Sonata for Cello and Piano in A Major (originally for Violin and Piano)
07. **I.** Alegretto ben moderato 6:45
08. **II.** Allegro 8:56
09. **III.** Recitativo – Fantasia 8:09
10. **IV.** Allegretto poco mosso 7:10

11. **MAURICE RAVEL** (1875-1937) *Piece en forme de habanera* for Cello and Piano (trans. by Paul Bazelaire) 3:35

12. **CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS** (1835-1921) *The Swan* from *Carnival of the Animals* 3:14

TOTAL: 51:45

Paris Mirages

Matthew Brown

Chamber music played a significant role in *fin de siècle* Paris: though traditionally associated with amateur music making, it gradually migrated from the salon to the concert hall thanks in large part to the proliferation of public venues and professional ensembles in the city. After France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War (1870), organizations such as Société Nationale de Musique promoted chamber music as part of its mission 'to spread the gospel of French music.' Music academies like the Paris Conservatoire and the École Niedermeyer followed suit, encouraging students to perform chamber works of the past and create new ones of their own.

Claude Debussy (1862–1918) was no exception in this regard: while still studying at the Conservatoire, he wrote his Piano Trio in G major in 1880 and *Nocturne et Scherzo* for cello and piano soon after. The latter, which may well have evolved from a piece for violin and piano that Debussy performed with Maurice Thieberg at the salon Flaxland on 12 May 1882, was completed on 14 June 1882 while Debussy toured Europe for the third time with Madame Nadezhda von Meck and her family. The score exists today as a single movement and is the quintessential example of salon music: its outer sections have the lightness typical of a *Scherzo*, whereas the middle section has the more passionate feel of a *Nocturne*. In their delightful rendition of the *Nocturne et Scherzo*, Misha Quint and Alexei Volodin capture the charm and passion of Debussy's music with consummate artistry; they allow the cello to shine and the piano to add glittering harmonic support.

While it is impossible to know how much Debussy's *Nocturne et Scherzo* for cello and piano differed from his earlier score for violin and piano, the cello transcription of "Clair de lune" literally transposes Debussy's piano score down from D♭ major to A major. It turns out that the original version belonged to a group of short salon pieces that Debussy completed around 1890, a group that included some of the most beloved compositions he ever wrote: *Petite Suite* (1888–1889); *Deux Arabesques* (1888–1889); and *Rêverie* (1890). Though initially conceived for piano solo or piano

duet, many of these works circulated as duets for cello and piano, as did early songs, such as "Il pleure dans ma cœur" (*Ariettes oubliées*, 1885–1887). Some even have programmatic allusions: "Clair de lune" was not only inspired by a poem from Verlaine's collection *Fêtes galantes* (1869), but its opening measures recall the start of Debussy's song "La Morte des amants" from his *Cinq poèmes* de Charles Baudelaire (1887–1889).

As with Debussy's other salon pieces, "Clair de lune" stands out for its melodic arabesques, lush harmonies, supple rhythms, and fluid three-part form. Misha Quint conveys the emotional intensity of the movement's main theme, allowing it to soar to ever greater heights. Alexei Volodin supports this line with shimmering arpeggios and beautifully crafted countermelodies. The duo is particularly effective at bringing out the melancholy overtones of the ending, thereby recreating the intoxicating charm of a nocturnal landscape bathed in moonlight. This is tone painting at its best.

Despite the success of his *Quatuor à cordes*, which received its premier at the Société Nationale de Musique in December 1893, Debussy wrote few chamber works during the 1890s and 1900s; it wasn't until 1915 that his publisher Jacques Durand encouraged him to compose a set of sonatas for an array of different instruments. The first year of WWI had already taken a heavy toll on Debussy. But, after hearing Saint-Saëns's Septet and being contracted to edit J. S. Bach's chamber music, he decided to write six sonatas "in the ancient mold," starting with the *Sonate pour violoncelle et piano*. Debussy finished the work quickly in July 1915, while on vacation in Pourville-sur-mer in Normandy. Two years later, on 24 March 1917, he performed it in Paris with Jacques Salmon at a fundraiser for the aid organization *Le Vêtement du blessé*. The sonata is one of Debussy's most evocative scores. Stately but melancholy, the opening Prologue alludes to the start of Rameau's opera *Les Fêtes de Polymnie* (1745), a work that he had edited for Durand in 1908. Midway through, it seems to recall the majestic central section of "La Cathédrale engloutie" (*Préludes*, Bk 1). The second movement is another matter entirely. Labelled *Sérénade*, it features menacing pizzicato sections, striking double stops, and violent changes of texture.

The results are far ahead of their time and inspired Benjamin Britten to compose the 'Serenade' for his Cello Suite No. 1 (1964). Debussy's *Sonate pour violoncelle et piano* ends with a boisterous Finale that brims with Spanish style guitar effects. In a truly outstanding performance of the sonata, Misha Quint and Alexei Volodin reveal every nuance of Debussy's score with extraordinary finesse, conveying the grandeur and pathos of the Prologue, the nervousness and anxiety of the Sérénade, and the excitement of the finale.

The same shift from private performances and public concerts can be seen with *Élégie*, Op. 24 by Gabriel Fauré (1845–1924). Unlike Debussy, who disliked bourgeois salon culture, Fauré was deeply involved in Parisian musical salons, viewing them as crucial for performing his songs and chamber pieces, for cultivating influential patrons such as the Princesse de Polignac, Mme de Saint-Marceaux, and Countess Greffulhe, and for connecting with creative people, such as Marcel Proust and Camille Saint-Saëns. He wrote *Élégie* in 1880, intending it to appear as the slow movement of a new cello sonata. But the sonata never saw the light of day. *Élégie* was therefore published independently in January 1883 and officially premiered at the Société Nationale de Musique in December 1883, with Fauré accompanying the cellist, Jules Loeb. Fauré later recast the movement for cello and orchestra and performed it with Pablo Casals in April 1901.

Quint and Volodin capture the essence of this remarkable score. Quint gives the famous opening melody the dark, somber tone that it deserves, while Volodin supports him perfectly with persistent eighth note chords in the piano. The two players then interact with each other to perfection in the contrasting middle section, skillfully trading off the complex syncopated rhythmic patterns. Their performance of the violent cadenza-like section is superbly forceful and virtuosic. Having allowed the piece to reach a brilliant climax, the duo end with the same sense of pathos with which it began. The emotional arc of *Élégie* is articulated perfectly.

Just as *Nocturne et Scherzo* was probably based on a lost piece by Debussy for violin and piano, so *Pièce en Forme de Habanera* for cello and piano by Maurice Ravel (1875–1937) was heir to a two-piano piece entitled "Habanera" that was composed in 1895, published in the set *Sites auriculaires*, and premiered by Marthe Dron and Ricardo Viñes on behalf of the Société Nationale de Musique on March 5, 1898. The

habanera is a Cuban dance that became especially popular in Paris after the success of Bizet's opera *Carmen* (1875). A decade after completing "Habanera," Ravel returned to the dance's duple rhythms, distinctive ostinato patterns, and sensuous melodic writing in the third movement of his orchestral score *Rapsodie espagnole* (1907–1908) and in a separate piece entitled *Vocalise-Étude* (1907), which he later recast as *Pièce en Forme de Habanera* for cello and piano.

As with the works by Debussy and Fauré for cello and piano, Ravel's habanera stands out for its intense melodic writing, which is so ideally suited to the cello. It evokes the intricate melodic arabesques that are so typical of Spanish folk music. Ravel's mother, who was of Basque heritage, grew up in Madrid and sang vernacular songs to him during his childhood. In their superb performance, Quint and Volodin convey the brooding intensity of Ravel's score to perfection. Quint highlights the soulful nature of the melodic line in a way that verges on the style of cante jondo. Volodin's accompaniment provides a vivid backdrop, rich in carefully graded tone colors. The rapid changes in texture are thrilling and reveal, yet again, the consummate mastery of the two performers.

Although the lyrical qualities of "The Swan" from *Carnival of the Animals* by Camille Saint-Saëns (1835–1921) rival those of "Clair de lune," *Élégie*, and *Pièce en Forme de Habanera*, the movement's purpose was utterly different and underscores the vital role chamber music played and continues to play in the training of classical musicians. Saint-Saëns apparently wrote the fourteen-movement suite in a small Austrian village in February 1886 following a disastrous concert tour of Germany. He reportedly wanted to write something "amusing" for his students at the École Niedermeyer de Paris and was adamant that it would not be published in his lifetime for fear that it might erode his reputation as a "serious" composer. But the work was performed at a private concert given by the cellist Charles Lebouc on 3 March 1886 and "The Swan" was published in 1887 in arrangement for cello and one piano.

The work was subsequently performed at semi-private events hosted by various chamber societies, such as La Trompette, wealthy patrons, such as Pauline Viardot, and on programs presented during the festival of Mi-Carême. In this exquisite recording, Misha Quint and Alexei Volodin convey the intimate beauty and poignancy of Saint-Saëns's iconic work. With a full rich tone and carefully controlled rubato, Quint's cello part evokes a magnificent white bird, while Volodin's shimmering piano arpeggios show it gliding gracefully over tranquil waters. The duo leaves no doubt that the movement is a "swan song," that final refrain sung just before death.

Franck: Sonata for Cello and Piano in A Major

Richard Brasier

One could argue that César Franck's legacy as a composer rests on three major works, all of which were composed during his final years: the Sonata for Piano and Violin (1886), the Symphony in D minor (1886–88) and the posthumously published Three Chorals for Organ (1890). The Sonate pour Piano et Violon is one of César Franck's best-known compositions and is widely regarded as one of the finest sonatas of its kind ever written.

Following a performance of the sonata in Paris on 27 December 1887, Jules Delsart, a cellist who had participated in the performance as part of a quartet, was so enthusiastic that he asked Franck for permission to arrange the violin part for cello. In a letter to his cousin, Claire Brissaud, presumably written shortly afterwards, Franck mentioned: 'Mr Delsart is now working on a cello arrangement of the sonata.' There is no doubt that Franck consented to this arrangement, given that the piano part remained unchanged. Around 1888, the renowned publishing house Hamelle did not publish the arrangement as a separate edition but enclosed the cello part with its own plate number in the score. César Franck probably did not object to the reference to Delsart on the title page, given that he gave copies to friends and acquaintances, sometimes inscribing them.

A comparison of the two solo parts shows that Delsart remained faithful to the original and generally limited himself to transposing the violin part to a lower register. There are

only a few exceptions where Delsart adapted the music to the cello's technical playing conditions. Delsart's arrangement of Franck's sonata for piano and cello has become one of the beloved sonatas in the instrument's repertoire. However, according to Eugène Ysaÿe, Franck had told him that the sonata was originally intended for violin or cello, and that a version for cello in Franck's own hand exists. Although such a manuscript has yet to materialize, a study of Franck's catalogue of works confirms that he did indeed plan to write a stand-alone cello sonata in 1890, the year of his death.

Not only does Franck's Sonata illustrate his role as a leading exponent of the French Romantic tradition and his influence on later composers, it also reflects the flourishing of Parisian musical life. For performers, it is a cornerstone of the Romantic chamber music repertoire, demanding technical mastery and expressive sensitivity. For listeners, it offers a profound emotional journey, ranging from lyrical tenderness to passionate intensity, and is widely regarded as one of the most moving sonatas of the nineteenth century.

The sonata is built on cyclic form, meaning themes recur across multiple movements, binding the work together into a unified whole. This was a hallmark of Franck's style and influenced later composers like Debussy and Ravel. Composed across four movements, *Allegretto ben moderato* is lyrical and flowing; *Allegro* contains dramatic contrasts and virtuosity; *Recitativo-Fantasia* is improvisatory with free-form dialogue, and *Allegro poco mosso* sees a cyclical return of earlier themes.

This recording by Misha Quint and Alexei Volodin is a welcome addition to the catalogue of Franck's sonata recordings. It is a striking performance of a piece that requires technical and musical cohesion between the pianist and cellist. The strength of the phrasing and the nuanced shaping of the cello part, coupled with the dynamic piano playing, demonstrate the fine musicianship of both performers very well. Quint and Volodin have captured the essence of César Franck, the man and the musician, with authority, which is not at all easy to achieve.

Engaging with the César Franck Sonata—whether in its violin or cello form—means encountering a masterpiece that embodies Romantic ideals of passion, innovation, and unity. It's not just a technical showpiece, but a work that continues to inspire musicians and audiences with its emotional depth and structural brilliance. The works dual identity makes the piece a rare example of Romantic repertoire that bridges two instrumental traditions.

Misha Quint

Misha Quint's artistry arises from a synthesis of the Russian instrumental tradition and the interpretive openness of contemporary musical culture. Celebrated by Harris Goldsmith as a "brilliantly accomplished virtuoso—an embodiment of interpretive and executive music-making at its rarefied best," Quint brings to the cello repertoire a command in which technical mastery and musical insight are inseparable.

At the heart of his repertoire stands the Austro-German tradition—above all Brahms, Beethoven, and Schumann—music that calls for both architectural strength and inward lyricism. Quint's interpretations are shaped by long-breathed phrasing, finely graded dynamic contours, and a singing cantabile that allows formal processes to unfold with natural inevitability. His virtuosity functions not as display, but as a vehicle for clarity of line, elasticity of rhythm, and expressive intensity. This same sensibility informs his engagement with Russian modernism and with composers such as Alfred Schnittke, Sofia Gubaidulina, and Krzysztof Penderecki, whose works demand acute timbral imagination and fearless technical range.

Born in Leningrad, Quint received his formative training under Daniil Shafran, Boris Pergamenschikow, and Natalia Gutman, a lineage that shaped his approach to tone production, bow articulation, and expressive rhetoric. Following his relocation to the United States, he established an international career as both soloist and chamber musician, appearing at major venues like Carnegie Hall and Avery Fisher Hall in New York, Queen Elizabeth Hall in London, and Leningrad Philharmonic Halls in Russia and festivals throughout Europe and the Americas.

Alexei Volodin

Acclaimed for his highly sensitive touch and technical brilliance, Alexei Volodin is one of today's most distinguished pianists, admired for an exceptionally broad repertoire spanning Beethoven and Brahms through Rachmaninov, Prokofiev, Scriabin, Shchedrin and Medtner.

Highlights of the 2025/26 season include concerto and recital appearances across Europe, Asia and North America, with performances in Canada, Israel, Greece, Japan, Spain, the Czech Republic and Taiwan. His recital engagements include Vilnius, Winnipeg, Beijing's NCPA and Shanghai Concert Hall.

Volodin has appeared with leading orchestras such as the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal, BBC Symphony Orchestra, NHK Symphony Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, Antwerp Symphony Orchestra, Mariinsky Orchestra and St Petersburg Philharmonic, collaborating with conductors including Valery Gergiev, Semyon Bychkov and Stanislav Kochanovsky. He regularly performs in major venues including Carnegie Hall, Wigmore Hall, Wiener Konzerthaus, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, Paris' Philharmonie and the Mariinsky Theatre.

A dedicated chamber musician, Volodin collaborates with artists including Igor Levit, Claire Huangci and Sol Gabetta, and has worked with Janine Jansen, Julian Rachlin, Mischa Maisky and leading string quartets. Recent and current partners include Ilya Gringolts, Alban Gerhardt and Eldbjørg Hemsing.

His recordings include Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No.4 with Valery Gergiev for the Mariinsky label and award-winning solo albums featuring Chopin, Rachmaninov, Schumann, Ravel and Scriabin.

Born in Leningrad, Volodin studied at the Gnessin Academy, Moscow Conservatoire and the International Piano Academy Lake Como. He won the Géza Anda Competition in 2003 and is an exclusive Steinway Artist.

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Album Artwork: **Denise Burt**
Photography: **Alexander Von Busch**
Liner Notes: **Richard Brasier, Matthew Brown**
Recorded at Jardin Musical, Brussels, 2024

The cover design takes inspiration from Verlaine's poem "Clair de lune", especially from the last part:

With the calm moonlight, sad and lovely,
Which makes the birds dream in the trees,
And the plumes of the fountains weep in ecstasy
The tall, slender plumes of the fountains among the marble sculptures.

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