

The NAXOS logo is a blue square with the word "NAXOS" in white, serif, all-caps font. Above the text are three stylized white columns.

BARBER DOHNÁNYI POULENC Cello Sonatas

Andreas Brantelid, Cello
Søren Rastogi, Piano





Photo: Ettore Causa

Samuel Barber • Ernő Dohnányi • Francis Poulenc

Cello Sonatas

The three sonatas on this album are each the product of pianist-composers yet reflect a strong affinity between them and the cello.

Francis Poulenc (1899–1963) was a fluent writer of chamber music, particularly in the form of the instrumental sonata, where he followed the example set by Debussy. Yet while Poulenc's sonatas for wind instruments with piano – flute, clarinet and oboe – have proved highly successful in the concert hall and on record, the success of those for violin and cello have proved less forthcoming. Poulenc struggled with the composition of his *Violin Sonata*, making at least four attempts until it was finished in 1943. By that time, he was underway with the *Cello Sonata* but smarting from his struggles and negative press. Building from musical material associated with the ballet *Les Animaux modèles*, the *Cello Sonata* had a fragmented form until 1948. At this point Poulenc enlisted the help of Pierre Fournier, confessing his 'admiration and affection' for the cellist who enabled him to finish the piece. It was Fournier who gave the first performance with Poulenc at the piano at the Salle Gaveau in Paris on 18 May 1949.

The work follows the precedent of Beethoven's cello sonatas with both instruments receiving equal attention. The first movement begins with a bright call to arms, marked *Tempo di Marcia*, with a limpid second theme introduced by the piano. The movement has an airy if often reflective dialogue, acquiring a shadowy profile in the slow movement, where a deeply felt outpouring and sombre response are reminders of the work's wartime composition date. The *Ballabile* finds the cello light on its feet, before the finale begins with an emphatic double-stopped fanfare from the cello. The hushed response, an eerie aside of harmonics, raises brief doubts, before the music is sent tripping on its way with lively dialogue. The fanfare returns to close out the sonata convincingly.

Samuel Barber (1910–1981) encountered the cello in his early twenties, playing the piano with cellist Domenico Menotti in performances of sonatas by Beethoven and Brahms in Italy in 1931. Menotti was the elder brother of composer Gian Carlo Menotti, who became Barber's lifelong partner. When Barber returned to Italy the following year he began to write his own sonata, with a musical language reflecting his studies at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, where he had been based since 1925. Barber's teacher of composition, Rosario Scalero, became the dedicatee of the piece and would no doubt have appreciated its close links with Brahms through passionate declamations from the cello and meaningful counterpoint from the piano. On his return to the United States Barber completed the work in consultation with Orlando Cole, a fellow student at the institute who would become an esteemed cello teacher. Cole and Barber gave an enthusiastically received first performance in Philadelphia, before the League of Composers presented them in the sonata's official premiere in New York on 5 March 1933.

The *Cello Sonata*'s home key of C minor is a fitting base for a piece with a stormy countenance, the two instruments closely linked in quick moving counterpoint powered by the deep tone of the cello's lower strings, as it often is in the two Brahms cello sonatas. The prayerful second theme of the first movement offers repose, but Barber's rich melodic lines soon reassert themselves, with virtuoso writing for both instruments keeping the music at high voltage. The capricious second movement alternates between a pensive *Adagio* theme from the cello and a whirring *Presto* section, before the finale revisits the turbulent waters of the first movement, expansive lines from the cello complemented by a dreamy piano theme.

Hungarian composer and pianist Ernő Dohnányi (1877–1960) completed his early *Cello Sonata* in 1899, the year of Poulenc's birth. Although primarily associated with the piano, Dohnányi wrote a number of important works for stringed instruments, with two concertos and a sonata for the violin and a *Konzertstück* for cello and orchestra, completed in 1904. His writing for cello was no doubt strengthened by his father's position as a keen amateur cellist, though ultimately the *Cello Sonata* was dedicated to Austrian cellist and composer Ludwig Lebell, who gave the first performance with Dohnányi late that year.

The sonata makes the unusual choice of B flat minor for its home key, but this proves an ideal setting for the bare statement in octaves with which the work begins. Soon the instruments yield to imposing musical material and flowing counterpoint, the influence of Brahms deeply felt as Dohnányi moves between tense standoffs and irrepressible faster passages.

The *Scherzo* relocates to G minor, a coiled spring with tense tremolo figures from the cello and a fast sequence of piano figurations, relenting for a hymn-like trio. The third movement provides more lasting calm, with a beautiful slow descending line from the piano to which the cello responds with an arching melody. Dohnányi sets up the final movement without a break, flitting between B flat minor and major with a theme and nine variations that share the character and key of Brahms' *Piano Concerto No. 2*. The mood shifts between a jubilant third variation, with big piano chords and scurrying cello, a twinkling sixth variation and a seventh recalling the feverish *Scherzo*. The penultimate variation makes a prayerful plea back in the minor key, before this deeply Romantic work ends with a triumphal final variation.

Ben Hogwood



Photo: Ida Wang

Andreas Brantelid



Andreas Brantelid was born in Copenhagen in 1987 to Swedish/Danish parents. After receiving early tuition from his father, he made his debut as a soloist at the age of 14 with the Royal Danish Orchestra. Today, Brantelid is one of the most sought-after Scandinavian artists, winning worldwide critical acclaim for his thought-provoking interpretations, uniquely colourful sound and engaging personality. Brantelid has previously released albums on labels such as Proprius, EMI and BIS, with acclaimed releases on Naxos including *Russian Tales* (8.573985) and *Times of Transition* (8.574365). Brantelid plays the 1707 'Boni-Hegar' Stradivarius, which has been made available to him by the generous support of Norwegian art collector Christen Sveaas.

Søren Rastogi



Photo: Klavs Kehlet Hansen

Søren Rastogi is one of Denmark's most versatile concert pianists. A consummate soloist and sought-after recital partner, he is a frequent guest at chamber music festivals, and together with his wife, cellist Janne Fredens, is co-artistic director of the Odsherred Kammermusikfestival. He also collaborates with the Danish National Vocal Ensemble as both pianist and musical director. Rastogi's discography includes the world premiere recording of Klenau's *Piano Concerto* (Dacapo Records), *Visiting Grieg* with baritone Johannes Weisser (Simax Classics) and *Upheaval* with Janne Fredens (OUR Recordings). Rastogi is associate professor at the Royal Academy of Music, Aarhus, and serves as chairman of the jury for the Aarhus International Piano Competition.

The artists wish to thank the following sponsors



AUGUSTINUS FONDEN

STIFTET 25. MARTS 1942

William
Demant | Fonden



Francis Poulenc was a fluent writer of sonatas for solo wind instruments with piano, but, after some difficulties in completing the *Cello Sonata*, he enlisted the help of the work's dedicatee, Pierre Fournier, who enabled him to finish the piece. Samuel Barber's stormy *Cello Sonata* has close links with Brahms through its passionate declamations from the cello and meaningful counterpoint in the piano. The influence of Brahms is also deeply felt in Ernő Dohnányi's *Cello Sonata* with its tense standoffs, beautiful lines and jubilant conclusion.

Francis Poulenc (1899–1963)

Cello Sonata, FP 143

(1948)

21:54

1 I. Allegro – Tempo di Marcia

5:40

2 II. Cavatine (Lent)

6:16

3 III. Ballabile (Très animé)

3:26

4 IV. Final (Lent – Presto)

6:32

Ernő Dohnányi (1877–1960)

Cello Sonata in B flat minor,

Op. 8 (1899)

23:47

8 I. Allegro ma non troppo

7:30

9 II. Scherzo: Vivace assai

4:37

10 III. Adagio non troppo –

2:29

11 IV. Tema con variazioni:

Allegro moderato

9:11

Samuel Barber (1910–1981)

Cello Sonata, Op. 6 (1932)

16:22

5 I. Allegro ma non troppo

7:16

6 II. Adagio

3:35

7 III. Allegro appassionato

5:31

Andreas Brantelid, Cello

Søren Rastogi, Piano

Recorded: 7–8 December 2024 **5–11**, 28–29 June 2025 **1–4**

at Studiescenen, Royal Danish Academy of Music, Copenhagen, Denmark

Producer, engineer and editor: Daniel Davidsen • Booklet notes: Ben Hogwood

Publishers: Heugel **1–4**, G. Schirmer, Inc. **5–7**, Schott **8–11** • Cover photo by Ida Wang

© & © 2026 Naxos Denmark ApS • www.naxos.dk