

Duo Virtuoso



Murasaki Duo
Eric Kutz, cello
Miko Kominami, piano



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Duo Virtuoso

1. Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco:
"Figaro" from Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* (5:23)
2. Bohuslav Martinu:
Variations on a Theme from Rossini's *Moses*, H. 290 (7:41)
3. Alberto Ginastera:
Pampeana No. 2, Op. 21 (9:07)
4. Astor Piazzolla:
Le Grand Tango (11:13)
- 5-7. Johannes Brahms:
Cello Sonata No. 1 in E minor, Op. 38 (25:46)

Total time: 59:10

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Cello Sonata No. 1 in E minor, Op. 38 (25:46)
5. Allegro non troppo (13:49)
 6. Allegretto quasi menuetto (5:22)
 7. Allegro (6:35)

Total time: 59:10



Castelnuovo-Tedesco: *Figaro* from Rossini's *Barber of Seville*

Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1895-1968) was an Italian composer of Jewish extraction who was born and raised in Florence. He obtained degrees in piano and composition from conservatories in Florence and Bologna, and he later became a leading musical writer and critic of the 1920s and 1930s. Castelnuovo-Tedesco was one of the first victims of Benito Mussolini's artistic purges. His performances and radio broadcasts were banned in 1938, six months before the passage of anti-Semitic laws. In 1939 he immigrated to the United States with his family, and shortly thereafter began a long association with the MGM movie studio, for whom he 'ghost-wrote' the music to approximately 250 films. From 1940 he was a faculty member at the Los Angeles Conservatory of Music, later the California Institute of the Arts. He was one of the most sought-after composers of film music of his generation; his students include Henry Mancini and John Williams. He remained close to his native Italy, journeying home many times for premieres of his works. He died in Beverly Hills, California.

Castelnuovo-Tedesco's *Figaro* of 1945 is one of several works he dedicated to the great Russian cellist Gregor Piatagorsky (1903-1976). *Figaro* is based on the famous aria "Largo al factotum" from Rossini's *Barber of Seville*. The cello part is little altered from the vocal line of the aria (aside from highly virtuosic octave transposition). The piano writing, on the other hand, departs considerably from the original. In this way Castelnuovo-Tedesco's true imprint as a composer is imparted on the earlier work: his use of abundant counterpoint, parallel chords in the manner of the French Impressionists, and polytonal blocks of harmony. The selection of the aria in the first place highlights another major animating force in Castelnuovo-Tedesco's music—his interest in Italian music of earlier eras.

Martinu: Variations on a Theme from Rossini's *Moses*, H. 290

Bohuslav Martinu (1890-1959) is considered the most important Czech composer of the second half of the twentieth century. His identity as a Czech was life-long, although after 1923 he never resided in his homeland. Martinu's upbringing in

the small market town of Policka was unusual; his family lived in quarters high in a church bell tower, where his father supplemented his income as a cobbler with ringing bells for services and also as fire lookout for the surrounding forests. Despite his relative isolation, Martinu's talent on the violin was recognized at an early age and he was sent to Prague for musical schooling. He failed out of school after one term but soon passed the state teaching examination and made a living during the First World War teaching violin. He was profoundly influenced by a performance he heard of Debussy's *Pelleas et Melisande*, and at the age of 20 had his first major outpouring of compositions. In 1923 Martinu journeyed to Paris, where he spent the next 18 years. During this period he absorbed the multitude of musical influences available, which ranged from Stravinsky to American Jazz. After the outbreak of war in 1939, Martinu helped numerous Czech refugees escape to Paris. For this activity he was blacklisted after the German invasion, and fled to the United States in 1941.

Martinu's *Variations on a Theme from Rossini's Moses* is the second work on this

compact disc written for cellist Gregor Piatagorsky, who premiered the work in 1943. The theme of Rossini in this case is a degree removed from Martinu's composition. In 1819, violinist Nicolo Paganini composed a fantasy on the aria 'Dal tuo stellato soglio' from Rossini's *Moses*. In the fantasy, meant to be played entirely on the violin's G string, Paganini begins with the aria proper and then transforms it into a rather jaunty march, which itself then becomes the subject for three subsequent variations. It is this march of Paganini's which Martinu uses as the theme of his own *Variations*. Four variations follow; they are derived from small fragments of the theme which undergo ingenious permutations. At times, snippets of the original theme intrude, virtually unaltered. A slower Andante third variation dissolves into a mysterious improvisatory cadenza for the piano, which then sets up the final variation: a frenetic tour-de-force. A triumphant return of the opening theme concludes the work.

Ginastera: Pampeana No. 2, Op. 21

Alberto Ginastera (1916-1983) is regarded as the greatest of Argentina's classical com-

posers. Born and raised in Buenos Aires, he also studied for a time with Aaron Copland in the United States.

Musicologists typically divide Ginastera's compositions into three periods; the *Pampeana No. 2* (1950) belongs to the second of these. At this time Ginastera abandoned his earlier practice of directly incorporating folk melodies into his compositions, and instead attempted to portray archetypal nationalistic elements in a new, original Argentine style. Ginastera wrote three *Pampeanas*; the first is for violin and piano, and the third is for orchestra. A *Pampeana* naturally is about the *Pampas*—the vast grassland that occupies northern Argentina, Uruguay, and southern Brazil. The piece is in a free, rhapsodic form that contains three main sections. One can perhaps hear the fierce and awesome traits of an untamed land in the music: music that soars, laments, and dances wildly, all in close proximity.

Piazzolla: Le Grand Tango

Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992) was the most famous composer of tangos and is widely credited with revitalizing the

genre. Born in Argentina, at the age of three his family emigrated to New York City, where Piazzolla first became noted as a child prodigy on the *bandoneon*, the accordion-like instrument inextricably linked to Argentine Tango. After study in Paris with Nadia Boulanger, Piazzolla returned to Argentina and began writing what he called 'nuevo tango,' which included expanded instrumentation, dissonance, and counterpoint. While this new style was accepted readily elsewhere, it initially received a cold reception in Argentina. By the 1980's, however, Argentines had come to embrace the new style, and Piazzolla's contribution to the genre was widely recognized.

Piazzolla wrote *Le Grand Tango* for the great Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich in 1982. But having not heard of the composer, Rostropovich did not look at the score for eight years. Piazzolla finally heard his work premiered in Buenos Aires in 1990. The piece is actually three tangos, in a slow-fast-slow ternary form. The imitative counterpoint, creative and free use of dissonance, and melodic inspiration are all hallmarks of Piazzolla's mature style. The final tango forms the

work's climax, building to a repeated ostinato in the piano's left hand and the cello, while the right hand flies about the keyboard fancifully and passionately.

Brahms: Sonata No. 1 in E minor, Op. 38

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) was arguably the greatest composer of chamber music to follow Beethoven. His output is impressive and varied, and it spans his entire creative career. While the differences between Brahms on the one hand, and Richard Wagner and his disciples on the other, may seem quaint now at such a distance, what remains clear is that for Wagner and the "New Germans," chamber music was not the music of the future. It was left to Robert Schumann, and later and more prominently to Brahms, to carry forward the mantle of serious chamber music at a time when it was no longer the music of the concert hall or the aristocratic drawing room.

Brahms initially composed three movements of his first Cello Sonata in 1862. He later discarded the slow movement (although a copy of it was likely extant until the 1930's), and added the final

Fugue in 1865 at the behest of a cellist friend. This extended gestation may explain the work's rather unusual structure: a broadly-paced, expansive first movement, followed by a much shorter, deliberately 'antique' Minuet, and concluding with an almost unrelenting fugal Finale. Brahms' fascination with older music is well documented, and in this Sonata he pays homage to Bach in the main themes of the outer movements, both of which bear a striking resemblance to different parts of Bach's unfinished final work, the *Art of the Fugue*.

— Eric Kutz

The Murasaki Duo

Since its founding in 1996 at the Juilliard School, the **Murasaki Duo** has been dedicated to performing the literature for cello and piano as chamber music. Named in homage to Lady Murasaki, the author of the world's first novel, cellist **Eric Kutz** and pianist **Miko Kominami** weave their instruments' voices together in a unique and compelling equal partnership. The Duo has performed throughout the United States and Canada, including concerts

in New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Toronto. In 2005 the Duo gave a six-concert tour of Scandinavia, which included performances in Copenhagen and Oslo.

Strong advocates for new music, the Murasaki Duo actively commissions new works, in addition to performing the classics. Its first compact disc—featuring works of Beethoven, Chopin, and Rachmaninoff—was recommended by the *Journal of the Atlanta Audio Society* as “ebullient . . . brilliant throughout.” The Duo has been featured at leading festivals, such as the Niagara International Chamber Music Festival, the Malibu Coast Music Festival, the Icicle Creek Music Center, Cello an American Experience, and Lutheran Summer Music; their performances have been broadcast on public radio stations throughout the country. Since 2002 the Murasaki Duo has been Ensemble-in-Residence at Luther College, Decorah, Iowa.

Cellist **Eric Kutz** has captivated audiences across both North America and Europe. He has been on the Luther College faculty since 2002, where he maintains a

large cello studio. He is active as a teacher, a chamber musician, an orchestral musician, and a soloist. His diverse collaborations cut across musical styles, and have ranged from cellist Yo-Yo Ma to jazz great Ornette Coleman. As an orchestral musician, Mr. Kutz summers in Chicago as a member of the Grant Park Orchestra’s cello section. He has also appeared in the strings sections of the New York Philharmonic, Minnesota Orchestra, and Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra.

Mr. Kutz has traveled to the Tchaikovsky Conservatory in Moscow as a visiting artist, performing new chamber works by American composers. Other performance highlights include a tour of Germany and a concert in New York’s Avery Fisher Hall as part of Lincoln Center’s Mozart Bicentennial celebration. Mr. Kutz has premiered over two dozen works, and has been broadcast live on WQXR and WNYC (New York City) and WFMT (Chicago), as well as nationally on PBS television’s *Live from Lincoln Center*. Mr. Kutz holds degrees from the Juilliard School and Rice University. He performs on a cello by Raffaele Fiorini (Bologna, 1877).





Pianist **Miko Kominami** graduated from the Juilliard School, and currently enjoys a varied career on the faculty at Luther College as a chamber musician and as the Principal Keyboardist of Orchestra Iowa. She has concertized extensively throughout North America, including performances in New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Minneapolis, Boston, and Toronto, both as a soloist and a collaborative artist. As a concerto soloist, she has performed with Orchestra Iowa, Danbury Symphony, Kishwaukee Symphony, Malibu Coast Chamber Orchestra, and the Luther College Symphony.

Ms. Kominami gave her New York Solo Debut Recital at Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall in 1996, as a result of winning the Artists International Award. She was acclaimed by *New York Concert Review* as "both a virtuosic and a musicianly performer." Other awards include a Canada Council Arts Grant, and First Prize at the 1996 Concerto Soloists' Competition in Philadelphia. She has performed live on WFMT Chicago, as well as Public Radio Stations in Maine and Iowa. Ms. Kominami can also be heard on other recordings released by Delos, Innova, Centaur, and Fleur de Son Classics.

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