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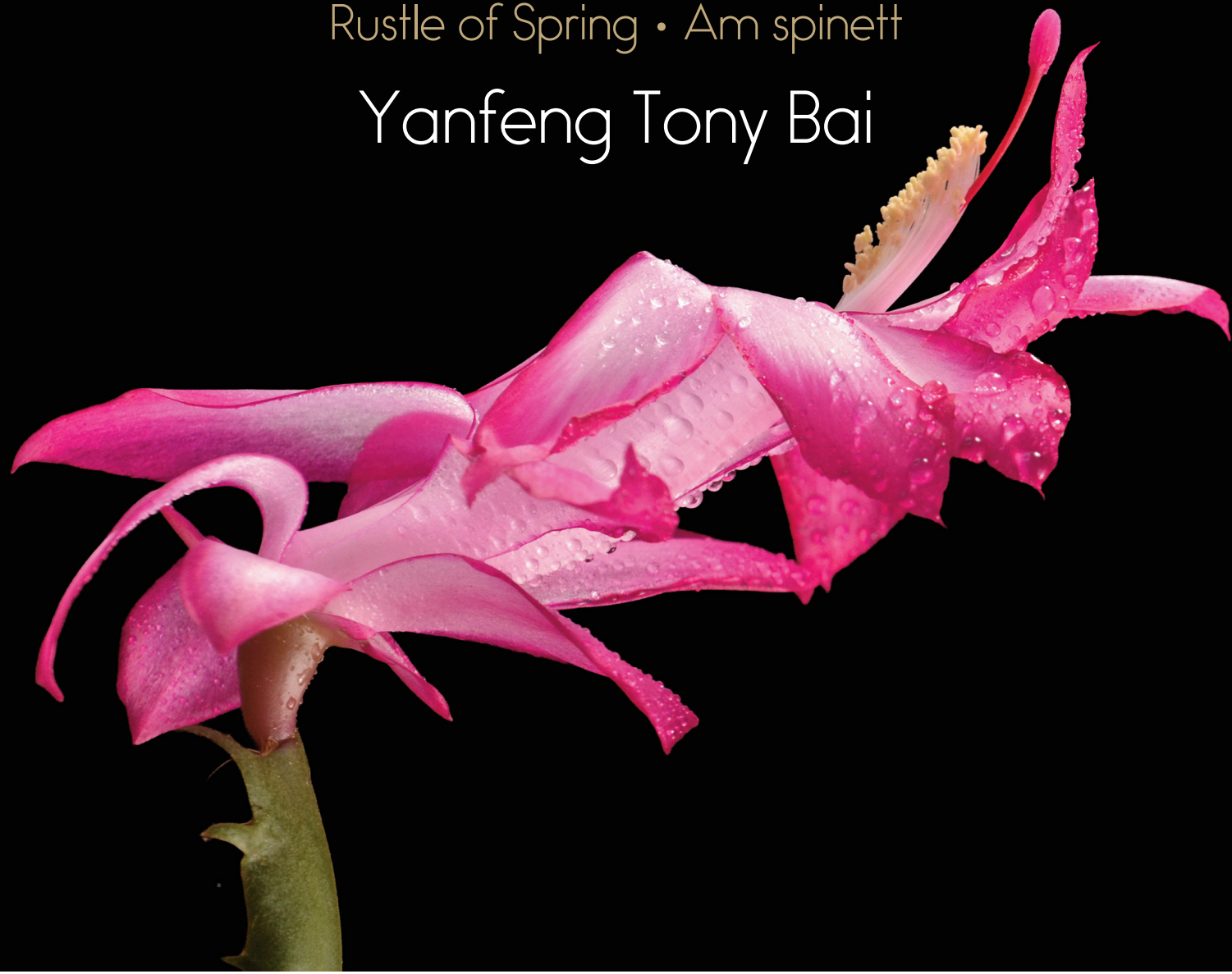
ROMANTIC PIANO

CHRISTIAN SINDING

Piano Works

Rustle of Spring • Am spinett

Yanfeng Tony Bai



Christian Sinding (1856–1941)

Christian (August) Sinding was born in Kongsberg, Norway, on 11 January 1856, and died in Oslo, Norway, on 3 December 1941.

Christian's father, Matthias Wilhelm Sinding, was a mining engineer who owned a sulphuric acid factory servicing the silver mines for which Kongsberg was known. When he died in 1860, Christian's mother Cecilie Marie Mejdell and her five children moved to Christiania (now Oslo) to be closer to relatives. Many family members were high achievers with Christian's brother Otto becoming an established artist, and brother Stephen an acknowledged sculptor. His sister Thora Catherine married her first cousin the jurist Glor Thorvald Mejdell, while his cousin Alfred Sinding-Larsen was a journalist and writer. Christian's uncles Nicolai Mejdell and Thorvald Mejdell were prominent in their respective fields of mining and forestry.

Unsurprisingly, Christian benefitted from some of Oslo's finest music teachers, including Gudbrand Bøhn (violin), Betzy Fischer (piano) and Ludvig Matthias Lindemann (organ and theory). For a time he played violin in The Philharmonic Society in Christiania with conductor Johan Svendsen. In 1874 he entered the Leipzig Conservatory, studying with Henry Schradiek (violin) and Salomon Jadassohn (theory and composition). During his four years there composition became his main focus, with the influence of Wagner and Liszt prevalent. However, despite regular performances of his works they were not particularly well received and many were destroyed through his avid self-criticism. Moving to Munich in 1882, Sinding began to receive more encouragement as a composer and scholarships from the Norwegian Government and private foundations supported his endeavours. Following further study in Dresden and Berlin he returned to Leipzig in 1886. There he met Russian violinist Adolph Brodsky and Italian composer Ferruccio Busoni, both of whom were decisive influences.

1889 proved a pivotal year with Brodsky and Busoni both playing in a performance of Sinding's *Piano Quintet* in Leipzig in January, and Norwegian pianist Erika Nissen performing his *Piano Concerto* in Berlin the following month. During the next three years the *Quintet* received 30 performances across Europe and America, and the *Piano Concerto* also established itself on the concert stage. Regular grants from the Norwegian government enabled him to build a successful composing career in Germany in the following years and his international reputation was sealed by the wildly popular *Frühlingsrauschen* ('Rustle of Spring') from his *Sechs Stücke, Op. 32* in 1896, although with copyright laws still undeveloped at the time he benefitted little financially from the enormous sales. In 1898 Sinding married actress Augusta Gade who had previously been married to physician and art patron Fredrik Geog Gade. In 1921 Sinding's *Third Symphony* was performed in Berlin by the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra under Arthur Nikisch, he taught at the Eastman School in Rochester, New York, USA, from 1921 to 1922, and in 1924 the Norwegian government granted him Grotten, a residence on the lands of Oslo's royal palace. Henceforth, this became his permanent home where supported by government grants, he could compose untrammelled by financial worries.

By this time Sinding was widely seen as Grieg's successor. His rich melodic gifts made him immensely popular, and he became a member of the Order of St Olav in 1905, a Commander in 1916 and was awarded the Grand Cross in 1938. Nevertheless, he did not encompass Norwegian folk-music in his compositions directly, as Grieg did. Instead, his more cosmopolitan musical outlook embraced the high Romanticism of Liszt and Wagner and was further marked by his empathy with the violin which ensured his remarkable melodic facility. Sinding's *oeuvre* stretches to Opus 132 and more than two thirds of this comprises piano music and songs. Of these the two collections of *Symra, Opp. 28* and *75* and the *Sange, Op. 18* have a special place. Some believe his best work was produced in earlier years where Wagner's influence appears freshly minted, such as his sole opera *Der heilige Berg, Op. 111* (1912), his *First Symphony, Op. 21* (1880–90) and his *Piano Concerto, Op. 6* (1889). Moreover Sinding did not progress his highly Romantic style to any large extent during his lifetime so that comments in 1889 about his piano quintet such as 'one cannot cease to voice one's admiration for this very important

musical talent that expresses itself, daring and individual everywhere' became in the 1920s 'Sinding readily absorbs outside influences without distinguishing between that which is worth imitation and that which is not.' In this context it must be said that some of Sinding's melodies sail perilously close to the Viennese Operetta style of fellow violinist Franz Lehár, whose works such as *The Merry Widow* enjoyed enormous popularity at the time. In the post-First World War period of Stravinsky and Prokofiev, Sinding's music must have sounded very outdated.

Despite these drawbacks the sheer melodiousness and elan of Sinding's music would undoubtedly have guaranteed the survival of more works but for a most unfortunate incident during the Second World War. He had suffered from severe dementia in his last years. Eight weeks before his death in 1941 he seemingly joined the Norwegian Nazi party, although his party card remained unsigned. It appears the party was desperately keen to recruit him given his immense popularity with both Norwegian and German audiences, although he had been clearly against the Nazi occupation of his country and had supported the cause of Jewish musicians during the 1930s. A generous verdict would surely have posthumously exonerated him in 1945 but generosity towards Nazi sympathisers was understandably in short supply at the time and he was not present to defend himself.

Am spinett, Op. 122 (1920)
This charming lightweight pastiche character piece mimics a musical box adding to the vision being evoked of a bewigged Baroque performance.

Frühlingsrauschen ('Rustle of Spring'), Op. 32, No 3 (1896)
Described somewhat unkindly as meretricious, Sinding's most successful score grew to define him in later years. He knew better than to tinker with one of his best themes and simply repeats it three times with a coda to finish.

Rodney Smith

Yanfeng Tony Bai


Photo: Victor Lee

Chinese pianist Yanfeng Tony Bai is a laureate of numerous international competitions, including the Olga Kern International Piano Competition, China Shenzhen International Piano Concerto Competition, International Grotrian Piano Competition and the China Central Television Piano Competition. An accomplished chamber musician, Bai is a founding member of Trio Azura. The trio was named Young Concert Artists' (YCA) inaugural Ensemble-in-Residence following the 2025 Susan Wadsworth International Auditions, and in 2024 it swept the board at the 51st Fischoff National Chamber Music Competition, winning the Grand Prize, Gold Medal, Lift Every Voice Prize and the Horszowski Trio Prize. Bai has performed with orchestras including the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, China Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestra Antonio Vivaldi and New Mexico Philharmonic, collaborating with conductors such as James Conlon and Miguel Harth-Bedoya. He has appeared across North America, Europe, Oceania and Asia, including at the Aspen Music Festival and Brisbane Festival. He is currently the chamber musician-in-residence at the Colburn Conservatory of Music and a YCA artist, and he completed his Artist Diploma at the Colburn School under Fabio Bidini.

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Norwegian composer Christian Sinding benefitted from some of Oslo's finest music teachers, later studying in Leipzig and encountering Ferruccio Busoni. With his rich melodic gifts Sinding became seen as Grieg's successor, though his music avoided Norwegian folk-music influences and looked more towards the high Romanticism of Liszt and Wagner. *Rustle of Spring*, Sinding's most famous score, came to define him in later years; *Am spinett* is a lightweight Baroque pastiche. Yanfeng Tony Bai's album of Sinding's *Fantaisies*, *Caprices* and the *Piano Sonata in B minor* is available on 8.574719.

Christian SINDING (1856–1941)

1	**Am spinett, Op. 122** (1918)	**3:51**
2	**6 Stücke, Op. 32 – No. 3. Frühlingsrauschen ('Rustle of Spring')** (1896)	**3:04**

Yanfeng Tony Bai, Piano

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