



ORCHID CLASSICS



DIALOGUE
DEBUSSY & SCHUMANN

Juliette Herlin, *cello* | Kevin Ahfat, *piano*

ORC100382

DIALOGUE: DEBUSSY & SCHUMANN

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

- 1 Liederkreis, Op.39 No.1 - In der Fremde 2.08

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

- 2 Nuit d'étoiles, CD 2 3.11

Robert Schumann

Fantasiestücke, Op.73

- 3 I Zart und mit Ausdruck 3.24
4 II Lebhaft, Leicht 3.43
5 III Rasch und mit Feuer 4.34

Claude Debussy

- 6 Romance - L'âme évaporée, CD 65 1.53

Robert Schumann

- 7 Liederkreis, Op.24 No.9 - Mit Myrten und Rosen 3.21

Claude Debussy

Cello Sonata in D Minor, CD 144

- 8 I Prologue 4.28
9 II Sérénade 3.31
10 III Finale 3.38

Robert Schumann

Adagio and Allegro in A Flat Major, Op.70

- 11 I Langsam, mit innigem Ausdruck 3.49
12 II Rasch und feurig 5.03

Claude Debussy

- 13 Beau soir, CD 84 2.23

- 14 Intermezzo, CD 40, No.1 5.19

Robert Schumann

Three Romances, Op.94

- 15 I Nicht schnell 3.38
16 II Einfach, innig 4.12
17 III Nicht schnell 4.32

Claude Debussy

- 18 Rêverie, CD 76 (Arr. Ronchini) 4.37

Total time

67.27

Juliette Herlin, cello

Kevin Ahfat, piano



The music of Debussy and Schumann has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. Schumann's song cycles have long been a favorite of mine, and for a period in my youth, I listened to some of them almost daily. Debussy has been the focus of my father's work in musicology, which, in turn, established Debussy as another central figure who helped shape my musical upbringing. For my debut album, I wanted to return to the origins of my identity as a musician and to the composers who have inspired me deeply.

Dialogue: Debussy & Schumann is also a double portrait of two composers whose artistic kinship – transcending time, nation, and instrumentation – has long been overlooked. This album features original works as well as transcriptions for cello and piano. While some compositions may be familiar to avid listeners of the cello repertoire, others are likely new. What all these pieces share is the two composers' pursuit of a musical language defined by deep introspection, lyrical expression, and fantasy.

In collaboration with pianist Kevin Ahfat, I invite you to experience Debussy and Schumann's intimate dialogue and hope their intertwining musical worlds resonate with you as deeply as they have with me.

Juliette Herlin



While Claude Debussy (1862–1918) is frequently associated with Frédéric Chopin, his connection to Robert Schumann (1810–1856) is far less often recognized. Yet Debussy held Schumann's music in high regard, so much so that he transcribed the *Six Studies for Pedal Piano* for two pianos, as well as *À la fontaine*, originally a four-hand piece, for solo piano. One of Debussy's close friends, the writer Louis Laloy, had already drawn parallels between the two in 1904, evoking a “link between the author of *Dichterliebe* and the subtle musician of the *Ariettes*

oublées." Their shared affinity for the art song set to poetry – whether *Lieder* or *mélodies* – the blend of introspection and fantasy in their music, as well as their sound worlds filled with mystery and depth, are so many bonds that unite the composers' musical universes. Both Debussy and Schumann's chamber music output is concentrated in relatively brief creative periods. Schumann composed the majority of his chamber works in 1842 and 1849. And aside from a few youthful works, Debussy devoted himself to the genre primarily between 1915 and 1917. For both, the blossoming of chamber works coincided with a "prolific year," as biographers often put it, when each composer rekindled a surge of creative energy.

Schumann's *Fantasiestücke*, Op.73, and *Adagio and Allegro*, Op.70, were conceived between February 11 and 17, 1849. Initially titled *Soiréestücke* ("Evening Pieces"), the *Fantasiestücke*, Op.73, while designed to showcase the registers of the clarinet, can also be performed on the violin or cello. The three pieces form a continuous set, as indicated by the "attacca" markings at the end of the first two movements. Their character evolves from "Tender and expressive" (*Zart und mit Ausdruck*) to "Fast and fiery" (*Rasch mit Feuer*), passing through a "Lively and light" (*Lebhaft, leicht*) middle section. The musical form recalls that of the *Lieder ohne Worte* (Songs Without Words) for solo piano, a genre in which Mendelssohn had excelled throughout his life. Schumann had barely completed the *Fantasiestücke* before launching, with equal enthusiasm, into the composition of *Adagio and Allegro* for piano and horn on February 14, drafting a first version in a single day. Completed by February 17, these two pieces are equally suited to the violin or cello. The opening *Adagio*, originally titled *Romance*, unfolds with a sense of intimate expressiveness in stark contrast to the subsequent *Allegro*'s passionate and impetuous energy.

Like the preceding two cycles, the *Drei Romanzen*, Op.94, were also composed in the span of a few days, between December 7 and 12, 1849. They return to the

spirit of the *Lied ohne Worte*, developing an intimate song imbued with emotion, simplicity, and introspection. Finally, Juliette Herlin has adapted two *Lieder* from the *Liederkreis* for cello. Remaining within the realm of vocality, the two cycles were composed in 1840: Op. 24, set to nine poems by Heinrich Heine, and the second, Op.39, based on twelve poems by Joseph von Eichendorff. Each *Lied* evokes a distinct atmosphere. *Mit Myrthen und Rosen* ("With Myrtles and Roses"), which concludes Op.24 with a message of hope, was warmly received by Clara Schumann, who described the *Liederkreis* as "a true treasure." *In der Fremde* ("In a Foreign Land"), the opening *Lied* of Op. 39, conveys nostalgia with a melodic line, gently accompanied by piano arpeggios, steeped in melancholy.

In his youth, Debussy composed a handful of chamber works, including the *Intermezzo*. The genesis of this piece remains mysterious as it was often confused with an orchestral work of the same name, which the young composer wrote in Guiraud's class in 1882, drawing its theme from the forty-third poem of Heine's *Lyrisches Intermezzo*. The only known manuscript, once owned by the cellist Gregor Piatigorsky, bears neither date nor signature. However, its highly refined style suggests that the *Intermezzo* for cello and piano dates from the same period as the song *Séguidille*, composed between 1883 and 1884, if only due to their shared Spanish character. Finally, it remains unknown for whom Debussy intended this work. One possible recipient could have been the cellist Danilchenko, with whom he spent summers at Madame von Meck's retreats during the 1880s.

The three other works by Debussy (*L'Âme évaporée*, *Beau soir*, *Rêverie*), two of which have been transcribed by Juliette Herlin, were all composed in 1891, four years after the composer's return from the Villa Medici. The first two originate from *mélodies* inspired by *Aveux*, a collection of poems by Paul Bourget published by Lemerre in 1882. In *L'Âme évaporée*, Debussy displays a particular poetic sensitivity, notably in the shift in color between the two stanzas,



highlighted by a more fluid piano writing and a major-key illumination. As for *Beau soir*, this *mélodie* represents a peak in Debussy's early style: the depth and suppleness of its harmonies, which shift in color according to the meaning of the text, the suspension of time, and the rhythmic interweaving that envelops the melodic line. Although published in 1905 and transcribed by Ferdinando Ronchini in 1914, *Rêverie* for piano dates from the same period. While Debussy expressed some reservations about its belated publication, this piece, with its great freshness, possesses an undeniable melodic charm.

With the exception of his *String Quartet*, composed in 1892–1893, Debussy set aside chamber music for many years, only returning to the genre near the end of his life. Written in the summer of 1915 in Pourville, three years before his death, the *Sonata for Cello and Piano* was intended as the first of a cycle of six sonatas for various instruments. Only three came to fruition. In revisiting chamber music, Debussy created a work which, despite its playful second movement, is nonetheless infused with deep nostalgia. The creative difficulties he had faced since late 1913, including the outbreak of World War I and the suffering caused by his cancer, had plunged him into immense despair. Confronted with such turmoil, Debussy envisioned this sonata as a response to Germanic influence, while also seeking to revive the French musical spirit of the eighteenth century – a model, in his eyes, of concision and clarity, as he noted in an August 1915 letter: "It is not my place to judge its excellence, but I love its proportions and its form, almost classical in the best sense of the term."

Denis Herlin

Juliette Herlin

Cello

Praised for her "impressive artistry" and "wonderful bowing technique" (San Francisco Classical Voice), French cellist Juliette Herlin has performed across the U.S., Europe, Asia, and South America. As a soloist, chamber musician, and recitalist, she has appeared in prestigious venues such as the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.; Alice Tully Hall in New York; the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées and the Musée du Louvre in Paris; as well as the Zhuhai and Chongqing Grand Theaters in China.

A winner of the Yamaha Music Foundation of Europe String Competition, Herlin has been invited to perform in renowned concert series and festivals, including the Chamber Music Society of Palm Beach, YellowBarn, Shenson Chamber Music Concerts, Shandalee Music Festival, Sundays Live at LACMA, the Chamber Music Society of Logan, Round Top Festival, Dame Myra Hess Memorial Concerts, the Festival International Violoncello León in Mexico, and the Festival Jeunes Talents in France. In 2018, she gave the North American premiere of Camille Saint-Saëns' newly discovered *Third Cello Sonata* with pianist Kevin Ahfat in a recital presented by Music Academy of the West.

An avid chamber musician, Herlin is the cellist of the Aletheia Piano Trio, alongside pianist Fei-Fei and violinist Francesca dePasquale. Formed in 2013 at the Juilliard School, the trio made its debut at the Rose Studio and Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center, as well as the Terrace Theater at the Kennedy Center. Since then, they have performed extensively across the U.S., made their Korean debut with the Beethoven Triple Concerto alongside the Gustav Mahler Orchestra, and toured China in 2018 and 2019, appearing in Poly Theatres throughout the country.

Herlin's performances are frequently featured on NPR's *Performance Today*, WFMT, KUSC, and France Musique. She studied with Ralph Kirshbaum at the

University of Southern California, Richard Aaron at the Juilliard School, and Jérôme Pernoo at Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris. In 2024, Herlin became a Bärenreiter Jubilee Ambassador.

Kevin Ahfat

Piano

An artist that "leaves no question about his riveting presentation and technical finesse" (Seattle Times), Canadian pianist Kevin Ahfat is acclaimed to be "poised to become one of the young heirs of the classical piano realm" (Vanguard Seattle). Possessing "a balanced mix of expressiveness and virtuosity" (Musical America), he "summons plenty of thunderpower in the big moments, but clearly values musicianship over mere showmanship" (American Record Guide).

Kevin was named of CBC Music's *30 hot Canadian classical musicians under 30* in 2018 and that same year was thrilled to give the North American Premiere of Camille Saint-Saëns' Third Sonata for Cello & Piano with French cellist Juliette Herlin. Kevin continues as a core member of the three-time Grammy-nominated ARC Ensemble, one of Canada's preeminent voices.

Kevin has had the privilege of sharing the stage with renowned artists across many genres, including Jean-Yves Thibaudet, Stefan Jackiw, Sonia Rodriguez, and SO Percussion. He has been broadcast globally and contributed to Yamaha Canada's *Dear Glenn* AI Project.

Kevin studied at Juilliard with Joseph Kalichstein and Stephen Hough and was in-residence as a Rebanks Fellow at the Royal Conservatory. He is Artistic Director of OPUS Chamber Music, Toronto's newest premier hub for chamber music.





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To Kevin, my artistic partner and dear friend for many years – thank you for your wonderful musicianship and camaraderie.

To Matt, whose magic in the studio and invaluable guidance helped bring this album to life – I am deeply grateful.

To Mike, for his brilliant eye and creativity, which added so much to this project.

To Orchid Classics, thank you for your enthusiasm and belief in this album.

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Finally, to my family – your help and unwavering support throughout this journey meant the world to me. I couldn't have done this without you.

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