

PROKOFIEV

Cello Concerto, Op. 58

Ballade, Op. 15 • Cello Sonata, Op. 119



Rohan de Saram

Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra / Anatole Fistoulari

Druvi de Saram *piano*

Sergey PROKOFIEV (1891–1953)		
	Cello Concerto in E minor, Op. 58 (1933–1938)	[37:08]
1	I. Andante –	[6:02]
2	II. Allegro giusto –	[14:07]
3	III. Allegro	[16:58]
	Rohan de Saram <i>cello</i>	
	Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra / Anatole Fistoulari	
4	Ballade for Cello and Piano in C minor, Op. 15 (1912)	[11:08]
	Sonata for Cello and Piano in C major, Op. 119 (1949)	[24:24]
5	I. Andante grave	[11:34]
6	II. Moderato	[4:52]
7	III. Allegro, ma non troppo	[7:47]
	Rohan de Saram <i>cello</i>	
	Druvi de Saram <i>piano</i>	
	Total Timing:	[72:47]

Live recordings, originally broadcast by Nederlandse Christelijke Radio-Vereniging (NCRV)
Recorded: VARA Concert Studio, Hilversum, Netherlands, 26 April 1972 [1–3], 27 April 1972 [4];
NCRV Studio, Hilversum, Netherlands, 14 April 1971 [5–7]
Remastered by John Croft (Chairo Audio) Transferred and remastered in 24bit, 96kHz high-resolution

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Sergey PROKOFIEV (1891–1953) Cello Concerto · Ballade · Cello Sonata

This release brings together Rohan de Saram's performances of three works which feature the cello by Sergey Prokofiev (1891–1953), a composer best known for his ballets and symphonic works but who was also encouraged to write for several of the leading instrumentalists of his day. The most productive such collaboration from his later years was with the young Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich, for whom Prokofiev composed one of the pieces featured here as well as extensively overhauling another such that the revision amounts to a different work.

The work in question is the *Cello Concerto*, its composition spanning the period during which Prokofiev chose to return for good to the Soviet Union. It had been suggested in 1934 by the cellist Gregor Piatigorsky (whom Rohan de Saram met in Los Angeles in 1968), though the composer made little progress by the time of his return to the USSR and most of the actual writing seems to have been done in the months prior to its first performance. Prokofiev had meanwhile admitted to Piatigorsky that the Soviet authorities were unlikely to cede rights of first performance to an overseas cellist, and so it proved when the premiere duly took place in Moscow on 26 November 1938 by Lev Berezovsky with the USSR State Symphony Orchestra and Alexander Melik-Pashayev.

Public reaction was decidedly cool, pianist Sviatoslav Richter

(who assisted with rehearsals) later claiming that neither the soloist nor conductor had any real understanding of the music. Even Piatigorsky's Western première with Koussevitzky in Boston during 1940 did nothing to arouse interest. It was not until 1947, when he heard the teenage Rostropovich perform the piece (with piano accompaniment), that Prokofiev was minded to reassess it – his subsequent reworking, in collaboration with the cellist, so far-reaching that its 1952 première in Moscow (with Richter making his one public appearance as a conductor) was billed as his *Second Cello Concerto* and only changed to *Symphony-Concerto* (or *Sinfonia Concertante*) after further revisions for a subsequent performance which the composer did not live to hear.

The original *Cello Concerto* enjoyed only a few hearings over the ensuing half-century, with those soloists who did perform it (notably the Hungarian-born American cellist János Starker) invariably observing a lengthy cut in the final movement that seems to have been an editorial amendment when this piece was published in the early 1950s. Only with the 2000 account by Alexander Ivashkin was it recorded complete; since when, various other cellists have tackled what remains one of the technically most challenging works yet conceived for this instrument.

The first movement opens with a rhetorically impassioned theme for the soloist, accompanied and commented on by the

orchestra, whose steady yet purposeful motion is maintained until a passage of musing introspection intervenes on upper strings and woodwind; the initial music then winds down to an unobtrusive yet unexpected pause. From here, the second movement begins in lively activity between soloist and woodwind; the strings countering with a motoric rhythm typical of the composer in this period. This is taken up by the soloist over the course of animated repartee, from which emerges a long-breathed melody more typical of the future composer. Its effect persists over the course of a pensive dialogue, until the earlier impetus is suddenly regained and continues as a stealthy backdrop even as the main melody is brought back by the soloist, with oboe duly taking up a plaintive variant of this. The music continues along this course until, with the second return of the melody, it assumes a greater expressive reticence before heading on towards a determined though by no means decisive conclusion.

The third movement elides its set of variations into a rondo-like format which also features a lengthy coda. The theme is stated by the soloist against an austere accompaniment on strings and lower woodwind – its restiveness intensified by the first interlude with evocative writing for solo strings and plangent woodwind asides, then carried over into the first variation with its similarly fateful atmosphere. The second variation alters tack in its scherzo-like dialogue with dextrous multi-stopping for the soloist – a solemn codetta for woodwind ushering in the third variation that returns to more serious matters, then culminates in a cadenza as sustained

rhetorically as it is exacting technically. The orchestra duly resumes its elegiac discourse, this performance omitting the latter half of the second interlude and entire fourth variation before heading into a ‘Reminiscenza’ as it returns to the work’s initial theme. Matters turn ever more sardonic in the coda, initially underpinned by castanets, while the soloist launches a virtuosic display that persists across edgy orchestral exchanges prior to the peremptory closing chords.

The other two works featured here come from either end of Prokofiev’s career. Composed in 1912, the *Ballade* is among his relatively few items of chamber music and was first played by Yevsey Belousov with the composer as pianist. While only occasionally revived, it has found advocates (among them Rostropovich) and is notable for having a taciturn, even introspective demeanour such as Prokofiev was to investigate periodically during the next quarter-century.

For all its compactness, the piece proceeds spontaneously as if a controlled improvisation. Over a halting piano accompaniment, the cello unfolds an impassioned theme which finds unlikely yet effective contrast with the tripping and capricious idea that follows. Elements from both these themes are combined as the forward impetus becomes increasingly hectic, and the relationship between the instruments more fraught. At length, the tension subsides into a pensive theme for piano, belatedly partnered by cello as the music once again takes on a more ominous character. From here the piano gently descends from near the top of its register, while the cello muses eloquently



on the opening theme – its rumination gradually winding down into the instrument’s depths, from where this piece attains a regretful close.

The *Cello Sonata* was written in 1949 when Prokofiev, in poor health and finding much of his music banned under the Zhdanov Decree of the previous year, adopted a much simpler idiom that might be accepted by Soviet officialdom. Even the public premiere, by Rostropovich and Richter in Moscow on 1st March 1950, was preceded by two ‘closed-door’ performances to secure its endorsement. Direct in manner though it may be, the work’s formal and expressive subtleties have since made it among the most often heard such pieces in the modern repertoire.

The first movement begins with a long-breathed theme for cello that is complemented by a more ironic response from piano. No such dichotomy is evident in the second theme, that is among the most affecting from the composer’s last years and is hardly less so when shared between both instruments. The ensuing development entrusts the first theme to an intensive and methodical dialogue, out of which its successor gradually makes its presence felt, and from which emerges a suitably transformed reprise that manages to preserve the essential character of both themes. This time, the second of these is interrupted by a sudden increase of tempo that presages an animated coda – though this in turn needs to make way for limpid recollections of the opening theme while the music heads towards a warmly fatalistic close.

The second movement is more a lively intermezzo than a scherzo, its piquant opening idea on piano joined by cello for a lithe and engaging interplay. The middle section centres on another theme of deft eloquence – after which, the initial idea resumes in even more whimsical terms. The third movement then sets off with a flowing and affable theme such as draws both these instruments into an agile and reciprocal dialogue, which is carried over into the quizzical codetta. The central section is more earnest and introspective, while also eliciting no less of an imaginative interplay, and from which the main theme resumes its course with a renewed resolve. This time, however, the music opens out toward a coda in which the opening theme from the first movement is made the basis of an elaborate as well as tellingly affirmative apotheosis.

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Rohan de Saram was born in Sheffield of Sinhalese parents. He began studying the cello at the age of nine with Martin Hohermann in Ceylon then, aged twelve, with Gaspar Cassadó at the Accademia Chigiana in Siena, Italy. In 1956 at the age of 16, he received the Suggia Award which enabled him to study with Pablo Casals in Puerto Rico and with John Barbirolli in London. Casals said of him: 'There are few of his generation that have such gifts.'

As a soloist he has played throughout Europe, Asia, Australia, New Zealand, the USA, Canada and the former Soviet Union with the major orchestras and leading conductors of the world such as John Barbirolli, Adrian Boult, Colin Davis, Zubin Mehta, Seiji Ozawa and Malcolm Sargent. His début appearance in the USA was with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra at Carnegie Hall at the invitation of Dmitri Mitropoulos. Among the composers he worked with at that time were Kodály, Shostakovich, Poulenc and Walton. After a recital in America, Piatagorsky presented him with a special bow which he uses for concerts.

De Saram is also an outstanding interpreter of contemporary music, and has worked personally with many leading contemporary composers. One of the first was Iannis Xenakis whose *Kottos* for solo cello was given its UK première by de Saram.

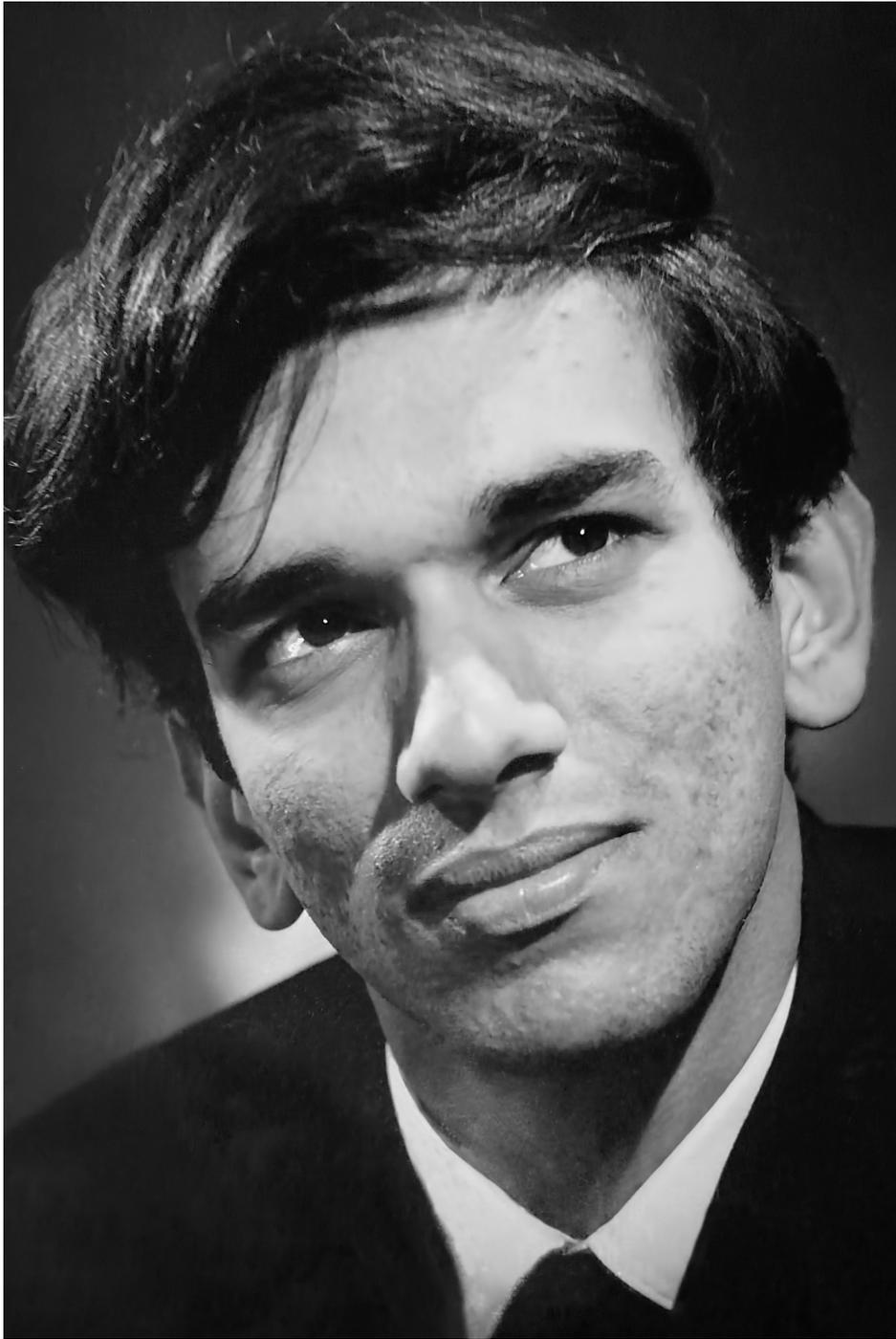
His performance of *Nomos Alpha* won him great praise from the composer who invited him to play it at the Xenakis Festival in Bonn. Later Xenakis wrote two works for him,





Epicycles for cello and ensemble and *Roscobek* for cello and double bass. He had also worked with György Ligeti, giving the première of his solo cello sonata; with Henri Pousseur, giving the world première of *Racine 19*, a work based on a 19-note scale and dedicated to him; and with Luciano Berio, giving the UK première of his work for cello and orchestra, *Il ritorno degli snovidenia*. After the performance, Berio wrote to de Saram: 'Your performance of *Ritorno* is splendid, but besides *Ritorno*, your sound, your perfect intonation, your phrasing and bowing technique make you a great performer of any music.' As a result, Berio wrote *Sequenza XIV* for de Saram: this wonderful piece incorporates in a unique way the rhythms of the Kandyan drum of Sri Lanka, an instrument which de Saram has himself played since his childhood in Sri Lanka.

For many years de Saram was the cellist of the Arditti Quartet for whom a great number of new works were written, resulting in world premières and many recordings. The Quartet was awarded the Siemens Prize for its services to music and a GRAMMY Award for its recording of works by Elliott Carter, including his *Sonata for Cello and Piano* and *Figment* for solo cello.



Born in Sri Lanka and relocating to England at the age of 16, **Druvi de Saram** has worked with a series of renowned musicians including Myra Hess, Stephen Bishop-Kovacevich, Daniel Barenboim and Maria Curcio.

He gave his London début at the Wigmore Hall after which he toured extensively as a soloist both in Europe and Asia, including tours of China, India and Australia. As a duo with his cellist brother, Rohan, he has performed at leading London venues and at prestigious international festivals in both the UK and Europe, including several tours of the former Soviet Union. As a chamber musician, de Saram has worked with the Arditti Quartet and solo artists such as violinist Salvatore Accardo and clarinetist Anthony Pay. Collaborating with contemporary composers, he has given first performances of works by Humphrey Searle, Roger Reynolds and John Mayer. He has also broadcast frequently for the BBC and several European radio stations.

Anatole Fistoulari was born in Kiev on 20 August 1907, conducting Tchaikovsky's *Sixth Symphony* when only seven. In the 1920s he went to Berlin where he received advice from Arthur Nikisch. From 1933 he was based in Paris, where he conducted the Grand Opéra Russe and the Ballets Russes. In 1939 he joined the French army but was invalided out. He then escaped to England where he began his association with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. Fistoulari was awarded British citizenship in 1948. Specialising in ballet music, he was also adept in French and Russian repertoire. He worked with singers including Boris Christoff and Victoria de los Ángeles; pianists including Vladimir Ashkenazy, Clifford Curzon and Shura Cherkassky; violinists including Yehudi Menuhin and Nathan Milstein. He died in London on 21 August 1995.

The **Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra** is based in Hilversum. Albert van Raalte founded the orchestra in 1945 and served as its first chief conductor. His successors have included Paul van Kempen, Bernard Haitink, Jean Fournet, Willem van Otterloo, Hans Vonk, and Sergiu Comissiona. Edo de Waart was its chief conductor during 1989–2004 and is now conductor laureate. Jaap van Zweden was its chief conductor and artistic director during 2005–2012 and is now principal guest conductor. In August 2010, Markus Stenz was made chief conductor, continuing until 2019 when this position was assumed by Karina Canellakis – so becoming the first female conductor to preside over a Dutch orchestra. The principal guest conductor since 2011 has been James Gaffigan, his contract having recently been extended until 2022.

Photos:

Page 5 and 13 of Sergey Prokofiev,
New York City, by George Grantham Bain, c.1918.

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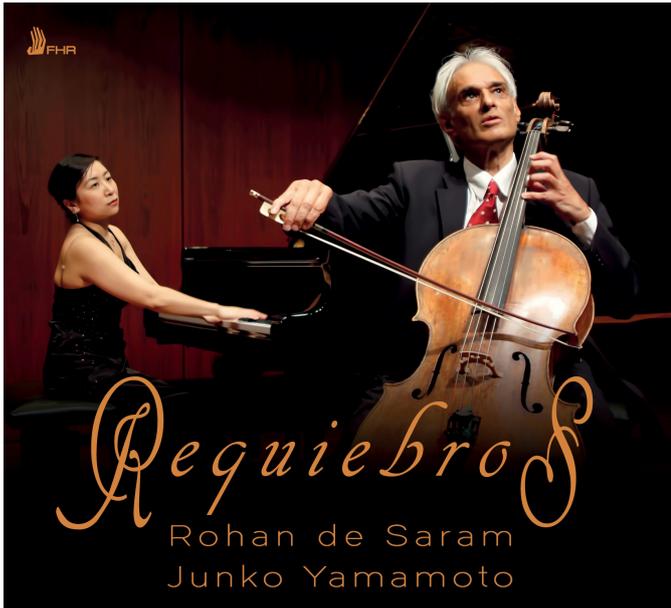
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Cello Concerto in E minor, Op. 58:

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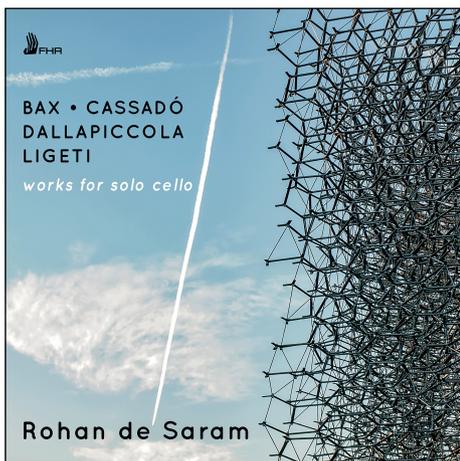
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