

Streaming Premiere - Friday, November 27, 2020, 7pm

# Yo-Yo Ma & Kathryn Stott Songs of Comfort and Hope

Filmed at the National Kaohsiung Center for the Arts (Weiwuying) Concert Hall, Kaohsiung, Taiwan, on November 14, 2020.

#### **PROGRAM**

Wu Tong (arr. Ding Doudou) Far Away Mountain (遠山)

Robert Schumann Fünf Stücke im Volkston, Op. 102

Mit humor - "Vanitas vanitatum"

Langsam

Nicht schnell, mit viel Ton zu spielen

Nicht zu rasch Stark und markiert

Harry Sdraulig Fantasia on Waltzing Matilda

Traditional American (arr. Caroline Shaw) Shenandoah

Traditional Irish (arr. Benjamin Britten) The Last Rose of Summer

Traditional Irish (arr. Fritz Kreisler) Londonderry Air (Danny Boy)

Sergei Rachmaninoff Vocalise

Wu Tong (arr. Li Xun/Ding Doudou) Rain Falling from the Roof (檐头雨)

Manuel de Falla Siete canciones populares españolas

El paño moruno Seguidilla murciana

Asturiana Jota Nana Canción Polo

Violeta Parra (arr. Jorge Calandrelli) Gracias a la vida

Astor Piazzolla Le Grand Tango

In collaboration with Opus 3 Artists

Note: following its premiere, the video recording of this concert will be available on demand through December 12, 2020.





# Only (Re)Connect:

# Transcending Isolation through Musical Intimacy

When the coronavirus pandemic lockdowns began, anxieties about how to secure basic provisions for our families naturally took precedence. But it wasn't long before other hungers emerged—hungers we were unable to ignore, no matter how many Netflix binges we indulged in. The longing for authentic artistic communication revealed how essential to our well-being is the shared experience of performance. This return to the stage by Yo-Yo Ma and Kathryn Stott brings that realization home, with a program beautifully chosen to reaffirm music's role as an agent of connection: between cultures and their different ways of perceiving the world, between performers and audiences, between ourselves and our fellow humans.

On the one hand, the partnership between Yo-Yo Ma and Kathryn Stott spans decades: the cellist and pianist have cherished their collaboration over many performances and recording projects, and this latest adventure continues that story. On the other, the circumstances surrounding *Songs of Comfort and Hope* are unprecedented. Ma's spontaneous performance videos from the early months of the pandemic became the seed for the artists' upcoming new album, which offers a response to the question: can music and musicians be of use during times of distress?

The duo champions their conviction that songs are "little time capsules of emotions in which connections intertwine with long-lost dreams and desires, feelings of great spirit, optimism, and unity." For Ma and Stott, "songs bring a sense of community, identity, and purpose, transcending boundaries and binding us together in thanks, consolation, and encouragement."

For this return to the stage just a few weeks ago in Taiwan, Stott designed a perfectly paced program that mingles selections from their forthcoming release with other gems from the world literature of song and musical miniatures. We range across Asia, Europe, and the Americas, with a focus on pieces inspired by the shared wisdom of folk traditions. These traditions are shown to be at once timeless and poignantly relevant, particularly in fresh arrangements and

reimaginings by contemporary artists—and in these realizations for the intimate combination of cello and piano. Even the most familiar melodies acquire a new layer

# Wu Tong (arr. Ding Dodou) Far Away Mountain (遠山)

In lieu of a flashy opening piece, the program begins with a tone of calm and contemplation—the perfect setting for a concert of deeply engaged musical storytelling.

Born in 1971 into a musical family, Wu Tong is a founding member of Silkroad, Yo-Yo Ma's ongoing collaborative project that began around the turn of the millennia and is devoted to cross-cultural, inclusive exploration of the possibilities of musical exchange. Wu Tong appears regularly on the Silkroad Ensemble's recordings and has been a frequent performance partner with the cellist. He is especially well-known as a virtuoso on and advocate for the sheng, a mouth organ using multiple bamboo or metal pipes whose shape evokes that of a phoenix; it is among the very oldest of Chinese instruments. He is also a remarkable vocalist and founded Again (Lunhui), the first rock band to appear on Chinese television.

Far Away Mountain was inspired by the landscape paintings of Wu Guanzhong (1919-2010), one of the most prominent figures in 20thcentury Chinese art. (He became the first living Asian artist to have a solo exhibition at the British Museum.) For Sotheby's in 2015, Wu Tong was asked to compose several works, including Far Away Mountain. Against an austerely beautiful accompaniment from the piano, Yo-Yo Ma's cello here takes the part originally conceived for sheng, singing a melody of simple but heartfelt eloquence. Drawn especially to the connections between painting and music that fascinated Wu Guanzhong, Wu Tong echoes the subtle interlacing of Eastern and Western cultures found in the artist's work.

#### Robert Schumann

# Fünf Stücke im Volkston, Op. 102

In 1848–49, a revolution against the authoritarian, post-Napoleonic regime swept across Europe and eventually arrived in Dresden,

where Robert Schumann was then living. His fellow composer Richard Wagner became actively involved in the uprising, but Schumann remained focused on his own creative work. He enjoyed a powerful outburst of inspiration in the months leading up to the crisis. One result was this set of *Five Pieces in Folk Style*. "It seemed as if the outer storms drew people to look inward, and only there did I find a counterforce against the forces breaking in so frightfully from without," he remarked.

Like many of the other short chamber pieces that date from this period, Schumann composed his Op. 102 at white-hot speed, in a matter of days in April 1849. Schumann originally intended to develop a career as a piano virtuoso but he also studied the cello in his youth, and he supplied that instrument with muchneeded new repertoire late in his career, including his Cello Concerto of 1850. (He also published an alternative version of Op. 102 for violin and piano.)

In Five Pieces, Schumann closely interweaves the cello and piano parts in unpredictable ways, enhancing the rich contrasts between each of these miniatures (which shift dramatically in tempo, character, and perspective). He likewise exploits the flexible lyrical gift that made him such a superb art song composer.

For all of its compositional intricacy and originality, this set of miniatures is grounded in impulses Schumann knew from everyday music. Recall an observation central to John Adams' worldview: "Whenever serious art loses track of its roots in the vernacular, then it begins to atrophy." The "popular style" referred to in Schumann's title is reflected by the qualities of fairy-tale, dance, poetic ballad, and even quirky humor that emerge.

# Harry Sdraulig: Fantasia on Waltzing Matilda

"Waltzing Matilda" is an institution onto itself. Boasting an unusually complicated, tangled history—it even has a museum dedicated to it—the song is widely considered Australia's unofficial national anthem and has become the symbol for an entire folk music genre: the so-called "bush ballads" that proliferated during

the late 19th century and into the early 20th, during the process of European colonization of Australia.

Bush ballads were rooted in oral tradition and described the harsh lifestyle of those in the outback, from field work to mining. It 1895, the poet "Banjo" Paterson penned the words to a tune contributed by Christina Macpherson (which she recalled from earlier sources). His song appeared in print in 1902, but the version published by Marie Cowan in 1903 became the standard. Cowan rearranged the tune and adjusted the words to work as an ad jingle for a tea merchant. In Australian slang of the era, a "waltzing matilda" refers to a homeless worker who travels on foot through the country with a blanket and belongings wrapped into a bundle and slung over his back. The lyrics belie the cheerful tune, recounting how the starving worker chooses suicide by drowning over being jailed for killing a wealthy landowner's sheep.

Sydney-based composer Harry Sdraulig has added to the layered history of "Waltzing Matilda," which exists in countless versions, with this fantasia written expressly for Yo-Yo Ma and Kathryn Stott. The result is a kind of musical labyrinth in which memories of the original beckon to lead us on. Sdraulig comments: "Though this work significantly 'reimagines' the harmonic and textural context of Marie Cowan's original melody, I have tried to remain faithful to its inherent expressiveness and lyricism which has provided such joy and meaning to many generations of Australians."

# Traditional American (arr. Caroline Shaw) Shenandoah

This song originated in the era of colonial fur traders in North America. The lyrics exist in multiple versions, some of which refer not to the river but to Chief Shenandoah, a legendary leader of the Oneida who negotiated treaties with the federal government. The melody worked its way across the network of rivers and canals that formed key trade routes in this period and later became a widespread sea shanty.

In 2013, Caroline Shaw became the youngest recipient in the history of the Pulitzer Prize for

Music. She is also an active performer as both a singer and a violinist. Shaw immersed herself in Americana while preparing her 2017 song cycle *Narrow Sea*. Dating from a few years earlier, her arrangement of "Shenandoah" creates an original frame for this beloved melody that evokes the timeless flow of the natural landscape.

# Traditional Irish (arr. Benjamin Britten) The Last Rose of Summer

During the early years of the Second World War, when Benjamin Britten was living in voluntary exile in the United States with his life partner, the tenor Peter Pears, the longing for his native England inspired a new interest in its folk song heritage. He and Pears returned to England in 1942, and Britten embarked on a decades-long series of fresh arrangements of traditional folk songs. Curiously, he began by recording his versions of French folk songs. Between 1943 and his death in 1976, Britten published eight volumes of folk song arrangements (mostly for piano and voice, and a volume scored for guitar and another for harp).

"The Last Rose of Summer" comes from the fourth volume, which Britten prepared in 1957, a collection of 10 settings of folk songs to the words of the Irish poet Thomas Moore (1779–1852). Haunting in its melancholy, this tune appears as the second to last in the collection. While the cello here takes the part of Britten's vocal line, the piano surrounds it with purling arpeggios that conjure a harp-playing bard.

# Traditional Irish (arr. Fritz Kreisler) Londonderry Air (Danny Boy)

The violin virtuoso Fritz Kreisler became a conservatory student in his native Vienna when he was only seven years old—and went on to shape the course of 20th-century violin playing, although his formal studies, which by then had taken him to Paris, ended at the ripe age of 12. Although he failed his audition for the Vienna Philharmonic, Kreisler became an international celebrity as a soloist. He composed a handful of larger works and produced dozens of miniatures for solo violin that are ubiquitous as concert encores as well as in competitions. Still another category he left posterity involves

the many arrangements of music from other sources, including this piece.

"Londonderry Air" is better known in its version as the tune to which are set the lyrics of "Danny Boy" (Frederic Weatherly's 1913 ballad). "Londonderry Air" is a traditional Irish song that appeared in print as part of the 1855 collection *The Ancient Music of Ireland*. Jane Ross, who submitted the tune for this purpose to the anthologist George Petrie, simply noted that it was "very old." A convoluted history of competing claims as to its origin—like that surrounding "Waltzing Matilda"—only attests to the powerful spell this melody casts over listeners.

Kreisler originally published his arrangement in 1922 for piano, violin, and cello and it is reconfigured for just the two string instruments here. Yo-Yo Ma creates the illusion of a ghost guest violinist with phrasings at the very top of his instrument's register.

## Sergei Rachmaninoff Vocalise

Sergei Rachmaninoff lamented the disappearance of a kind of songfulness he believed had been banished from modern music. That view made him seem "outdated" to impatient contemporaries, but the Russian composer's music has outlasted the verdicts of his harshest critics. Perhaps his sense of that loss—of the elemental component of song—contributes to the yearning quality of his own melodic gift. Rachmaninoff's tunes have been pirated and plundered in countless film scores and in popular songs (recall Eric Carmen's 1975 hit "All by Myself," which lifts from the slow movement of the Second Piano Concerto).

Rachmaninoff's impressive catalogue of art songs is closely tied to his Russian identity. Between 1910 and 1912, following his first American tour, the composer wrote a set of 13 songs that he published as Op. 34. In 1915, he added what would become the best-known number of the entire set, unusually choosing to write a song with no words but instead allowing the singer to choose syllables at will—hence the title "Vocalise." While the piece was written for the soprano Antonina Nezhdanova, fellow

Russian Serge Koussevitzky previewed "Vocalise" in an arrangement for his instrument (double bass) and orchestra and then conducted the premiere in the composer's version for orchestra and soprano in 1916 in Moscow. Innumerable versions have since been made, including the one we hear for cello and piano.

What gives this enchanting melody its power? Rachmaninoff taps into the idea of an "infinite melody" (you hear this in some Baroque arias, but it became a holy grail for the Romantic era). At the same time, a chantlike character evokes an aura of timeless ritual. The music traces a gentle chiaroscuro, shades of light and dark blending seamlessly.

# Wu Tong (arr. Li Xun and Ding Doudou) Rain Falling from the Roof (檐头雨)

Wu Tong recorded his artistic response to the coronavirus pandemic with this piece. He describes reading this story from the Northern Song Dynasty during a rainstorm: "A novice monk asks a renowned Zen master about the meaning of Buddhism. The master points to the raindrops falling from the eaves of a roof. The novice monk, after being perplexed for a long time, suddenly experiences an epiphany." The simultaneous sound of raindrops around him made Wu Tong consider: "People depend upon peaceful coexistence with each other and with Mother Nature to live in true harmony. No one exists in isolation."

Originally written for his instrument, the *sheng*, and Yo-Yo Ma, *Rain Falling from the Roof* is here arranged for piano and cello. Wu Tong's own practice of meditation informs the calm but assured pacing of the whole. Framing it are raindrop-like notes on the cello and graceful *gymnopédie* rhythms; elsewhere, Ma takes up the bow to render the melody that wistfully arcs across the piece.

#### Manuel de Falla

# Siete canciones populares españolas

In 1907, Manuel de Falla, a native of the port city of Cádiz in the Andalusia region of Spain, moved to Paris until the onset of the First World War. Paris at the time was ground zero for anyone passionate about new music. Falla developed close ties with Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel and fell under the sway of young Igor Stravinsky, who was just emerging in this period with his revolutionary ballets for the Paris-based Ballets Russes company. He also got to know several fellow expatriate Spanish composers.

As the Russian-themed Stravinsky ballets show, a fascination with folkloric roots was all the rage—and proved to be compatible with the most radically leaning Modernist. Debussy and Ravel were meanwhile experimenting with form and texture in compositions that drew inspiration from Spanish imagery and settings. The fact that Falla found a renewed interest in Spanish music while he was living over the border reminds us of the important role of cultural crisscrossing.

In 1914, the outbreak of war compelled him to return to Madrid, where he brought the set of *Siete canciones populares españolas* ("*Seven Popular Spanish* Songs") for voice and piano that he had recently composed in Paris. While drawing on authentic Spanish folk melodies, Falla reshaped them in distinctive ways, adding substantial, rhythmically incisive accompaniments to complement the words, which focus on the pangs of love. His choice of material reflects the regional variety of Spain as well as its multicultural historical legacy. The *Siete Canciones* have since been adapted and arranged for a wide spectrum of settings and performers.

"El paño moruno" ("The Moorish Cloth") and the flamenco-tinged "Seguidilla murciana" (both form the province of Murcia) use the images of a soiled cloth and a worn coin, respectively, to figure tainted love. "Asturiana" is a lover's lament from Asturias in Northwest Spain, while "Jota," the most cheerful of the set, uses an animated dance type from Aragon. "Nana" is a lullaby associated with Falla's native Andalusia, and "Canción" is a lover's breakaway song. "Polo," again bowing to Andalusia's flamenco tradition with its fiercely percussive accompaniment, concludes the set with a passionate curse on love's pain.

# Violeta Parra (arr. Jorge Calandrelli) Gracias a la vida

The 20th-century Chilean Violeta Parra was a multifaceted artist who composed, sang, studied folk song and folklore, and painted and embroidered. "Gracias a la vida" ("Thanks to Life") dates from the mid-1960s but became popular internationally in the 1970s thanks to widely heard versions by Mercedes Sosa and Joan Baez.

Parra herself recorded the song on her final album, which was released in 1966; she committed suicide in 1967. That circumstance has contributed to the haunting ambiguity of "Gracias a la vida," which has become one of the most widely covered songs from Latin America. The Argentine pianist, arranger, and composer Jorge Calandrelli won the 2014 Golden Score Award for his many arrangements, which include collaborations with such artists as Barbra Streisand, Celine Dion, Michael Bublé, and Placido Domingo. In this version, alterations in tempo and phrasing give the impression of a set of variations on a theme, while the cello is made to sing with vulnerability and warmth.

# Astor Piazzolla Le Grand Tango

Mention the name Astor Piazzolla, and it immediately evokes the tango, the signature dance of Piazzolla's native Argentina. Much as Johann Strauss, Jr., did for the waltz, Piazzolla transformed a popular idiom into richly layered, complex music. Born into a family of Italian immigrants to Argentina, Piazzolla became a prodigy on the *bandoneón* (button accordion). In 1936, while he was still a teenager, the composer's family returned to Argentina after

some years in New York, and soon he was playing in the best tango orchestra in Buenos Aires. To this Piazzolla added the experience he gained from nights playing in popular clubs.

Piazzolla became famous for experimenting with hybrids of tango and other musical sources. This gave birth to a revolutionary musical movement, *nuevo tango*, which drew on elements from jazz and contemporary classical music. *Nuevo tango* leans toward exciting rhythms, rich chromatic harmonies, and more intricate textures—all the while remaining true to its popular roots. Piazzolla experimented in adapting the tango to longer forms, even venturing a tango-based operetta. Yo-Yo Ma collaborated with Kathryn Stott for the 1997 album *Soul of the Tango*, which is devoted to Piazzolla's music.

Le Grand Tango comes from near the end of Piazzolla's career: in 1982, when the composer was living within blocks of the Atlantic Ocean. Cast in tripartite form, Le Grand Tango displays the many faces of this dance, including in a "free and singing" middle section that allows for a subtle relaxation of the sexual tension; the final section thrills with its fiery, reckless speed and musical (as well as metaphoric) mating of both instruments.

The piece exists in many arrangements, but Piazzolla originally scored it for cello and piano, intending it for the great cellist Mstislav Rostropovich (who premiered it in 1990). According to the biographers María Susana Azzi and Simon Collier, *Le Grand Tango* is one of cellist Yo-Yo Ma's favorite pieces and represents "just about the most exciting music Piazzolla ever wrote."

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#### YO-YO MA, cello

Yo-Yo Ma's multifaceted career is testament to his enduring belief in culture's power to generate trust and understanding. Whether performing new or familiar works from the cello repertoire, collaborating with communities and institutions to explore culture's role in society, or engaging unexpected musical forms, Yo-Yo strives to foster connections that stimulate the imagination and reinforce our humanity.

With partners from around the world and across disciplines, he creates programs that stretch the boundaries of genre and tradition to explore music-making as a means not only to share and express meaning, but also as a model for the cultural collaboration he considers essential to a strong society. It was this belief that inspired Yo-Yo to establish Silkroad, a collective of artists from around the world who create music that engages their many traditions.

In August 2018, Yo-Yo began a new journey, setting out to perform Johann Sebastian Bach's six suites for solo cello in one sitting in 36 locations around the world, iconic venues that encompass our cultural heritage, our current creativity, and the challenges of peace and understanding that will shape our future. Each concert is an example of culture's power to create moments of shared understanding, as well as an invitation to a larger conversation about culture, society, and the themes that connect us all.

Yo-Yo Ma was born in 1955 to Chinese parents living in Paris. He began to study the cello with his father at age four and three years later moved with his family to New York City, where he continued his cello studies with Leonard Rose at the Juilliard School. After his conservatory training, he sought out a liberal arts education, graduating from Harvard University with a degree in anthropology in 1976. He has performed for eight American presidents, most recently at the invitation of President Obama on the occasion of the 56th Inaugural Ceremony. He plays three instruments, a 2003 instrument made by Moes & Moes, a 1733 Montagnana cello from Venice, and the 1712 Davidoff Stradivarius

#### KATHRYN STOTT, piano

At the age of five, I made friends with the upright piano in our living room and by the age of eight, I found myself at a boarding school for young musicians, the Yehudi Menuhin School. During my studies there I was heavily influenced by two occasional visitors to the school; Nadia Boulanger and Vlado Perlmuter. From them, my great passion for French music was ignited and Fauré in particular has remained the musical love of my life.

Further studies at the Royal College of Music in London then led me very abruptly into the life of a professional musician via the Leeds International Piano Competition. When, quite by chance, I met Yo-Yo Ma in 1978, it turned out to be one of the most fortuitous moments of my life. Since 1985, we have enjoyed a collaboration which has taken us to so many fascinating parts of the world and led to musical adventures with musicians who shared so much from their own traditions.

Presently, I enjoy the challenge of creativity in a different way by bringing many musicians together once a year in my role as the artistic director of the Australian Festival of Chamber Music. There are too many highlights in my career to mention. Yes, it was a thrill to perform at the Last Night of the Proms to millions around the world, but equally a massive thrill to have lit up 20 small faces in an inner city school while they jumped up and down to energetic piano music! Working with young musicians is something I feel passionate about and I presently teach at the Academy of Music in Oslo. I've also had some truly exciting music written for me and enjoyed a particularly close collaboration with composer Graham Fitkin.

Filmed at the National Kaohsiung Center for the Arts (Weiwuying) Concert Hall, Kaohsiung, Taiwan, on November 14, 2020.

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