



CC1033

Vieuxtemps Saint-Saëns

Cello Concertos

PETER
MARTENS

Cape Town
Philharmonic Orchestra

Bernhard Gueller

The Artists

Peter Martens Cello

Cellist Peter Martens holds a PhD from Stellenbosch University where he is Director of the Stellenbosch International Chamber Music Festival. He studied at the Mozarteum in Salzburg and returned to South Africa in 1993. Formally principal cellist of The Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra, he is a member of the Amici String Quartet and enjoys playing in chamber music festivals worldwide. Concerto engagements have resulted in collaborations with a number of fine conductors including Bernhard Gueller, Victor Yampolsky, Douglas Boyd, Nicholas Cleobury and Jonas Alber. His CD recordings of the Beethoven Cello Sonatas, the Bach Cello Suites and Allan Stephenson's Cello Concerto have received critical acclaim internationally.



Photo: Jac de Villiers

Bernhard Gueller Conductor

Bernhard Gueller, principal guest conductor of the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra and Music Director Laureate of Symphony Nova Scotia where he was music director from 2012-2018, was also music director of the Nuremberg Symphony Orchestra and principal guest conductor of the Victoria Symphony in Canada. Acclaimed for passion, interpretations and phrasing, he continues to bring excitement to the podium. He has collaborated with artists such as pianists Lars Vogt and Marc Andre-Hamelin, violinists James Ehnes and Joshua Bell, as well as Metropolitan Opera singers Pretty Yende and the late Johan Botha. CDs with Symphony Nova Scotia include orchestrated Schubert lieder, and Wagner-Mahler lieder with mezzo-soprano Hanneli Rupert and the CPO.



Photo: Jac de Villiers

The Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra

The Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra is the oldest and foremost orchestra in Africa, having been established in 1914. It has a national and international reputation for excellence thanks to the high quality of its performances and the artists such as pianists Paul Lewis and Stephen Hough and violinist Joshua Bell. Versatile and multifunctional, the CPO accompanies ballet, opera, musicals, plays pops, rock and family concerts as well as concerts tailored for schools and presents a platform to community performances. The orchestra's vast youth education and development programme includes two acclaimed youth orchestras, a music academy and a grassroots strings and woodwinds training project, Masidlale, which teaches marginalized young people the value and self-worth that comes from music.

Photo: Alain Proust



The Works

As a student in Salzburg, one of the highlights of 1992 was a trip to the home of legendary cellist Heinrich Schiff for a masterclass. I arrived at Schiff's villa on the shores of the Attersee, a typically picturesque Austrian lake, suitably nervous for the occasion – it was not only Schiff's stature as one of the world's finest cellists that preceded him, but his short temper too... As it turned out, I had nothing to worry about. My teacher, Heidi Litschauer, and I were warmly greeted upon arrival and were ushered into the dining room for tea with rum (it was winter) before the lesson. Schiff sat at the head of his large dining room table and hanging on the wall behind him was an enormous poster for a performance of the Vieuxtemps Cello Concertos with the Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Sir Neville Marriner.

Schiff's celebrated recording of these concerti was made five years prior to my visit, and it is a recording that inspired many of us to take up the challenge of learning these beautiful but fiendishly difficult works. Maestro Bernhard Gueller who conducts the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra on this recording was a cellist and, as fate would have it, is part of my story from the beginning, having sat on the front desk of the cello section of the Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra for the recording with Heinrich Schiff!

Henri Vieuxtemps 1820 - 1881

Henri Vieuxtemps was a Belgian composer, violinist and conductor. His compositions, mostly for the violin and including seven notable concertos for the instrument, are characterized by beautiful sweeping melodies juxtaposed with technical wizardry of the sort that only a virtuoso violinist himself would be able to conjure up. The piano score of **First Cello Concerto Op. 46 in A minor** was completed in 1876 and following the first (unofficial) performance by Joseph Servais, a Belgian virtuoso nicknamed by some as the Paganini of the cello, the following critique appeared in the *Revue et Gazette musicale*

de Paris, “Virtuosi will be grateful to this great artist for having enriched their repertoire with a work that makes such a sure and brilliant effect”. Stroke-induced paralysis ended the composer’s performing career in 1879 and he wrote his last few compositions in the confines of a sanatorium. His Second Cello Concerto is an awkward piece with unbalanced (dare I say unmusical) phrasing and almost impossible virtuoso writing that even in the hands of great masters of the cello, leaves the listener yearning for the kind of simple Romantic beauty so prevalent in the first concerto. It is for these reasons that I chose not to record the second concerto as well, but rather to add the well-known masterpiece by Camille Saint-Saëns, his **Cello Concerto No. 1 Op. 33** in the same key as Vieuxtemps’ first cello concerto.

Camille Saint-Saëns 1835 - 1921

It is not well known that Saint-Saëns also wrote a second cello concerto. This too is inferior to his first in similar ways to the cello concerti by Vieuxtemps, perhaps making the **Op. 33 Concerto** by Saint-Saëns all the more suitable as a stablemate to Vieuxtemps’ first cello concerto on this disc. Furthermore, Saint-Saëns also wrote his first concerto for a Belgian cellist, this time Auguste Tolbecque, who premiered the work just three years prior to Servais’ first performance of Vieuxtemps’ work. There are many recordings of Saint-Saëns’ first cello concerto and, when contemplating another recording thereof, one needs to ask if the world really needs it? It doesn’t, but I have somewhat personal reasons for having wanted to record it. Besides it being a most effective showcase of the cello’s capabilities (sublime melodies exploiting the most beautiful registers of the instrument in a succinct package that pleases players and listeners alike), it is the first concerto I ever played with orchestra. The orchestra was the Cape Town Symphony Orchestra and the year 1987. Although the orchestra has undergone a name change or two in the last 30 years or so, the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra is essentially the same orchestra with which I feel I have made a somewhat nostalgic journey all these years. In addition to being a most sympathetic musical compatriot, Bernhard Gueller has

brought the orchestra tutti to life in a most vibrant way which somehow tells his life-story of joy in music making, much of which has also been with Cape Town's excellent symphony orchestra.

To complete this disc of Franco-Belgian cello music with orchestra, I have perhaps neglected some obvious, albeit obscure, choices like Ysaÿe's *Sérénade* or *Méditation* for cello and orchestra or Adrien-François (father of Joseph) Servais' Cello Concerto No. 1 in B minor. Both Vieuxtemps' and Saint-Saëns' concertos are conventional (but different from one another) in their form and use of traditional Romantic harmonic language. It made sense to me, a self-confessed lover of standard repertoire greats from the Baroque to the Romantic era, that I should complete the disc with three much loved pieces from the cello literature that one perhaps does not hear with orchestra every day.

The Swan from Camille Saint-Saëns' *Carnival of the Animals* is perhaps the most popular cello encore of all. Although the *Carnival* is an orchestral piece, **The Swan** is written for solo cello accompanied by the piano (two pianos actually). Of **The Swan**, Heinrich Schiff says, "[it is] so wonderfully noble and last but not least an original cello piece, or rather, the musical embodiment of the instrument's soul". The arrangement on this CD retains the original solo cello and first piano part (played here on the harp), but adds a soft bed of string timbre and a few quiet notes in the French horns for added affect.

Gabriel Fauré 1845 - 1924

Although most cellists do not have the luxury of an orchestra to accompany Gabriel Fauré's **Elégie Op 24**, it was scored for solo cello and orchestra by the composer 15 years after its original incarnation for cello and piano in 1880. In the words of Steven Lowe, "*The Elégie is a prime example of Fauré's ability to distill anguish into a short, but touchingly effective musical statement. The choice of a cello, with its baritone human*

timbres, is the perfect voice for so personal a statement". It is interesting to note that its first performance with piano in 1880 was at the home of Camille Saint-Saëns.

Finally, Saint-Saëns' **Allegro appassionato Op. 43** for cello and either piano or orchestra is a charming work composed around the time of his first cello concerto. It is thought to have been intended as an encore and is essentially just that on this CD. Thanks to Pablo Casals it is now recognized as one of the most attractive pieces of standard repertoire for the cello. John Palmer describes the Allegro appassionato as, "*Transparently scored and elegantly tuneful*". I certainly thought so (and continue to think so) when in 1986, I played the piece for the first time with my high school orchestra in Cape Town.

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Programme notes

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Jac de Villiers

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**CAPE TOWN
PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA**

Henri Vieuxtemps (1820 – 1881)

Cello Concerto No. 1 in A minor, Op. 46

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|---|--------------------------------------|--------|
| 1 | Allegro moderato – Cadenza – Allegro | 14'12" |
| 2 | Andante | 7'18" |
| 3 | Finale (Allegro) | 7'15" |
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Camille Saint-Saëns (1835 – 1921)

Cello Concerto No. 1 in A minor, Op. 33

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|---|---------------------|-------|
| 4 | Allegro non troppo | 5'48" |
| 5 | Allegretto con moto | 5'11" |
| 6 | Tempo primo | 8'38" |
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| 7 | Camille Saint-Saëns (arr. Paul Vidal) The Swan from <i>The Carnival of the Animals</i> | 2'56" |
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| 8 | Gabriel Fauré (1845 - 1924) Élégie Op. 24 | 6'59" |
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| 9 | Camille Saint-Saëns Allegro appassionato Op. 43 | 3'44" |
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