

BTP Kanneh-Masons.wav

[00:00:06] **Speaker 1** The fun of collaboration and the energy of a live performance, replicating the live concert for their debut album Muse. Sheku and Isata Kanneh-Mason are performing siblings from England.

[00:00:20] **Speaker 2** Yes, so I'm Isetta to Kanneh-Mason and I play the piano.

[00:00:25] **Speaker 3** I'm Sheku Kanneh-Mason I'm a cellist.

[00:00:34] **Speaker 1** I'm Colleen Phelps, and this look behind the playlist, Sheku and Isata Kanneh-Mason going from soloists to duo.

[00:00:48] Samuel Barber was 22 when he composed his cello sonata Sheku. That's your age, right?

[00:00:52] **Speaker 3** It's exactly my age, yes. And I think I think it's a wonderful piece of music, but also I guess a piece that. I mean, the age thing doesn't necessarily mean that we can understand it more, but it doesn't definitely has a youthful energy that we we both like.

[00:01:26] **Speaker 1** It's kind of a striking piece when you think about the Adagio for strings and his songs, the sonatas kind of angular for him. What about it struck the two of you as the thing to play right now?

[00:01:36] **Speaker 2** It was recommended by Sheku's teacher, and I think that we both listen to it and we just we just really loved the piece. We were drawn to the piece and we noticed that not many people were playing it at the moment. And so I think that's what made it feel like the right thing. We both felt like we could say something with the music, and we we knew that it hadn't been done loads before. And those two things really drew us in. And then we just loved the drama of the piece and the kind of there's a constant struggle between the two instruments and a conflict, and we found that very exciting to explore. And he kind of portrays that through many complicated rhythmic elements and through that just through his use of the different themes sort of passing them between the piano and cello. And that was a lot of fun to explore.

[00:02:22] **Speaker 3** I think it's the shameless drama of it. It's so exciting, and there's never a wasted moment. He really packs so much into a relatively short piece. And the sort of yeah, the rhythmic intensity of it is something that's very, very, very special. And although it is a very youthful piece, it's very mature harmonically, I think, and also mature in the conciseness of how it's how it is written. So it's it's amazing.

[00:02:58] Isata the last time we spoke, you pointed out that we're all human, so you'll inevitably find something in common with any composer. But do you feel like you're both still sharing what Barber had at the time in that he was coming out of a household full of high level music making and into the early stages of going in the world and making a big splash musically?

[00:03:17] **Speaker 2** Yeah, I think that's always a very unsettling time, no matter what you're doing and kind of leaving your foundations and going out there. And I think it's a necessary time for everyone and something that most people can relate to. And you can definitely feel that in the music. And that's definitely something that we've both felt. And I

think many people can relate to that feeling of kind of chaos and everything being new and exciting, but also unsettling.

[00:04:00] **Speaker 1** The Rachmaninoff cello sonatas described as a favorite piece for the two of you to perform together, what about that piece do you love so much?

[00:04:07] **Speaker 2** We both loved this piece since we were very young and I've always been drawn to Rachmaninoff as a composer. And for me, it's the harmony of his music. I think it's just so beautiful, and it's it's kind of impossible to describe in words why, but I just have such a strong emotional response to his music every time. And this Sonata is no exception, and I also think it's a fantastic piece of chamber music. It's both instruments have wonderful parts written for them, and then the textures that they create together are also they just, yeah, beautiful.

[00:04:57] **Unidentified** The the joy you feel at the end of the piece, having gone on that journey. It's really joyful music by the end. It's very special and you know, from the start to finish this so many different emotions that you pass through and explore. And yeah, it's quite a sort of emotionally intense piece to play and to perform and full of so much detail and richness in the harmonies, as they said and so many amazing, amazing melody. Some of my favorite melodies on this, in this sonata.

[00:05:37] **Speaker 1** Rachmaninov was, of course, a brilliant pianist, so he didn't want to call it a cello sonata since he felt the piano was on equal footing rather than accompanying. Is that part of what makes it work so well for you two as siblings kind of entering as equals?

[00:05:52] **Speaker 2** Yeah, I think that's what makes it such a wonderful piece of chamber music, and I think all wonderful pieces of chamber music have that. And yeah, it's great because it means we're able to both explore our parts in equal measure and then both sort of equally contribute to the music.

[00:06:07] **Speaker 3** Yeah. And I think this music is most satisfying when you're able to spend a lot of time as a duo working on it, and it doesn't make sense yet to see the two parts to separate because of how complex and refined his voicing is. Even within the piano part, there are many voices going on at the same time, and the cello has to respond to those and vice versa and all of the sort of ranking the role of all of those different voices as a juror, I think is such an important thing to do with this piece because it's so rich.

[00:07:14] **Speaker 1** When Sergei Rachmaninoff was composing the Cello Sonata, he was in one of his worst bouts of performance anxiety. Now, you're both known for your poise on stage during outstanding musical performances, but I'm sure, like anyone else, you also have moments of nervousness around a big show. What are your strategies for working through that?

[00:07:34] **Speaker 2** I think that nerves and performance, this is something that you deal with from a very young age, so it becomes a very familiar feeling and so you know, you're used to performing with that pressure. And with that adrenaline. And I think that nerves can be a good thing because it can be adrenaline and it can make you perform to a higher level in a way that you can in a practice room. If you don't have any kind of pressure or nerves and you're a bit too relaxed, it's easy to kind of switch off and not give your all. So I think that that's a good thing. It just depends on how you view them. And of course, the more you feel them, the more you're used to them, so you learn to work with them.

[00:08:09] **Speaker 3** I think preparation is very, very important when it comes to toe performance and developing many, many different layers of understanding towards the music that you can rely on when you're on stage. Even things like when it comes to memory, having, you know, a harmonic structure in your mind, the sort of overall structure, different melodies, the different characters, the different colors that are happening and then all the different technical elements that you've invested time into. I think doing, you know, the proper detailed preparation gives you, yeah, gives you a confidence and a sort of surety of what you want to say when you're when you're performing. I think that's a very important part of it as well.

[00:08:48] **Speaker 1** For Rachmaninoff, the Cello Sonata was a sort of transitional piece that was his last work of chamber music, and the world is in a kind of transition right now, either to the last time we spoke to, we talked about what we were looking forward to with the world reopening. Now that things are moving around and you're traveling. What else are you looking forward to now?

[00:09:09] **Speaker 2** Well, just more of that. Just being able to travel, travel more and being able to see concert halls full, I think would be something wonderful to see until everywhere feels open. It's never going to feel back to normal. And so that's something that we both look towards as and we hope that happens.

[00:09:34] **Speaker 1** What was the process like recording this album?

[00:09:38] **Speaker 3** Yeah, it was a wonderful process. The recording we recorded in a small a small town in the UK called Saffron Walden, and it's very much in the countryside, kind of in the middle of nowhere. But it has this wonderful, wonderful for chamber music. And so we recorded there for a few days. I mean, it was a lovely atmosphere. Our brother, Braimah, came and was listening for a few of the days. One of my teachers also came to listen to me, had a sort of mini many audience of one or two to perform to us. We were recording, which was really, really nice. And to have that, that feedback as well. And then there we were really happy with the. Sound because we wanted all of the detail that we'd really thought about and. Practice and rehearse, we wanted all of that detail to come across. And so we were really happy with the sound engineers that we were working with in creating a really intimate feeling because it is a piece of chamber music and you want that intimacy, but also the ability to hear the scope of all of the all of the voices.

[00:11:16] **Speaker 1** It's been wonderful to see you and the whole family returned to the stage as the pandemic starts to wane and a lot of musicians are just now picking up their instruments again. What's your advice for people who took a break from playing for whatever reason and are now returning to their instrument?

[00:11:34] **Speaker 2** I mean, I've never taken a long break for my instruments. I can't give first hand advice about what to do exactly, but I think that if you've returned to your instrument, that means that you're still enjoying it and still loving it. And so I would say, just keep going, keep practicing and keep going to concerts if there are concerts where you are.

[00:11:51] **Speaker 1** Halloween just happened in the United States, some radio stations even turn to Christmas music this week. What is your holiday jam?

[00:12:02] **Speaker 3** I've never been a massive fan of like, really joyful Christmas music as Christmas obviously is, is a joyful, joyful time. But there's something about like the bells that's I had never thought of.

[00:12:12] **Speaker 1** So minor keys like Ukrainian Bell Carol.

[00:12:15] **Speaker 3** Yeah, yeah. It was like the slower, the slower Christmas carols, and in the bleak midwinter is my is my favorite.

[00:12:22] **Speaker 2** But I think no one knows in the bleak midwinter outside of the UK.

[00:12:25] **Speaker 3** Yeah, maybe that's true. I don't know.

[00:12:27] **Speaker 1** It just depends which version.

[00:12:29] **Speaker 3** Oh, the Holst version?

[00:12:30] **Speaker 1** Yeah, that's the one we know.

[00:12:32] **Speaker 3** OK, cool. That's my favorite.

[00:12:46] **Speaker 2** I like Sia's Christmas album.

[00:12:58] **Speaker 2** and Sheku's like rolling his eyes because he's had to hear every year. He doesn't like it.

[00:13:26] **Speaker 1** Muse featuring Sheku and Isata Kanneh-Mason released today, and you'll hear it on ninety point five WUOL classical Louisville.