

Korea's long, rich tradition in the performing arts has helped it produce a number of internationally acclaimed classical musicians, despite its relatively short acquaintance with Western music.

Kyung-Wha Chung was the first of Korea's performers to achieve this status. She is best known as a concert soloist, but is also recognized for her appearances with her younger brother, pianist and conductor Myung-Whun, and elder sister, cellist Myung-Wha, in the Chung Trio.

Born in Seoul, in 1948, Chung at first took up the piano; however, a magnetic introduction to the violin at the age of 6 inspired her to switch. After studying with Shin Sang Chul, she made her debut at the age of nine with the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra, playing Mendelssohn's E minor Concerto. When she was 12 years old, Chung toured Japan, and the following year moved to New York to study at the Juilliard School of Music with Ivan Galamian, with whom she worked until 1971.

In the late '60s she took first prize at the Leventritt Competition (along with Pinchas Zukerman) and also appeared as a soloist with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. She made her London debut with its Symphonic Orchestra in 1970, playing the Tchaikovsky Concerto. Shortly thereafter, she began to expand her circle of teachers by working with Josef Gingold, Szymon Goldberg, Paul Makanowitzky, and Joseph Szigeti. Her sonata partners have included Peter Frankl, Itamar Golan, Radu Lupu, Stephen Kovacevich, and Krystian Zimerman, and she has performed with leading conductors, such as André Previn, George Solti, and Lorin Maazel. Her brother, Myung-Whun, has also been the acting conductor when she has performed as soloist.

At the turn of the 21st century she maintained a rigorous touring schedule, performing more than 100 times a year. She was named one of the most prominent violinists of the latter part of the 20th century by The Sunday Times of England, and took eight curtain calls in the mid-'90s when she played Bartók's Second Violin Concerto at a concert at the Champs Elysees Theater in Paris, organized to commemorate the 70th birthday of Pierre Boulez. The performance, which was recorded by EMI, was critically acclaimed and awarded the Gramophone Prize. Her other recordings, totaling over 20, include the concertos of Beethoven, Berg, Bruch, Elgar, Mendelssohn, Saint-Saëns, Sibelius, Tchaikovsky, and Walton, and are primarily under the Decca label.

As members of the Chung Trio, she and her siblings became the United Nations' first goodwill anti-drug ambassadors for their concert-giving support of anti-drug campaigns in Rome, New York, Chicago, and other cities of the world. Kyung-Wha Chung has been literally showered with recognition for her sparkling, energetic personality, and for her concentrated, inspiring, and nearly technically perfect performances; she is considered one of the top violinists in the world.



Walton • Violin Concerto

Stravinsky • Violin Concerto In D

Kyung-Wha Chung, violin

André Previn

London Symphony Orchestra



Walton first met Jascha Heifetz in 1936, and in 1938 the virtuoso violinist commissioned him to write a concerto. In the same year, the British Council for the Arts asked Walton for a work to be performed at the New York Fair in June 1939, and the prospect of an early premiere looked likely. However, Walton was dissatisfied with the last movement, which he suspected was "not difficult enough for Heifetz," and withdrew the concerto from the New York concert. At the invitation of Heifetz he sailed to the United States in 1939 to discuss it with the soloist, who made a few suggestions for changes; but war broke out in Europe, so the premiere took place in Cleveland, OH, in December 1939 with Heifetz and Artur Rodzinski conducting. The concerto was not heard in New York until 1941, when critic Virgil Thompson wrote, "Its material is inoffensive but extremely vague. Its violin writing is glittery, its texture is continuous. The whole surface of it is dainty and luxurious [but] there is very little substance beneath." Today's listeners might well feel that, on closer acquaintance, the concerto has many hidden depths. It is among the most lyrical of Walton's major works, free from the tensions that mark his Symphony No. 1 and full of quirky, seemingly improvisatory surprises. Its tonality is precarious and rhythms complex; yet in many respects it is one of Walton's most romantic works.

The first movement (*Andante tranquillo*) is the slowest of the three and highly demanding on the soloist. The second movement (*Presto capriccioso alla Napolitana*) is mostly very fast, with a song-like middle section in waltz time marked *Cantelina*. The finale (*Vivace*), marked *Tema con improvazione*, starts in a lively 3/4 tempo and contains some of Walton's most eloquent inventions, with much thematic interweaving ending in a spectacular flourish. Two of the variations are for full orchestra, and two for solo violin.

There is no sign of the doubt and indecision that preceded the work in its final form. Delicate and full-blooded by turns, its most attractive qualities lie in the ways in which Walton's lively imagination spreads a sunny, Mediterranean glow over what is, by any standards, a challenge to both players and listeners.

Stravinsky composed the Violin Concerto (1931) at the instigation of his friend Willy Strecker, head of the music publishing house of Schotts Söhne in Mainz. Strecker and the young Russian-American violinist Samuel Dushkin approached the composer about the possibility of writing a concerto for Dushkin. Stravinsky, himself a pianist, hesitated, realizing that although he had featured the violin prominently in works like *L'histoire du soldat* (1918), it was an altogether different matter to write an extended solo work for the instrument.

Stravinsky consulted Paul Hindemith, whom he knew to be a superb string player, and asked him if he thought his lack of knowledge of violin technique would be obvious in the work.

Stravinsky later noted: "Not only did he allay my doubts, but he went further and told me that it would be a very good thing, as it would make me avoid a routine technique, and would give rise to ideas which would not be suggested by the familiar movement of the fingers." Additionally, "Willy Strecker allayed my doubts by assuring me that Dushkin would place himself entirely at my disposal in order to furnish any technical details which I might require. Under such conditions the plan was very alluring."

Stravinsky then began a close collaboration with Dushkin on the solo part. Dushkin's memoirs reveal that he was quite an active partner in this endeavor. When asked about working with the young virtuoso, Stravinsky said: "When I show Sam a new passage, he is deeply moved, very excited -- then a few days later he asks me to make changes." Of course, the ultimate creative decisions rested with the composer. For example, when Dushkin argued for the retention of a particularly virtuosic passage, Stravinsky said: "You remind me of a salesman at the Galeries Lafayette. You say, 'Isn't this brilliant, isn't this exquisite, look at the beautiful colours, everybody's wearing it.' I say, 'Yes, it is brilliant, it is beautiful, everyone is wearing it -- I don't want it.'"

Dushkin recalled the genesis of the sonority -- a wide-spanning D - E - A chord -- which begins each movement of the concerto: "During the winter [1930-1931], I saw Stravinsky in Paris quite often. One day when we were lunching in a restaurant, Stravinsky took out a piece of paper and wrote down this chord and asked me if it could be played. I had never seen a chord with such an enormous stretch, from the E to the top A, and I said 'No'. Stravinsky said sadly 'What a pity.' After I got home, I tried it, and, to my astonishment, I found that in that register, the stretch of the 11th was relatively easy to play, and the sound fascinated me. I telephoned Stravinsky at once to tell him that it could be done. When the concerto was finished, more than six months later, I understood his disappointment when I first said 'No'. This chord, in a different dress, begins each of the four movements. Stravinsky himself calls it his 'passport' to that concerto."

Although Stravinsky insisted that his Violin Concerto was not modeled after those of Mozart, Beethoven, or Brahms, he did acknowledge that "the subtitles of my concerto -- *Toccata*, *Aria*, *Capriccio* -- may suggest Bach, and so, in a superficial way, might the musical substance. I am very fond of the Bach Concerto for Two Violins, as the duet of the soloist with a violin from the orchestra in the last movement of my own concerto may show." The premiere of the concerto took place on October 23, 1931, in Berlin, with Dushkin as soloist and Stravinsky conducting the Berlin Rundfunk Orchestra.

Walton • Violin Concerto
Stravinsky • Violin Concerto In D
Kyung-Wha Chung, violin
André Previn London Symphony Orchestra

Concerto For Violin And Orchestra

- 1. Andante Tranquillo 11:13**
- 2. Presto Capriccioso Alla Napolitana 6:33**
- 3. Vivace 12:42**

Concerto In D For Violin And Orchestra

- 1. Toccata 5:52**
- 2. Aria I 4:21**
- 3. Aria II 5:20**
- 4. Capriccio 6:14**

Recorded by Decca in 1972 at Snapes Malting

Producer: Christopher Raeburn Engineer: Colin Moorfoot & Tryggvi Tryggvason



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admin@highdeftapetransfers.com
or visit our website:
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