

**CHAMBER**

--- Reviews editor's choice ---

**TRUE ARTISTS LEAD THE WAY**

The first disc to combine the 'big three' 20th-century Russian cello sonatas is a winner, says **BARRY MILLINGTON**

**RACHMANINOFF**

**Cello Sonata in C minor, Op. 19**

**SHOSTAKOVICH**

**Cello Sonata in D minor, Op. 40**

**PROKOFIEV**

**Cello Sonata in C, Op. 119**

David Finckel (cello), Wu Han (piano)

ArtistLed 19901-2 (distr. +1 888 278

5332; www.artistled.com)

79:36 mins. . . . . £ £ £

**RACHMANINOFF**

**Cello Sonata in C minor, Op. 19; Prelude, Op. 2/1; Danse orientale, Op. 2/2; A Dream, Op. 8/5; So many hours, so many fancies, Op. 4/8; Vocalise, Op. 34/14**

Petja Svensson (cello)

Bengt-Åke Lundin (piano)

Caprice CAP 21643 56:30 mins £ £ £



**DAVID FINCKEL AND WU HAN:** rapt delivery

**T**he three great Russian cello sonatas of the 20th century, by Rachmaninoff (1901), Shostakovich (1934) and Prokofiev (1949), have often been combined on disc, but previously only two at a time. ArtistLed, the label set up by cellist David Finckel and pianist Wu Han in 1997, proudly announces that 'thanks to technological advances which can accommodate compact discs of almost 80 minutes in length', the sonatas can now appear all together. They do not mention that they have to cut exposition repeats, but never mind: these are superb performances, impeccably recorded and excellently packaged (thoughtful notes by Gerard McBurney and fascinating historical photographs).

The disc is dedicated to Mstislav Rostropovich, who of course is strongly identified with this

repertoire. Indeed, his 1964 Aldeburgh performance of the Shostakovich with Benjamin Britten was described on these pages last November as 'definitive' and 'essential listening', even if several fine modern alternatives offered 'more detailed and luxuriant sound'. The latter is certainly offered by this new recording: first-rate engineering does full justice to Finckel's rich, rounded, tone, where Rostropovich, as captured on the Decca recording, often sounds wiry and uningratiating.

In the Prokofiev and Rachmaninoff sonatas, too, Finckel brings his magnificently burnished tone and outstanding musicianship to bear, ably partnered by Wu Han. This is a formidable team: rapt and sensuous where required, but

capable of incandescent outpourings of lyricism too.

The account of the Rachmaninoff by the Swedes Petja Svensson and Bengt-Åke Lundin would doubtless be enjoyable in recital but cannot compete with playing of this order. Moray Welsh and Martin Roscoe on Black Box (BBM 1044), on the other hand (another superbly engineered recording), are in no way inferior. If you want an all-Rachmaninoff programme, the latter remains unbeatable, but for the 'big three' together, Finckel and Han can be unequivocally recommended.

**PERFORMANCE (Finckel)** ★★★★★  
**SOUND** ★★★★★  
**PERFORMANCE (Svensson)** ★★★  
**SOUND** ★★★  
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