



Press Release from BBT: 10 March 2025

## THE FREEDOM OF FANTASIES

### ZLATOMIR FUNG'S DEBUT RELEASE ON SIGNUM RECORDS

SIGCD882 Release date: 25 April 2025

*"These fantasies are a grand expression of musical freedom: the freedom to play, to wander, to risk, and to evolve. This feeling of freedom is what I hoped to celebrate most in the selection of works featured on this album."* Zlatomir Fung

This recording is a first for young American cellist Zlatomir Fung, although he has already garnered accolades, critical acclaim and standing ovations at performances around the world and is widely recognised as a highly virtuosic and sensitive musician and a rapidly rising star in the current generation of top cellists. Supported by his 2022 Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship, *Fantasies* is Fung's debut album on Signum Records and is a very personal project that is emblematic of his endless curiosity and interest in unusual repertoire.

It was during the pandemic lockdown period that Fung's fascination with opera fantasies was nurtured by an extensive exploration of the genre – a musical territory into which virtually every composer ventured in the mid-19th century, including many celebrated cellists. The transcriptions for cello and piano selected for this album range from exuberantly virtuosic and lyrical fantasies inspired by Donizetti and Rossini, to showpiece arias from operas by Tchaikovsky and Wagner. World premiere recordings of Fung's own fantasy on Janáček's *Jenůfa*, Marshall Estrin's *Fantasia Carmèn* composed specially for him, and Francois George-Hainl's virtually unknown transcription of Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* also feature.

Fung and his regular performance partner, pianist Richard Fu, are captured on a short BBT film ([LINK](#)) made during the recording sessions at Wells Cathedral School, in which they eloquently discuss the challenges of transferring the essential emotional power of not only the music, but also the vocal text and story of opera, to a purely instrumental form. At the same time, the genre's loose parameters allow the freedom to create something tailored to the performer's own tastes and technical skills, which eventually led to Fung both commissioning and creating his own fantasies.

He was drawn to the idea of Janáček's *Jenůfa* because of its dark storyline and idiosyncratic musical language, as well as the fact that 19<sup>th</sup>-century opera fantasies had fallen into obscurity by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when this opera was premiered. Fung avoided any references to the plot or libretto; *"my goal was to highlight the music I love most from Jenůfa and arrange it in a way that felt logical and true to the spirit of the opera"*.

The idea of commissioning Estrin to write a new fantasy on *Carmen* was mooted back in 2018. Although several already exist, Fung felt that none of them fully capture the cello's capacity as a virtuoso instrument. He considers Estrin's *Fantasia Carmèn* to be one of the most outstanding examples of the genre that demands the fullest extent of the cello's technical and virtuosic capabilities along with a show-stopping lyrical aria; *"Its more unconventional elements reimagine the notion of the fantasy itself, proving that the genre's possibilities are far from exhausted – and, indeed, may only be in their infancy."*

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## NOTES TO EDITORS

Watch the short film made during the recording: <https://www.bbtrust.com/artist/zlatomir-fung/video/>

### *Fantasies*

Zlatomir Fung cello

Richard Fu piano

Signum Records SIGCD882 Release date 25 April 2025

#### Track List

Leoš Janáček, arr. Zlatomir Fung *Fantasy on Jenůfa*

Adrien-François Servais *Fantaisie et Variations sur des motifs de l'Opéra La Fille du Régiment* de Donizetti, op.16

François George-Hainl *Fantaisie sur des motifs de Guillaume Tell* de G. Rossini, Op.8

Richard Wagner, arr. August Wilhelmj 'Walther's Prize Song' from *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, arr. Mikhail Bukinik 'Lensky's Aria' from *Eugene Onegin*

Marshall Estrin *Fantasia Carmèn*

#### ZLATOMIR FUNG cello

<https://www.zlatomirfung.com>

- **BORN** 1999 in the United States into a family of mathematicians of Bulgarian and Chinese heritage.
- **STUDIES** Began playing cello at age three. Studied at Juilliard School as a recipient of the Kovner Fellowship under the tutelage of Richard Aaron and Timothy Eddy. 2024-25 marks Fung's first season on the cello faculty at his alma mater.
- **AWARDS & PRIZES** include BBT Fellowship in 2022, Avery Fisher Grant in 2020, as well as joining the roster of Young Concert Artists International in 2017. He was also selected a 2006 US Presidential Scholar for the Arts and was awarded the 2016 Landgrave von Hesse Prize at the Kronberg Academy Cello Masterclasses. Fung burst onto the international scene in 2019 as the youngest ever musician to win the International Tchaikovsky Competition Cello Division, having already taken top prizes at the 2018 Alice & Eleonore Schoenfeld International String Competition, the 2016 George Enescu International Cello Competition and the 2015 Johansen International Competition for Young String Players, among others.
- **ORCHESTRAS** appearances as concerto soloist include with Cleveland Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Rochester Philharmonic, San Antonio Philharmonic and Baltimore, Dallas, Detroit, Milwaukee, Seattle and Kansas City symphonies in the US. Internationally they include Barcelona Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre National de Lille, BBC Philharmonic, London Philharmonic Orchestra, and as Artist-in-Residence in the 2023-24 season at the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.
- **RECITALS** in 2024-25 season include New York City, Boston, St Louis and London, plus playing the complete Bach Cello Suites at Mechanics Hall in Worcester, Massachusetts and Arcata, California.
- **FESTIVAL** appearances include Verbier, Dresden, Ravinia, Leoš Janáček International, Tsinandali, Bravo! Vail, Grant Park and Aspen music festivals, as well as the Cello Biennale Amsterdam.
- **REPERTOIRE** As well as mastering the classical canon of works for cello, Fung also champions contemporary music by composers such as Unsuk Chin, Anna Clyne and Katherine Balch whose *whisper concerto* he world-premiered in 2023 with the Dallas Symphony under the baton of Gemma New. The UK premiere followed in February 2024 with the BBC Philharmonic conducted by Joshua Weilerstein.
- **RECORDINGS** *Fantasies* on the Signum Records label (released April 2025) is Fung's debut album, a collection of opera fantasies and transcriptions for cello and piano.
- **INSTRUMENTS** Domenico Montagnana c. 1735 on loan from a generous benefactor and the 1696 'Lord Aylesford' Stradivarius on loan from the Nippon Music Foundation.
- **INTERESTS** outside of music include chess, cinema and creative writing (he has already written, and performed in, a radio play for WXQR's Artist Propulsion Lab in 2023).