

**Esa-Pekka Salonen's cello concerto for Yo-Yo Ma**  
**Released on Sony Classical on March 8, 2019**



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On March 8, Sony Classical will release a recording of [Esa-Pekka Salonen's cello concerto](#) featuring Yo-Yo Ma and the Los Angeles Philharmonic under Salonen's baton. Co-commissioned for Ma by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic, the Barbican Centre, and Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, Salonen's cello concerto premiered on March 9, 2017 with Salonen himself conducting the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Ma and the concerto then came to the New York Philharmonic on March 17, 2017, with then-Music Director Alan Gilbert conducting; Ma and Gilbert continued the premiere season with performances at London's Barbican Centre and Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie. This recording captures the live performance in Los Angeles on February 8, 2018.

The approximately 30-minute concerto includes scoring for electronics and begins with "a simple thought emerging out of a complex landscape. Almost like consciousness developing from clouds of dust," in Salonen's words. The second, main movement follows with "slow cello arches...looped to create harmony from single lines." This is followed by the third movement of music that is "often dance-like; sometimes gesticulating wildly, perhaps from the sheer joy of no longer having to do with clouds and processes." Salonen concludes, "Finally the kinetic energy burns itself out gently, the rapid movement slows down,

and the cello line climbs slowly up to a stratospherically high B-flat, two centimetres to the left from the highest note of the piano.”

Salonen has noted that some ideas for the piece “can be traced back by at least three decades, but the actual material for the piece was mostly developed in the summer of 2015 when I decided to spend a few months researching new kinds of textures without a concrete plan for how to use them.” Salonen and Ma are long-time friends and collaborators, having worked together on many projects in the 27 years since Salonen first led Ma in a performance at the Los Angeles Philharmonic in 1992. Salonen says, “It has been a very great pleasure and honour to write a concerto for one of the most unique life-givers and communicators of our time, Yo-Yo Ma. It has been inspiring to know that his technique knows no limits. Perhaps more important: nor does his imagination.”

The concerto has been met with critical and popular acclaim: Anthony Tommasini of *The New York Times* described the piece as “restive, cosmic and formidably difficult,” its ending “a cello concerto equivalent to the ‘Sacrificial Dance’ from Stravinsky’s ‘The Rite of Spring.’” John Von Rhein of the *Chicago Tribune* noted that the concerto “plays loosely with traditional concerto form but fills that free-form structure with the kinds of things [Ma] does better than any cellist around. It is as much a showpiece for his stupendous instrumental gift as it is a study in opposing forces—think quiescent clouds of lyricism giving way to punchy hyperactivity, and back again.” He added, “Those forces are finally reconciled over the course of the half-hour piece, which ends with Ma climbing to a vertiginous high B flat on the cello’s A string, as if he were reaching for the stars. Cosmic imagery—racing comets and the ‘stylized chaos’ of the universe, to quote the composer—in fact plays a central role in Salonen’s compositional thinking here, as does throwing prickly technical challenges in the cellist’s way and daring him, with a good-natured wink, to surmount them. Which of course he did with amazing nonchalance.”

Salonen will be taking the concerto on tour this season, conducting cellist Truls Mørk and the Philharmonia Orchestra, of which he is currently the Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor. After a February 24 performance at London’s Southbank Centre, Salonen, Mørk, and the Philharmonia will embark on a tour of the United States in March, with dates in New York, Ann Arbor, and Berkeley. Later in the month, Mørk and the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra will give the concerto its Czech premiere under the baton of conductor Ben Gernon. On April 1 Salonen and Ma will reunite for the Chicago Civic Orchestra’s centennial celebration. Salonen’s newest composition *Castor*—a companion piece to his 2018 *Pollux*—will see its premiere early next season in Los Angeles; Salonen will conduct both pieces with the New York Philharmonic on November 8.

Sony Classical has recently released career-spanning and defining works from both Salonen and Ma. [Salonen’s Complete Sony Recordings](#), released in 2018, is the most comprehensive collection of recordings by the composer/conductor, featuring a wide range of material from across his entire career, all released on Sony Classical. The 61-disc set features several of Salonen’s original works, as well as his conducting work with several ensembles. On 23 discs he conducts the Los Angeles Philharmonic, where he is Conductor Laureate, having been Music Director for 17 years. On another 12 discs he conducts the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, where he was Principal Conductor from 1985 to 1994. And on 14 he conducts the Philharmonia Orchestra, where he has been Principal Conductor since 2008—and where his international career was launched in 1983, when he deputized at the last minute in Mahler’s Third Symphony.

Likewise, Ma has had a long relationship with Sony Classical. His newest recording for the label, [Six Evolutions - Bach: Cello Suites](#), was released August 17 and subsequently spent twelve weeks atop the *Billboard* Classical Traditional chart and three weeks atop the Classical Total chart. The album has been streamed more than 19 million times worldwide, and has met with great acclaim from the likes of *The New York Times*, NPR, and *Time*. *Gramophone*'s Rob Cowan notes, "I don't think he has ever made a greater recording." *Six Evolutions - Bach: Cello Suites* is Ma's third and, by his estimation, final recording of the cello suites; his Grammy Award-winning first complete recording of the suites was made when he was in his late twenties. His second, *Inspired by Bach*, was released when he was in his early forties and recorded alongside a multi-genre, collaborative exploration of the works. Both previous recordings of the cello suites, also on Sony Classical, became landmarks in the history of classical discography, as well as milestones in Ma's musical life. The August release of *Six Evolutions* also signaled the beginning of a two-year, six-continent journey—The Bach Project—in which Ma will devote himself to Bach's music, playing all six Cello Suites in single sittings in familiar and unlikely locations. Accompanying each performance will be events that seek to put culture in action by bringing people and organizations together to address pressing social issues.

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