

In English /En inglés

“INSPIRATIONS”

Meet the Artist – CAMILLE THOMAS

French Solo Cellist

Some people don't know what they'll do on December 31st *[this was 2021 - ed.]* are starting to worry a little... Others, like Camille Thomas, are booked until 2025 (!!), and have the nerve to admit that it scares them a little too...

No wonder you have such a busy schedule when you're the first female cellist to sign an international exclusive contract with the prestigious record label Deutsche Grammophon (the yellow rectangle on classical music CDs) this is them!), and also one of the youngest! But this sesame is far from falling from the sky: the result of years of hard work, countless concerts and awards since age 16, including a 2014 Music Victory nomination.

Yet, when you look at Camille's Instagram account, it's the one of a girl today, who loves travel, fashion and meetings, in a thousand places of the usual prejudices about classical music and its performers. On the contrary, listening to her album shows that she is much more than the long-lined, smiling brunette on the cover, that she has achieved virtuosity in her art while remaining free and modern. And finally, when we meet her, she confirms this delightful paradox: the classic can be both 200 years old and have a touching freshness...

You're a "Belgian-Parisian" and you've chosen to go and train in Germany... Tell us about your European trip.

My parents are Belgian, they moved to France after their wedding. And even though Paris is the city where I grew up, I still find a particular warmth in Belgium, a country I am proud to belong to!

Germany, I went there by train at 17 years old, a bit by chance, to try a competition (the one of the entrance to the Berlin Academy of Music ndlr) that I made it; I thought I would stay for a few weeks, but I spent 10 years there! This experience was an immense opportunity, it allowed me to develop in a sincere and profound way, to get to know myself, and to get out of a pretty similar setting since I was 8 years old: class in the

morning, music in the afternoon... I was very attracted to Slavic culture, and especially Russian: the generosity of Tolstoy's characters, but also the strong and extreme characters like Dostoyevsky's. Classical music is all about this and having teachers from this Eastern European culture in Germany allowed me to integrate these concepts and move in the direction I wanted.

And of course, signing my contract at Deutsche Grammophon in Berlin was a very nice achievement!

Since your debut at 4 and a half years old (!), the cello hasn't left you anymore. How did this calling come about?

Music is in my family: my mother is a pianist, my father was her student... So I asked very quickly to play an instrument. It was left to be known which one! The cello imposed itself as an evidence, my earliest childhood memory is the sound of this instrument, even if I do not remember my first notes. To me, the cello is not a job, it's an accomplishment, I can't see my life any other way.

Have you ever had a shadow of hesitation?

I'm a Gemini so I question everything... Except for that! And even though the cello requires a lot of discipline, sacrifice, sometimes I feel like becoming a pancake seller just before going on stage (laughs)... Once I start playing, the adrenaline rises and any doubt disappears. I have no choice, I was put on earth to do this!

In your interpretation style, as in your fashion style, you can feel a momentum and freedom that you wouldn't expect from a classical musician.

How do you go against some prejudices about classical music and its interpretation contexts?

I want to show my generation that classical music is extremely current, away from the clichés that can sometimes get to your skin! Like great novels or great paintings, if certain pieces have made it through time and eras, they have universal value. They capture the soul with force, intensity, truth and depth, this is to me the definition of art. They make us live more intensely, and I'm sad that some miss out on this experience solely because of old prejudices.

That's why I try by my work and style to be me, a person of his time playing the music of his time.. For example, my stage dresses always have pockets, where I hold my I Phone to record my performance and then correct myself, this is not very "old school"!

It seems that a "new wave" of female classical artists who are both very talented and pretty panties are making their way on the international scene, in part thanks to social media: Katia Buniatishvili on piano, you on cello.... What do you think about this?

It's a good thing female personalities impose a different style in classical music, because you'll never criticize a man's attire on stage, let alone women... Anyway, I know Katia Buniatishvili, and she does have strong positions, she is really like that, it's not overplayed.

As far as I'm concerned, I'm very careful with the image, because it can be double sharp: it's great to be able to promote your work through Instagram, but I'm still an interpreter: my place is the stage and not my phone, and even if I want to dress well out of respect for the public and the musicians, I am not the centre of the matter. I am just passing on someone else's work as a single passer-by of art, beauty. I always keep this in mind and it also helps me survive the track sometimes!

What do you do when you're not playing?

I never really log off.... Playing professionally is like getting into religion, so everything I do has to be related to the music, the movies I watch, the books I read... But I try to spend as much time with my family and friends as I can that's my priority when I'm not playing games.

What's your type of day this tour period?

It's always a little special concert day, trying to balance adrenaline rush and calm, energy and rest. Swim, breathing exercises, repeat with musicians.

More generally, I work a lot uphill so that I can forget everything once I enter the stage, completely relax and be in sharing with the audience.

The pressure is still pretty intense, with 80 musicians and 2000 people to show up in front of, knowing a finger 1/4 millimetre too high can kill you lol! So I try to stay calm, keep my spirits up, tell myself that every gig is a lesson that moves me forward, it's always incredibly better on stage!

Do you have a specific beauty routine?

Clinique foundation and lipstick, my must-haves for flawless staging, even though playing doesn't last long, I often end up in a funny state, lol).

I also pay extra attention to my concert attire. It allows me to enter the performance, to get me in the mood, it's also a mark of respect for the audience and musicians. My dress must be both "Wow!" and simple, modern and affordable, I wouldn't want to wear dresses that cost 20 concert tickets! Recently I also wear high heels, I did not dare before with my im80, but they give me assurance, I feel better with it now!

And for your hands and arms that must be the most sought after?

It's actually the opposite of what you'd think: playing very relaxed, so the muscles aren't working that much, and my arms are pretty fragile! So I have to avoid carrying heavy loads outside of concerts (my cello is on my back), and practice relaxing sports like swimming rather than fitness or bodybuilding.

My hands are something else, they grew up with the cello, so my one is bigger than the other, and my fingers are marked. I like to leave them very natural, they are craftsmen's hands, hands not necessarily very neat because they work a lot!

Your Instagram account shows that you like varied and original looks. What's your day and night style?

Elegant and comfortable at the same time in every occasion. Sometimes I have to change myself several times a day, I have to get comfortable!

What would you say to people who've never been to a classical music concert to give it a try?

Classical music makes everything feel 10x stronger: if you're in love, you'll be 10x harder; if you're sad, you'll cry 10x harder, but it's catharsis, it'll do you good. This is an opportunity that is now open to everyone, so come and try yours!



Camille Thomas – Biography

Optimism, vitality and joyful exuberance are elements of **Camille Thomas**'s rich and compelling personality. The young Franco-Belgian cellist, who signed an exclusive contract with Deutsche Grammophon in April 2017, understands art's power to bring people together, to unite individuals from diverse cultures, countries and backgrounds. Her charismatic artistry is driven by a passion for life and a desire to inspire others to open their hearts to the wonder and emotion of classical music. "I strongly believe that music has the power to enlarge the heart, to make you feel everything with more intensity," she says. "Music gives hope for the beauty and greatness of the human soul."

Voice of Hope, her second DG album, was set for international release on June 6, 2020. At its heart is the world premiere recording of Fazil Say's Concerto for Cello and Orchestra 'Never Give Up', the composer's response to terrorist attacks on Paris and Istanbul, written expressly for Thomas, who gave its world premiere performance in Paris in April 2018. It is the first classical album recorded in partnership with UNICEF, reflecting the cellist's desire to help others through her music.

Camille Thomas was born in 1988 in Paris. She began playing cello at the age of four and made such rapid progress that she was soon taking lessons with Marcel Bardon. She moved to Berlin in 2006 to study with Stephan Forck and Frans Helmerson at the Hanns Eisler Hochschule für Musik, and continued her training in the form of postgraduate lessons with Wolfgang-Emanuel Schmidt at the Franz Liszt Hochschule für Musik in Weimar.

Camille is conquering the world stage at a staggering pace. She has already worked with such conductors as Paavo Järvi, Mikko Franck, Marc Soustrot, Darrell Ang, Kent Nagano, Stéphane Denève and with orchestras such as the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, Academia Santa Cecilia, the Sinfonia Varsovia, Staatsorchester Hamburg in the Elbphilharmonie, the Lucerne Festival Strings in the Herkulesaal in Munich, the Orchestre National de Bordeaux, and Brussels Philharmonic.

Camille Thomas plays the famous 'Feuermann' Stradivarius 1730 as a loan from the Nippon Music Foundation.