

Winner of the 2009 Canada Council Musical Instrument Bank Competition, Canadian cellist **Rachel Mercer** was awarded the use of the 1696 Bonjour Stradivarius cello, donated anonymously to the council, until August 2012. As the grand prize winner of the 2001 Vriendenkrans Competition in Amsterdam, Rachel made her European recital debut in the Concertgebouw Kleine Zaal. Rachel has performed as a soloist across Canada, in Europe, the Balkans, the United States, South Africa and Israel, including appearances with the Toronto Symphony, National Arts Centre, Durban, and Banff Festival orchestras. Her performances have been broadcast in Canada, Israel and Europe. She currently records for Israeli indie label EnT-T. Her debut disc "Room" of solo cello pieces, was released in April 2008.

Currently based in Toronto, Rachel has given guest masterclasses at the University of Toronto and QuartetFest at Wilfred Laurier University. She is principal cellist for Via Salzburg, a chamber music series led by Mayumi Seiler, and member of piano quartet Ensemble Made in Canada, winners of CBC Galaxie Rising Stars Award, and named among "80 women to watch" in the 80th anniversary edition of Chatelaine magazine in May 2008. Ensemble Made In Canada tours regularly across the country and most recently began appearing in the United States with a residency at SUNY, New Paltz, NY. Rachel and her violinist sister Akemi formed the Mercer-Oh Trio in 2007 (with Toca Loca pianist and Toronto Music Gallery curator Gregory Oh) and are playing a complete Haydn Piano Trio cycle in 9 concerts for the Kitchener-Waterloo Chamber Music Society between 2009 and Haydn's birthday; April 1, 2012. Rachel also appears in recital with pianist Angela Park as the Mercer-Park duo. Their debut disc of Barber, Shostakovich and Lau was released in July 2011.

Recent concerts include appearances with the Mercer-Park Duo, Mercer Duo, Ensemble Made In Canada, Art of Time Ensemble, Via Salzburg, Tchaikovsky's Rococo with the Etobicoke Philharmonic and the International Cello Festival of Canada in Winnipeg. Rachel is performing four Bach Suite Cycles this year and will record them on the Bonjour Stradivarius cello in the fall. This season, Rachel gave world premieres of two works written especially for her by Hunter Coblenz and Abigail Richardson-Schulte. The 2011-12 season will include the Saint-Saens concerto with the Canadian Sinfonietta, a recital tour to Yellowknife, an all-Canadian recital at the University of Toronto New Music Festival with the Mercer-Park Duo including two world premieres, a trio concert with Andre Laplante and Mayumi Seiler, and an extensive BC-Alberta tour with Ensemble Made In Canada. Rachel will also be teaching at the University of Toronto from January-May 2012 while Shauna Rolston is on sabbatical.

As a member of the award-winning Aviv String Quartet from 2002-2010, Rachel toured regularly on five continents, playing in halls such as the Auditorium du Louvre, Zurich Tonhalle, Wigmore Hall, Herbst Theater in San Francisco, the Library of Congress in Washington DC, Baxter Hall in Cape Town, St Lawrence Centre in Toronto, and at festivals such as Montpellier, Aix-en-Provence, Lockenhaus, Davos, Colmar, Oslo and Ottawa. The quartet released cds on Naxos and Dalia Classics and celebrated its 10th anniversary with a complete Shostakovich cycle at the 2007 Verbier Festival. Collaborations included performances with Jorg Widmann, Boris Berman, Pierre-Laurent Aimard, James Tocco, Boris Petrushansky, Elisso Virssaladze and Anton Dressler. The quartet also gave masterclasses, coaching and outreach performances in the United States, Israel, South Africa and Canada, including at the University of Toronto.

Born in Edmonton, Rachel began cello studies at the age of three with Diana Nuttall. She spent formative years with Kristl Armstrong at the Vancouver Academy of Music, where she made her solo debut with the Vancouver Academy Chamber Orchestra at the age of 12. After moving to Ontario, Rachel attended the Royal Conservatory of Music and received the Gold Medal for her Associate Diploma, studying with Susan Gagnon and David Hetherington. She received a BM from the University of Toronto with Shauna Rolston, an MM with honours from the New England Conservatory with Laurence Lesser, and a solo diploma from the Conservatorium van Amsterdam with Dmitri Ferschtman. Rachel attended Orford, Banff, Holland Music Sessions, Ravinia, Prussia Cove, Scotiifest, Proquartet, the Juilliard Quartet Seminar and the Verbier Academy, for masterclasses with Boris Pergamenschikow, Frans Helmerson, Lynn Harrell, Janos Starker, Aldo Parisot, Gregor Horsch, Valentin Berlinsky, Valentin Erben, Henry Meyer and Walter Levin.

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