

Julian Steckel, Cello

Biography

Written music is potential energy that a performer must unleash. Audiences can tell if a musician really feels that energy, or if their expression is second-hand. When Julian plays, he is sharing something fragile and alive. “As an interpreter, I’ve started trusting my inner life more and letting the audience in,” he says. “It’s a kind of vulnerability that makes you stronger.” His first child was born at the end of 2018. Since then, his conviction has grown, his sense for metaphor expanded.

He knows that making music for an audience occasionally involves tipping the scales too far one way or another. But he is aware of his responsibility toward what is often called the “intentions of the composer.” He dives deep into scores, investigating the organic connections that give a work its unity. “If you know one room in an apartment, but not that the apartment has seven other rooms, you won’t even understand the room you’re in,” he says. When Julian plays, the music is in safe hands. You listen for his discoveries; what the music, through him, is trying to tell you.

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Every life is a series of experiences, encounters, memories, places. Sometimes it’s possible to understand the contours of a musician’s ability through a list of these moments. Julian Steckel’s solo career gained significant momentum when he won the ARD International Music Competition in 2010. Since then he has appeared with the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, the Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, the Munich Philharmonic, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Orchestre de Paris, the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra and the Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra Tokyo, working with conductors including Iván Fischer, Christoph Eschenbach, Sir Roger Norrington, Nicholas Collon, Fabien Gabel, John Storgårds, Lahav Shani, Gustavo Gimeno, Katharina Wincor and Daniele Rustioni.

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For Julian, these experiences and encounters are the result of organic growth, not external pressure. It’s a development that tends to happen when a musician of his ability goes through life with an open mind.

His playing is effortless, unhindered by technical boundaries. He derives energy from appearing not to try. It’s a quality that many look for and few find. He sees his talent and his musical upbringing as a gift. His mentors are responsible for the rest.

“My very first teacher considered lightness and simplicity to be at the core of cello playing,” Julian says. “Listen to yourself, plan what you’re doing, get it right the first time. I owe everything to these insights.” He studied with Ulrich Voss, Gustav Rivinius, Boris Pergamenschikow, Heinrich Schiff and Antje Weithaas. Now he is a teacher too, at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Munich.

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During the 2026/27 season, his engagements will take him to the Pohang Music Festival and to Taiwan, amongst other places, where he will first perform Haydn's Sinfonia concertante at the National Symphony Orchestra's New Year's Eve concert and will subsequently appear in four chamber concerts as part of the Paul Huang & Friends concert series. Other highlights include Anna Thorvaldsdottir's cello concerto *Before We Fall* with the Belgian National Orchestra under Michael Schønwandt, as well as Shostakovich's Cello Concerto No. 1 with Het Residentie Orkest. The start of the season also includes a lot of chamber music: as artistic director of the 'vielsaitig' festival in Füssen, he will present a varied programme in the town, which is regarded as the historic centre of European lute and violin making. Performances with renowned partners such as Carolin Widmann, Nils Mönkemeyer and William Youn, Dénes Várjon, Ning Feng, Adrien La Marca, Frank Dupree, Karen Gomyo and Matan Porat will take him to venues including the Louisiana Museum in Copenhagen, the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, Wigmore Hall in London and the Tonhalle in Düsseldorf.

Highlights of previous seasons include the opening of the Dvořák Festival in Prague together with the Bamberger Symphoniker and Jakub Hrůša, his debut with the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra under Ruth Reinhardt, Walton's Cello Concerto with Tianyi Lu in Leipzig, Strauss's *Don Quixote* with the Sapporo Symphony Orchestra under Elias Grandy in Japan, as well as Shostakovich's First Cello Concerto with the Frankfurt Radio Symphony under Tabita Berglund. He performed all of Bach's Cello Suites in Shanghai and Beijing before returning to the Musikverein Vienna and Festspielhaus St. Pölten to perform Dvořák's Cello Concerto with the Tonkünstler Orchestra and Tomáš Netopil – a work he also played that season with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra under Ana María Patiño-Osorio. Further performances included Saint-Saëns with the Orquesta de Extremadura as well as his debut with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra performing Haydn. He also played Gulda's Concerto for Cello and Wind Orchestra with the Orchestre Symphonique de Québec under Clemens Schuldt, where he has been a regular guest in recent seasons. He subsequently also performed Gulda's work with Sinfonia Varsovia in Warsaw.

Chamber music – a constant source of inspiration and the communicative backbone of his musicianship – has brought him together with partners such as Janine Jansen, Christian Tetzlaff, Antje Weithaas, Vilde Frang, Sharon Kam, Antoine Tamestit, Lars Vogt, Elisabeth Leonskaja, Martin Helmchen, Timothy Ridout, and the Modigliani, Armida and Ébène Quartets. Most recently, chamber music projects have taken him to venues including the Alte Oper Frankfurt and on a tour of Japan, as well as to the Muziekgebouw Amsterdam with the Leonkoro Quartet.

Julian's relationship with music spans analytical intelligence and extreme commitment. His interpretations are grounded and accessible. He's played his way to freedom.

As of: 2026/27 season