

Sheku Kanneh-Mason

Sheku Kanneh-Mason MBE (born 4 April 1999) is a British cellist who won the 2016 BBC Young Musician award. He was the first black musician to win the competition since its launch in 1978.^[1] He played at the wedding of Prince Harry to Meghan Markle on 19 May 2018 under the direction of Christopher Warren-Green.

<div>Sheku Kanneh-Mason</div> <div>MBE</div>	
Born	4 April 1999 <div>Nottingham, England</div>
Genres	Classical
Instruments	Cello
Years active	2015–present
Labels	Decca Classics
Website	shekukannehmason.com (https://shekukannehmason.com/)

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Early life and education

Kanneh-Mason grew up in Nottingham, England. He was born to Stuart Mason, a luxury hotel business manager from Antigua, and Dr. Kadiatu Kanneh, a former lecturer at the University of Birmingham, from Sierra Leone.^{[2][3]} He is the third of seven children^[3] and began learning the cello at the age of six with Sarah Huson-Whyte, having briefly played the violin.^[4] His love for the cello started when he saw his sister perform in 'Stringwise', an annual weekend course for young Nottingham string players, run by the local music charity Music for Everyone. He then switched from violin to cello and went on to take part in Music for Everyone's Stringwise courses, impressing their conductors with his astonishing ability to play everything from memory.^[5] At the age of nine, he passed the Grade 8 cello examination with the highest marks in the UK,^{[6][7]} and won the Marguerite Swan Memorial Prize.^[8] Also aged nine he won an ABRSM junior scholarship to join the Junior Academy of the Royal Academy of Music, where he was tutored by Ben Davies.^{[1][9][10]} Kanneh-Mason received his non-specialist education as a pupil at the Trinity School, Nottingham,^[10] where he studied for A levels in Music, Maths and Physics.^[8]

Career

In 2015, he and his siblings were competitors on *Britain's Got Talent* as The Kanneh-Masons. He won the BBC's Young Musician of the Year contest in May 2016, later telling *The Observer* that appearing on *Britain's Got Talent* had been "a good experience for getting used to performing in front of lots of people, with cameras and interviews. When it came to BBC Young Musician there were fewer cameras so I wasn't fazed at all."^[4]

Kanneh-Mason was a member of the Chineke! Orchestra, which was founded by Chi-chi Nwanoku for black and minority ethnic classical musicians; his sister Isata and brother Braimah are also members.^[4] In 2016, Kanneh-Mason told The Guardian's Tom Service that:^[11]

Chineke! is a really inspiring project. I rarely go to a concert and see that kind of diversity in the orchestra. Or in the audience. Having the orchestra will definitely change the culture. It's so important we're celebrating music by black composers, too, like the piece by Chevalier de Saint-Georges we're playing in September.

In November 2016, Kanneh-Mason was the subject of a BBC Four documentary entitled *Young, Gifted and Classical: The Making of a Maestro*.^[12] The following month, he was interviewed for BBC Radio 4's Front Row round-up of the year's major arts and entertainment award winners.^[13]

In January 2018, it was reported that Kanneh-Mason had donated £3,000 to his former secondary school, enabling ten other pupils to continue their cello lessons.^[14]

Sheku currently studies with Hannah Roberts at the Royal Academy of Music in London.^[15]

Kanneh-Mason signed a deal for worldwide general management with London-based boutique agency, Enticott Music Management^[16] in June 2016, and went on to sign a major recording contract with classical music label Decca Classics in November 2016. The record deal was signed on board a Nottingham City Transport bus which the local authority had named in his honour after Kanneh-Mason won the BBC Young Musician contest.^[17] The label announced that his first recording would feature the piece with which he won the BBC's Young Musician of the Year contest, Shostakovich's Cello Concerto No.1.^[1]

Kanneh-Mason performed at the 2017 British Academy Film Awards (BAFTA) held in London's Royal Albert Hall.^[18] In the same year, he was the soloist for the Chineke! orchestra's performance at the BBC Proms, playing Antonín Dvořák's Rondo in G Major.^[19] In February 2018, Sheku became the first artist ever to be re-invited to perform a second time at the British Academy Film Awards, playing "Evening of Roses" by Josef Hadar in an arrangement by Tom Hodge.^[20] For his second BAFTA performance, Sheku was joined on stage at the Royal Albert Hall by four of his siblings: Isata, Braimah, Konya, and Jeneba Kanneh-Mason.

In early February 2018, the BBC reported that Kanneh-Mason's album *Inspiration* was "the biggest-selling British debut of the year to date", entering the UK Albums Chart at number 18, had become number one on the UK classical albums chart, and had achieved 2.5 million streams on Spotify.^[21]

On 19 May 2018, Kanneh-Mason performed as part of the musical selections for the wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle.^{[22][23]} On 11 November 2018, he performed in the presence of the same couple at the Royal Variety Performance which was broadcast on ITV.^[24]

Musical influences

Kanneh-Mason has cited the prominent cellists Jacqueline du Pré and Mstislav Rostropovich as his "musical heroes", alongside Bob Marley.^[4]

Honours and awards

Kanneh-Mason was the winner of the 2016 BBC Young Musician competition, following which his home town of Nottingham named a bus in his honour.^{[1][17]} In that year he also won the Royal Philharmonic Society Young Instrumentalist Duet Prize.^{[25][26]}

In June 2017, he won the Classical category of the South Bank Sky Arts Awards' *The Times* Breakthrough prize.^[27]

In June 2018, he won both the Male Artist of the Year and the Critics' Choice Award at the Classic BRIT Awards.^[28]

Kanneh-Mason was appointed Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in the 2020 New Year Honours for services to music.^[29]

In March 2020, Kanneh-Mason won the public vote for Best Classical Artist at the Global Awards.^[30]

Discography

Kanneh-Mason released his debut EP in February 2017 to coincide with his performance at the BAFTAs. The three tracks on the EP were recorded at the Abbey Road Studios.

- Pablo Casals, "Song of the Birds", acc. Isata Kanneh-Mason
- Ernest Bloch, "Abodah", arr. Sheku Kanneh-Mason
- Gabriel Fauré, "Après un rêve"

These tracks followed the viral success of his video of Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah", arranged by Tom Hodge. Sheku performed this arrangement at the BAFTAs in February 2017.^[31] Sheku has also recorded Gaspar Cassadó's "Requiebros".^[32]

Sheku appears as a guest artist on the album *Tecchler's Cello: from Cambridge to Rome* by cellist and fellow BBC Young Musician winner Guy Johnston, released in September 2017.^[33]

On 26 January 2018 Sheku's first full-length album, *Inspiration*, was released by Decca. The recording includes the Shostakovich Cello Concerto No. 1 (accompanied by the CBSO conducted by Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla) as well as shorter works by Shostakovich, Saint-Saens, Offenbach, Casals and Sheku's own arrangement of Bob Marley's "No Woman, No Cry". On 2 February 2018, the Official UK Charts Company announced that *Inspiration's* success had made Sheku "the UK's youngest cellist to break into the Official Albums Chart Top 20 with his debut album" (the previous holder of the accolade being Julian Lloyd Webber, who was 39 when he released Lloyd Webber Plays Lloyd Webber in 1990).^[34] As well as being the highest-charting BBC Young Musician on the UK's Official Albums Chart, Sheku is also the first BBC Young Musician to break into the albums Top 40 with their debut record.

Sheku's second album *Elgar* was released by Decca Classics on 10 January 2020. It features a recording of the Elgar Cello Concerto in E minor, Op. 85, with the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sir Simon Rattle. The album also includes arrangements of traditional melodies, along with works by Bloch, Bridge, Elgar, Fauré, and Julius Klengel.^[35]

Albums

Title	Details	Peak chart positions
		UK ^[36]
<i>Inspiration</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Released: 26 January 2016 Label: <u>Decca</u> 	11
<i>Elgar</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Released: 10 January 2020 Label: <u>Decca Classics</u> 	8

Charitable work

Sheku was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes at the age of 12. On 13 September 2018 the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF) announced that it had appointed Sheku as a global ambassador.^[37]



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External links

- [Official website \(https://shekukannehmason.com/\)](https://shekukannehmason.com/) 
 - [Sheku Kanneh-Mason \(https://twitter.com/ShekuKM\)](https://twitter.com/ShekuKM) on [Twitter](#) 
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