

The story of how Eleanora Spina and Michele Benignetti became a piano duo has a certain fairy tale quality to it. It started when the Italian solo pianists decided they would try their hand at playing a favourite Rachmaninoff piece written for two pianos.

As Michele explains, "It was not a professional idea of becoming a piano duo at the beginning - it was just having fun playing together. And then we realised when we were playing together there was something different from when we play solo. There was something magical that came out."

They followed that magic and haven't looked back. Since 2013 they have been focusing their career and studies on performing together as a duo. Although they were both established solo pianists by that stage, Michele tells me that being a piano duo is a completely different discipline.

"At big concert halls and big festivals you will often get two solo pianists who come together for just one concert, and you can immediately understand that they are not a duo because there is no balance between them. The challenge when you play as a duo is to create a sound that is beautiful, with a lot of energy but a delicate tone. That's very complicated."

Their studies, at schools such as the prestigious Ecole Normal de Musique in Paris and under the tutelage of mentor musicians, has paid off. They have won international competitions, were recently appointed official Yamaha artists, released the very well received album Lifetime in 2017, and perform together in concert halls around the world. They are living a dream, and not taking anything for granted. When I asked Michele to name a dream performance venue he is hesitant to answer.

"Even in China, everywhere, there are fantastic venues with 1000 seats. Acoustically perfect buildings. It's important to enjoy the moment. And then, of course, if you play Carnegie Hall that would be the top." He laughs, "Even the Albert Hall in London is quite good."

Spina and Benignetti toured Australia earlier this year and have plans to return next year. They loved Australia, enjoying the spaciousness of Sydney compared to European cities and also noting a difference in the audience. "It was nice to see young people at the concert, that's very good. In Europe it's not so often that you see that. Because Europe is an old continent, classical music is something typically - not for old people exactly - but not for children."



Both Eleanora and Michele balance jobs as music professors with their careers as touring musicians. Though he says he feels very lucky, Michele describes a busy lifestyle of travel and rehearsals as well as plans to record a second album this year. But he wouldn't have it any other way.

"I really enjoy teaching because it's important to inspire young people. The fact that I'm also a concert artist is important, to show them that classical music is something that is alive and not just on paper."