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SERGEI PROKOFIEV

PIANO MUSIC
VOL. 3



OLEG MARSHEV

PIANO

Sergei Prokofiev (1891 - 1953)

[1] **Sonata no. 3 in A minor, Op. 28 “From Old Notebooks”** (1907, rev. 1917) 7:32

10 Pieces Op. 12 (1906-13) 23:04

- [2] I March 1:32
- [3] II Gavotte 2:39
- [4] III Rigaudon 1:15
- [5] IV Mazurka 1:25
- [6] V Capriccio 2:49
- [7] VI Legend 3:06
- [8] VII Prelude 2:19
- [9] VIII Allemande 2:56
- [10] IX Scherzo Humoristique 2:19
- [11] X Scherzo 2:23

Thoughts, 3 pieces Op. 62 (1933-4) 13:52

- [12] I 4:26
- [13] II 2:58
- [14] III 6:22

[15] **March Op. 89, no. 8** (1941) 1:53

4 Pieces Op. 32 (1918) 11:40

- [16] I Dance 3:24
- [17] II Minuet 1:32
- [18] III Gavotte 1:31
- [19] IV Waltz 5:09

Sonata no. 5 in C major, Op. 38/135 (1923, rev. 1952-3) 14:38

- [20] i Allegro tranquillo 5:50
- [21] ii Andantino 4:02
- [22] iii Un poco allegretto 4:40

Oleg Marshev, Piano

Throughout his career Prokofiev never ceased composing for his own instrument. True, following the 5th Sonata's unenthusiastic reception in 1923, he was to renounce that particular musical genre for 16 years before taking up his pen to write the great "War" trilogy of sonatas 6, 7 and 8; but the late 20's and 30's were to see the birth of keyboard works of a more experimental nature such as the collections opp. 45, 59 and 62. And these creative "gaps" are characteristic of the composer's output in all three of his preferred musical forms - other than the piano sonata, the symphony and the concerto: 14 years separate the 4th and 5th symphonies and there are 10 years between the 3rd and 4th piano concerti.

The works featured on this recording cover Prokofiev's entire creative life, and despite his death at the early age of 61, this "creative life" as pianist and composer spanned over fifty years. At six he was already sketching his first works, and at 9 he commenced composition of an opera, supplying not

only music, but also the subject matter, libretto and stage direction! He entered the St. Petersburg Conservatoire in 1904, receiving diplomas in pianoforte and composition 5 years later and graduating in June 1914 winning the Rubinstein Prize, the highest award for piano playing. Characteristically his examination work was his own D-flat piano concerto.

The **10 Pieces Op 12** date from his study years. As might be expected, they are already completely idiomatically laid out for the keyboard. The atmosphere of this charming collection is often more Gallic than Russian (listen to the *Rigaudon* or the delightful *Prelude*), though Prokofiev's own pungent voice is not to be mistaken in pieces such as the opening *March*, the *Gavotte* (with its clear anticipations of the dance of the girls with lilies outside Juliet's window on her wedding morning) and the two concluding *Scherzos*.

The composer started work on his **3rd**

Sonata during the same period, but set it aside for some ten years (during which time he wrote his 2nd Sonata) before taking up the sketches again and sub-titling the complete work "From Old Notebooks" (an appellation later also given to the 4th Sonata). One can readily imagine the young firebrand trying to impose some order on this teeming material. In common with the 1st Sonata, the work is cast in a dense single movement, but the structure here is more subtle, the material more richly varied - astonishingly so for such a brief composition - and highly organised. As ever, Prokofiev makes considerable demands on the pianist, not just in technical terms, but in adjusting to the kaleidoscopic shifts of mood that characterise the work.

Prokofiev enthusiastically welcomed the February Revolution of 1917, that same summer composing his 1st Symphony ("Classical") in St. Petersburg. Yet exaltation quickly gave way to the realisation that the heady climate of political turmoil would not

offer many opportunities to an ambitious young pianist and composer. In May 1918 he gained a permit to leave the country and travelled to the USA, starting what was to be fifteen year voluntary exile during which he established a formidable international reputation. The **4 Pieces Op. 32** were composed around the time of his departure. Despite the spicy "Magyar" flavoured *Gavotte* and the seductive harmony of the slow *Waltz*, there is little sign in this delightful dance suite of the new tendencies that his work was to display on his arrival in the New World. After a successful concert in Chicago, the opera house there commissioned his "The Love of Three Oranges".

In 1920 the composer made Paris his permanent base in the West, writing three ballets for Diaghilev and enjoying the championship of his orchestral works by his compatriot Serge Koussevitsky. Exposure to the stimulating Parisian artistic environment is clearly to be discerned in the **5th Sonata**. The influence of

works such as Stravinsky's "Petrushka" has been pointed out by several observers, and there is no doubt that his encounter with myriad new creative stimuli wrought a radical change in Prokofiev's art. The work marks a new departure for him: the piano writing is more restrained calling for less ostentatiously virtuoso approach to the keyboard; the harmony is more spare, at times even primitive; formally it is taught. Though the actual structure of the 1st movement is quite traditional, the thematic and motivic material is deployed with considerable subtlety. A deceptively artless opening theme and not particularly contrasting second subject combine to create a surprisingly intense development section which spills over into the recapitulation most effectively. Prokofiev substitutes a stalking "clockwork" *Andantino* for the traditional slow movement. Elegantly poised between innocence and irony, this material too is developed with his customary resourcefulness. The "mechanical" element continues into the 3rd movement and the sonata

concludes in a savage, obsessive mood of grim determination reminiscent of the more demonstratively iconoclastic efforts of the composer's youth.

Yet the work was given a cool reception, causing the composer to set it aside for subsequent revision. Did he lack faith in his own intuitions or did he merely not wish to compromise the relative luxury of his Parisian existence and his new-found celebrity status with works of a more problematic nature (hardly likely perhaps for a composer who had made the explicit aggression of his music a creed)? Certainly Prokofiev was always extremely susceptible to criticism, and, as later bitter experience proved, he was not incapable of conformation when necessary. Whatever the cause, it was not until the very last years of his life that he took up the 5th Sonata again. By this time he obviously felt more confident with the work and its idiom, subjecting mainly only the last movement to revision. The present recording is of the final text, but pianists are now increasingly turning to the ori-

ginal 1923 version, convinced that, despite its innovative style, the composer was already sufficiently master of his creative intuitions and chosen medium to know exactly what he wished to achieve.

Unlike Stravinsky and Rachmaninov, Prokofiev's reasons for staying in the West were financial rather than political. Thus when the social and financial climate in the West deteriorated in the late 20's and early 30's and commissions for new work declined, it was natural for the composer to return to his native country. Yet his timing was hardly ideal. The USSR of 1933 was not a suitable environment for an artist used to exercising his creative integrity. Under the new doctrine of social realism Prokofiev found himself - perhaps not too reluctantly - constrained to produce quantities of film and ballet music to appease Soviet officialdom. "**Pensées**" (**Thoughts**) **Op. 62** are one of his most personal statements and surely a direct reaction to the circumstances in which

he found himself at this time. These are meditative, predominantly melancholy, works whose rambling form and often obscure harmonic treatment inhabit an expressive dimension worlds apart from the ebullient 'public' masterpieces of the same period: "Romeo and Juliet", "Peter and the Wolf", "Lieutenant Kijé" and "Alexander Nevsky".

In 1941 Prokofiev composed seven settings for choir and piano of poems by Mayakovsky, Surkov and M. Mendelssohn. He concluded this Op. 89 collection with a short **March** for piano solo, heading it with the date of its composition: 28 July 1941. Who would guess from its genial tone that a mere month before, 164 German armoured divisions had surged into the USSR from the west.

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Born in Baku, ex-USSR, OLEG MARSHEV trained with Valentina Aristova at the Gnesin School for Highly Gifted Children and with Mikhail Voskresensky at the Moscow Conservatory where he completed his Performance Doctorate in 1988 gaining the Diploma with Honour.

Marshev's First Prize in the 1988 "Pilar Bayona" International Piano Competition (Spain) proved the first in a series of illustrious competition victories which have confirmed the artist's reputation as one of the most talented Russian pianists of his generation: in 1990 he took First Prize and the Gold Medal at the AMSA World Piano Competition of Cincinnati; in 1991 First Prize at the Concorso Pianistico Internazionale "Citta di Marsala" and the following year he was awarded the coveted *Primo Premio Assoluto* in the Italian capital's premier competition, the Concorso Pianistico Internazionale "Roma 1992".

In addition to numerous engagements in his native country, Marshev has performed in Hungary, Poland, Spain, Germany, Holland, Scandinavia, Japan and in the United States and Canada. 1991 saw his New York debut with a highly acclaimed recital at the Lincoln Center "Alice Tully Hall" which led to an invitation to perform at the Amsterdam Concertgebouw. A resident in Italy since 1991, the artist gives concerts regularly in that country's leading music centres, from Messina, Catania and Palermo in the south, via Rome and Tuscany to the major cities of the north such as Turin and Milan. He is also in increasing demand as a teacher, holding masterclasses in Spain, Italy and the USA.

Besides recording the complete original solo piano music by Prokofiev (DACOCD 391 - 395) for Danacord, Oleg Marshev has recorded Anton Rubinstein's 3rd and 4th Piano Concertos with the Artur Rubinstein Philharmonic Orchestra under Ilya Stupel (DACOCD 411).



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Total playing time: 73:02

COMPACT
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