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SERGEI PROKOFIEV

PIANO MUSIC
VOL. 4



OLEG MARSHEV

PIANO

Sergei Prokofiev (1891 - 1953)

Sonata no. 2 in D minor, Op. 14 (1912) *18:10*

- [1] i Allegro ma non troppo *6:15*
- [2] ii Allegro marcato *1:51*
- [3] iii Andante *5:20*
- [4] iv Vivace *4:34*

4 Pieces Op. 4 (1910-12) *9:35*

- [5] I Réminiscences *2:34*
- [6] II Elan *00:54*
- [7] III Désespoir *3:22*
- [8] IV Suggestion diabolique *2:36*

- [9] **Song without Words** (ca. 1905?) *1:20*

Things in Themselves, 2 pieces Op. 45 (1928) *13:11*

- [10] I *8:05*
- [11] II *5:04*

Children's Music Op. 65 (1935) *18:11*

- [12] I Morning *1:23*
- [13] II Promenade *00:58*
- [14] III A short Tale *2:22*
- [15] IV Tarantella *1:01*
- [16] V Regrets *2:05*
- [17] VI Waltz *1:17*
- [18] VII Grasshoppers' Parade *00:53*
- [19] VIII Rain and the Rainbow *1:22*
- [20] IX Playing "tag" *00:55*
- [21] X March *1:02*
- [22] XI Evening *2:35*
- [23] XII Moonlit meadows *1:45*

Sonata no. 4 in C minor, Op. 29 "From Old Notebooks" (1908 rev. 1917) *17:16*

- [24] i Allegro molto sostenuto *5:42*
- [25] ii Andante assai *8:01*
- [26] iii Allegro con brio ma non leggero *3:27*

Oleg Marshev, Piano

Has Prokofiev's reputation as *enfant terrible* and *provocateur* of the keyboard been exaggerated by posterity? On the evidence of some of the works featured in this recording, perhaps not. Yet the abrasive uncompromising Prokofiev is only one facet of this protean artist, and even here one may opine that it is not so much the *matter* itself as the *manner* in which it's presented that is new. True, he dismissed Mozart completely and hinted that Chopin could also be dispensed with, but few can deny that Russian's music can be as sumptuously Romantic as it can brazenly dissonant.

The young Prokofiev was by all accounts a man of extraordinary exuberance and vitality, and this must have influenced not only the way in which his audiences perceived him as a performer, but also his actual style and method of composition. It may be argued that his tactile sensation of the keyboard directly conditions the overall shape and substance of his compositions; and indeed, in the right hands, the music gives the impression of being borne of the

composer's motoric intoxication by his transcendental piano playing: a celebration of his own prodigious abilities. The risks of such a visceral approach to composition are legion - above all that the emotional 'content' eclipses the formal dimension of the work. "Shaping power without sounding substance is empty", wrote Friedrich Blume, adding that conversely "sounding substance without shaping power is blind". Well 'empty', or dry and academic, Prokofiev's music is never. But there are certainly instances in his *oeuvre* where emotion gets the better of intellect (one could perhaps cite the 1st movement of the 2nd Piano Concerto as an example, in which the awe-inspiring solo cadenza roosts in the cosy sonata form with all the incongruousness of a cuckoo in a wren's nest). Yet his rigorous training under Rimsky-Korsakov and Liadov at the St Petersburg Conservatoire obviously went some way to instilling sufficient compositional discipline in him to tame his often volcanic keyboard instincts. But no amount of teaching and discipline can

entirely account for Prokofiev's success in reconciling the exhilarating muscular thrill of piano playing with satisfying formal structure. He was simply a natural, intuitive talent.

If he had not quite achieved this balance in a work like the brief 1st Sonata, then by the time he neared his graduation in 1914, he was creating works of an altogether more substantial nature. Sandwiched between the 1st and 2nd piano concertos, the **2nd Sonata Op. 14** was written in 1912. Its 4-movement structure may perhaps seem a trifle ambitious, but the well wrought "*Allegro ma non troppo*" and darkly eloquent slow movement justify its generous proportions. Here we find both the brilliant elements, lean texture and formal discipline that characterise the 1st Concerto (a performance of which was to win him the coveted Rubinstein Prize for piano playing at his graduation), and the more traditional keyboard exuberance of the 2nd. The ardent opening theme and lyrical second subject could almost have been created by Fauré, though the power

and dissonance of the development section based on the second subject in augmentation, not to mention the transcendental handling of the keyboard with its terraced technical devices, are a far cry from the French master's more conciliatory pen. A bracing and emphatic *Allegro marcato* 2nd movement leads us to poised *Andante* in which the composer shows the skill and restraint with which he is already capable of "orchestrating" the piano (and how conversely we note that his orchestral palette often reminds us of the keyboard textures). The *Vivace* finale is a burlesque celebration, a combination of savage satire and delicate irony that would not seem out of place in a Fellini film! The brief return of the lyrical 1st movement theme gives but brief respite before the riotous conclusion.

The **4 Pieces Op. 4** are rather traditional character pieces in the 19th century *Stimmungsbilder* tradition. No. 1 is characterised by long phrases and warm chromatic harmony not unlike that later used in the 7th Sonata's slow movement;

no. 2 is an angular spikey piece, a stray almost from the composer's "Visions Fugitives" or "Sarcasms" collections; no. 3's "despair" is portrayed by the conflict between rising and descending motifs which move to a climax over a pedal point before the ascending tendency is overwhelmed by its opposite; no. 4 is the most celebrated of the group, often heard as an encore at recitals (though this is hardly a work for the artist suffering from post-concert fatigue!). Based on the tritone (the interval of the augmented fourth also known as *diabolus in musica*) and marked *Prestissimo fantastico*, this is Prokofiev's "Allegro Barbaro", his "Scarbo", its athletic energy and outrageous dissonance a gauntlet flung in the face of tradition by the angry young man of Russian music.

The short "Song without Words" was recently re-discovered in Moscow and this is its first ever recording. Probably written around the time of his entering the St Petersburg Conservatoire in 1904, this poignant little melody is not dissimilar in tone to another Prokofiev

trifle, the "Dumka" (recorded on DACOCD 391), first published in the *Sovietskaya Musika* periodical in 1967.

The 2 pieces **Things in Themselves Op. 45** were written in Paris where the composer had made his permanent base in the West following his departure from the USSR in 1918. The work was written during a 16 year silence in Prokofiev's sonata output which followed the cool reception of the 5th Sonata in 1923. During this period he wrote collections of shorter works (in addition to Op. 45, Opp. 59 and 62), often experimenting with new forms and harmonic devices. Op. 45 is the outcome of a transitional period of artistic and stylistic uncertainty which also saw the birth of the 3rd and 4th Symphonies (themselves to be followed by a lengthy period of silence before the composer resumed work in this genre in the 1940's with the much more substantial 5th and 6th Symphonies). The "Things" are predominantly abstract creations, with an improvisatory tone and unadorned nature far removed from the 5th Sonata. Prokofiev toys with new

textural possibilities, but the teeming ideas in no. 1 are never really developed and only a return to the opening motif at the end rescues the work from rambling; the second piece is lighter in mood and more organically structured, punctuated throughout by a rising cadential motif.

Children's Music Op. 65 was written shortly after the composer's return to the USSR at a time when he was realising the full extent of the creative strictures imposed by Soviet officialdom under the new political system. This delightful collection was composed while Prokofiev was working on "Romeo and Juliet", shortly before he wrote that most enduring and instructive of musical works for young audiences, "Peter and the Wolf". Unlike other so-called 'children's music', Prokofiev's is conceived to be performed *by* children rather than *for* them. Technical demands are relatively modest (it is actually subtitled "Twelve easy pieces"); yet each is a jewel. The composer thought highly enough of this 'charm' to orchestrate several numbers (to become the "Summer Day Suite") and

still others found their way into his late opera "The Stone Flower".

Two of Prokofiev's piano sonatas were given the title "From Old Notebooks" - nos. 3 and 4. 'Old' in this context refers to the first versions of both works which date from 1907-8 when the composer was still a student in St Petersburg. Both were revised ten years later. The **4th Sonata Op. 29** is cast in three movements and is perhaps the composer's most original work up to this time. The *Allegro molto sostenuto* 1st movement is densely structured, brooding and melancholy in mood. The slow movement is a darkly eloquent and moving *Andante* (Prokofiev was to orchestrate it in 1934) and the scintillating finale is not altogether capable of dispelling the cryptic and rather tragic atmosphere which pervades this mysterious work. It certainly shares little of the optimism and confidence so characteristic of the 1st Symphony ("Classical") and 3rd Piano Concerto, also written in the wake of the 1917 Revolution.

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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 (DACOD 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 (DACOD 411).



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Prokofiev: Complete Piano Music Vol. 4
Oleg Marshev, Piano

DACOCD 394

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cord**Sergei Prokofiev**

(1891 - 1953)

- 1 **Sonata no. 2 in D minor, Op. 14**
- 5 **4 Pieces Op. 4**
- 9 **Song without Words**
- 10 **Things in Themselves Op. 45**
- 12 **Children's Music Op. 65**
- 24 **Sonata no. 4 in C minor, Op. 29**

Oleg Marshev, Piano

Total playing time: 78:08

COMPACT
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DIGITAL AUDIO

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 Produced and recorded by Zbigniew Kusicki
 Executive Producer: Jesper Buhl

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