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# SERGEI PROKOFIEV

PIANO MUSIC  
VOL. 5



OLEG  
MARSHEV

PIANO

## **Sergei Prokofiev** (1891 - 1953)

### **Sonata no. 9 in C major, Op. 103** (1947) *25:56*

- [ 1 ] i Allegretto 8:24
- [ 2 ] ii Allegro strepitoso 3:33
- [ 3 ] iii Andante tranquillo 8:15
- [ 4 ] iv Allegro con brio, ma non troppo presto 5:44

### **4 Etudes Op. 2** (1909) *11:06*

- [ 5 ] I Allegro 2:37
- [ 6 ] II Moderato 2:37
- [ 7 ] III Andante semplice 4:09
- [ 8 ] IV Presto energico 1:43

### **Pieces for Children** (1904-5 ?) *2:57*

- [ 9 ] I 1:32
- [10] II 1:25

### **Sarcasms, Op. 17** (1912-14) *12:40*

- [11] I Tempestoso 2:18
- [12] II Allegro rubato 1:45
- [13] III Allegro precipitato 2:02
- [14] IV Smanioso 3:12
- [15] V Precipitosissimo 3:23

### [16] **Toccata, Op. 11** (1912) *4:10*

### **Sonatina, Op. 54, No. 1** (1932) *10:14*

- [17] i Allegro moderato 3:27
- [18] ii Adagietto 3:39
- [19] iii Allegretto 3:08

### **Sonatina, Op. 54, No. 2** (1932) *11:16*

- [20] i Allegro sostenuto 4:12
- [21] ii Andante amabile 3:02
- [22] iii Allegro, ma non troppo 4:02

## **Oleg Marshev**, Piano

The works featured on this recording span Prokofiev's entire creative life, from the juvenilia of the "2 Pieces for Children", written when the composer was about 14 years of age, to his last completed piano sonata, composed in 1947 some six years before his death. Their relative lack of popularity with both performers and audiences is curious however, for they still sum up the essential and most characteristic aspects of his work: from the non-conformist outpourings of his student days, through the experimental and more introverted works of the 1930's, to the spare textures and elusive works of his full maturity. Yet their apparent diversity resides less in the substance of their matter than the manner of its presentation. Prokofiev achieved a musical idiom concordant with his principles early in his career and much of his successive production was concerned less with the evolution of this idiom than with its exploitation to the full. Thus the boldness and vivid colours so typical of the Russian nationalist school (let us not forget that he trained in

composition under Lyadov and Rimsky-Korsakov) may be readily detected in condensed form even in the most abrasive and concise works of his youth, whilst the yearning melody and poignant harmony of the Romantic tradition still glow at the heart of his dark and meditative late compositions.

Typical too of all the composer's piano music, from the full-blown "War" sonatas to the epigrammatic "Vision Fugitives", is his unerring ability to create a well defined mood at the start of the composition capable of establishing an instant *rapprochement* with his listener. It is this instinct for narrative, for "Once upon a time...", which sets the scene for all that is to follow, regardless of duration, not just in thematic or motivic terms, but also in structural ones. Though his works are often based on traditional sonata forms, the musical discourse appears to develop less through standard tonal procedures than through the psychological exploitation of what one might term "abstract narrative"; the list-

ener is guided through a plot about which he knows neither character nor storyline, but which is nevertheless vividly descriptive.

The **2 Pieces for Children** are brief samples of this storytelling ability and are perhaps the earliest example of his fascination for writing for the young (notable later ones being the “Music for Children” Op. 12, the “Winter Bonfire” suite Op. 122, “The Ugly Duckling” song cycle, that most enduring of musical works for young audiences, “Peter and the Wolf” and the 7th Symphony which was conceived as a work for young performers). Discovered recently in the Moscow Central State Archives of Literature and Art, they were probably composed around 1904-5. The **4 Etudes** Op. 2 are young persons’ music of a rather different kind. Written halfway through Prokofiev’s student period at the St. Petersburg Conservatoire, their often hair-raising difficulties bear testimony to his brilliant keyboard technique and precocious musical mind.

Two years before graduating in 1914, winning the Rubinstein Prize, the highest award for piano playing, the composer threw down two gauntlets in the face of the establishment: the “Suggestion Diabolique” from his Op. 4 collection and the **Toccata** Op. 11. Their metallic, incisive sound world and outrageous dissonance instantly confirmed Prokofiev’s status as the angry young man of Russian music. The aptly named **Sarcasms** Op. 17 come from the same drawer. We find the young firebrand once more trying to express primitive emotions without resorting the traditional romantic means, and these often ostentatiously abrasive works bear witness to his quest for ways of communicating directly and profoundly with his audience, even at the risk of alienating them, in a tonal language that did not conform to a received aesthetic norm.

It is a pity that the **2 Sonatinas** Op. 54 are seldom heard, for they are key works from the beginning of what was to prove a troubled period in the composer’s life.

They were written in 1932 shortly before he returned to the Soviet Union after his lengthy self-imposed exile in the West and belong to a hiatus in his sonata production following the cool reception afforded the 5th Sonata in 1923. It was not until the 6th Sonata (1939-40) that he regained full confidence in the form. The Op. 54 sonatinas are perhaps “dry runs” for the great “War trilogy”, an attempt to carry still further the procedure of honing down and concentration initiated in the 5th Sonata. In common with the opp. 45, 59 and 62 collections, these brief three-movement works show Prokofiev grappling with more experimental forms. Like the “Pastoral Sonatina” composed a few years later as part of his Op. 59, their conciseness and structural clarity are undeniable Gallic in mood, though the dense harmony and often intricate counterpoint are pure Prokofiev. Their essentially introspective nature anticipates the enigmatic sound world and brooding melancholy of the late piano sonatas.

The 1930's had not been an easy period for Prokofiev. He found himself increasingly constrained to appease Soviet Officialdom with State commissions, and the campaign against the alleged “formalist” tendencies in Soviet music waged by the Central Committee reached its height with the public condemnation of Shostakovich, Khatchaturian and other composers by Zhdanov at the 1948 Congress. Prokofiev and his colleagues were compelled to “confess” their shortcomings in an open letter to the Union of Soviet Composers. The **9th Sonata** Op. 103 was composed in 1947 shortly before these momentous events and is the composer's last completed work in the genre (we have only a fragment of the 10th Sonata). It bears a dedication to the young Sviatoslav Richter who graduated from the Moscow Conservatoire that same year. It would be idle to pretend that the work is an entirely worthy successor to the 6th, 7th and especially 8th sonatas. True, the opening movement does possess the same dark-hued, multi-

faceted appeal so characteristic of its immediate predecessor, and in the third movement Prokofiev unrolls one of his most richly embroidered tonal tapestries. But the twilit and slightly sinister second movement seems a little lightweight in this context and the concluding *Allegro con brio* does not entirely succeed in resolving the sonata's accumulated emotional tension. It remains however a highly personal work whose fragmentedness certainly reflects the state of mind of an artist in what often proved to be a lethal socio-political climate.

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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).

## **OLEG MARSHEV plays Prokofiev:**

Sonata no. 6  
Dumka, Visions Fugitives, Op. 22  
Sonata no. 7  
DACOCD 391 (DDD)

Sonata no. 1. Four Pieces, op. 3  
"Old Grandmother's Tales", Op. 31  
Three Pieces, Op. 59, Sonata no. 8  
DACOCD 392 (DDD)

Sonata no. 3. 10 Pieces Op. 12  
Thoughts, 3 Pieces Op. 62,  
March, Op. 89, 4 Pieces, Op. 32.  
Sonata no. 5  
DACOCD 393 (DDD)

Sonata no. 2. 4 Pieces, Op. 4  
Song without Words.  
Things in Themselves, Op. 45.  
Children's Music, Op. 65. Sonata no. 4  
DACOCD 394 (DDD)

Sonata no. 9. 4 Etudes, Op. 2.  
Pieces for Children, Sarcasms, Op. 17  
Toccata, Op. 11. 2 Sonatinas, Op. 54  
DACOCD 395 (DDD)



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cord**Sergei Prokofiev**

(1891 - 1953)

- 1 Sonata no. 9 in C major, Op. 103
- 5 4 Etudes Op. 4
- 9 2 Pieces for Children
- 11 5 Sarcasms, Op. 17
- 16 Toccata, Op. 11
- 17 2 Sonatinas, Op. 54

**Oleg Marshev, Piano**

Total playing time: 79:53



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