

A close-up portrait of pianist Oleg Marshev. He is wearing a black tuxedo jacket, a white dress shirt, and a light-colored bow tie. He has dark hair and is resting his chin on his right hand, looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Richard Strauss
Piano Music

Sonata Op. 5
Piano Pieces
Opp. 3 & 9

Oleg Marshev

**Jana
cord**



Richard Strauss (1864-1949)

Piano Sonata in B minor, Op. 5 25:24

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- [2] II. Adagio cantabile 5:58
- [3] III. Scherzo. Presto – Trio. Un poco più lento 2:55
- [4] IV. Finale. Allegretto vivo 7:16

Five Piano Pieces, Op. 3

- [5] No. 1: Andante 5:12
- [6] No. 2: Allegro vivace scherzando 4:11
- [7] No. 3: Largo 7:43
- [8] No. 4: Allegro molto 4:30
- [9] No. 5: Allegro marcatissimo 5:48

Stimmungsbilder (Mood Paintings), **Op. 9**

- [10] Auf stillem Waldespfad (In silent forests) 4:40
- [11] An einsamer Quelle (At the spring) 3:55
- [12] Intermezzo 4:14
- [13] Träumerei (Reverie) 3:26
- [14] Heidebild (The Heath) 4:40

Oleg Marshev, piano

“They are minor miracles: as refined, as polished, as anything Mendelssohn did in his teenage years”. Perhaps not everyone would concur with these descriptions of Richard Strauss’ piano works Opp. 3 and 5 by that inveterate *provocateur* Glenn Gould in an interview given shortly before his death in 1982 (the Sonata Op. 5 was indeed the last work the pianist ever recorded). And others still might demur when Gould claims that “with the exception of Mendelssohn, no sixteen-year-old has *ever* written with such craft and assurance – and I am *not* forgetting Mozart” [his italics] * Still, Gould the performer had an uncanny ability to make second-rate music sound first rate, and as someone who labelled himself “an incurable romantic” it was natural that he nurtured a particular affection for Strauss’ piano compositions.

It is tempting to take a conventional view of certain composers, not least Richard Strauss, the great late-romantic composer of tone-poems and operas, or the monumental symphonists Sibelius, Nielsen, Bruckner and Mahler, to mention but five names. Common to them all however is a production of chamber and piano works which continues to languish in relative obscurity. Whilst not pretending that their lesser works in any way usurp the pre-eminent role played by their

orchestral music, our conception of them as artists remains poorer if we choose to ignore Bruckner’s and Mahler’s modest chamber output and the piano works of Nielsen, Sibelius – and Strauss. Whereas his Scandinavian colleagues returned regularly to the keyboard throughout their creative lives, with the exception of song accompaniment, Strauss effectively abandoned the instrument after his teens. A glance at his copious *Lied* production (over 200) shows how idiomatically he was able to write for the piano, but this was an epoch in which the symphony orchestra reached its acme in terms of power and expressive potential: why then employ a poor man’s band, the domestically piano-forte, if one’s mastery of the real thing, both as composer and conductor, had few peers?

Any complete survey of Strauss’s works for piano should include not only the three assigned opus numbers featured on the present recording, but also the 20-30 compositions listed in von Asow’s catalogue which range chronologically from the “Schneider Polka” penned in the composer’s sixth year (1870) to the occasional “Königsmarsch” from 1906. Though the composer commenced piano studies at the age of 4, his principal instrument was the violin. From the age of 13 he played at the back desks of his father’s semi-professional orchestra, though

he was quick to move up the ranks. In 1881 his compositions took wing seriously, that year seeing first performances of his String Quartet, a *Festmarch*, the Symphony in D minor and two of his published piano works, the **Five Piano Pieces Op. 3** and **Sonata Op. 5**. Both would undoubtedly have pleased the young man's father for they are strongly influenced by the classical composers, Beethoven and Mendelssohn in particular, whose works Franz Josef Strauss insisted his son study. Gould's comparison with Mendelssohn is particularly telling, for a certain classical poise allied to a natural melodic gift is characteristic of both these precocious young men. On the evidence of his Op. 5 however, Strauss found sonata form rather less congenial than his Leipzig colleague: the first movement tends to be garrulous and he is only saved from losing his bearings completely in the development section by the assertiveness of his musical gestures and also thanks to some conspicuous keyboard fireworks. The *Lieder ohne Worte* influence of Mendelssohn is evident in the passionate and generously inventive second movement, whilst it is virtuosity which once more carries the day in the mercurial *scherzo* and *finale*.

With the launch of his career as composer outside his native Munich, Strauss's self-assurance increased and he began to forge the style characteristic of his more mature years. He left university in 1883 to concentrate exclusively on musical studies and a mere two years later, before even celebrating his 21st birthday, Strauss was in the unique position of having heard his works performed by the leading German conductors of the day, including Hans von Bülow and Franz Wüllner. Who can therefore blame the young genius brimming over with self-confidence for seeing his way forward exclusively in orchestral terms: the period of his great tone-poems was dawning. His definitive farewell to the piano as a solo instrument came in the delightful *Burleske* with orchestra from 1885. From 1882-84 however he wrote the *Stimmungsbilder Op. 9*, arguably the first work in which his mature style may be glimpsed. Abandoning the irksome constraints of classical forms evidently liberated his imagination and both the titles and idiom of the five pieces suggest a debt more to Schumann and Brahms than Mendelssohn.

* [The Glenn Gould Reader, Faber&Faber, 1984 & 1987, p.454].

Oleg Marshev

Born in Baku, former 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 is thus a direct representative of the fifth generation of Russian pianism since Liszt, through Alexander Siloti, Konstantin Igumnov and Voskresensky's teacher, Lev Oborin.

Marshev's First Prize in the 1989 "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 in Cincinnati; in 1991 First Prize at the Concorso Pianistico Internazionale "Città 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

Germany, Holland, France, Poland, Spain, Switzerland, Scandinavia, Japan and in the United States and Canada. 1991 saw his New York debut with a highly acclaimed recital at the Lincoln Centre "Alice Tully Hall", the year later he debuted at the Amsterdam Concertgebouw.

The artist, who has resided in Italy since 1991, is also in increasing demand as a teacher, holding Master Classes in Italy and Spain.

Marshev's activities also extend to the recording studio: in addition to a CD with piano concertos of Anton Rubinstein, he has recorded the complete original works for solo piano by Prokofiev in five CDs. These releases have been received to unanimous critical acclaim by leading international publications such as *Gramophone*, *Classic CD*, *High Fidelity*, *Fanfare*, *In Tune*, *Diapason*, *Repertoire des Disques Compacts*.

“Here is clearly a great pianist who more than any other plays this music as if he believes in it and loves it” –
CLASSIC CD, Great Britain

“A veritable hurricane of a pianist!.. Granted, Sviatoslav Richter is still among us, but when it comes to interpreting Prokofiev’s dynamic sound world, currently no-one seems to compete with Marshev” –
KRISTELIGT DAGBLAD, Denmark

“One of the most authoritative and impassioned romantic performances on disc so far.” – GRAMOPHONE, Great Britain

“Most impressive is Marshev’s superb performance of the Seventh Sonata, surely ousting Pollini’s classic account.” –
CLASSIC CD, Great Britain

“Oleg Marshev plays divinely: with superiority, clarity and great temperament. He completely lives up to the considerable demands placed on him in this repertoire and his virtuosity is free and unencumbered. This is quite exceptionally fine piano playing...” –
HIGH FIDELITY, Denmark.

Oleg Marshev on Danacord:

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DACOCD 440

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