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Costas Fotopoulos Piano

Music by
Sergei Rachmaninov & Costas Fotopoulos

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Costas Fotopoulos Piano

Three Etudes-Tableaux, Op. 39

Sergei Rachmaninov (1873–1943)

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------|-------------|
| 1 | No. 4 in B Minor | 3:56 |
| 2 | No. 5 in E Flat Minor | 5:32 |
| 3 | No. 6 in A minor | 2:54 |

Variations on a Theme of Corelli, Op. 42

Sergei Rachmaninov

- | | | |
|----|-----------|-------------|
| 4 | Theme | 0:52 |
| 5 | Var. I | 0:40 |
| 6 | Var. II | 0:34 |
| 7 | Var. III | 0:43 |
| 8 | Var. IV | 1:01 |
| 9 | Var. V | 0:24 |
| 10 | Var. VI | 0:23 |
| 11 | Var. VII | 0:32 |
| 12 | Var. VIII | 1:10 |
| 13 | Var. IX | 0:59 |
| 14 | Var. X | 0:41 |
| 15 | Var. XI | 0:26 |
| 16 | Var. XII | 0:42 |
| 17 | Var. XIII | 0:37 |

- | | | |
|----|------------|-------------|
| 18 | Intermezzo | 1:23 |
| 19 | Var. XIV | 1:06 |
| 20 | Var. XV | 1:43 |
| 21 | Var. XVI | 0:38 |
| 22 | Var. XVII | 1:09 |
| 23 | Var. XVIII | 0:40 |
| 24 | Var. XIX | 0:33 |
| 25 | Var. XX | 0:50 |
| 26 | Coda | 1:32 |

Toccata

Costas Fotopoulos (Born 1974)

- | | | |
|----|--|-------------|
| 27 | | 4:59 |
|----|--|-------------|

Sonata No. 2 in B Flat Minor, Op. 36 (1913 Edition)

Sergei Rachmaninov

- | | | |
|----|---------------------------------|--------------|
| 28 | Allegro agitato | 10:51 |
| 29 | Non allegro - Lento | 7:07 |
| 30 | L'istesso tempo – Allegro molto | 8:11 |

TOTAL LENGTH **1:02:48**

Costas Fotopoulos Biography

Costas Fotopoulos is a passionate and accomplished pianist and composer who has studied at the Royal Academy of Music (London), the Juilliard School (New York) and most recently the Royal College of Music (London).

As a talented and committed performer, Costas has made numerous appearances as a concert pianist, giving concerto performances in Britain and both solo and chamber performances there as well as in Austria, Italy, America, Australia, New Zealand and Nigeria.

He has recorded a Chopin Nocturne for the BBC Radio Worldplay, Hitler in Therapy, and chamber repertoire for BBC Radio 2 and 3. He has also recorded the piano solo work, Cross hands, for a CD of music by British composer Nicholas Sackman, released on the Metier label.

Costas has for many years now worked as an improvising silent film pianist, accompanying silent films at festivals and screenings throughout the UK, Europe and North America.

In 2002 Costas completed his Master's degree in the composition of music for film, television and multimedia at the Royal College of Music, passing with Distinction. Since then he has spent time working as an assistant to film composer Trevor Jones, as well as composing original music for British short films and musical theatre.

Costas continues to expand his portfolio of concert compositions: his Three Impressions (for accordion and piano) was premiered at St. Martin-in-the-Fields on Christmas Eve 2004; and his Elegiac Romance (for cello and piano) has been performed at the Wigmore Hall.

Costas is keen to develop all aspects of his career, and continues to expand his recital and concerto repertoire to complement his work as a composer and improvising pianist.

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Three Etudes-Tableaux, Op. 39

Sergei Rachmaninov (1873–1943)

No. 4 in B Minor

No. 5 in E-Flat Minor

No. 6 in A Minor

The term 'étude' had originally meant a study or technical exercise, but it later came to mean a complete musical composition that explored a particular aspect of instrumental technique in an aesthetically satisfying way. Rachmaninov added a further dimension to his own two sets of studies by giving them the title, *Etudes-Tableaux*, or "Study-Pictures", thereby implying a pictorial or literary inspiration behind the pieces (which he hardly ever disclosed). He composed eight of his nine *Etudes-Tableaux*, Op. 39 in 1916–1917. No. 6 was, in fact, written as early as 1911, since it was originally intended to form a part of the Op. 33 set of *Etudes-Tableaux*. It was withdrawn, however, and published as part of Op. 39.

When Rachmaninov began composing the set in the summer of 1916, he had just learned that his father had died and, moreover, had recently become preoccupied with a fear of death. His extensive use of the *Dies Irae* ("Day of Judgement") plainchant in many of these pieces, including Nos. 4 and 5, may have reflected these concerns. The ironic No. 4, with its aggressive accents and piquant harmonies, and the devilish No. 6 (which, according to Rachmaninov himself, depicts the story of *Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf*) flank the intensely lyrical, passionate and tragic No. 5, which rises to a great climax and ends in peaceful resignation.

Sonata No. 2 in B-flat Minor, Op. 36 (1913 Edition)

Sergei Rachmaninov

Allegro agitato

Non allegro – Lento

L'istesso tempo – Allegro molto

Rachmaninov conceived and composed this intensely passionate and lyrical work – dedicated to Matvey Pressman, his old colleague at the Moscow Conservatory – mainly during his sojourn in Rome, in the early months of 1913. Interestingly, he was staying in the same apartment in the Piazza di Spagna in which Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov's early mentor and idol, had composed many great works.

The sound of church bells, which was a central aspect of pre-Revolutionary Russian culture, had a deep, lifelong influence on Rachmaninov, as can clearly be heard throughout this sonata as well as in many other of his works. In fact, his masterful choral symphony, *The Bells*, based on Edgar Allan Poe's poem of the same name, was composed at exactly the same time.

Rachmaninov completed both *The Bells* and his second piano sonata in the summer of 1913 back in Russia, and he performed the sonata himself in Moscow in December of that year (also giving its British premiere in January 1914). He continued to perform it until he left Russia in 1917, but apparently became dissatisfied with the work in about 1930. This stemmed from his chronic but unjustified lack of confidence in the structure of many of his large-scale works and, in the sonata's case, it led to



detachment, and it can, therefore, be seen as a 'prelude' to the *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* in this sense, as well as in terms of its overall form. However, Vars. 14-15 do represent the work's lyrical 'heart', especially since they are the only two variations not based in the solemn home key of D minor, but in the very remote and warm key of D-flat major. Both these keys – particularly the former – held special significance for Rachmaninov: while D minor occurs regularly in his music, D-flat major is also used for the heart of the Paganini Rhapsody and the second movement of the Third *Piano Concerto*.

Toccata

Costas Fotopoulos (b. 1974)

I composed this piece in 2001 and gave its world premiere in London in 2002. A 'toccata' (literally the Italian for "touched") is a solo keyboard work – of which the earliest examples date back to late sixteenth-century Venice – designed to exhibit all aspects of the performer's touch and technique.

In keeping with this tradition, my piece contains many fast runs as well as large chords, and has various changes of mood and character – particularly the contrast between disturbance and tranquillity. The entire work is derived from a single melodic theme, presented at the beginning. It is dedicated to my ex-Professor at the Royal Academy of Music, the acclaimed pianist Hamish Milne.

Variations on a Theme of Corelli, Op. 42

Sergei Rachmaninov

Rachmaninov wrote this, his last original work for solo piano, in 1931, after almost fourteen years in self-imposed exile from his native Russia. It is dedicated to the great violinist and friend of the composer, Fritz Kreisler, who also introduced him to the theme on which the entire work is based. As Rachmaninov only later discovered, this theme was not, in fact, by Corelli, but an ancient Portuguese dance melody called *La Folia*, which Corelli and numerous other composers had used as variation material during its four-hundred-year history.

Rachmaninov's immaculately constructed work takes us on a uniquely personal journey – perhaps even reflecting his own, distinctly nomadic existence after leaving his homeland – through countless different moods and emotional inflections, all clearly having the theme as their ultimate point of departure and utilising it in an impressively disciplined manner. Some characteristic examples of the endless emotional variety are to be found in the plaintive and sombre quality (so reminiscent of Russian Orthodox church music) of Var. 4, the insouciant mischief and ironic wit of Vars. 6 and particularly 10, the chilling, supernatural imagery of Vars. 8-9 and the Intermezzo, together with the typically Russian-Oriental influences of the Intermezzo and Vars. 16-17 and the lush Romanticism of Vars. 14-15.

The work contains those typically Neo-classical features of Rachmaninov's later style such as lean textures and – at times – a twentieth-century type of emotional

the publication of the fundamentally “revised and modified” second edition of the work in 1931. In this edition, he reduced the sonata’s length by about 120 bars, lightened the texture (in accordance with his later style) and completely rewrote large sections of the work, particularly in the second movement. However, he remained unhappy with it.

In more recent times, there has been a revival of interest in the original edition, and it is my opinion – as well as that of other pianists – that the substantial content which Rachmaninov excised from this edition, far from being a mere display of superfluous virtuosity, actually contains tight and thoroughly organic thematic development which is essential to the composer’s original conception of the work. Although the revisions are undoubtedly fascinating in that they reveal the workings of an exceptional musical mind, a knowledge of both versions allows one to recognise how much more smoothly and naturally the original version unfolds before the listener, free – as it is – from the occasionally very abrupt transitions of the revised version. It is for these specific reasons that I have chosen to record the original version on this disc.

For Katerina with all my love.

Costas Fotopoulos, 2009

Booklet translations available at www.jclrecords.com

Foreword

The music of Rachmaninov has held a particularly special place in my heart for the past twenty years. The first pieces of his which I ever studied and performed were three of the Op. 23 *Preludes* – including the famous, martial, G minor Prelude – and this unforgettable experience opened up an incredibly rich, new musical world to me in which I have totally immersed myself ever since. Chopin had been the favourite composer of my childhood, but when I discovered Rachmaninov I realised that I could identify even more closely with *his* mode of expression: the Russian Orthodox chants and folk-songs which so profoundly influenced his music represented a musical universe remarkably close to that of the Greek folk and popular music with which I had grown up, and I immediately felt a particular affinity with Rachmaninov’s unashamed urge to express his innermost, darkest, feelings openly. The works of his which I have recorded for this disc are among my favourites, and I have lived with and performed them all for over ten years.

My *Toccata* bears some of Rachmaninov’s influence, and for that reason I hope that it will not be out of place on this CD. However, another great influence on me as a composer has undoubtedly been the fantastic world of Jazz, which this piece reflects more strongly. I hope you enjoy it!

Costas Fotopoulos, 2009