

DANIEL GOITI

As the piano developed in the early 19th century, so did piano writing: the wider range of the instrument, the power it gained from the invention of the iron frame, and the virtuosity and palette of colours achieved by the new breed of celebrity performers, led composers in turn to imagine new possibilities for it. They could paint pictures with it, tell stories and even express complex ideas. As the forces of Romanticism took hold, they could use the piano as they would the orchestra, to affirm music's unity with literature, painting and sculpture.

This tradition, established by Schumann and Chopin, reached its apogee in the 1840s and '50s in the works of Liszt, well exemplified by the three sets of pieces he called *Années de pèlerinage*. The movements variously depict natural scenes and events (a lake, a storm), represent paintings (by Salvator Rosa) and respond to poems (by Plutarch and Dante) in a complex pianistic language designed to display the virtuoso's agility as well as his poetic soul. Above all, it takes as its unifying subject the figure of the composer-hero himself. The pilgrimage is the composer's, the landscapes are those he sees, the poems are those he reads. Every image exists solely in order to be perceived, and made into music by him.

The *Vallée d'Obermann*, which forms the conclusion of the first, Swiss, book of the *Années de pèlerinage*, shows this process in perfect miniature. *Obermann* was a prototypically Romantic, and now almost totally forgotten, novel by Etienne Pivert de Senancour, much admired by Liszt and his circle for its impassioned, melancholic response to nature. A long quotation from the novel precedes the score, "Vast consciousness of a Nature everywhere overwhelming and impenetrable, universal passion, indifference, advanced wisdom, voluptuous abandon, all the desires and all the profound torments that a human heart can hold, I have felt them all, suffered them all in this memorable night...." To render these conflicting extremes of experience, Liszt subjects a small group of short, relatively simple motives to very complex development and forward-looking harmonic writing, sustained across a span unmatched in these pieces outside the *Dante* Sonata, which culminates in an unexpected paean of joy, as the artist glories in the power which his suffering has bestowed on him.

The third book of the *Années* followed twenty years after the other two, when Liszt had become an introspective, almost hermit-like figure. His music travelled inward with him, groping for a higher truth and a release from tonality. Scriabin, on the other hand, sought those truths, and wrote music in their name, all his life. Late in his career he conducted experiments in which light and colour became as important as sound itself. As that career began, though, he saw himself as part of the Romantic tradition: reputedly he slept with an edition of Chopin under his pillow, and the music at this period sounds at times as though osmosis had occurred.

The main theme of the second sonata, with its long self-consciously decorated line, rippling accompaniment, and ambivalent harmony, could pass for one of the older composer's nocturnes, aptly since it describes a night over the Black Sea at Yalta, where Scriabin had recently spent his honeymoon. Equally, the swift, turbulent finale calls to mind the abrupt last movement of Chopin's own second sonata. But it looks ahead to Scriabin's own later, much more individual sonatas in its concision (it is less than half the length of the previous sonata), its shape (two movements, the second a violent presto releasing the tension built up in the longer, slower first), and in its thematic content. By the end, the long singing lines of the first movement have started to fragment, and the distinction between foreground and background has begun to blur. Pianistic and harmonic colour as expressive ends in themselves, which would concern Scriabin for so long, have begun to assert themselves.

By the *Four Pieces* Op. 51 of 1905, they have pretty well taken over. These elusive pieces, three with idiosyncratic titles, the other simply called *Prélude*, each circle round and round a single rhythmic or melodic cell. In the first, *Fragilité*, a rising and falling fourth is extended and developed in a series of crescendi, each of which falls away to a sudden quiet. The second, a prelude marked *lugubre*, develops the same figure to a grander, more sonorous conclusion. The third, *Poème ailé (Winged Poem)* simulates flight with an obsessively repeated falling-scale figure, and a sequence of accelerandi which thrust the music forward and then impulsively rein it back, in a manner reminiscent of a bird of prey's steep descent and sudden halt. The last piece, *Danse languide*, seems, as its syncopated dotted figure is passed through many harmonic prisms, redolent of the orientalism of a Salome or a Salammbo.

Whilst we can infer the subjects of these pieces from the suggestions in their titles, we have rather fewer clues to the programmes behind Rachmaninov's *Études-Tableaux*. This rather puzzling term was Rachmaninov's own, and seems on the face of it, rather contradictory. An étude, as the word suggests, is at root a teaching aid, through which the budding pianist masters by repetition and study one element of his technique. By definition, then, it is an abstract piece, whose only subject is the detail it exemplifies. Even such sophisticated examples as those of Debussy are very firmly "pour les quarts" or "pour les sixtes". So being an étude would seem incompatible with being a tableau, all the more so when the pictures in question are, as in this case, hidden from the performer. But then, unlike Debussy's études, so are the technical subjects. Should we perhaps read the term *Étude-Tableau* as a study in painting a picture, a test of the pianist's skill in turning the aural into the visual, and of finding the precise image that the composer intended?

That he did have specific images for the *Études-Tableaux* is suggested by a letter he wrote to Respighi in 1930, fourteen years after writing them, when the younger composer was preparing to orchestrate a group of them. To help him, Rachmaninov described the pieces in almost crudely pictorial terms. Thus Op.33 No.4 was "a scene at a fair"; and Op.39 No.6, rather surprisingly for a composer of his dour reputation, represented "Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf". Of the two on the present recording, only Op.39 No.2 was chosen by Respighi; to Rachmaninov this showed "the sea and seagulls". We can perhaps hear the waves and undertow in the constant play between triplets in one hand and alternating 3/4 and 6/8 in the other.

For Op.39 No.5 we have no verbal clue from Rachmaninov, so the listener and the performer are free to make their own guesses. The key, though, (E flat minor) is extremely dark, the mood tense and emphatic, the form that of an anguished, slowly disintegrating march. Perhaps we might think of it as a picture of its times, for the *Études-Tableaux*, for all their tuppenny-coloured gaudiness, were at a moment of great upheaval for both Russia and Rachmaninov. In 1916 and early 1917, the Romanov dynasty was in decline, the Russian army was failing to hold the eastern front, and, closer to home, Rachmaninov's own father, an errant and absent man, fell ill and died. Later that year Rachmaninov left Russia and his beloved country estate for good.

Rachmaninov's Romanian contemporary, Enescu made the opposite journey three years earlier. As he watched the war clouds gather around his precariously neutral homeland in 1914, he travelled back to Bucharest from exile in Paris. As a composer, patriotism could be expressed through music-making; over the succeeding months and years he single-handedly re-invigorated Romanian musical life, touring the country to raise money for a new organ for Bucharest's main concert hall, working to establish a national opera company and, above all, giving endless concerts. During this period, he conducted the first complete Romanian performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, and devised a long recital series, in which he demonstrated the history of the violin and the development of the violin sonata; in the last six weeks of 1915 alone he gave 24 concerts.

Like Rachmaninov, too, Enescu found time amid this ceaseless performing for composition. The last of his three suites for piano was assembled at precisely this period. Like the *Études-Tableaux*, these pieces seem to represent a retreat from difficult times into a world of innocence, childhood and pure sensation. Of the three on this disc, the *Mélodie* is Enescu at his very simplest and most limpid; it is, as it says, a melody pure and simple, avoiding complexity and extra-musical meaning. *Burlesque* is a benignly humorous piece, unlike the savage burlesques of Mahler and Bartok. It celebrates the popular music of Romania, in a mosaic of folk dances, gypsy cimbalom tunes and (like Rachmaninov's Op.39 No.2) a fairground waltz. The third piece, *Carillon Nocturne* is more precisely descriptive in the manner of a Debussy prelude. Again, the subject is Romanian, the sound of the bells of a monastery in the mountains at Sinala, echoing and re-echoing among the high pastures. To capture the contrast between the purity of the main bell note and the harmonics that sound as the note decays, Enescu uses a technique which looks forward fifty years to Ligeti and Xenakis, two other composers born in Romania. The tone cluster: fifths, sixths and sevenths above the ringing note, float, pianissimo, across the space of two octaves, a beautiful piece of onomatopoeia and a new discovery which Enescu would use as the structural basis of his first piano sonata eight years later.

In 1903, when he composed the second of his Suites, his style and intention were markedly different. Unlike its successor, the second is a suite in the ancient sense, which recreates and unifies the dance-forms of the baroque, in this case a sarabande, pavane and bourrée, closing with a fast toccata. The initial impetus came from a competition organised by the Parisian journal *Musica* for works in ten

different categories. Enescu won the category for piano suite, as well as the prize for the best piano work of any kind. This was not Enescu's first venture into the neo-baroque, however; the first suite of 1897, subtitled *dans le style ancien*, had used both the forms and harmonic language of the ancient models. The second departs from this, the forms may be those of Bach, but the language is much closer to that of Fauré or Debussy, whose own *Pour le Piano* of a year earlier had included a sarabande and a toccata. The melodic writing, however, particularly in *Sarabande* is much more long-breathed and lyrically expressive than anything Debussy might have written (the Pavane, indeed, is a thinly-disguised Romanian doina). The second suite has often been compared to Ravel's *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, which also revives ancient dance-forms in modern dress. Enescu himself, late in life, thought that he had been influenced by *Le Tombeau*, and confessed in a radio interview that the second suite's toccata reproduced the rhythm of Ravel's. This is, to say the least, rather curious, given that *Le Tombeau de Couperin* was not written before 1914 and not published until 1917. Ravel himself was much clearer about his influences. When he was asked, many years after its composition, how his *Jeux d'eau* should be played, he replied, with a hint of mischievous bafflement, "Like Liszt, of course". Like the Liszt of the *Années de pèlerinage*, to be precise, for Ravel's model for *Jeux d'eau* was its near namesake, *Les Jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este* from the late third book, a showpiece as much admired by pianist-composers for its harmonic invention, as for its brilliant evocation of a Roman fountain. Ravel's *Jeux d'eau*, at once more radical and more playful, is headed by a quotation from Henri de Regnier describing "the river god laughing at the water as it tickles him".

In a more sober mood, Ravel would later praise the piece, saying "*Jeux d'eau* is at the origin of whatever pianistic innovation my works may be thought to contain". We might take that tribute to stand for all the works on this disc, in which originality of technique has gone hand in hand with, and been inspired by, the composer's powerfully immediate response to the world around him. To misquote Schoenberg's judgement on Cage, the composers are also the inventors of genius.

Stephen Follows

Daniel Goiti was born in Resita, Romania in 1968, and studied in Romania, and under Professor Georg Sava at the Hochschule der Kunste, Berlin. He is presently assistant professor at the Gheorghe Dima Musical Academy in Cluj, Romania.

Daniel won first prize at the Arthur Schnabel International Piano Competition in Berlin in 1992, and he has taken a number of prizes in Romania, including first prize and the Laureate of the George Enescu Piano Competition. He has appeared many times on television in Romania, and has given recitals not only locally, but also in Vienna, Tokyo, Berlin and Tel Aviv.

His repertory is a broad one stretching from Bach to the twentieth century composers. He has a particular fondness for the French repertory, indeed, he won a

prize for the best interpretation of a French piano work, and also for George Enescu, the Romanian violinist and composer.

In the view of most people, both in Romania and certainly here in the West, the revolution to end communism could only result in a better life for all. While this has proved true in many aspects, there is still much suffering.

The economy has completely collapsed, the number of children abandoned has increased, old people are often deprived of even the most basic needs, and poor families, who formerly worked in the now bankrupt industries, are reduced to selling their possessions to buy food.

Understanding the responsibility of Romanians to be active in meeting these needs from within their own country, DANIEL and RIMONA GOITI work together in their home city of Cluj, in Transylvania, establishing a charity with six full-time volunteer staff. They seek out the lost and the deprived, they set to work to give whatever appropriate aid they can, medical, nourishment, clothing and so forth. Life for many has been sustained, but always the needs far outstrip the supply. Daniel, wanting to be a part of his people's future, donates his wonderful musical talent. May the fruit of this be a benefit upon the lives of those who have been forgotten in the rush to democracy.



Recorded in the Rosslyn Hill Chapel on a Steinway piano on February 27th 2000.

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