

NAXOS

# RACHMANINOV

## Preludes (Complete)

**Eldar Nebolsin, Piano**



## Sergey Rachmaninov (1873-1943)

### Preludes Op. 3, No. 2, Op. 23 and Op. 32

The Russian composer and pianist Sergey Rachmaninov was born in 1873, the son of aristocratic parents. His father's improvidence, however, led to a change in the fortunes of the family when increasing debts necessitated the sale of one estate after another, followed by removal to an apartment in St Petersburg. It was there that Rachmaninov, at the age of nine, entered the Conservatory on a scholarship. The subsequent separation of his parents and his own failure in general subject examinations brought about his move to Moscow, where he was accepted as a pupil of Nikolay Zverev, a pupil of John Field's pupil Dubucque and of Adolf von Henselt. Rachmaninov lodged in Zverev's house, where the necessary discipline was instilled, providing him with the basis of a subsequently formidable technique. In 1888 he entered the Conservatory as a pupil of his cousin Alexander Ziloti, a former pupil of Zverev and later of Liszt. Rachmaninov's other teachers at the Conservatory were Sergey Taneyev, a former pupil of Nikolay Rubinstein and Tchaikovsky, with whom he studied counterpoint, and Rimsky-Korsakov's former pupil Anton Arensky, Rachmaninov's teacher for fugue, harmony and free composition. In Moscow, as time went on, he won considerable success, both as a performer and as a composer, after graduating in the piano class of the Conservatory in 1891 and in composition the following year.

The Revolution of 1917 brought many changes. While some musicians remained in Russia, others chose temporary or permanent exile abroad. Rachmaninov took the latter course and thereafter found himself obliged to rely on his remarkable gifts as a pianist for the support of himself and his family, at the same time continuing his work as a conductor. Composition inevitably had to take second place and it was principally as a pianist, one of the greatest of his time, that he became known to audiences. Concert-tours in America proved lucrative and he established a

publishing enterprise in Paris, where he lived for some time, before having a house built for himself and his family at Hertenstein, near Lucerne. In 1939 he left Europe, finally settling at Beverly Hills, where he died in 1943.

Rachmaninov wrote his famous *Prelude in C sharp minor* in Moscow in the autumn of 1892 and played it in public for the first time at a concert at the Electrical Exposition. It was to prove an embarrassingly successful piece, a fact that at first brought him some pleasure and later some misgivings, as audiences everywhere clamoured for its inclusion in any recital programme he gave, and arrangements by others for a diversity of instruments followed, including one for the banjo and another for trombone quartet, while some may still recall the use of its opening notes in a music-hall sketch by the well known English comedian, Leslie Henson. The *Prelude* itself is in fact a dramatic and impassioned piece, redolent with apparent Russian melancholy. It was published as the second of the five *Morceaux de fantaisie, Op. 3*, and in 1938 arranged by the composer for two pianos.

Rachmaninov's first set of *Preludes, Op. 23*, published in 1903, begins a series continued in the thirteen *Preludes, Op. 32*, completed in 1910, that makes use of all major and minor keys, with the exception of C sharp minor, a key used in the all too well known *Prelude, Op. 3, No. 2* of 1892. The procession of keys, however, lacks the harmonic logic of Chopin's similar work, but alternates minor and major keys. Opus 23 opens gently enough, in F sharp minor, proceeding to a more grandiose second B flat major *Prelude*, as the mood of the *Second Piano Concerto* takes over. A third, marked *Tempo di minuetto*, soon forgets its opening in a more overtly romantic texture. Moving from D minor to D major, the fourth of the set offers a simple enough melody, soon to be developed, followed by a G minor march of increasing intensity. The sixth again recalls the mood of

the *Second Piano Concerto*, completed in 1901, while the cascading notes of the seventh and eighth are as unmistakably by Rachmaninov as the chromatic deluge of the ninth, capped by a solemn but lyrical final G flat major, returning to the tonality of the opening tonic minor key.

The thirteen *Preludes, Op. 32*, in alternating major and minor keys, open in a dramatic C major, followed by a gentle *siciliano* rhythm in the second of the set, in B flat minor. A histrionic *Allegro vivace* in E major is followed by the increasing brilliance of its successor, in E minor. In the fifth of the set, in G major, the melody appears over an arpeggio accompaniment, leading to the contrasting dramatic tension of the sixth, in F minor.

Relatively tranquil lyrical moments continue to alternate with the passionate or dramatic, as the series unfolds, reaching what some have regarded as its height in the sombre and increasingly intensely felt tenth *Prelude* in B minor, inspired, seemingly, by a painting of Böcklin, whose *The Isle of the Dead* had suggested Rachmaninov's symphonic poem of that name. The mood subsides to a lilting B major, a singing G sharp minor and a final D flat major, a positive and optimistic answer to the Slav melancholy of its isolated earlier counterpart in the enharmonic tonic minor key of C sharp minor.

**Keith Anderson**

## Eldar Nebolsin



Born in Tashkent in 1974, Eldar Nebolsin began piano studies at the age of five with Natalia Wasinkina. He went on to win the Young Russian Pianists Competition in Tbilisi when he was twelve, and the Radio Concertino Praga at the age of fourteen. His international career was launched with his triumph at the Eleventh Santander International Piano Competition in 1992 where he took, besides the Grand Prix, the Prize for the best performance of the Mozart concerto. This resulted in engagements with over 130 orchestras, and recital series and festivals all over the world. Engagements included appearances with the Berlin Deutsche Oper Orchestra, Vienna Chamber Orchestra, Moscow Virtuosi, Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse, and the Gulbenkian Foundation Orchestra in Lisbon. In March 1994 Nebolsin made his North American debut with a highly acclaimed recital at New York's 92nd Street Y. Subsequent North American engagements have included debuts with the Minnesota Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, and the Baltimore, Chicago, St Louis and Montreal Symphonies under such conductors as Yuri Temirkanov, Riccardo Chailley, and Leonard Slatkin. He has also given recitals at the Kennedy Center in Washington and the Roy Thompson Hall in Toronto. He has since appeared with the Cleveland Orchestra, Detroit and Houston Symphonies and the Cologne Radio Symphony Orchestra, and given recitals in the Herkules Saal in Munich,

Milan Conservatory, the Tonhalle Zürich and Carnegie Hall in Pittsburg. In October 1998 he appeared as a soloist on an extensive European tour with the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra and Hans Vonk, later in the season returning to the Bamberg Symphony under Yakov Kreizberg. He made his Australian debut with great success in Sydney and Melbourne under Lawrence Foster, and his career continues with performances in major concert halls throughout Europe and America. He has collaborated with distinguished colleagues in chamber music and in recordings. In 2005 Eldar Nebolsin became a winner of the First Richter International Piano Competition in Moscow and was awarded a special prize for the best performance of a Mozart piano concerto. He has studied with Dmitry Bashkirov in Madrid in the famous Escuela Superior de Musica Reina Sofia, where he now gives lessons in chamber music together with Ralf Gothoni, Menahem Pressler and Bruno Canino.

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Spanning 45 years of the composer's life, Rachmaninov's piano music has become a staple of the repertoire. His first set of *Preludes, Op. 23* begins a series continued in the thirteen *Preludes, Op. 32*, completed in 1910, that makes use of all major and minor keys, with the exception of C sharp minor, a key used in the famous *Prelude, Op. 3, No. 2*. This dramatic and melancholy piece, with its ominous descending chords leading to one of Rachmaninov's most memorable tunes, rapidly became one of his most famous compositions. It is even more well-known today through its use in numerous arrangements, in music-hall sketches and in the film *Shine*.

## Sergey RACHMANINOV

(1873-1943)

<b>1</b> Prelude in C sharp minor, Op. 3, No. 2	<b>4:21</b>	<b>Preludes, Op. 32</b>	<b>39:27</b>
<b>Preludes, Op. 23</b>	<b>33:55</b>	<b>12</b> No. 1 in C major: <i>Allegro vivace</i>	<b>1:18</b>
<b>2</b> No. 1 in F sharp minor: <i>Largo</i>	<b>3:38</b>	<b>13</b> No. 2 in B flat minor: <i>Allegretto</i>	<b>3:17</b>
<b>3</b> No. 2 in B flat major: <i>Maestoso</i>	<b>3:11</b>	<b>14</b> No. 3 in E major: <i>Allegro vivace</i>	<b>2:29</b>
<b>4</b> No. 3 in D minor: <i>Tempo di minuetto</i>	<b>3:38</b>	<b>15</b> No. 4 in E minor: <i>Allegro con brio</i>	<b>5:24</b>
<b>5</b> No. 4 in D major: <i>Andante cantabile</i>	<b>5:07</b>	<b>16</b> No. 5 in G major: <i>Moderato</i>	<b>3:01</b>
<b>6</b> No. 5 in G minor: <i>Alla marcia</i>	<b>3:55</b>	<b>17</b> No. 6 in F minor: <i>Allegro appassionato</i>	<b>1:23</b>
<b>7</b> No. 6 in E flat major: <i>Andante</i>	<b>3:06</b>	<b>18</b> No. 7 in F major: <i>Moderato</i>	<b>2:33</b>
<b>8</b> No. 7 in C minor: <i>Allegro</i>	<b>2:20</b>	<b>19</b> No. 8 in A minor: <i>Vivo</i>	<b>1:44</b>
<b>9</b> No. 8 in A flat major: <i>Allegro vivace</i>	<b>3:17</b>	<b>20</b> No. 9 in A major: <i>Allegro moderato</i>	<b>2:50</b>
<b>10</b> No. 9 in E flat minor: <i>Presto</i>	<b>1:56</b>	<b>21</b> No. 10 in B minor: <i>Lento</i>	<b>5:21</b>
<b>11</b> No. 10 in G flat major: <i>Largo</i>	<b>3:48</b>	<b>22</b> No. 11 in B major: <i>Allegretto</i>	<b>2:18</b>
		<b>23</b> No. 12 in G sharp minor: <i>Allegro</i>	<b>2:12</b>
		<b>24</b> No. 13 in D flat major: <i>Grave – Allegro</i>	<b>5:37</b>

### Eldar Nebolsin, Piano

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