

Martha Argerich - Live Prokofiev and Ravel (1960 - 1992)

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Prokofiev- Piano concerto no. 3 1. *Andante – Allegro* 2. *Tema con variazione* 3. *Allegro ma non troppo*
Martha Argerich - piano European Community Youth Orchestra Mstislav Rostropovich - conductor (live, 22.8.1992, London Proms) 4. Prokofiev- Piano sonata no. 3 Martha Argerich - piano (12/1967, Berlin radio studio) Ravel- Gaspard de la Nuit 5. *Ondine* 6. *Le gibet* 7. *Scarbo* Martha Argerich - piano (16.3.1960, studio of the Norddeutscher Rundfunk, Hamburg) Prokofiev- Piano sonata no. 7 8. *Allegro inquieto* 9. *Andante caloroso* 10. *Precipitato* Martha Argerich - piano (16.3.1960, studio of the Norddeutscher Rundfunk, Hamburg)

Sergey Prokofiev - Piano Concerto No. 3 in C major, Op. 26.

For his third concerto for piano and orchestra, Prokofiev looked to the past for inspiration: this concerto incorporates material derived from sketches made between 1911 and 1918. The first movement contains two themes that were written in 1916, plus a chordal passage first sketched in 1911; the second movement contains a theme and variations that was written in 1913, while the final movement uses thematic material from a discarded string quartet begun in 1918. When he began composing this concerto during a holiday in Brittany, Prokofiev wrote, "I already had all the thematic material I needed except for the third theme of the finale and the subordinate theme of the first movement." The Third Piano Concerto is perhaps Prokofiev's best known essay in this genre, and approaches Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov in popularity and frequency of performance. Its opus number places it just after the "Classical" First Symphony of 1917, and the concerto is, in its way, similar to the First Symphony in a number of ways: both works are lively, acerbic, with brilliant orchestration and a certain transparent texture. Both pieces are also clearly the work of a deft young composer of considerable technical skill; however, the two works differ greatly in regards to their reception. The "Classical" Symphony was reasonably well received in Russia, where it was performed only once before Prokofiev emigrated to the United

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States. Subsequent performances of the symphony in America were very successful. The Third Concerto, on the other hand, did not fare so well, and after a good premiere in Chicago (along with the opera *Love for Three Oranges*) in 1921, the work was roundly denounced in New York.

The concerto displays much of the "harmonic liveliness," in Nancy Siff's words, of the mid-period symphonies, with its sudden shifts from key to key and chromatic harmony. The sophistication and bravura generally associated with Prokofiev's music is ever present, as is the humor found in many of his orchestral works. The concerto is in a traditional three-movement concerto form (the only one of Prokofiev's five piano concertos to use the traditional form), beginning and ending with fast movements that flank a slow middle movement. Each movement is about the same length, and the thematic weight and interest is distributed evenly throughout the movements. The work begins with a vivacious opening movement, which includes a humorous march underlined by castanets, followed by the five variations of the second movement, and concludes with a grandiose display of colorful harmonies and virtuosic orchestration. The solo writing for the piano is also virtuosic, and at times quite percussive. ---Alexander Carpenter, allmusic.com

Sergey Prokofiev - Piano Sonata No. 3 in A minor ("From Old Notebooks"), Op. 28.

Prokofiev completed both the Third and Fourth Piano Sonatas in 1917, though they owe much of their existence to sketches dating from 10 years earlier. Both sonatas are subtitled "D'après de vieux cahiers" (From the Old Notebooks), and are re-constructions of compositions and sketches from 1907-1908. Prokofiev's First and Third Sonatas are identical in structure; both are single movement works using sonata-allegro form. Both sonatas are also studies in contrast between the lyrical and what pianist Murray McLachlan calls Prokofiev's "Scherzando-motoric" style. The two works differ significantly in one important respect: the Third Sonata is a highly unified work, compared to the less mature, somewhat derivative First Sonata. In the Third Sonata, the themes are more original, and are developed in a more natural, less pedantic way than in the First Sonata, and thematic material is developed in the former all the way through the piece, whereas the latter sometimes substitutes figuration and sequential padding for development. This piece was surprisingly well received by critics (Prokofiev was no critic's darling, to be sure), who praised its unity and sincerity.

The Third Sonata is a short piece, but has been described by some commentators as one of

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Prokofiev's best piano compositions, by virtue of its passion and freshness. It is a definite departure from the Second Sonata of 1912, a lighthearted, witty virtuoso piece, profoundly humorous and volatile. By 1917, Prokofiev had moved beyond the humor and episodic structure of the Second Sonata, creating with his Third Sonata a work of great drama, symphonic in scope and character. The sophistication and maturity of this sonata are evident from the outset, as the two themes of the exposition -- the angular first theme and the lyrical second theme -- are clearly stated before dissolving into an energetic and powerful development section. Both themes are developed rigorously, and are transformed in character throughout this middle section of the piece, leading into the recapitulation. It is at this point that Prokofiev diverges significantly from standard sonata form, choosing to completely omit the first theme from the recapitulation; instead, the bridge passage from the exposition is heard, followed by an almost unrecognizably transformed version of the second theme. The piece ends with a coda, in which the second theme is finally heard in its original form.

After the Third Sonata would come a period of deep introspection for the composer, a period in which he would compose a number of extremely lyrical and introverted pieces, beginning with the Fourth Piano Sonata. ---Alexander Carpenter, allmusic.com

Maurice Ravel - Gaspard de la nuit, for piano.

Though competent at the piano, Ravel was no virtuoso; so, when he set out to compose a work for the instrument that would be, in his own words, "more difficult than [Balakirev's] Islamey," he drew heavily on the brilliant pianistic style of Franz Liszt to fulfill his ambition. The resulting three-part suite, *Gaspard de la nuit* (1908), forever changed the technical landscape of keyboard music. Perhaps pianist Alfred Cortot put it best when he called the work "one of the most extraordinary examples of instrumental ingenuity which the industry of composers has ever produced."

Gaspard de la nuit, subtitled "Three Poems after Aloysius Bertrand," takes as its inspiration Bertrand's same-titled 1842 collection of medieval tales, which the author claimed were whispered to him in the night by the devil, Gaspard. Each of the pieces in Ravel's suite is prefaced by one of the poems; no doubt the same macabre streak that led Ravel to spend many nights absorbed in the stories of Edgar Allan Poe is also responsible for the composer's powerful attraction to Bertrand's rather dark work. *Gaspard* was premiered in January 1909 by

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pianist Ricardo Viñes, who had introduced Ravel to Bertrand's work.

Each of the three pieces of the suite, "Ondine," "Le Gibet," and "Scarbo," presents not only an individual assortment of pianistic demands but also a unique musical language and narrative vision. In the first piece Ravel undertakes the portrayal of the water nymph Ondine's seduction of a mortal man. Shimmering C sharp major figuration soon becomes the background for a transparent melodic strand marked *très doux et très expressif* (very soft and expressive). The fluid background pauses only once during "Ondine" -- for a brief *pianissimo Très lent* that precedes the final, quicksilver cadenza.

"Le Gibet" (The Gibbet) is a musical horror story of such textural density that Ravel notated nearly all of the piece on three staves. An extract from the preface of the corresponding poem provides some idea of the musical atmosphere: "It is the bell sounding from the walls of a city far away below the horizon, and the carcass of a dead man hanging from a gibbet, reddened by the setting sun." Ravel's "bells" are the slightly irregularly grouped B flats that sound continuously throughout the piece, around which the composer weaves music of total psychological suspense. The dynamic never exceeds piano, and Ravel demands that the performer play "without expression" for the last portion of the piece.

"Scarbo" is 19 pages of some of the most frightful digital difficulties ever devised. Scarbo himself is a somewhat malicious night-dwarf who comes, laughing, to horrify, and then disappears without a trace. Here Ravel places the greatest emphasis on his singular sense of rhythm; witness the perfectly placed pauses throughout. Rapid repeated notes, wild arpeggiations, and sudden shifts of texture and dynamics are among the hurdles pianists must overcome; a famous passage in parallel seconds seems to owe its existence to the composer's own peculiarly double-jointed thumb, and is therefore quite challenging for those without such a physical anomaly. After a tremendous triple-*fortissimo* climax, the music dissolves into impish *pianissimo* thirty-second notes. ---Blair Johnston, allmusic.com

Sergey Prokofiev - Piano Sonata No. 7 in B flat major ("War Sonata 2/Stalingrad"), Op. 83.

This is the middle panel in Prokofiev's grand trilogy of works called War Sonatas. It is the most

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popular of the three and, at about 16 or 17 minutes, the shortest as well. The first movement, marked *Allegro inquieto*, opens with a dark, menacing theme whose militaristic vehemence seizes the expressive reins at times with insistent bass chords that hammer out a crushing rhythm. The listener immediately senses a connection to war and struggle in this lively but conflicted opening. A lyrical second theme introduces gentler music, but does not break the dark mood. In the development section, a tense buildup constructed mainly on the first theme leads to a powerful climax, after which the music gradually becomes more tranquil, the second theme being reprised in a gloomy ethereality. A brief, rhythmic coda follows, its lively springiness seeming to sputter and stagger as it reaches the finish line.

The second movement is marked *Andante caloroso* and features a consoling main theme whose gently rocking lilt and overripe textures convey an almost decadent sense, as if its beauty is beginning to decay. Some listeners hear it as a kind of dark salon-like creation in its perfume-drenched melancholy and quasi-pop catchiness. The middle section turns intense and climaxes in a tolling-bell passage that eventually gives way to a reprise of the main theme.

The *Precipitato* finale is the most famous and dramatic movement of the three. Cast in an ABCBA structure, it opens with a driving main theme whose rhythmic jazzy elements convey a frenetic, fight-for-dear-life sense. The second theme maintains the perpetual-motion drive, but now the feeling of desperation takes on an insistent, if less harried manner, before yielding to the ensuing idea, which rises from the bass regions to turn almost subdued in the upper ranges. After the second theme reappears the main theme returns for a crashing, dissonant but ultimately triumphant conclusion in a blaze of dazzling virtuosic writing. ---Robert Cummings, allmusic.com

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