

Horowitz Plays Rachmaninoff (1989)

Written by bluesever

Friday, 19 February 2010 22:39 - Last Updated Friday, 28 March 2014 22:44

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1. Sonata No. 2, Op. 36 In B Flat Minor: Allegro agitato 9:41 2. Sonata No. 2, Op. 36 In B-Flat Minor/Non Allegro; Lento 6:11 3. Sonata No. 2, Op. 36 in B-Flat Minor/L'istesso Tempo; Allegro Molto 6:12 4. Moment Musicale, Op. 16, No. 2 In E-Flat Minor 3:03 5. Prelude in G, Op. 32 No. 5 3:22 6. Polka V.R. 4:18 7. Concerto No. 3, Op. 30 In D Minor/Allegro Ma Non Tanto 15:20 8. Concerto No. 3, Op. 30 In D Minor/Intermezzo: Adagio 9:46 9. Concerto No. 3, Op. 30 In D Minor/Finale: Alla Breve 12:11 Vladimir Horowitz - piano RCA Victor Symphony Orchestra
Fritz Reiner – conductor

Yes, Virginia, Rach 3 existed before David Helfgott and Shine. Vladimir Horowitz made a recording in 1951 that continues to be the delight and despair of every pianist, notwithstanding standard cuts and minor, nerve-induced inaccuracies. The 1980 Second Sonata is looser but no less intense than Horowitz's storied 1968 CBS version, while the short pieces ooze with sex: even the Polka! --Jed Distler, amazon.com

Vladimir Horowitz made three "official" recordings of Rachmaninoff's formidable Third Concerto. There are wonderful things in the 1930 recording with Coates, but that performance was severely cut. The 1978 version with Ormandy is also marvelous in its own way, but this 1951 studio recording with Reiner is the probably Horowitz's high water mark in this piece. There are a few cuts here, but not as severe as the version with Coates or Rachmaninoff's 1939 recording with Ormandy. Reiner is a sympathetic collaborator and draws some virtuoso playing from the pickup orchestra. The recording balance favors the piano, but Horowitz dazzling virtuosity and clarity deserve to be highlighted. On the whole, this is my favorite Rachmaninoff Third on CD.

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The solo pieces were recorded live later in Horowitz's career. Personally, I prefer the lithe, panther-like 1968 recording of the Rachmaninoff Sonata over this brooding version from 1980--but I wouldn't want to be without either recording. The G Major Prelude, recorded in 1977 is more lovingly played here than the more casual 1986 version recorded in Moscow. The E-Flat Minor Moment musical is electrifying in a way that could be only termed Horowitzian. Rachmaninoff's Polka was a favorite Horowitz encore, and his timing of the two "blues" chords in the coda brings a murmur of amusement from the audience. The sound here is a bit hard and airless, but a substantial improvement over the LP. This album is a must for piano lovers. ---
Hank Drake, amazon.com

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