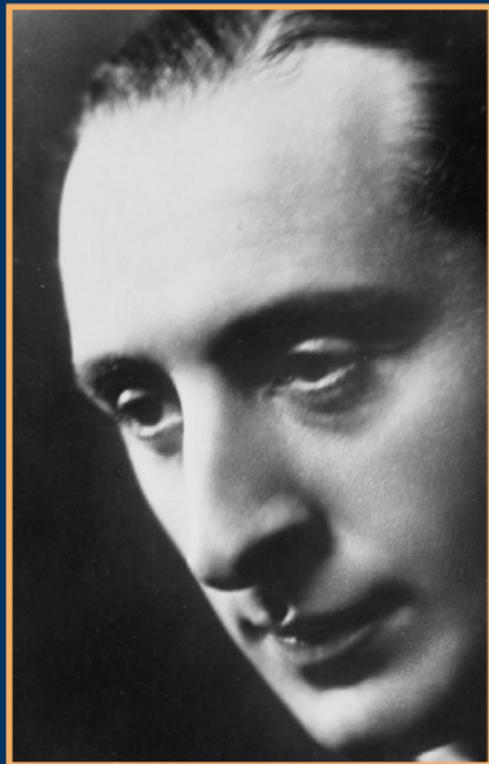




Great Pianists • Horowitz

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LISZT

Sonata in B minor

SCARLATTI

Sonata in G major

Sonata in B minor

CHOPIN

Mazurka No. 32

'Black Key' Etude

Vladimir Horowitz

Historical Recordings 1932-1935

Great Pianists: Vladimir Horowitz: HMV Recordings 1932-35

Born in the Ukraine in 1903, Vladimir Horowitz entered the Kiev Conservatory at the age of nine, his teachers being Sergey Tarnowsky and Felix Blumenfeld. He played in Russia from 1920, but then left the country in 1925. After his Berlin and American débuts in the late 1920s Horowitz had a unique career involving four periods of retirement from the concert stage and many triumphs. His last concerts were given in the mid-1980s and he died in New York in 1989.

Horowitz's first recordings were made for Victor in America, but after recording Rachmaninov's *Third Piano Concerto* in London in 1930, he recorded in England, for the sister company HMV, for the next six years. From these sessions come some of the classic recordings of the Horowitz discography including Scarlatti, Liszt, Chopin and some French and Russian works.

It was in the autumn of 1932 that Horowitz returned to Britain after a lukewarm reception at his London début in 1927. Between then and his return five years later his recording of Rachmaninov's *Third Piano Concerto* had been released. It was an extensive tour where he not only played in many main cities including Glasgow, Sheffield, Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, Belfast, Nottingham and Leicester, but had three major recording sessions at HMV's new studio complex at Abbey Road on 11th, 12th, and 15th November 1932. As he said at the time, 'I began with a sonata by Haydn, after that the Liszt B minor, which alone required eight sides. After that I played many short works by Chopin, Schumann, Stravinsky, Poulenc and Rimsky-Korsakov. All together twenty-five records. That is quite enough.' There were, in fact, thirty sides recorded at these three sessions, of which nineteen were issued. From these sessions come two major sonata recordings, the *Sonata in E flat* by Haydn and the *Sonata in B minor* by Liszt. The Haydn sonata, as with many of Horowitz's performances from the classical period has divided critical opinion over the

years, yet on its initial release the *Gramophone* found it 'first rate, interesting and charming as music, and played with extraordinary grace and beauty of tone.' The reviewer had not heard any of Horowitz's records before, but had heard him in concert at the Queen's Hall and was 'delighted to find that so much of the magic survives in a gramophone reproduction'.

The recording of the Liszt *Sonata* is one of Horowitz's most celebrated recordings, and still one of the outstanding recordings of this work. When he played the work at his New York début in 1928, however, it provoked very different responses from the critics. Olin Downes in the *New York Times* called it 'a noble and powerful conception, a reading that towered above everything else ... stamping Horowitz with most if not all of the qualities of a great interpreter'. Yet Pitts Sanborn in the *New York Telegram* found that the sonata 'oscillated between ineffectual mooning and orgies of high-speed massacre, achieving a general obliteration of rhythm and destruction of design'.

It should be remembered that in the 1930s Liszt was rarely taken seriously as a composer, and the *Gramophone* reviewer of this recording took a whole column denigrating the work, but saying nothing of Horowitz's performance. To see Liszt's sonata described as 'a funny mixture of real and shoddy, art and artificiality, great ideas and tawdry mindedness' is extraordinary, and terms such as 'Liszt's born cheapness' and 'The coda breaks lolling in: cheap, cheap, Liszt!' is today almost unbelievable. The recording remains as one of Horowitz's greatest, today attaining almost legendary status.

The three 1932 sessions were successful in that Horowitz only needed to record one or two takes of each side, and many first takes were issued.

It was at a concert at London's Queen's Hall in May 1933 that the critic Neville Cardus, referring to a performance of Brahms's *Paganini Variations*, penned the infamous line describing Horowitz as 'the greatest

pianist, dead or alive'. One recording session on 29th May was not successful as only eight sides were recorded, and of these, only one was approved for release. At this time Horowitz was under pressure from exhaustive performance schedules and the emotional decision over whether to marry Wanda Toscanini. When he and his wife returned to Europe a year later three more sessions were arranged on 6th, 12th, and 29th May 1934. The last produced only one side that was never issued, a pairing of Chopin's *Etudes Op. 10, No. 5* and *Op. 25, No. 3*. After being dissatisfied with this recording from the 12th May session, Horowitz returned specifically to record it again on 29th but was again not satisfied, so then approved the second take, only to have it withdrawn shortly before it was due to be published. His indecision was also reflected earlier in the withdrawal of the side containing the Stravinsky and Rimsky-Korsakov works, but in this instance a few copies were published and as a result are now one of the rarest of Horowitz 78rpm discs. During the 12th May 1934 sessions Horowitz recorded one side of Brahms's *Paganini Variations*, but this side was never published and the project never went any further; one wonders why after the comments by Neville Cardus. From these 1934 sessions, however, comes a poetic performance of Schumann's *Arabesque* (a work that was attempted a year before), and an *Etude* by Debussy.

In June of 1935 Horowitz visited the HMV studios three times and on each occasion attempted to record Chopin's *Sonata No. 2 in B flat minor*. He had played it at Carnegie Hall on 13th April, one critic commenting that Horowitz's 'fingers are in service to the music rather than to personal exhibitionism'. Although nine sides were attempted, and a further eight the following March, none were approved for issue. From the June 1935 sessions, however, come the first recordings of Horowitz playing Scarlatti sonatas (an arrangement of one by Tausig had been recorded in 1928). Horowitz always had a fascination with the sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti and played them throughout his career. They appeared on his debut recital programme in New York in 1928, and his appearances in London in the 1980s. His performances of this composer nearly always generated enthusiasm from critics and public alike. Olin Downes in the *New York Times* wrote of Horowitz's 'fluency, sparkle and charm' in these works and this cannot be denied in the *G major sonata K. 125*, yet even more impressive is the variety and range of tonal control he uses in the reflective *Sonata in B minor K. 87*. One of Horowitz's best recordings from the LP era, made in 1964, is an album of eighteen of these sonatas by Scarlatti, twelve being chosen for the original issue on LP.

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Mark Obert-Thorn

Mark Obert-Thorn is one of the world's most respected transfer artist/engineers. He has worked for a number of specialist labels, including Pearl, Biddulph, Romophone and Music & Arts. Three of his transfers have been nominated for Gramophone Awards. A pianist by training, his passions are music, history and working on projects. He has found a way to combine all three in the transfer of historical recordings.

Obert-Thorn describes himself as a 'moderate interventionist' rather than a 'purist' or 're-processor,' unlike those who apply significant additions and make major changes to the acoustical qualities of old recordings. His philosophy is that a good transfer should not call attention to itself, but rather allow the performances to be heard with the greatest clarity.

There is no over-reverberant 'cathedral sound' in an Obert-Thorn restoration, nor is there the tinny bass and piercing mid-range of many 'authorised' commercial issues. He works with the cleanest available 78s, and consistently achieves better results than restoration engineers working with the metal parts from the archives of the modern corporate owners of the original recordings. His transfers preserve the original tone of the old recordings, maximising the details in critical upper mid-range and lower frequencies to achieve a musical integrity that is absent from many other commercially released restorations.

Producer's Note

This release presents a cross-section of the varied repertoire recorded by Horowitz in London during his affiliation with His Master's Voice in the early 1930s. The source material used for the transfers were pre-war U.S. Victor pressings ("Z" and "Gold" label) except for the Scarlatti sonatas, taken from a laminated postwar Italian Voce del Padrone disc, and the ultra-rare Rimsky/Stravinsky side, which comes from a British HMV shellac, its only form of issue.

The recording quality provided to the pianist varied a great deal; the 1932 sides are prone to fuzziness during loud passages, while the 1934 sessions produced a distant, tinny sound. I have tried to avoid overfiltering and overprocessing, and have left some of the deficiencies of the original recordings alone in an effort to extract the maximum piano tone from the grooves.

Mark Obert-Thorn

The Naxos historical label aims to make available the greatest recordings in the history of recorded music, in the best and truest sound that contemporary technology can provide. To achieve this aim, Naxos has engaged a number of respected restorers who have the dedication, skill and experience to produce restorations that have set new standards in the field of historical recordings.

Great Pianists: Vladimir Horowitz: HMV Recordings 1932-34

- ① **SCARLATTI: Sonata in B minor, L. 33/Kk 87** 4:22
Recorded 4th June, 1935 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3
Matrix no. 2EA 2076-2. First issued as HMV DB 2847
- ② **SCARLATTI: Sonata in G major, L. 487/Kk 125** 2:08
Recorded 2nd June, 1935 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3
Matrix no. 2EA 2077-1. First issued as HMV DB 2847
- HAYDN: Sonata in E flat major, Hob. XVI/52** 14:41
- ③ Allegro 5:47
④ Adagio 4:56
⑤ Presto 3:58
Recorded 11th November, 1932 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3
Matrix nos. 2B 4487-2, 4488-2, 4486-1, 4485-1. First issued as HMV DB 1837 and 1838
- ⑥ **SCHUMANN: Arabesque in C major, Op. 18** 6:17
Recorded 6th May, 1934 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3
Matrix nos. 0B 6722-3 and 6723-4. First issued as HMV DA 1381
- ⑦ **SCHUMANN: Traumes Wirren (Fantasiestücke, Op. 12, No. 7)** 2:22
Recorded 15th November, 1932 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3
Matrix no. 0B 4508-1. First issued as HMV DA 1353
- ⑧ **CHOPIN: Mazurka No. 7 in F minor, Op. 7, No. 3** 2:23
Recorded 15th November, 1932 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3
Matrix no. 0B 4506-1. First issued as HMV DB 1305
- ⑨ **CHOPIN: Mazurka No. 32 in C sharp minor, Op. 50, No. 3** 4:13
Recorded 2nd June, 1935 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3
Matrix no. 2EA 2074-2. First issued as HMV DB 2788
- ⑩ **CHOPIN: Etude in C sharp minor, Op. 10, No. 4** 2:01
- ⑪ **CHOPIN: Etude in G flat major, Op. 10, No. 5 ('Black Key')** 1:33
Recorded 2nd June, 1935 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3
Matrix no. 2EA 2075-2. First issued as HMV DB 2788

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| 12 | DEBUSSY: Etude XI: Pour les arpèges composés | 3:34 |
| | Recorded 6th May, 1934 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3 Matrix no. 2B 6197-1. First issued as HMV DB 2247 | |
| 13 | POULENC: Pastourelle (L'Eventail de Jeanne, No. 8) | 2:13 |
| 14 | POULENC: Toccata (Trois pièces pour piano, No. 2) | 1:51 |
| | Recorded 11th November, 1932 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3 Matrix no. 2B 4484-1. First issued as HMV DB 1869 | |
| 15 | RIMSKY-KORSAKOV (arr. RACHMANINOV): The Flight of the Bumble-Bee (from Tsar Saltan) | 1:10 |
| 16 | STRAVINSKY: Danse russe (from Petrushka) | 2:15 |
| | Recorded 11th November, 1932 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3 Matrix nos. 2B 4489-1. First issued as HMV DB 1869 | |
| | LISZT: Sonata in B minor, S. 178 | 26:29 |
| 17 | Lento assai – Allegro energico – Grandioso | 11:07 |
| 18 | Andante sostenuto – Quasi adagio | 6:08 |
| 19 | Allegro energico – Più mosso | 4:10 |
| 20 | (Cantando espressivo) – Stretta quasi Presto – Presto – Prestissimo | 2:35 |
| 21 | Andante sostenuto – Allegro moderato – Lento assai | 2:29 |
| | Recorded 12th November, 1932 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3 Matrix nos. 2B 4490-2, 4491-2, 4492-2, 4493-2, 4494-2, 4495-1 First issued as HMV DB 1855 through 1857 | |

Playing
Time
77:31

Vladimir Horowitz

(1903-1989)

Recorded 1932-35

8.110606

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| 1 | SCARLATTI: Sonata in B minor, L. 33/Kk 87 | 4:22 |
| 2 | SCARLATTI: Sonata in G major, L. 487/Kk 125 | 2:08 |
| 3-5 | HAYDN: Sonata in E flat major, Hob. XVI/52 | 14:41 |
| 6 | SCHUMANN: Arabesque in C major, Op. 18 | 6:17 |
| 7 | SCHUMANN: Traumes Wirren (Fantasiestücke, Op. 12, No. 7) | 2:22 |
| 8 | CHOPIN: Mazurka No. 7 in F minor, Op. 7, No. 3 | 2:23 |
| 9 | CHOPIN: Mazurka No. 32 in C sharp minor, Op. 50, No. 3 | 4:13 |
| 10 | CHOPIN: Etude in C sharp minor, Op. 10, No. 4 | 2:01 |
| 11 | CHOPIN: Etude in G flat major, Op. 10, No. 5 ('Black Key') | 1:33 |
| 12 | DEBUSSY: Etude XI: Pour les arpèges composés | 3:34 |
| 13 | POULENC: Pastourelle (L'Eventail de Jeanne, No. 8) | 2:13 |
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| 17-21 | LISZT: Sonata in B minor, S. 178 | 26:29 |

The pianist Vladimir Horowitz enjoyed a long career, from his Berlin début in 1926 to his final recitals in the 1980s. The present release includes the 1932 recording of Liszt's *B minor Sonata*, a recording today of almost legendary status. It also includes two sonatas by Domenico Scarlatti, in whose interpretation Horowitz gained wide critical acclaim.

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn

A complete tracklist can be found in the booklet

www.naxos.com

Special thanks to Nathan Brown, Donald R. Hodgman, Don Manildi of the International Piano Archives at the University of Maryland (IPAM), Charles Niss and Don Tait for providing source material for this release.
Cover Photograph: Vladimir Horowitz (Lebrecht Collection)


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CANADA
