

**Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849)****Sonata No. 2 in B flat minor, Op. 35  
'Funeral March'**

- |   |                         |      |
|---|-------------------------|------|
| 1 | Grave: Doppio movimento | 5:01 |
| 2 | Scherzo                 | 5:44 |
| 3 | Marche funèbre          | 8:40 |
| 4 | Finale: Presto          | 1:19 |
- Recorded in RCA Studio No. 2, New York City  
on 11th, 18th and 29th March, 1946  
Matrix nos.: D6-RC-5189 through 5193 and 5210  
First issued on RCA Victor 11-9357  
through 11-9359 in album M-1082

**Preludes, Op. 28**

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|----|-------------------------|------|
| 5  | No. 1 in C major        | 0:52 |
| 6  | No. 2 in A minor        | 1:54 |
| 7  | No. 3 in G major        | 0:52 |
| 8  | No. 4 in E minor        | 1:47 |
| 9  | No. 5 in D major        | 0:29 |
| 10 | No. 6 in B minor        | 1:50 |
| 11 | No. 7 in A major        | 0:53 |
| 12 | No. 8 in F sharp minor  | 1:43 |
| 13 | No. 9 in E major        | 1:16 |
| 14 | No. 10 in C sharp minor | 0:33 |
| 15 | No. 11 in B major       | 0:36 |
| 16 | No. 12 in G sharp minor | 0:59 |
| 17 | No. 13 in F sharp major | 3:32 |
| 18 | No. 14 in E flat minor  | 0:27 |
| 19 | No. 15 in D flat major  | 4:31 |
| 20 | No. 16 in B flat minor  | 0:59 |

- |    |                        |      |
|----|------------------------|------|
| 21 | No. 17 in A flat major | 3:36 |
| 22 | No. 18 in F minor      | 0:43 |
| 23 | No. 19 in E flat major | 1:21 |
| 24 | No. 20 in C minor      | 1:34 |
| 25 | No. 21 in B flat major | 1:52 |
| 26 | No. 22 in G minor      | 0:44 |
| 27 | No. 23 in F major      | 1:06 |
| 28 | No. 24 in D minor      | 2:13 |
- Recorded in RCA Studio No. 2, New York City  
on 10th, 11th and 20th June, 1946  
Matrices: D6-RC-5947 through 5954  
First issued on RCA Victor 12-0564  
through 12-0567 in album M-1260

**3 Nouvelles Etudes**

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|----|-----------------------|------|
| 29 | No. 1 in F minor      | 2:09 |
| 30 | No. 2 in A flat major | 1:31 |
| 31 | No. 3 in D flat major | 1:32 |
- Recorded in Manhattan Center, New York City  
on 21st April, 1958  
First issued on RCA Victor LM-2277

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|----|-------------------------|------|
| 32 | <b>Berceuse, Op. 57</b> | 4:23 |
|----|-------------------------|------|
- Recorded in Manhattan Center, New York City  
on 21st April, 1958  
First issued on RCA Victor LM-2277

- |    |                           |      |
|----|---------------------------|------|
| 33 | <b>Barcarolle, Op. 60</b> | 9:22 |
|----|---------------------------|------|
- Recorded in France in 1957  
First issued on RCA Victor LM-2277

Arthur Rubinstein, *piano*

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn

**CHOPIN****Sonata No. 2,  
'Funeral March'****Preludes****3 Nouvelles Etudes****Berceuse****Barcarolle**

Arthur Rubinstein

1946–1958 Recordings

## Arthur Rubinstein (1887-1982):

### CHOPIN: Sonata No. 2 • Preludes Op. 28 • 3 Nouvelles Etudes, Op. posth.

Born in 1887, in Łódź, Poland, Arthur Rubinstein was the youngest of seven children, the sixth being born eight years before him. When he was four, Joseph Joachim tested the boy's musical talent at the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin. Rubinstein was not exploited as a child prodigy and at the age of ten returned to Berlin, where Joachim supervised his musical training, and Heinrich Barth taught him piano. At twelve Rubinstein made his début in Berlin playing Mozart's *Piano Concerto in A major, K. 488*, with Joachim conducting. The summer of 1903 was spent with Paderewski at his home in Morges and upon his return to Berlin, Rubinstein decided to finish his studies with Barth and go to Paris where he made his début in 1904. Two years later he made his début in New York and during the next ten years lived the life of a touring artist performing in Europe and South America and collaborating with Pablo Casals, Jacques Thibaud and Eugène Ysaÿe.

After the First World War Rubinstein lived life to the full as performer and socialite, and continued a successful career well into his eighties. In the mid-1950s he played seventeen works for piano and orchestra in five concerts, and in 1961, already in his mid-seventies, played ten recitals at Carnegie Hall. He gave his final recital in London's Wigmore Hall in June 1976 at the age of 87. He lived on with failing eyesight until the age of 95, completing two volumes of an entertaining autobiography entitled *My Young Years* (1973) and *My Many Years* (1980). He died in 1982 in Geneva, Switzerland.

Rubinstein had half a dozen recording sessions in New York for RCA during March 1946. At the end of a session on Monday 11th March he recorded the *Funeral March* from the *Piano Sonata No. 2, Op. 35*, by Chopin and then on Friday of the same week he recorded the first and fourth movements and the first part of the *Scherzo*. The following Monday was taken up with the conclusion of the *Scherzo* and some retakes of the first and fourth movements. These recordings were made in RCA's Studio 2 in New York, but for a concerto recording made

the following week, Carnegie Hall was used and it was here that Rubinstein recorded more Chopin in the form of the *Piano Concerto No. 2 in F minor, Op. 21*, with the NBC Symphony Orchestra and William Steinberg (Naxos 8.111296). The final retakes for the Chopin *Sonata* were made two days later when he again recorded the *Funeral March* movement.

This performance of the *Sonata* has the tension and drama of a live recording with Rubinstein setting off at a terrific tempo for the opening movement. In his biography of Rubinstein, author Harvey Sachs complains that the *Scherzo* is 'uncontrolled and messy', but this writer finds it spontaneous and carefree. The last movement is notoriously difficult to bring off, but Rubinstein achieves a stunning performance that is at once technically superb and musically convincing.

As recording technology developed, Rubinstein recorded many works of Chopin more than once during the era of 78rpm, mono LP and stereo LP disc. However, he only ever recorded Chopin's complete *Preludes Op. 28* once, on 78rpm discs a few years before the introduction of the LP. This recording of the *Preludes* has received opposing reviews and opinion of it is still divided. In 1974, nearly thirty years after the recording was made, Rubinstein himself wrote in a letter that 'My *preludes* aren't good enough'. This poses the question, why did he not record them again, particularly when he re-recorded his Chopin repertoire in stereo for RCA? It may be that he did not feel comfortable with every *prelude* and did not programme the complete set in public, although around 1969 and 1970 he did play Nos. 8, 15, 23 and 24 in concert. Harvey Sachs writes that 'although the set contains some gems, on the whole I agree with Rubinstein's assessment.' Sachs gives a critique of each of the *preludes* finding the first two 'nicely played but strangely uninvolved,' while No. 3 is 'too fast and sloppy'. The doyen of New York critics Harold Schonberg thought Rubinstein 'a great pianist when he is in the mood, which he isn't, especially, here.' He went

on to say that 'Rubinstein sounds pressed, a little flurried....' But, if one were to play devil's advocate, it is precisely these facts that make the recording so unusually exciting. Unlike many studio recordings made by Rubinstein, this one sounds more like a live performance because generally three *preludes* were recorded without a break, on each side of the 78rpm discs with no editing. Also, it should be borne in mind that Rubinstein only made one take of most of the sides so one would infer that he must have been satisfied at the time.

The first sessions for the *Preludes* on the 10th and 11th June 1946 took place in the evening between 7pm and 11pm at RCA's Studio 2 in New York and it could be that either Rubinstein or the producer was not happy with the sound as on the 14th June he made some test recordings at the Lotus Club in New York, a venue sometimes used by RCA at this time. On the 17th June

Rubinstein provided 'an exceptionally brilliant opening' to the Lewishon Stadium concert season with a performance of Brahms's *Piano Concerto No. 2 in B flat, Op. 83*, and three days later returned to Studio 2 where he recorded again *Preludes 11-13* and the *Berceuse Op. 57* (a later recording from 1958 is heard here as track 32). In contrast to Sachs and Schonberg's opinion of the *Gramophone Shop Record Supplement* reported of Rubinstein that 'He plays these *Preludes* with masterful technique and fine understanding.... The tone of the piano comes across beautifully, and the set may be recommended without reservation' while when the recording was issued in the UK on LP in 1955, after comparing it to recordings by Guiomar Novaes and Friedrich Gulda the *Gramophone* declared 'As a whole, this masterly performance is the best we have had so far of Chopin's great work'.

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## Producer's Note

This fourth instalment in Naxos' series of Rubinstein's "middle period" Chopin recordings (after the two *Concertos* on 8.111296, the *Polonaises* on 8.111346 and the *Waltzes* and *Impromptus* on 8.111365) contains recordings from the two extreme ends of the period. The *Sonata* and *s* were recorded in 1946 and first issued on 78 rpm discs. The recording of the *Preludes* (Rubinstein's only version of the work) has long been notorious for its poor original sound quality. All of the sides were dubbings, and some are dubbings of dubbings. I have removed the pops and clicks and tried to give more body to the piano tone, but some inherent deficiencies remain. The rest of the selections were recorded on tape in 1957 and 1958 in noticeably higher fidelity.

Mark Obert-Thorn