

## GREAT PIANISTS • Sviatoslav RICHTER

Pyotr Il'yich TCHAIKOVSKY (1840-1893)

**Piano Sonata in G major, Op. 37****31:00**

- |   |                                      |       |
|---|--------------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | I Moderato e risoluto                | 11:34 |
| 2 | II Andante non troppo quasi moderato | 10:11 |
| 3 | III Scherzo. Allegro giocoso         | 2:53  |
| 4 | IV Finale: Allegro vivace            | 6:22  |

Recorded in 1956

First issued on Melodiya LP D 04558/9

Sergey PROKOFIEV (1891-1953)

**Piano Sonata No. 7 in B flat major, Op. 83****18:01**

- |   |                     |      |
|---|---------------------|------|
| 5 | I Allegro inquieto  | 8:06 |
| 6 | II Andante caloroso | 6:19 |
| 7 | III Precipitato     | 3:36 |

Recorded in Moscow on 29th June 1958

First issued on Melodiya LP D 04448

Sergey PROKOFIEV (1891-1953)

**Piano Sonata No. 9 in C major, Op. 103****24:35**

- |    |                        |      |
|----|------------------------|------|
| 8  | I Allegretto           | 7:42 |
| 9  | II Allegro strepitoso  | 2:55 |
| 10 | III Andante tranquillo | 8:32 |
| 11 | IV Allegro             | 5:26 |

Recorded in Moscow in 1958

First issued on Melodiya LP D 04449

Sviatoslav RICHTER, Piano

Special thanks to Donald Manildi

# TCHAIKOVSKY

## Piano Sonata in G major, Op. 37

# PROKOFIEV

## Piano Sonatas Nos. 7 and 9



Sviatoslav Richter, Piano

## Sviatoslav Richter (1915-1997): Early Recordings Vol. 2 (1956-1958): Tchaikovsky and Prokofiev

Sviatoslav Richter was born in Zhitomir in the USSR, now the Ukraine, in 1915. His father was a German pianist and composer who had studied in Vienna and then taught at the Odessa Conservatory where Richter's mother was his pupil. Sviatoslav began piano lessons at the age of seven and with a natural musical curiosity he received great pleasure in sight-reading any music he could find including operatic scores. This was the way he learnt music rather than studying with a famous teacher. In 1930 from the age of fifteen to seventeen he earned his living as accompanist at the House of Sailors in Odessa, then became accompanist to the Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre the following year.

Richter's formal training began at the age of 22 when he entered the Moscow Conservatory studying with Heinrich Neuhaus from 1937 to 1944. In 1945 he won joint first prize at the All-Union Piano Competition in Moscow and soon earned a reputation in the USSR in the years after the war and was awarded the Stalin Prize in 1949. His first appearance outside the USSR was at the Prague Spring Festival in 1956, and the following year he played in China. It was not until 1960, however, that he travelled to the West, causing a sensation with his playing. In October of that year he gave no less than five recitals at Carnegie Hall within twelve days. From then on he had a prestigious career throughout the world and died in Moscow in 1997.

Richter gave his first public recital during the Second World War in Moscow in July 1942. Shortly afterwards at his second recital he performed for the first time Tchaikovsky's *Piano Sonata in G major, Op. 37*, in a Russian programme that included works by Rachmaninov, Glazunov and Scriabin. Richter often played neglected works by well know composers – one of the works on the same programme was the *Fantasia in B minor* by Scriabin, and the Tchaikovsky *Sonata* was a work that few front rank pianists played in the

second half of the twentieth century. Shura Cherkassky is one of the few who had it in his repertoire, but in 1940s Russia it was quite popular, and recordings exist from this decade of two great Russian pianists – Grigory Ginzburg (1904-1961) and Konstantin Igumnov (1873-1948).

Although Richter met Prokofiev on a number of occasions he said himself that 'I had more contact with Prokofiev's music than with the composer himself. I was never particularly close to him as a person: he intimidated me.' He also stated that Prokofiev was always business-like and that they never had any serious conversations but always spoke only about particular points concerning the composition in hand.

Early in 1943 Prokofiev decided that he wanted Richter to play his new *Piano Sonata No. 7 in B flat, Op. 83*, at a concert of Soviet music, but he was given just four days in which to learn it from the manuscript score. The only piano Richter could find on which to practise was at the home of his teacher Heinrich Neuhaus, whose wife was very ill with a fever of forty degrees. As Richter himself wrote, 'The poor woman had to submit to the onslaughts of the final movement for three or more hours at an end, over a period of four whole days.' When he had learnt the work Richter went to the National Hotel, where Prokofiev was staying, to play it for him and this was the only time Richter was ever alone with the composer. The pedal on the piano in Prokofiev's room was broken so the two of them had to crawl under the instrument to fix it and banged their heads together violently. Richter's first performance of the work was a great success, after which the composer was called on to the stage. After the audience had left Moscow's Hall of the House of Trade Unions, the remaining musicians were anxious to hear the work again and pressed Richter to oblige. He noted that there was an atmosphere of elation and seriousness in the hall

– 'and this time I played well.'

Richter played the work again in the old palace of Kalashny Pereulok for important Moscow officials, but the ornate piano was not regulated and he played badly suffering a memory lapse. Prokofiev, who was in attendance, rather uncharacteristically said to him afterwards, 'Something odd happened there, but it doesn't matter. You got out of it extremely well. But I wondered how you'd go on.' Richter then made his first tour of the Soviet Union and on his programmes were this work and the *Piano Sonata No. 4 in C minor, Op. 29*. He later wrote of the *Seventh Sonata*, 'It's a fantastic work, but I still prefer the *Fourth* and, above all, the *Eighth*, the one dedicated to Gilels, which he played with such sovereign skill.'

Often described as the centre of Prokofiev's trilogy of War Sonatas (Nos. 6-8) the *Seventh Sonata* is often used by piano competition contestants to show off their digital technique – particularly in the last movement. It is, however, a work that portrays the horrors of war, and Richter, having lived through the time and place of the work's gestation, was well aware of this. He wrote that 'with this work, we are brutally plunged into the anxiously threatening atmosphere of a world that has

lost its balance. Chaos and uncertainty reign. We see murderous forces unleashed.'

Richter recorded for the USSR State Record Company between 1948 and 1956 on 78rpm discs and on LP for Melodiya from 1952 to 1959. Only the *Seventh* and *Ninth Piano Sonatas* of Prokofiev were recorded, and then only in 1958 just before he began recording for record companies in the West.

On Prokofiev's birthday in 1947 he invited Richter to lunch at his home and presented him with the manuscript of his *Piano Sonata No. 9 in C major, Op. 103*. 'This will be your sonata. But don't think it's intended to create an effect. It's not the sort of work to raise the roof of the Grand Hall.' Richter admitted later that he was disappointed and thought the score looked 'a little simplistic'. He grew to love the work, however, and performed it for the first time the day before Prokofiev's sixtieth birthday at the Composers' Union, but Prokofiev, by then too ill to attend the concert, listened to it over the telephone. Richter has described the work as 'a radiant, simple and even intimate work'.

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