



THE EDISON RECORDINGS

Scarlatti-Tausig

Mozart

Chopin

Liszt

Rachmaninov

Sergey Rachmaninov

Recorded in April 1919

Great Pianists: Sergey RACHMANINOV (1873-1943) Solo Piano Recordings Volume 4 • The Edison Recordings

Sergey Rachmaninov was born in Novgorod, Russia in 1873. After studies with a few local teachers, Rachmaninov's cousin, Alexander Siloti (1863-1945), arranged for him to go to the Moscow Conservatory to study with Nikolai Zverev, a renowned disciplinarian. In fact, Rachmaninov and two other boys lived with Zverev under a strict regime of rigorous practice. However, in this environment the young Rachmaninov met and heard the greatest musicians of the time including Anton Rubinstein, Anton Arensky, Sergey Taneyev and Pyotr Tchaikovsky.

At the age of fifteen, Rachmaninov began piano studies with Siloti, and also took harmony with Arensky and counterpoint with Taneyev. In 1891 Siloti resigned from the Moscow Conservatory, and rather than have a new teacher for his final year, Rachmaninov was allowed to take his final piano exams a year early.

The 1890s were spent in composition and conducting and it was in November 1901 that Rachmaninov gave the first performance of his famous *Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor, Op. 18*. He made his American debut in 1909 playing his newly written *Piano Concerto No. 3 in D minor, Op. 30*. The years up to World War I were taken up with touring, performing and composing, and in 1914 Rachmaninov toured southern Russia with Serge Koussevitzky giving concerts for the war effort. However at the end of 1917 Rachmaninov received an invitation to perform in Stockholm and he took his wife and two daughters with him, never to return to his homeland. Having left all his possessions in Russia, Rachmaninov decided at the age of forty-five that he would have to start a new life and support his family by performing on the piano.

Although he had hated his previous experience of America, Rachmaninov decided that his best chances of success were in the New World. In an effort to raise substantial funds to buy a home for his family, during the four months at the end of 1918 he gave forty concerts there and it was not long before the fledgling record companies took an interest in the great composer-pianist. No doubt, Rachmaninov saw recording as another source of considerable revenue possibilities. Perhaps because of his reputation as the inventor of recorded sound, Rachmaninov decided to accept Thomas Edison's offer for whom he made his first recordings in April 1919 at the Edison recording studio on 5th Avenue and 16th Street in

New York City. It is generally known today that Edison was not a connoisseur of classical music and at this time there were no front rank pianists in his catalogue. Edison could see the business rewards of having an artist such as Rachmaninov and at the same time expand his classical section with one of the greatest exponents of the piano. The only other pianist of note to record for Edison was Moriz Rosenthal, but of a dozen or so sides recorded in 1929, only two were issued at the time. Those recordings were made by the sonically superior electrical process, but Rachmaninov's discs were made by the old acoustic process. Edison also used his own invention of hill-and-dale recording (rather than lateral recording) where the stylus moved up and down the groove rather than from side to side, the latter process being used universally from the mid-1920s onwards. The actual recorded sound is good but the hill-and-dale process unfortunately introduces a great deal of surface noise. These new transfers reveal the piano Rachmaninov played to be a reasonably decent instrument. Some sources claim it to be a bad upright, but the Edison studios used local Lauter pianos, including grands, built in New Jersey, and this is probably what Rachmaninov is playing in these recordings though Edison commented that the piano was not ideal for 'this powerful player'.

It was Edison's policy to record three takes of each title, not purely for artistic reasons, but more for technical ones and so that he had a fresh copy in reserve when an existing stamper became worn. There does not seem to have been an option for destroying takes on purely artistic grounds. Takes were either 'approved' or 'held' in reserve. Rachmaninov was always rigorous with his rejection of imperfect takes when he recorded for Victor but may not have had this option with Edison. Indeed, the first take of the Scarlatti-Tausig *Pastorale* has a noticeable wrong note (Track 5 at 0'22'') that Rachmaninov would certainly have not passed in his future sessions at Victor.

At his first session for Edison on 17th April 1919 he recorded three takes of the Chopin *Waltz, Op. 42* and three of the Mozart *Theme and Variations*. None were approved, but all were held. Of the other recordings, Rachmaninov approved all takes of the Liszt *Hungarian Rhapsody*, Scarlatti-Tausig *Pastorale* and his famous *Prelude in C sharp minor*. All remaining sides were held. It seems that once Rachmaninov had decided how to interpret a work

he always played it identically, unlike some artists such as Shura Cherkassky or Josef Hofmann whose performances often depended on their mood. However, each recording of Rachmaninov is in itself a different performance. Whether Rachmaninov rejected any of his Edison recordings is unknown, but after rushing them into production they sold well, so Edison used both 'approved' and 'held' versions for issue. Some sources state that Rachmaninov was angry that Edison released takes he had rejected and therefore he signed with Victor, but according to the Edison recording information, none was designated as rejected.

Apparently, Rachmaninov did not have a contract with Edison, so in order to continue recording for the company, Rachmaninov asked for one which included several conditions. The draft received from Edison omitted these conditions and Rachmaninov returned it requesting amendments. Probably one of the emendations Rachmaninov stipulated was to have any takes he did not approve of destroyed, but Edison dithered and meanwhile the Victor company was pursuing him, finally securing his signature on a contract dated 22nd April 1920 a year after the Edison recordings were made. Apparently, this contract included the stipulation of rejected takes being destroyed.

Rachmaninov plays Chopin in a virtuoso fashion supposedly in an effort to remove the image of a sickly, drawing-room composer prevalent at the beginning of the twentieth century. His performance of the *Waltz, Op. 42* is robust to say the least with the tempo constantly pushing forward and varying dramatically for each section. In the

coda the semiquavers are clipped and the bass notes almost 'pounded' (to use Edison's description).

Like many nineteenth-century pianists Rachmaninov applied his era's style to the music of Mozart, investing it with a beautiful tone but overemphasising cadences and rubato, giving it an air of sentimentality. However, in Tausig's nineteenth-century take on Scarlatti, Rachmaninov sounds much more at home as Tausig decorates the cadences and provides copious dynamic indications.

The most interesting of the Edison recordings is that of the *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2* by Liszt. It is the longest solo work Rachmaninov recorded and it is enhanced by the insertion of his own cadenza. This was not improvised at the recording session (although slight differences can be heard in the introduction amongst the three takes) but something the composer had worked out and performed in public beforehand. His cast-iron technique is breathtaking and the three consecutive takes show its infallibility. In the two surviving takes of his own most famous solo work, the *Prelude in C sharp minor, Op. 3, No. 2*, the same voicing and balancing of chords is employed and the composer manages to make this piece full of harmonic and melodic interest even though he must have played it very many times.

All the surviving takes of Rachmaninov's last two recordings for Edison, his *Barcarolle* and *Polka de W. R.* will open Volume 5 in this series.

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Thomas A. Edison Inc. Recordings

Recorded in New York, 18 April 1919			
	Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849): Waltz in A flat major, Op. 42 mat. 6731A; cat. Edison 82197-L	4:01	9
1			
	Waltz in A flat major, Op. 42 mat. 6731C; cat. Edison 82197-L	3:52	10
2			
	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791): Sonata No. 9 in A major, K.331	4:08	11
3			
	I. Andante grazioso (Theme with six variations) mat. 6732A; cat. Edison 82197-R	4:09	12
4			
	Sonata No. 9 in A major, K.331 I. Andante grazioso (Theme with six variations) mat. 6732C; cat. Edison 82197-R	4:09	13
4			
Recorded in New York, 19 April 1919			
	Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757) arr. Carl Tausig (1841-1871): Pastorale in E minor (arr. of K.9/L.413/P.65) mat. 6735A; cat. Edison 82170-L	4:02	14
5			
	Pastorale in E minor (arr. of K.9/L.413/P.65) mat. 6735C; cat. Edison 82170-L	3:57	15
6			
	Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849): Waltz in A flat major, Op. 64, No. 3 mat. 6736A; cat. Edison 82202-R	2:50	16
7			
	Waltz in A flat major, Op. 64, No. 3 mat. 6736B; cat. Edison 82202-R	2:45	17
8			

	Waltz in A flat major, Op. 64, No. 3 mat. 6736C; cat. Edison 82202-R	2:49	
	Recorded in New York, 23 April 1919		
	Franz Liszt (1811-1886): Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 in C sharp minor, S.244/2 (cadenza by Sergey Rachmaninov) mat. 6739A, 6740A and 6741A; cat. Edison 82169 and 82170-R	10:35	10
	Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 in C sharp minor, S.244/2 (cadenza by Sergey Rachmaninov) mat. 6739B, 6740B and 6741B; cat. Edison 82169 and 82170-R	10:27	11
	Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 in C sharp minor, S.244/2 (cadenza by Sergey Rachmaninov) mat. 6739C, 6740C and 6741C; cat. Edison 82169 and 82170-R	10:32	12
	Recorded in New York, 24 April 1919		
	Sergey Rachmaninov Prelude in C sharp minor, Op. 3, No. 2 mat. 6742A; cat. Edison 82187-R	3:49	13
	Prelude in C sharp minor, Op. 3, No. 2 mat. 6742C; cat. Edison 82187-R	3:51	14



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8.111397



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ADD

SERGEY RACHMANINOV (1873-1943)

Solo Piano Recordings • 4

The Thomas A. Edison Inc. Recordings, April 1919

Playing Time 71:46

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Recorded in New York, 18 April 1919

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|---|--|------|
| 1 | Fryderyk Chopin: Waltz in A flat major, Op. 42 | 4:01 |
| 2 | Fryderyk Chopin: Waltz in A flat major, Op. 42 | 3:52 |
| 3 | Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Sonata No. 9 in A major, K.331: I. Andante grazioso (Theme with six variations) | 4:08 |
| 4 | Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Sonata No. 9 in A major, K.331: I. Andante grazioso (Theme with six variations) | 4:09 |

Recorded in New York, 19 April 1919

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|---|---|------|
| 5 | Domenico Scarlatti, arr. Carl Tausig: Pastorale in E minor (arr. of K.9/L.413/P.65) | 4:02 |
| 6 | Domenico Scarlatti, arr. Carl Tausig: Pastorale in E minor (arr. of K.9/L.413/P.65) | 3:57 |
| 7 | Fryderyk Chopin: Waltz in A flat major, Op. 64, No. 3 | 2:50 |
| 8 | Fryderyk Chopin: Waltz in A flat major, Op. 64, No. 3 | 2:45 |
| 9 | Fryderyk Chopin: Waltz in A flat major, Op. 64, No. 3 | 2:49 |

Recorded in New York, 23 April 1919

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| 10 | Franz Liszt: Hungarian Rhapsody, No. 2 in C sharp minor, S.244/2 (cadenza by Sergey Rachmaninov) | 10:35 |
| 11 | Franz Liszt: Hungarian Rhapsody, No. 2 in C sharp minor, S.244/2 (cadenza by Sergey Rachmaninov) | 10:27 |
| 12 | Franz Liszt: Hungarian Rhapsody, No. 2 in C sharp minor, S.244/2 (cadenza by Sergey Rachmaninov) | 10:32 |

Recorded in New York, 24 April 1919

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|----|--|------|
| 13 | Sergey Rachmaninov: Prelude in C sharp minor, Op. 3, No. 2 | 3:49 |
| 14 | Sergey Rachmaninov: Prelude in C sharp minor, Op. 3, No. 2 | 3:51 |

A complete track list can be found inside the booklet

Rachmaninov was obliged to start a new life after abandoning all his possessions when leaving Russia for good in 1917. He sought his fortune in the New World, supporting his family as a pianist and giving numerous concerts. This activity generated interest from fledgling record companies, and before long Rachmaninov was working for Thomas Edison in his New York studio. These new transfers of 'approved' and 'held' takes made using the old acoustic process known as 'hill-and dale' reveal more about the instrument Rachmaninov played (probably a Lauter piano) than ever before, as well as opening out his robustly virtuoso approach to Chopin, the beautiful tone he gives to Mozart, and his breathtaking technique in Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2*, the longest solo work he ever recorded.

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Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Ward Marston
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Cover Photograph: Rachmaninov in New York, ca. 1923 [Private Collection]