



Great Pianists • Rachmaninov • 1

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**CHOPIN**  
**Piano Sonata**  
**No. 2**

**Ballade No. 3**

**SCHUMANN**  
**Carnaval**

**Sergey Rachmaninov**

Historical recordings 1925-1942

## Great Pianists: Sergey RACHMANINOV (1873-1943)

### Solo Piano Recordings Volume 1 • Chopin and Schumann

Sergey Rachmaninov was born in Novgorod, Russia in 1873. After studies with a few local teachers, his cousin, Alexander Siloti (1863-1945), arranged for him to go to the Moscow Conservatory to study with Nikolay Zverev, a renowned disciplinarian. In fact, Rachmaninov and two other boys lived with Zverev under a strict régime of rigorous practice. In this environment, however, 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*. In 1909 he made his début in America, where he toured 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. At the end of 1917, however, 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, he decided at the age of 45 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, he decided that his best chances of success were in the New World. In four months at the end of 1918 he gave forty concerts there and within the next three years had bought a house in New York and signed a contract with Victor Records. For the next 25 years

of his life he toured America each year for six months, performed in Europe for one month, and spent five months composing and resting, spending winters in New York and summers in Europe.

Rachmaninov was the first twentieth century composer of note to record all of his piano concertos and far from these recordings being left as a blue print for future performers, the trend and style when presenting these works gradually became more romantic and indulgent. This was due in part to the Hollywood connotations of his *Second Piano Concerto* which was used in the British film *Brief Encounter*. As the decades rolled on, performances and recordings of these concertos gathered more and more varnish until recently when they were recorded by Stephen Hough in a style far closer to Rachmaninov's own.

In every recording by Rachmaninov, whether it be of his own compositions or not, one is immediately aware of his complete control. This is combined with acute clarity, sparse use of the sustaining pedal and an orchestral conception of sound. He scrupulously moulds phrases in a totally musical fashion with tempo and dynamic fluctuations that cannot possibly be indicated in the *urtext* score but which have everything to do with musical grammar and balance. The first track on this recording is a perfect example: Rachmaninov plays the opening phrase of Chopin's *Ballade in A flat, Op. 47*, as if it is a conversation between a quartet of voices. An opening question in the soprano is followed by an answer in the tenor voice. The bass then speaks, answered by the soprano. The freedom of tempo, the subtle shading of tone and dynamics in these opening eight bars is a distillation of Rachmaninov's total command and rigorous control of the music. While a poetic and artistically formed interpretation today can be seen as indulgent and wayward, with a disregard for the text and Chopin's markings, yet Rachmaninov, as a composer himself,

is able to bring to Chopin's music what he, or any other composer, cannot possibly indicate in the score. It is these vital elements that bring the music to life and prevent it from sounding like a mere succession of notes.

Rachmaninov made a few recordings for Edison in 1919, but from that same year until his death in 1943, he recorded for Victor. He was as rigorous in the recording studio as he was in his practise studio. He would record a side over and over again until everything was exactly as he wanted it. The recording of the *Ballade in A flat*, an early electric recording, was not issued at the time and was one of the rare unpublished sides that survived as Rachmaninov would insist on any unsatisfactory sides being immediately destroyed. In the *Nocturne in E flat, Op. 9, No. 2*, every note is weighed and balanced. With his control of tone quality and his seamless *legato*, Rachmaninov plays the melody line as a singer would sing it with *rallentandos* and *accelerandos* fitted to the shapes of the phrases. Notice how he extends the value of the third note of the melody; he does the same on his recording of the famous eighteenth variation melody of his *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* which again, is not written in the score. Rachmaninov recorded this *Nocturne* three times, one straight after the other, and it is the third attempt that was released and is heard here. With the *Waltz in A flat, Op. 64, No. 3*, he again recorded it three times in a row on 19th March 1927, then recorded it three more times on 5th April 1927, the last attempt being passed for issue. Notice the extraordinary use of *rubato* following the trills (at 0'58") and the subsequent strong rhythmic characterisation.

The *Waltz in E minor* was a filler for the recording of Chopin's *Piano Sonata in B flat minor, Op. 35*, making up the eighth side. Rachmaninov's interpretation is more a violent diabolical 'Mephisto' waltz than one to dance to. At a recording session on 12th April 1929 in which he made retakes of parts of Schumann's *Carnaval, Op. 9*, he began by recording the first side of Chopin's *Piano Sonata in B flat*

*minor, Op. 35*. He made two takes, but obviously knew he was not in the right mood to record the sonata so abandoned it and went on to the Schumann work. When he came to record the Chopin Sonata on 18th February 1930 new matrix numbers were used for the first side and no doubt the previously recorded version of side one was destroyed. The recording went well from 10am to 4pm with an hour's break for lunch at 1pm. Rachmaninov recorded two takes of each side and three takes of the last side (the first take being issued of the last side while all the others were from take 2). The work was completed in the one session with three takes of the *E minor Waltz* being recorded at the end.

When Rachmaninov came to record Schumann's *Carnaval, Op. 9*, on 9th April 1929 he recorded two takes of each side and three of side four in a three hour afternoon session. The next morning he spent two hours recording further takes of each side with the exception of side four, and in the afternoon recorded part of his *Piano Concerto No. 2* with the Philadelphia Orchestra. Two days later the session took place with the aborted attempt at the beginning of the Chopin *B flat minor Piano Sonata* mentioned above, followed by retakes of the first two sides of *Carnaval*. Rachmaninov was obviously not satisfied with the first side of *Carnaval* as he made eight attempts, the seventh being passed for publication.

Although since arriving in the United States Rachmaninov had toured every year, by 1942 he was too old and frail to continue. On tour in January 1943 he was obviously unwell and the following month gave his last concert in Knoxville. Cancer was diagnosed, and he died at the end of March. His final recording sessions took place in Hollywood as he was living in Los Angeles at the time. On 25th February 1942 he recorded single takes of *Variations in A major* by Mozart, Schumann's *Novette in F sharp minor* and his own arrangement of movements from Bach's *E major Partita* for solo violin. A note on the session sheets states in bold capital letters, 'These matrices all scrapped at request of Mr. Rachmaninoff. He will remake these

selections at a later date.' Perhaps unsure of his health and how he would be feeling, Rachmaninov in fact returned the next day but did not repeat the Mozart and Schumann works, beginning the session with retakes of the Bach sides and continuing with his own arrangements of works by Kreisler and Tchaikovsky. The following day he stepped into the recording studio for the last time and the three final

tracks on this recording come from this session. Even though his health was failing, the nearly seventy-year-old Rachmaninov gives sparkling performances of Tausig's arrangement of Schumann's song *Der Kontrabandiste* and two of Liszt's arrangements of Chopin's songs.

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	<b>Fryderyk CHOPIN (1810-1849):</b>			<i>Matrix CVE-51090-2; Cat. 7184-B</i>	
<b>1</b>	<b>Ballade No. 3 in A flat, Op. 47</b>	<b>7:23</b>	<b>17</b>	Réplique	0:24
	Recorded on 13th April 1925		<b>18</b>	Sphinxes	0:37
	<i>Matrices. CVE-32510-1 and 32511-2</i>		<b>19</b>	Papillons	0:39
	<i>(unpublished on 78rpm)</i>		<b>20</b>	A.S.C.H.-S.C.H.A. (Lettres dansantes)	0:39
<b>2</b>	<b>Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2, in E flat</b>	<b>4:45</b>	<b>21</b>	Chiarina	1:08
	Recorded on 5th April 1927		<b>22</b>	Chopin	0:44
	<i>Matrix CVE-37465-3; Cat. 6731-B</i>				
<b>3</b>	<b>Waltz Op. 64 No. 2, in C sharp minor</b>	<b>3:41</b>	<b>23</b>	Estrella	0:25
	Recorded on 5th April 1927		<b>24</b>	Reconnaissance	1:24
	<i>Matrix BVE-24645-5; Cat. 1245-A</i>		<b>25</b>	Pantalon et Colombine	0:51
<b>4</b>	<b>Waltz Op. 64 No. 3, in A flat</b>	<b>2:47</b>	<b>26</b>	Valse allemande	0:51
	Recorded on 5th April 1927		<b>27</b>	Intermezzo: Paganini	1:16
	<i>Matrix BVE-37455-6; Cat. 1245-B</i>			Recorded on 9th April 1929	
<b>5</b>	<b>Waltz Op. posth., in E minor,</b>	<b>1:48</b>		<i>Matrix CVE-51092-3; Cat. 7185-B</i>	
	Recorded on 18th February 1930		<b>28</b>	Aveu	0:46
	<i>Matrix BVE-59415-3; Cat. 1492-B</i>		<b>29</b>	Promenade	1:54
			<b>30</b>	Pause	0:17
	<b>Sonata No. 2 in B flat minor, Op. 35</b>	<b>19:00</b>	<b>31</b>	Marche des "Davidsbündler"	
	<b>'Funeral March'</b>			contre les Philistins	3:02
				Recorded on 10th April 1929	
<b>6</b>	I. Grave-Doppio movimento	5:56		<i>Matrices CVE-51093-3 and 51094-3; Cat. 7186</i>	
<b>7</b>	II. Scherzo-Più lento-Tempo I	5:18			
<b>8</b>	III. Marche funèbre: Lento	6:10			
<b>9</b>	IV. Finale: Presto	1:26			
	Recorded on 18th February 1930				
	<i>Matrices BVE-59408-2, 59409-2, 59410-2,</i>		<b>32</b>	<b>SCHUMANN:</b>	
	<i>59411-2, 59412-2, 59413-2, and 59414-1</i>			<b>Spanisches Liederspiel, Op. 74</b>	
	<i>Cat. 1489-92A</i>			No. 10. Der Kontrabandiste (arr. C. Tausig)	1:53
				Recorded on 27th February 1942	
				<i>Matrix PCS-072137-1; Cat. 11-8593-A</i>	
	<b>Robert SCHUMANN (1810-1856)</b>				
	<b>Carnaval, Op. 9</b>	<b>24:04</b>		<b>CHOPIN: Chants polonais, S. 480 / R145</b>	
			<b>33</b>	<b>(excerpts), arr. Liszt:</b>	
<b>10</b>	Préambule	2:18		No. 6. Die Heimkehr	1:26
<b>11</b>	Pierrot	1:08		(Narzeczoney, Homeward)	
<b>12</b>	Arlequin	0:35		Recorded on 27th February 1942	
	Recorded on 12th April 1929			<i>Matrix PCS-072137-1; Cat. 11-8593-A</i>	
	<i>Matrix CVE-51089-7; Cat. 7184-A</i>		<b>34</b>	No. 1. Mädchens Wunsch	2:45
				(Życzenie, The Maiden's Wish)	
<b>13</b>	Valse noble	1:02		Recorded on 27th February 1942	
<b>14</b>	Eusebius	1:27		<i>Matrix PCS-072136-1; Cat. 11-8593-B</i>	
<b>15</b>	Florestan	0:47			
<b>16</b>	Coquette	0:59		Thanks to Daniel Barolsky,	
	Recorded on 9th April 1929			Lawrence Holdridge and Donald Manildi	

Also available

 Great Pianists • Rubinstein 8.111289 



**RACHMANINOV**  
Piano Concerto No. 2  
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Arthur Rubinstein  
NBC Symphony Orchestra  
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Philharmonia Orchestra  
Walter Susskind  
1946 - 1950 Recordings

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CHOPIN  
LISZT  
MENDELSSOHN  
MOZKOWSKI  
PADEREWski  
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Josef Hofmann  
Recorded 1916-1923

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ALBENIZ

Arturo  
Benedetti Michelangeli

8.111351



8.112020

ADD

SERGEY RACHMANINOV (1873-1943)

Solo Piano Recordings • 1  
Victor Recordings 1925-1942

Playing  
Time  
68:32

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1	<b>Fryderyk CHOPIN (1810-1849): Ballade No. 3 in A flat, Op. 47</b> Recorded on 13th April 1925	7:23
2	<b>Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2, in E flat</b>	4:45
3	<b>Waltz Op. 64 No. 2, in C sharp minor</b>	3:41
4	<b>Waltz Op. 64 No. 3, Waltz in A flat</b> Recorded on 5th April 1927	2:47
5	<b>Waltz in E minor, Op. posth.</b> Recorded on 18th February 1930	1:48
6-9	<b>Sonata No. 2 in B flat minor, Op. 35 'Funeral March'</b> Recorded on 18th February 1930	19:00
10-31	<b>Robert SCHUMANN (1810-1856) Carnaval, Op. 9</b> Recorded on 9th, 10th and 12th April 1929	24:04
32	<b>Spanisches Liederspiel, Op. 74</b> No. 10: Der Kontrabandiste (arr. C. Tausig) Recorded on 27th February 1942	1:53
33	<b>CHOPIN: Chants polonais, S. 480 / R145 (excerpts) (arr. Liszt):</b> No. 6: Die Heimkehr (Narzęczony, Homeward)	1:26
34	No. 1: Mädchens Wunsch (Życzenie, The Maiden's Wish) Recorded on 27th February 1942	2:45

Rachmaninov's formidable piano technique was notable for its precision, rhythmic drive, refined legato, crystalline clarity and sensitivity to melodic line. While avoiding sentimentality, he sought and expressed music's emotional essence. Though fleet fingered, he had, in Arthur Rubinstein's words, "the secret of the golden, living tone which comes from the heart", awing listeners with the aristocratic quality of his playing. This is particularly evident in his interpretations of Chopin, Schumann and Liszt, whose great Romantic spirit matched his own. Even today, his recordings remain classics.

MADE IN  
GERMANY



Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Ward Marston  
Special thanks: Daniel Barolsky, Lawrence Holdridge and Donald Manildi



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