

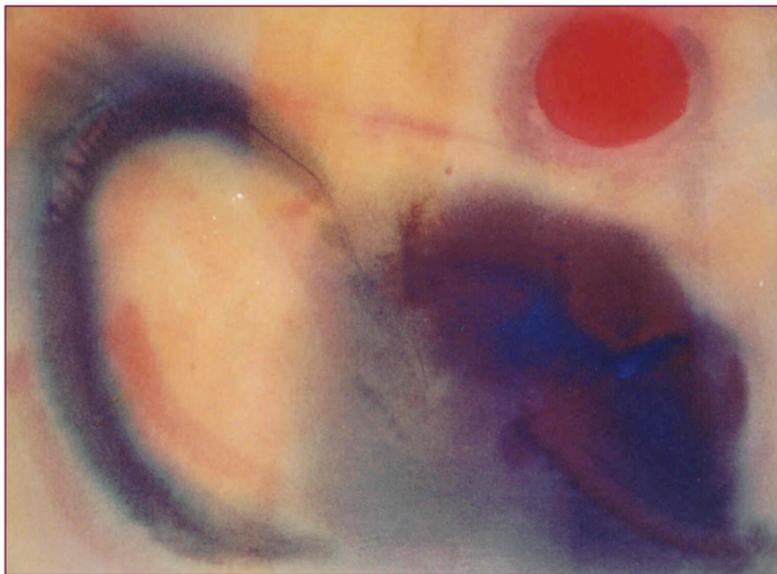
NAXOS

SHOSTAKOVICH

Piano Sonata No. 2

The Limpid Stream • A Child's Exercise Book

Konstantin Scherbakov, Piano



Dmitry
SHOSTAKOVICH
(1906-1975)

Piano Sonata No. 2 in B minor, Op. 61 (1943)	24:08
1 Allegretto	6:54
2 Largo	6:01
3 Moderato (con moto) – Allegretto con moto – Adagio – Moderato	11:12
Three Pieces (1919-20)	2:51
4 Minuet	0:50
5 Prelude	0:55
6 Intermezzo	1:07
A Child's Exercise Book, Op. 69 (1944-45)	6:41
7 I. March: in the tempo of a March	0:41
8 II. Valse: in the tempo of a Waltz	0:33
9 III. Sad Tale: Adagio	2:07
10 VI. Merry Tale: Allegro	0:34
11 V. The Bear: Allegretto	0:48
12 VI. Clockwork Doll: Allegretto	0:45
13 VII. Birthday [no tempo indication]	1:12
14 Murzilka (undated, c. 1944-52?)	0:49
Five Preludes (1919-21)	6:39
<i>(Selected by the composer from 8 contributed to a projected collection of 24 written in collaboration with fellow students Pavel Feldt and Georgi Klements; some of the Preludes derive from Eight Preludes, Op. 2 (manuscript lost))</i>	
15 No. 2 in A minor: Allegro moderato e scherzando (Op. 2, No. 5)	0:49
16 No. 3 in G major: Andante (Op. 2, No. 2)	2:17
17 No. 4 in E minor: Allegro moderato	0:55
18 No. 15 in D flat major: Moderato (Op. 2, No. 7 or 8)	1:30
19 No. 18 in F minor: Andantino (Op. 2, No. 6)	1:08
The Limpid Stream – Ballet, Op. 39 (1934-35) (transcribed by the composer)	15:51
20 Scene and Waltz-Entr'acte: Allegretto (Act I, Scene I, No. 7)	5:56
21 Dance of the Milkmaid and the Tractor Driver: Moderato con moto (Act I, Scene II, No. 12)	2:20
22 Ballerina's Waltz: Tempo di valse (Act I, Scene II, No. 13)	2:56
23 Tango: Allegro – Andante – Allegro (Act II, Scene III, No. 23)	4:39

The order of the Opus 69 items is that of the composer in his archives, and was used on his first recording of 1946 when he added Birthday No. 7 and announced each piece in Russian.

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Piano Music

When considering the output of Dmitry Shostakovich, with its focus on theatrical projects in his earlier years and symphonic works thereafter, it is easy to forget the rôle of piano music as the repository for some of his most immediate ideas. This is not surprising when one remembers that the composer was a prizewinner at the 1927 Chopin Competition in Warsaw and appeared frequently, if often unwillingly, as an exponent of his piano music until restricted by illness in the late 1950s. Following on from the monumental cycle of *24 Preludes and Fugues* [Naxos 8.554745/6], the *First Piano Sonata* and the *24 Preludes* [Naxos 8.555781], this disc features most of Shostakovich's remaining piano pieces - including miniatures and arrangements no less characteristic for their brevity.

Very different from its youthful, hard-hitting predecessor, the *Second Piano Sonata* was begun during February 1943 and completed a month later. Dedicated to the memory of his one-time teacher Leonid Nikolayev, the composer gave the official première in Moscow on 6th June. Despite its positive reception, and advocacy of distinguished pianists (notably Emil Gilels), not to mention its poise and lucidity as piano writing, the work has remained at or near the periphery of the modern repertoire, perhaps because its largely introspective nature evinces a decidedly private, even ambiguous response to the war years. The *Allegretto* springs into life with an animated theme in which melody and accompaniment are closely interrelated. Gathering momentum, this leads into a insouciant-sounding theme which has a march-like gait. A brief recall of the first theme presages the development, which takes this as the basis for a series of imitative entries building to the main climax - at which, the first theme is stated in full before dissolving into a sparser rendition of the second theme. The first theme returns as a coda to steer the movement towards its brusque conclusion. The *Largo* opens with an elegant if moody theme, whose tonal uncertainty increases its

restlessness. A central episode features a self-effacing idea over minimal accompaniment, unfolding in an almost improvisatory manner, before the first theme eases back into the frame, mingling with elements of its successor as the movement reaches a quiet but far from tranquil close. The finale is a passacaglia (variations on a theme often confined to the bass register), a form that became a familiar feature of Shostakovich's instrumental works in the next quarter-century. The deceptively self-effacing theme is presented as a single unaccompanied melodic line of thirty bars duration. *Variation I* thickens the texture by the addition of a bass line and simple harmonic accompaniment whilst *Variation II* increases the momentum with flowing triplets above the theme as presented in the left hand. Marked *più mosso*, *Variation III* increases the pace still further with quiet *staccato* writing that gains in intensity until the chordal writing of *Variation IV* - a typically cold Shostakovich landscape. *Variation V* is a terse *scherzo* marked *Allegro con moto*, which features some of the most virtuosic writing of the sonata. The almost canonic representation of the theme in *Variation VI* is characterised by "punctuations" between the two hands that builds in complexity until a *molto rit* heralds the *poco meno mosso* of *Variation VII* with its pulsating, dotted *ostinato* rhythm. The austerity of *Variation VIII*, marked *Adagio*, gives way to a more gentle version of the same rhythmic idea in *Variation IX* which, in turn, ends with another cold chordal variant of the theme before the start of *Variation X* which sees the theme accompanied by murmuring semiquavers in the right hand. The mood subsides to end the movement in an atmosphere of reflective regret.

Shostakovich's works pre-dating his *First Symphony* of 1925 only really became known with publications in the wake of his sixtieth birthday in 1966, one being the *Five Preludes* of 1919-21. At this time the composer also wrote a set of *Eight Preludes*, first heard in July 1926 and designated 'Op. 2', but not published,

with the manuscript later lost. In 1921, however, Shostakovich extracted five of these for a cycle of 24 preludes (only eighteen were completed) composed with his fellow students Pavel Feldt and Georgi Klements, and which are heard here.

The *Prelude in A minor* is a rapid though lightly tripping number, given additional character by telling chromatic side-slips. The *G major* combines a ruminative motion in the left hand with sonorous chords above, building to a ringing climax before a return to the calm of its beginning. The *E minor* maintains a driving energy through its heavy chords and demonstrative gestures. The *D flat major* is, by contrast, unruffled in manner, combining its limpid phrases to discreet if touching effect. The *F minor* is the most Russian-sounding, its melancholic phrases, redolent of the 'Romance' settings by an earlier generation of composers, finally disappearing off the top of the keyboard.

Even earlier - probably around the time Shostakovich entered the Petrograd Conservatory in autumn 1919 - are the *Three Pieces*. The *Minuet* is an ingratiating exercise in Mozartian elegance, while the *Prelude* sounds a gently wistful note. The *Intermezzo*, though incomplete¹, is more developed in manner, recalling 'easy pieces' by the teenage Prokofiev a decade before.

Composed in 1944-5, ostensibly to test the pianistic skills of Shostakovich's daughter Galina, the *Child's Exercise Book* is a light-weight but never trite undertaking. The *March* unfolds with a robust emphasis on its underlying rhythm, while *Valse* brings an element of suffused wistfulness. *The Bear* seems to be a relatively good-natured beast, for all the heavily accentuated gestures of its gait, and *Merry Tale* bursts forward in the manner of a boisterous gallop familiar from the composer's ballet scores. *Sad Tale*, the most extended number, inhabits a very different world in its gentle but expressive pathos, while *Clockwork Doll*

moves rapidly and not too awkwardly in its automated gestures. *Birthday* sounds a note of celebration through its repeated-note fanfares, an apt way with which to round off the whole cycle.

Undated, the brief *Murzilka*, named after a children's magazine, was likely also written in the mid-1940s. Its spikily imitative counterpoint makes it a musical frontispiece of no mean irony.

The Limpid Stream (1934-5) was Shostakovich's attempt to meet the dictates of Socialist Realism for music that embodied the most positive qualities of the Soviet people. The scenario, with groups of performers and collective farmers meeting in the countryside, acknowledging common ideological aims and celebrating them forthwith, is little more than an excuse for extended dance routines. Yet the ballet enjoyed a successful run at Leningrad's Maly Theatre from June 1935 until February 1936, when a harsh review in *Pravda* (after an equally negative appraisal of the opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* weeks earlier) sealed its fate. Shostakovich's piano reduction of the ballet saw publication as recently as 1997, and extracts are included here. *Dance of the Milkmaid and the Tractor-Driver* is alternately winsome and demonstrative in manner, and effectively evokes the contrasting demeanour of its protagonists. The succinct *Scene and Waltz* unfolds in lively fashion, while *Ballerina's Waltz* is in the true traditions of its genre, the main theme alternating with several episodes in an evident 'show-stopper'. After a rhetorical flourish, *Tango* stealthily brings out the dance's stylized wit and energy, building a keen momentum that concludes with a suitably hectic dash to the finish.

Richard Whitehouse

¹ 'Completed' on this recording with the addition of a perfect cadence by the pianist.

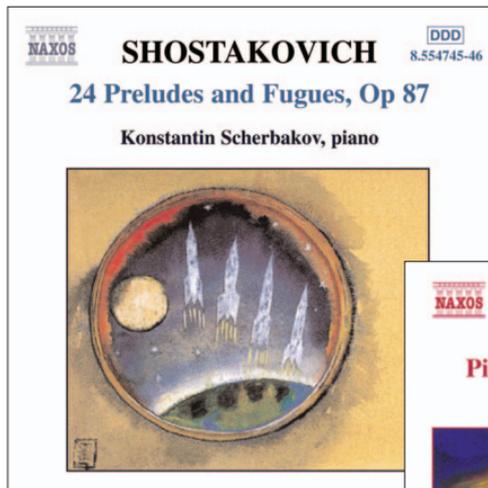
Konstantin Scherbakov



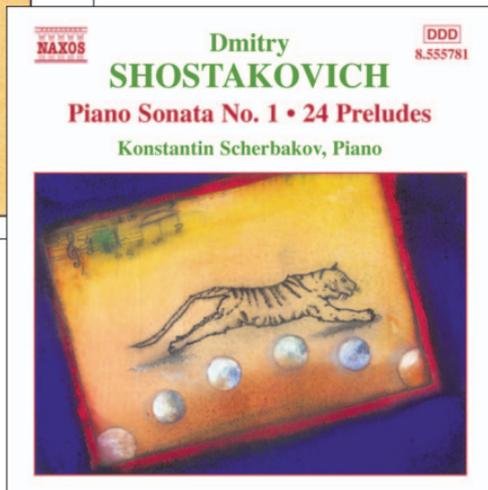
Photo:
Lucy Leipzig

Hailed by critics at the Lucerne Festival as a modern Rachmaninov and the triumphant winner of the first Rachmaninov Competition in Moscow in 1983, Konstantin Scherbakov launched his international career in 1990 at the XXth Chamber Music Festival of Asolo, where he performed the complete Rachmaninov works for piano solo in four recitals, to the manifest approval of Sviatoslav Richter, who listened to his performance. Born in the Siberian town of Barnaul, Konstantin Scherbakov made his debut there at the age of eleven as soloist in Beethoven's *First Piano Concerto*. Soon after he moved to Moscow to continue his musical education at the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory with the legendary teacher Lev Naumov, whose assistant he later became. After winning an array of prizes at prestigious international competitions in Montreal, Bolzano, Rome and Zurich, he has performed with all the leading orchestras of the former Soviet Union and played recitals in more than a hundred cities. Since 1992 Konstantin Scherbakov has lived in Switzerland. In addition to recitals, orchestral performances and tours all over the world, and televised and broadcast performances throughout Europe, his concert activity has brought participation in major festivals, such as Frankfurt, Bregenz, Bodensee, Luzern, Klavier-Festival Ruhr, Bad Kissingen, Schubertiade Feldkirch and Salzburg, among others. Boasting a phenomenal repertoire of some fifty concertos and a similar number of recital programmes, Konstantin Scherbakov has recorded music from Bach to Strauss and Scriabin and from Beethoven to Medtner and Respighi, with a current commitment to record for Marco Polo the complete piano music of Leopold Godowsky. His acclaimed contribution to the Naxos Liszt piano music series includes critically acclaimed performances of Liszt's transcriptions of Beethoven's *Symphonies*, of which the *Ninth Symphony* was awarded the German Critics' Prize 2005. His recording of Godowsky's *Sonata in E minor* for Marco Polo was awarded the German Critics' Prize in December 2001. Scherbakov's recording of the *24 Preludes and Fugues* [Naxos 8.554745-46] of Shostakovich for Naxos received the Classical Award 2001 at Cannes. In August 2005 Scherbakov played the cycle in two recitals at the Salzburg Festival to very enthusiastic critical acclaim.

Also available:



8.554745-46



8.555781