

OPHELIA GORDON

KAPUSTIN

BETWEEN THE LINES



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OPHELIA GORDON, PIANO

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| 1. | Big Band Sounds, Op. 46 | 5:00 |
| | Selections from 24 Jazz Preludes, Op. 53 | |
| 2. | Prelude No. 4 in E Minor | 1:38 |
| 3. | Prelude No. 5 in D Major | 2:09 |
| 4. | Prelude No. 11 in B Major | 2:20 |
| 5. | Prelude No. 16 in B \flat Minor | 1:43 |
| 6. | Prelude No. 17 in A \flat Major | 1:49 |
| 7. | Prelude No. 18 in F Minor | 2:08 |
| 8. | Prelude No. 19 in E \flat Major | 1:31 |
| 9. | Prelude No. 23 in F Major | 2:13 |
| 10. | Contemplation, Op. 47 | 7:05 |
| 11. | Aquarela do Brasil, Op. 118 | 3:53 |
| | Concert Etudes, Op. 40 | |
| 12. | I. Prelude | 2:30 |
| 13. | II. Reverie | 3:54 |
| 14. | III. Toccata | 2:30 |
| 15. | IV. Reminiscence | 4:53 |
| 16. | V. Raillery | 2:53 |
| 17. | VI. Pastoral | 3:24 |
| 18. | VII. Intermezzo | 4:17 |
| 19. | VIII. Finale | 3:16 |
| 20. | Paraphrase on Dizzy Gillespie's Manteca for two pianos, Op. 129 | 4:28 |

Total playing time 63:44

**CLASSICAL PIANISTS DON'T OFTEN PLAY JAZZ.
AND JAZZ PIANISTS DON'T USUALLY STICK TO THE SCORE.
KAPUSTIN IGNORED BOTH RULES — AND I'M GLAD HE DID.**

I first discovered Kapustin on BBC Radio 3, while driving along the glamorous roads of South London, and I immediately fell in love. I said to myself at that moment: *"I need to get home as quickly as possible — I must learn how to play this music."* At the time, I'd been searching for a composer who embodied the spirit of jazz, but in a way I could access. In walks Kapustin — the king of this fusion of jazz idiom with classical structure. His music is, honestly, addictive.

All my recent concerts have been full Kapustin programmes, showcasing his many sides and styles. I've even been lucky enough to work with drummers, bassists, guitarists, jazz pianists, and saxophonists in creating arrangements of his music for jazz ensemble. I dream of a world where classical and jazz musicians can perform side by side, with no gatekeeping or barriers. Kapustin's music makes that dream feel possible. It sits beautifully in the space between genres. It speaks directly to jazz musicians through its harmony and rhythm, and to classical musicians through its texture and form.

Kapustin always saw himself as a classical composer:

"I was never a jazz musician. I never tried to be a real jazz pianist, but I had to do it because of the composing. I'm not interested in improvisation – and what is a jazz musician without improvisation? All my improvisations are written, of course, and they became much better; it improved them."

Here, he touches on something deep — that improvisation is at the heart of traditional jazz. But it's worth remembering that classical musicians used to improvise too. Composers like Chopin rarely played the same piece the same way twice. My journey with Kapustin has opened up a wider question: what even is 'jazz'? What's 'classical'? I don't believe in boxing music into neat categories. As Duke Ellington said: *"If it sounds good, it is good."* And that's exactly what Kapustin is to me.

This album is a celebration of that in-between space — where rhythm dances with form, where freedom and structure meet, and where labels fall away.

THE MUSIC

Big Band Sounds, Op. 46 (1986)

I could say all Kapustin's pieces are my favourites, but this one sits high on the list. I often start concerts with this to set the vibe — straight-up jazz harmony, crunchy chords, and a classic swing rhythm throughout. Originally written for piano and big band (Op.10), I studied that score to enhance my own interpretation and recreate a full big band in the solo arrangement.

Selection from 24 Jazz Preludes, Op. 53 (1988)

The album wouldn't be complete without a few preludes. Based on Chopin's concept, I chose my eight favourites to balance the etudes. If you want to hear Kapustin's more jazz-inspired repertoire, these are the ones. Some are vibrant and energetic; others are reflective and steeped in blues and soul. I've given a few their own names after jazz legends I'm sure Kapustin was inspired by. Prelude No. 17 is "Oscar," No. 5 is "Bill," and No. 11 is "Ray." I'll let the listener decide which musicians those are.

Contemplation, Op. 47 (1987)

This piece speaks to me deeply. It's been a companion through many dark nights, when there was only me, a piano, and Kapustin. Its reflective nature invites both listener and performer to turn inward. This piece isn't about showing off — it's about introspection.

Paraphrase on "Aquarela do Brasil", Op. 118 (2003)

I can't help but want to dance every time I play this. Based on the famous Brazilian standard "Brazil," composed by Ary Barroso in 1939, I played along with a samba beat on this recording to lock into the groove. Kapustin doesn't just cover Barroso's tune — he rewires it. What was once a samba becomes a sparkling, relentless fantasy where rhythm and lyricism chase each other across the keyboard. It's both homage and reinvention — you can feel Kapustin smiling between the bars.

Eight Concert Etudes, Op. 40 (1984)

These are quite possibly Kapustin's most 'famous' set of pieces. Each with its own distinct character, they take you on a journey through the many colours of jazz. Composed in 1984, the etudes reflect influences from early jazz giants like Art Tatum and Erroll Garner, to the late-night lyrical jazz of Bill Evans in the '60s. We even explore funk boogie sounds, with hints of Chick Corea and Herbie Hancock. Of course, Kapustin being a Soviet composer, there are influences of this landscape connecting all his works — sonorous bass and Rachmaninov-style chords.

Often performed as encores or stand-alone solo pieces, they make their biggest impact when performed as a complete set. They are relentless, fierce, poetic, and beautiful.

Prelude

We kick things off with a real showstopper. Punchy syncopated octaves, chunky chords like a big band, and a groove that drives from start to finish. It's a great place to begin and is a signature of his style.

Reverie

A nod to the impressionists, *Reverie* is a beautiful contrast to what came before. Dreamy and romantic, Kapustin reveals his softer side. The right hand's pattern of sixths (perhaps inspired by Chopin's etudes) plays over a melodic bass line that holds the rhythmic framework. The middle section shows Kapustin's fiery character in triple time, ending with a reflective reprise.

Toccata

The groove kicks in here. The relentlessness allows hardly any breathing space — a true exercise in stamina and finger coordination. Often played at breakneck speed, I chose a more locked-in approach to highlight the syncopation and rhythm.

Reminiscence

A new sound world emerges, maybe influenced by Bill Evans. Running passages in the right hand float over a grounding rhythmic left hand, with beautiful voicing typical of jazz standards. There's no clear melody, and that's part of its beauty — dreamy yet passionate. Just when you think there might be some respite, Kapustin dives straight into the next etude.

Raillery

Where madness and funk collide. The bass line is relentless, with barely a pause, while the right hand interjects syncopated chords. The structure is a 12-bar blues, full of boogie immersion.

Pastoral

Despite its name, this etude is playful and energetic — almost video-game-like — but with the momentum typical of Kapustin. Harmonically accessible, it's a good place to start for any pianist who wants to learn the etudes.

Intermezzo

Near the end of the set, we visit a more traditional jazz sound. With a clear swing feel, it sounds like it's just walked out of a jazz club. There's plenty of stride piano and a satisfying “bring it home” moment towards the end.

Finale

If the previous pieces weren't enough, Kapustin closes with a ferocious finale that gets the blood pumping. A fusion of funk, romance, and grit, it makes a thrilling conclusion.

Paraphrase on Dizzy Gillespie's “Manteca” for Two Pianos, Op. 129 (2009)

When I found this piece, it confirmed to me that Kapustin is as much a jazz musician as he is classical. I had to decide who to perform it with, and after asking a few trusted colleagues with no luck, there was only one option: to learn both parts myself. The process was lengthy and difficult but incredibly rewarding. I split the parts into “rhythm” and “melody.” Though both switch roles, it was essential to record the rhythm part first, then play the solo part alongside it. I now perform this live with the rhythm coming through a PA system!

Ophelia Gordon, 2025

NIKOLAI KAPUSTIN

Nikolai Kapustin (1937–2020) was a Ukrainian composer and pianist known for blending classical forms with the language of jazz. He was born in Horlivka, Ukraine, and trained at the Moscow Conservatory under pianist Alexander Goldenweiser. Although he spent much of his early career performing in big bands and jazz ensembles, Kapustin was fundamentally a classical composer at heart. He wrote everything down in meticulous detail — fugues, sonatas, preludes, etudes — but infused it all with swing rhythms, jazz harmony, and stylistic nods to blues, bebop, boogie-woogie, and funk. Over his lifetime, he composed more than 160 works, including 20 piano sonatas, numerous concertos, and a vast collection of virtuosic solo piano music.

OPHELIA GORDON

I was born in the musical depths of South London — Croydon — and was surrounded by music from the start. My mum is a pianist and saxophonist, my grandfather was a pianist, and my great-grandfather was a concert pianist from Paris. I attended Coloma Convent Girls School, a specialist music school in Croydon, where I studied piano, classical guitar, double bass, violin, singing, and trumpet. In search of something less traditional, I attended the BRIT School for my sixth form years, and was immersed in pop, jazz, contemporary, world, and electronic music.

After that, I began a BMus course at Durham University, specialising in classical guitar and double bass for my first year, before continuing the course for the final two years at City University London. I've been working as a pianist ever since I graduated — teaching, accompanying, performing, and competing.

After a major life event in 2023, I decided to enrol in a master's programme at Trinity Laban to fully immerse myself in piano. It was around this time that James from Divine Art Records heard me play Kapustin while attending the Chetham's International Piano Summer School, and I was invited to create this album. As I write these notes, I am in my second year of the course, studying with Ji Liu and Liam Noble, supported by the Cutlers Scholarship.


Jazz Roots and Kapustin's Language

I grew up surrounded by the sound of jazz, although all my formal training was in classical music. I learnt to read notation, study composers, and honour what was written. But the sound of my home was Oscar Peterson, Courtney Pine, and Bill Evans. I grew up watching boogie pianists in my living room, and most weekends our home became an impromptu jazz club.

I played plenty of written-out jazz, but I never learnt to improvise or read lead sheets — so when I found Kapustin, it touched something deep in me that had been waiting to be heard. His music is not just 'jazz for classical pianists'. It's his own language that no other composer, regardless of genre, could ever copy. I feel Kapustin's music on a deep level — it's a language I just knew. There was a resonance impossible to explain in words, something I feel in my bones. Also, there is no better way to listen to Kapustin than through the smoky sounds of a vinyl, and I managed to source two rare copies, one from Albania and the other from Denmark.

Kapustin's music doesn't sit neatly in any one box — and that's exactly what pulled me in. His pieces borrow from jazz, speak the language of classical form, and groove like something altogether new. As I kept exploring his catalogue, I realised this wasn't just a composer playing with styles - this was someone building a world where those styles could live together. The pieces on this album reflect that hybrid space: they're unpredictable, electric, and totally unapologetic about mixing things up. It's the kind of music that makes you rethink what genres are even for.





This album was born during some of the hardest years of my life.

It grew out of a time when everything was shifting — and somewhere in the middle of that, Kapustin's music gave me clarity, challenge, and joy. These pieces held space for all of it: the grief, the grit, the rebuilding. I didn't just play them — I lived with them.

Thank you to everyone who's been part of this wild journey. To my teachers, for helping me shape my voice. To the friends and family who reminded me I could keep going when it felt like too much. To the engineers and producers who made these recordings feel alive.

And to Kapustin — thank you for writing music that lets me be all of myself at the piano.

Recorded at Trinity School, Croydon December 2024 and April 2025

Piano technician: James Beckwith - Steinway Model D3 #3474010 (1961)

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