

Русская фортепианная музыка
Russian Piano Music Series

volume 13



**Sergei
Rachmaninov**

Piano Sonata No. 1, Op. 28
Moments Musicaux, Op. 16
Etude-Tableau, Op. 39 No. 2

Alfonso Soldano

Russian Piano Music Series, vol. 13: Sergei Rachmaninov

Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943)

1	Etude-Tableau in A minor, Op. 39 No. 2	8:15
	Moments Musicaux, Op. 16	31:21
2	No. 1 <i>Andantino</i> in B flat minor	8:50
3	No. 2 <i>Allegretto</i> in E flat minor	3:49
4	No. 3 <i>Andante cantabile</i> in B minor	4:42
5	No. 4 <i>Presto</i> in E minor	3:32
6	No. 5 <i>Adagio sostenuto</i> in D flat major	4:29
7	No. 6 <i>Maestoso</i> in C major	5:52
	Piano Sonata No. 1 in D minor, Op. 28	40:20
8	I <i>Allegro moderato</i>	15:38
9	II <i>Lento</i>	9:34
10	III <i>Allegro molto</i>	15:06

total duration : **79:56**

Alfonso Soldano piano

Dedication

I wish to dedicate this album to the great Italian pianist and professor Paola Bruni. Paola was a special friend, and there was no justice in her sad destiny; she was a superlative human being, deep, special and joyful always, as was her playing..everybody will miss you forever Paola!

Alfonso

Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943)

“The Wanderer’s Illusions”

by Rosellina de Bellis

".. What I try to do, when I write my music, is to say simply and directly what is in my heart when I compose. If there is love, or bitterness, or sadness, or religion, these moods become part of my music .. "

The bitterness of the words spoken by Schubert about the connection between song and love, "... when I wanted to sing love it turned into pain, and if I wanted to sing pain, it became love; so both divide my soul... ", forms the perfect imprint of the romantic genius. The inextricable intertwining of feelings and contrasts reflects the mirror of human life, and the condition of the musician inevitably depicts the fugacity of the same. The archetypal *Wanderer*, he who drifts between the illusions of a wounded bond and the magnificence of unlimited talent: this could be said of Sergei Rachmaninov, one of the last yet foremost of pianist-composer figures born in the nineteenth century, an old world that has reached its last gasp. And so, Rachmaninov, the last *Wanderer*, sang without pause *"the return"* (from *conversations with Benno Moiseiwitsch, on Prelude op 23 no. 10*), looking back to trace the trajectory of an unsatisfied desire to return to his homeland.

From the touching *"Songs"* with texts by Russian authors, an intimate nucleus of Rachmaninov's production, we can understand the presence of an inextinguishable pain, in which the embrace of music and words allows a merging without limits. Rachmaninov's reserved temper perfectly matched his immense instrumental abilities to give life to a sweeping language, direct and in absolute contrast to the transgressive *"waters"* of the culture that was looking forward to the twentieth century. Rachmaninov, the rebel, in the crisis that enveloped the tonal world, took refuge in the melody, through an exaggerated individualism, unlike the hyperbole of Scriabin,

companion and recognized star of the musical firmament, but leaning towards an unexplored future. Rachmaninov, brilliant young artist of whom Tchaikovsky said "For him, I predict a bright future", may be seen as a sort of putative son; in addition to having trained pianistically in the very severe boarding-house of Nikolai Zverev, he completed his studies with his cousin Alexandr Ziloti, already a professor in the Conservatory and a friend of Tchaikovsky as well as one of the "elect", a pupil of "his majesty" Franz Liszt. This very special formative *pedigree* had a strong impact on Rachmaninov's early compositions, although he immediately showed a creative vein made up of lights and shadows, as in the more intense *Caravaggio*.

In the seething scenario of the early twentieth century, Rachmaninov was able to sublimate an expressive spectrum full of orthodox liturgical echoes (in the significant memories of his nephew Alexander, his grandfather loved to listen to sacred music even late at night), distinctive elements of the Russian homeland and compositional ideals of a purely representative nature. Liszt's lesson and his music "by program" were always present in a composer who did not disdain a certain Mendelssohnian style in the structure of his compositions. Privileged by his own talent, he was able to escape from the October Revolution and leave overnight for America, with which he had a more than controversial relationship: on the one hand, this cauldron of States allowed the explosion of its fame, economic ease and opportunities for unparalleled affirmation; on the other the umbilical cord with his land made him create a "fortress" in his residence in Beverly Hills, in which he created a real circle of *emigrés*, whether they were musicians, writers, lawyers or doctors.

The meticulousness that characterized Rachmaninov's professional life was well infused in his scores - "Play like you are!" - Aldo Ciccolini said. So much spontaneity and prolificacy was linked to a specific strategy of spiritual, emotional and formal tension in his musical work. A heightened sense of perception of human characteristics allowed

Rachmaninov, following the teachings of Tchaikovsky, to weave the fabric of his perorations towards grueling culminating points, up to a sense of profound liberation.

The depth of humanity of his musical speech did not prevent him from clamorous fiascos, including the well-known one of the *First Symphony*, but the reality is that Rachmaninov was an individual of such overflowing talent for every form of musical figure – conductor, performer, composer – that he did not know how to choose a single road, and found, restarting from his famous *Second Concerto*, a plurality of commitments that led him to never mask himself as an ascetic in the compositional environment.

His fidelity to the tonal "Garden of the Hesperides" is easily noticed when listening to Rachmaninov interpret the music of other composers; for example the legendary recorded performance of Schumann's *Carnaval* seems to be played by a Shakespearean hero and by the continuous hovering of ghosts; Rachmaninov's masks in this case are of a gloomy aspect, or constantly touched by a thin veil of nostalgia, which permeates the unmistakable sound of the Russian pianist.

The brilliant career as a concert artist he undertook did nothing but consolidate his idea of writing, made more essential and picturesque with the passing of the years, but perfectly traceable in a line of continuity for the whole production period, unlike Scriabin and the distinct periods of his career.

6 Moments Musicaux, op.16

The *Moments Musicaux*, a set of musical paintings already seen in the famous examples of Schubertian production, constituted the first work truly representative of the young Rachmaninov's style; they were composed during 1896. All the instrumental and

dialectical explosiveness of a talent in his early twenties can be reconciled in this work with a tribute inspired by the formal icons of nineteenth-century compositional tradition.

In its order of progression, Rachmaninov draws a well recognizable design, giving it imperishable life thanks to its own colors of the highest order. We hear a piercing

Nocturne (*Andantino*), a breathless Impromptu (*Allegro*), presented in its slender 1940 revision, a mournful Canto (*Andante Cantabile*), an Etude depicting the charge of a Mongolian cavalry towards the battle (*Presto*), a placid yet resigned Barcarolle (*Andante*), and a Poème su perpetuum mobile (*Maestoso*) unleashed, free and warm, like wide and joyful effluvia, in perhaps similar expression to the *Song op.26 n. 11 "Fountains"*.

Etude-Tableau in A minor, op.39 no. 2

Rachmaninov also succumbed to the luxuriant temptation to compose studies for piano, a common practice for didactic and educational purposes at first, and for more poetic purposes during the nineteenth century.

In particular, Rachmaninov considered Liszt's example; he can be said to have invented "program music" as seen in most of his *Transcendental Studies*, a relevant title that gave the performer a serious starting point for interpretation (if they managed to master the dreadful technical difficulties proposed). Rachmaninov overcame this programmatic concept by creating a generic but explanatory title of the style of these pieces, calling them "Studies-Frameworks" but not specifying any title.

Written after numerous fruitful experiences between 1916 and 1917, shortly before leaving Russia, the rhythmic and sonic effects heard in the *Etudes-Tableaux* are more

radical than in Rachmaninov's earliest works, and in the longest of the collection, this second *Etude* clearly shows the improvisational ability of the composer, creating a *tableau* on the theme of the *Dies Irae*, heavily transfigured and presented in a feverish way on various registers, gradually becoming more agitated and convulsive, through a dramatic growth, eventually to vanish in a questioning and suspended breath.

Piano Sonata no. I in D minor, Op. 28

The wishes and doubts that Rachmaninov had about his monumental *First Sonata* for Piano are all expressed in a letter addressed to Medtner: "... *This work is naturally wild and infinite. The basic idea consists of two opposing characters that refer to a literary subject, Faust. Naturally I have not written a music program in the true sense of the word even if the sense of the Sonata will be better understood if this subject is kept in mind. No one will ever dare to execute this because it is too difficult, long and discontinuous on the musical level. I was tempted to draw a symphony from it, but this purpose proved to be impossible because this composition is typically for piano ...* ". What follows is that the *Sonata* is, together with the *Third Concerto op.30*, the summa of all the musical and instrumental experiences of the composer, and certainly, the most demanding work for solo piano conceived by him. Composed in 1906 in Dresden it rivals Liszt's *Sonata* for the skills required of the performer. The *Leit-motiv* of the work, omnipresent in the intricate polyphonic undergrowth of the composition, sometimes literally, is the theme of the *Dies Irae*, an excellent partner for the ambitious intentions of this controversial and obscure "*Faust-Sonate*".

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The pianist

Alfonso Soldano was born in 1986 in the Puglia (Apulia) region of southern Italy. He completed his five year bachelors and postgraduate courses at the Conservatory "N. Piccinni" in Bari, gaining his Degree in Piano Performance with Honors. He also obtained the High Performance Diploma in Concert Piano Performance at the National Academy of Santa Cecilia in Rome, under Benedetto Lupo. His mentors throughout his artistic life have been Aldo Ciccolini and Pierluigi Camicia. Mr. Soldano has attained first place in many piano competitions and is regularly invited to competitions both as artist and juror in Italy and throughout Europe. He also gives masterclasses all over Italy and has played with a substantial number of major orchestras.

In particular he performed, at age 17, in a production of Rachmaninov's complete works for piano and orchestra, with the Bacau Philharmonic Orchestra. He has worked with conductors such as O. Balan, D. Frandes and M. Cormio and performed with many orchestras, both Italian and from other countries. Mr. Soldano is recognized for his deep and particular sound and breathtaking virtuosity, and is considered by many to be among the foremost Italian talent of his generation. He is one of the last and favourite long-time students of legendary Italian-French pianist Aldo Ciccolini; he has developed a substantial repertoire that includes many solo piano works and numerous concertos with orchestra.

Mr. Soldano has undertaken many concert tours, festivals and events in great halls, such as the Musikum Salzburg, Hindemith Foundation Switzerland, G. Enescu Festival Bucarest, Bacau, several Italian universities (Rome "La Sapienza", Bari) and recitals in major cities including various theaters in Rome (Parco della Musica), Milan, Verona and Bologna. As a writer he produced the first biography of Russian composer Sergei Bortkiewicz, which was published by Florestano Edizioni.

Alfonso Soldano was awarded a scholarship at Bari Conservatory in 2008 as 'best piano student'; he was a finalist in the 'Società Umanitaria di Milano' competition in

2009 and was awarded the International Gold Medal Prize from 'Maison des Artistes' in Rome for Best Italian Artist in April 2013, with a large ceremony in the University's "La Sapienza" great hall. Mr Soldano is also busy working as a concert transcriber both for MusePress (Japan) and Florestano Edizioni (Italy). He is currently finalizing the publication, with Florestano Edizioni, of a large piano set of concert transcriptions for two pianos.

The great pianists that have heard him have always highlighted the particular interpretative maturity of his performances, the result of continuous insights into the history of piano technique and interpretation. Mr Soldano is currently Professor of Piano performance at the Conservatory U. Giordano in Foggia, following similar posts in Teramo, Taranto and Lecce. Formerly also a professor at S. Cecilia Conservatory in Rome, he is also Artistic Director of the European Arts Academy Foundation "Aldo Ciccolini" in Trani, the town in which he now resides. His recent performance of Tchaikovsky's Second Piano Concerto received strong critical acclaim and was broadcast on Italian regional television. His recordings for Divine Art have also received great praise from critics around the world.



Divine Art Russian Piano Music Series

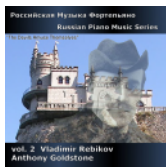


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"Played to perfection by Alfonso Soldano, the album is a gem." – *Music Notes*

This recording was made in the Theatre “G. Curci”, Barletta, Italy on 1-4 July, 2019
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Piano by Steinway (model D274)
Piano tuning: Massimiliano Griffi
Series producer/design – Stephen Sutton
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