

Georges Bériachvili
piano



RECITAL ALLEMAND

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- Jean Sébastien Bach (1685-1750)**
Toccatà en mi mineur Toccatà in E minor BWV 914
1 [Introduction] - Poco allegro - Adagio - Fuga. Allegro 7'08
- Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)**
Sonate N° 4 en mi b majeur Sonata N° 4 in E flat major K.282
2 I. Adagio 6'17
3 II. Menuetto I, Menuetto II 4'24
4 III. Allegro 3'07
- Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)**
5 Trente-deux variations en do mineur sur un thème original
Thirty-two variations in C minor on an original theme WoO 80 10'58
- Franz Schubert (1797-1828)**
6 Moment musical en la b majeur Moment musical in A flat major op.94 N° 2 5'39
- Robert Schumann (1810-1856)**
Trois Romances Three Romances op.28
7 I. Sehr markiert, si b mineur B flat minor 3'06
8 II. Einfach, fa# majeur F sharp major 3'00
9 III. Sehr markiert, si majeur B major 6'19
- Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)**
10 Intermezzo en la mineur Intermezzo in A minor op.118 N° 1 1'50
11 Intermezzo en si mineur Intermezzo in B minor op.119 N° 1 2'51
12 Ballade en sol mineur Ballade in G minor op.118 N° 3 3'46
13 Intermezzo en mi b majeur Intermezzo in E flat major op.117 N° 1 4'05
- Durée totale : (62'50)

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This recording spans about two centuries in the history of music, an era which can be considered as the golden age of German piano music. From Bach to Brahms, we can witness the incredible blossoming of German keyboard music. Through the musical eras – baroque, classical, romantic – the piano (and prior to it the harpsichord) remains the favourite instrument of most of the great German composers, who make it in turns the instrument of intimacy and the instrument of fiery rhetoric. Let us also point out that, in spite of changing eras and styles, we can easily trace a long line of continuous artistic evolution. The composers featured in this recording mark the high points of this lineage, their pianistic legacy an integral part of the very backbone of the history of music.

The Toccata in E minor BWV 914 was composed between 1707 and 1710, when Johann Sebastian Bach, then in his twenties, held the position of organist of the chapel and chamber musician of the dukes of Weimar. From this early period also date several toccatas and fugues for the organ, among which the ultra-famous *Toccata and fugue in D minor BWV 565*. As for the toccatas for the harpsichord, Bach has left us seven (BWV 910-916), all of them written between 1705 and 1712.

The genre of the toccata (from Italian *toccare* - to touch) was widespread at the baroque period in Italian and German music; it goes back to the XVIth century. It was originally a keyboard piece devised for the musician to make contact (“touch”) with the instrument, hence its generic features: improvisatory style, free structure with linking sections of contrasting characters, use of scales, arpeggios, virtuoso passages. Bach’s toccatas are the climax of a long evolution through the compositions of A. Gabrieli, G. Frescobaldi, G. Muffat, J.J. Froberger, D. Buxtehude...

Among the harpsichord toccatas, the *E minor toccata* is probably the most enthralling work. It stands out by its terseness, by the concentration of the musical process, by its unity of style and content, along with its extreme diversity of figures and great generosity of expression. The polyphonic writing of the fugal parts is not as sophisticated as in his later works, but the piece is permeated all through by a huge inspirational drive that provides it with extraordinary freshness and inventive power. Particularly striking, in this toccata, is its “signposted” dramatic conception, which was very uncommon in the baroque era. The piece comprises four movements: introduction (no indication of tempo), small 4-part double fugue *Un poco Allegro*, recitative *Adagio*, and 3-part fugue *Allegro*. The fugue, in its turn, an intense drive towards the final exclamation mark, is perceived as a climax and prepared step by step by the previous three parts. Thus, through the four movements runs an actual narrative of destiny: the grand introduction, the meanderings of the first fugue, the deep and impassioned meditation of the recitative – something like the search for a creed that eventually leads to its vibrant assertion – and at last the great fugue. The linking of recitative and fugue takes them beyond the simple juxtaposition of two sections towards a conclusion, like the liberation of forces that have matured all along the previous movements and can now meet up in a gushing flow with the course of the universe.

Could this be an unduly “romantic” outlook, influenced by XIXth century music and culture? It might be so, and yet it seems amply justified to consider this piece as the work of a visionary Bach who exceeded the standards of his era and stood a century ahead of the evolution of his art.

The Sonata in E-flat major K.282 is the fourth in a series of six sonatas for the piano K.279-284, composed by Mozart at the time of his trip to Munich (December 1774 – March 1775). The main reason for this trip was the performance of his opera-buffa *La Finta Giardiniera*. According to various sources, sonatas 1 to 5 were completed before his departure, in Salzburg, so as to be played during Mozart’s stay in the Bavarian capital. The

sixth sonata, on the other hand, dates from March 1775. These sonatas really are the first authentic Mozart sonatas for piano solo (apart from a few childhood pieces as well as his famous improvisations). Strangely, many authors tend to underestimate these compositions and consider them as imitative or downright superficial. True enough, Mozart, then aged 19, was in the midst of his artistic quest. He was eagerly studying various styles and composers, imitating them and appropriating their legacy. For the sonatas, he mainly emulated, among other models, the sons of Bach (Johann Christian, and probably Carl Philip Emmanuel) and more particularly Joseph Haydn who had just had six sonatas for the piano published (Hob. XVI n° 21-26). But Mozart's sonatas definitely belong in the same league as those of his elders. Better yet, they transcend the courtly and sometimes superficial style of his models. This is where the typically Mozartian approach can be noticed, as he oversteps the forms and genres of his era, not by revolutionizing their outer shapes, but by saturating them "from inside".

The *Sonata in E-flat major* is a beautiful example of this process. This piece, which rarely features in concert or recording programmes, demonstrates a sophisticated art of composition, which manages to enclose a rich and intricate musical substance within seemingly simple musical forms. This is particularly true of the *Adagio*, which constitutes one of the very few cases of a slow first movement in sonata form. It is thus all the more arresting. In this piece, brimming with grace and poetry, which alternates, in the space of just a few bars, moments of daydreaming, of bliss, of poignant sadness, of hesitation, of childlike naiveté, we can get a glimpse of the most intimate and secret Mozart.

The following *Minuet*, where the Trio is replaced by the *Minuet II*, draws its inspiration from Austrian popular dances. This is a humorous piece, which conjures up images of Mozart improvising and entertaining his audience with all kinds of musical surprises.

The final movement is a brilliant sonata allegro. Much the same as in both previous movements, we can hear in this short piece the typically Mozartian alternation of forte and piano, of contrasting elements and nuances within short sequences. This musical whirlwind links together mischievous motives, graceful, almost languid passages, and outbursts of joy. The disquieting shadows scattered in the development soon give way to the recapitulation which restores the atmosphere of youthful spirit and jubilation.

Beethoven's Thirty-two variations in C minor on an original theme were composed in the autumn of 1806, when Beethoven was experiencing rising fame and intense creativeness. He then produced a string of masterpieces such as *Appassionata*, the "Kreutzer" sonata for violin and piano, the *Third Symphony* ("Eroica"), the *Piano Concerto n°4*, the "Razumovsky" Quartets, the *Coriolan Overture* and many others. The *Thirty-two Variations*, published in 1807 without opus number or dedication, can be considered as one of the jewels in this era of his artistic career, often called "heroic".

In this monumental piece, the composer has drawn on the early music genres of the chaconne and the passacaglia. His reference was doubtlessly Handel, to whom he is known to have vowed the highest admiration. Did he also know Bach's great chaconne in the *Partita in D minor* for solo violin, which was published much later, in 1844? There is no documentary evidence of it, but there are blatant similarities between both variation cycles. However, Beethoven's work remains deeply individual and, together with the *Diabelli Variations* op.120, it can be considered as one of the highest points in the history of the variation as a genre.

The majestic 8-bar theme rests upon a rather widespread pattern of harmonic and melodic progression. And yet it includes a few fiery elements of vintage Beethoven, particularly at the end with the sturdy syncopated chord followed by a brief piano conclusion, which abruptly break up the initial rising line. Then, while strictly keeping its harmonic and

metric individuality, the theme undergoes a set of transformations in which the composer displays a whole range of piano pyrotechnics: arpeggios, repeats, chords, double notes, quick virtuoso passages, variations of texture. Beyond traditional techniques of variation, Beethoven resorts to complex, many-layered dramatic processes. The variations are assembled in groups which in turn will form the major sections of the piece. On an overall architectonic level, a three-part structure takes shape (“exposition”, central group in a major mode, and developed recapitulation) followed by a great coda. Moreover, the composer creates a set of extra thematic lines, the most striking of which is the rhythmic cell: ♩ a kind of Beethovenian signature which crops up in some of his works; this rhythmic pattern will later make up the main kernel of the *Fifth Symphony*. These complementary elements, often derived from the theme, follow their own courses by interacting with other incidental elements and with various figures of movement. The deployment of all these logistical means aims at setting up a process of dialectical evolution through a confrontation of opposites, conflicting thoughts and frames of mind that develop and clash. The end-result of this process is a coda of symphonic dimensions where the new theme of the last bars embodies the supreme synthesis – a powerful statement of will and heroic determination.

In the art of Beethoven, the conception of music as a dialectical process of evolution reaches its climax. Incidentally, Hegel, the philosopher of dialectics, was Beethoven’s contemporary, and was born in the same year. In this connection, Theodor Adorno has made a curious entry in his notebooks: “Beethoven’s music is Hegelian philosophy: but at the same time it is truer than that philosophy.”

Schubert’s Moment musical N°2 in A-flat major is part of a collection of six pieces published in 1828 and titled by the publisher, in broken French: “Momens Musicaux pour le Piano Forte”. The pieces are very diverse and were composed at different periods, between 1822 and 1827. And yet, the collection does have a form of stylistic unity, as much on a purely musical level as on that of pianistic writing – very sober but diversified and with a wealth of details.

From a historical standpoint, this collection is of much greater importance than its unassuming appearance gives us to understand. The *Musical Moments* indeed, like the eight *Impromptus* completed in 1827, mark the starting-point of a new era of piano music. They come up with a new type of composition for the piano, the *Characterstück* (character piece), which the romantic century will explore more extensively than any other genre. All the works of Schumann and Brahms recorded on this CD fall within the scope of this lineage.

The part played by Schubert must be stressed, not that he was the first to compose pieces of that kind – he wasn’t – but because instrumental music in his compositions undergoes a deep renewal process, which at the same time offsets the very essence of the “character pieces”. This renewal springs from a new source, from which Schubert’s instrumental music draws its inspiration, that of the German *Lied*. With its immediacy and simplicity, the *Lied*, of which Schubert himself is a peerless master, rejuvenates instrumental music by turning it towards a more subjective form of expression, a “first-person” narrative, towards a more romantic style of imagery.

Musical moment N°2 (Andantino) is a perfect example of this trend, with its intimate intonations, its subtle nuances, its harmonic inflections that constantly switch from major to minor. The form is set as a mere alternation of two themes in five sections A-B-A’-B’’-A’’. There is hardly any development, except for a few bars in the middle section. The first theme includes slightly dance-like rhythmic patterns, elements of song and choral; the long sustained notes make it sound like a reflexive monologue. The second theme, on the other hand, is a real lied of poignant sadness. It is particularly impressive when repeated in a sudden *forte*, which briefly emphasizes the tragic undertones of Schubert’s universe.

The Three Romances op.28 do not feature among the most often played pieces of Schumann, except for the second one, which is relatively well-known – a strange deficiency that can only be accounted for by the notorious inertia of concert repertoires. And yet, this opus is in no way inferior to the other productions of Schumann. On the contrary, as a triptych, it is worthy of particular attention. Schumann's short cycles for the piano are comparatively rare and this one is doubtlessly the most accomplished. With great intensity and a wide range of contrasts, it brings together the cardinal points of Schumann's music – passion and turmoil, daydreams and tenderness, humour and fantasy. Like nearly all of Schumann's piano works, it displays marvellous expressiveness and inventiveness in the piano writing (not a single commonplace!). The cycle is also remarkable by its tonal consistency and beautiful formal unity.

The first piece, the feverish *Sehr markiert* (very accented), in B-flat minor, is a real *Sturm und Drang* poem. Even from a structural standpoint, it looks like a poem, with self-contained periods, repeated like stanzas and with accents recalling German poetry, where only the passionate outbursts stand out.

The second piece, *Einfach* (with simplicity) in F-sharp major, is worlds away from the first: an *Abendmusik* (evening music), in typical Schumann style, tender and serene, with a few darker colors in the middle section; a love duet sung by two voices in the third, cradled in a shimmering harmonic accompaniment.

The third, *Sehr Markiert* again, in B major, where the refrain figures a kind of burlesque march, takes us into the inner world of Schumann the story-teller – funny stories, tales of fantasy, moving or scary tales – back to the storyteller he was in his youth, steeped in the imaginative world of romantic literature.

The *Three Romances* rank among the last pieces in the first period of Schumann's work, when he totally dedicated himself to the piano. He composed them in 1839 and sent them to Clara Wieck (his wife-to-be) as a Christmas present. Clara wrote back to him, enthusiastically, that she knew of “nothing more tender than these three Romances, especially the middle one, which is really the most beautiful love duet”. She had insisted that Robert should dedicate them to her, but Schumann had answered that the pieces were not “good enough” for her. The opus 28 eventually came out with a dedication to Count Heinrich II Reuss-Köstritz, an admirer and friend of the composer. Over the years, Schumann seems to have reassessed these *Romances*, since a few years later, in a letter, he refers to them as some of the best of his piano compositions.

Brahms's Intermezzi and Ballade, recorded on this CD, belong to his last creative period. In 1890, Brahms, then aged 57, decided to give up music and go into peaceful retirement. But this determination only lasted a few months. Deeply impressed by a performance of the clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld, he went back to work and composed two major works, the *Trio for piano, clarinet and cello* op.114 and the *Clarinet quintet* op.115. This resumption of composition is marked by a return to the piano. Yet, far from his fondness for monumental forms at the time of his youth and middle age, the composer now seems to find the small form more appealing. He thus composes twenty pieces published in op.116-119 (1891-1893) which rank among the most magnificent collections of miniatures in the history of music.

Memories, dreams, evocations of childhood, autumnal moods, the harsh landscapes of Northern Germany, these are all the motives woven together in these songs of the twilight of the great German romantic piano music. In these works, the incredible sophistication of the piano writing never obfuscates the immediacy and naturalness of expression but rather

deepens and enriches them. This synergy between inspiration and scholarly art – a typical feature of Brahms’s genius – characterizes all the pieces recorded here.

The *Intermezzo* op.118 N°1 in A minor, *Allegro non assai, ma molto appassionato*, is one of the shortest pieces in the collection. However, in its musical flow, we can perceive the fullness of Brahms’s passion, a passion with an epic dimension (unlike Schumann’s, which is often feverish and hectic).

The *Intermezzo* op.119 N°1 in B minor, *Adagio* – this is a page of music that displays an uncommon mastery of musicwriting, expertly blending melody, harmony and polyphony. And yet, is there a more sincere expression of sadness, of nostalgic lyricism and loneliness?

The impetuous *Ballade* op.118 N°3 in G minor, *Allegro energico*, revives the heroic thrust of Brahms’s early works. But it is more condensed, and actually brimming with lyricism, which gushes out in the lullaby – the center piece in this 3-part form.

Lastly, the *Intermezzo* op.117 N°1 in E-flat major, *Andante moderato*, is the only piece that bears an epigraph. Brahms drew it from a Scottish lullaby that he had found in Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient Poetry* (in Herder’s German translation): “Sleep, my child, now softly sleep!/It grieves my heart to see you weep”. The lullaby, a musical genre particularly dear to Brahms, here reveals the depth of its essence, with tenderness and light in the main theme clashing with the darker tones of the middle section.

Georges Bériachvili
(English translation: Pierre Bourhis)

BIOGRAPHY

Georges Bériachvili (Beriashvili) is one of the very few musicians whose musical characters were molded off the beaten tracks of artistic careers. He started to learn the piano at the age of seven, and then interrupted his music studies for several years. It was not until the age of 23, after graduating from a college of sciences, that he joined the State Conservatory of Tbilisi (Georgia), where he majored in the theory and history of music. During the same period, he began to perform as a pianist. Since settling down in France in 2001, he has worked as a concert pianist, piano teacher and musicologist. While giving numerous concerts, with a broad repertoire from Bach to Stockhausen, he has carried out theoretical research, published various articles and, in 2010, he defended his PhD thesis on the theory, aesthetics and psychology of avant-garde music in the XXth century.