

Sergei Prokofiev – Complete Piano Sonatas (Bronfman) [2002]

Written by bluesever

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Piano sonata № 1, f-moll Op. 1 1. *Allegro* Piano sonata № 2, d-moll Op. 14 2. *Allegro ma non troppo* 3. *Scherzo, allegro marcato* 4. *Andante* 5. *Vivace*

Piano sonata № 3, a-moll Op. 28

6. *Allegro tempestoso*

Piano sonata № 4, c-moll Op. 29

7. *Allegro molto sostenuto* 8. *Andante assai* 9. *Allegro con brio, ma non leggiero*

Piano sonata № 5, C-dur Op. 38

1. *Allegro tranquillo* 2. *Andantino* 3. *Un poco allegretto*

Piano sonata № 6, A-dur Op. 82

4. *Allegro moderato* 5. *Allegretto* 6. *Tempo di valzer* 7. *Vivace*

Piano sonata № 7, B-dur Op. 83

8. *Allegro inquieto* 9. *Andante caloroso* 10. *Precipitato*

Piano sonata № 8, B-dur Op. 84

1. *Andante dolce* 2. *Andante sognando* 3. *Vivace*

Piano sonata № 9, C-dur Op.103 4. *Allegretto* 5. *Allegro strepitoso* 6. *Andante tranquillo* 8. *Allegro con brio, ma non troppo presto* Yefim Bronfman – piano

Prokofiev's nine mature Piano Sonatas (a fragment of a tenth is the last music to have fallen from his pen and an eleventh was in the planning stages at the time of his death) are a good analogy for a journey through his musical life. From the strangely anachronistic and lyrical harmonies of the First Sonata before the Revolution, through the passionate expressiveness of the so-called "War Sonatas" (Six, Seven and Eight) to the somewhat pallid Ninth at the end of his life, the Piano Sonatas mirror Prokofiev's musical development and inspiration.

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Not that the First Piano Sonata was actually the first work in this genre that the young Prokofiev had created – there are at least six such sonatas among his ‘juvenilia’. However, it is the first work about which the composer felt seriously enough to ascribe an opus number to. Later in life he would refer to the work as forming a watershed between his early period and his serious musicianship. Both this and the Second Sonata show the influence of Myaskovsky, and there is an unmistakable exploration of the ‘new music’ emanating from Scriabin – an unavoidable influence on any Russian composer of the era. But in the scherzo of the Second Sonata we can already hear the diabolical technique and barely suppressed angst that will come to characterise so much of Prokofiev’s music in the future.

It is not the purpose of this review to catalogue the history of all nine of these works. But the fact they are a progression is best heard when comparing the beginning of disc one (Sonatas One and Two) with the end of disc two (Sonatas Six and Seven). The angularity of the "War Sonatas" is so vastly different from the youthful Romanticism of the earlier works that it is difficult to believe they came from the same mind – until, that is, one knows something of the musical influences, social pressures and personal insecurities at work on this artist. Then, miraculously, the music falls into place and ‘makes sense.’ Prokofiev is a classic example of a composer whose music becomes much more appreciable once the listener can put the composer’s personality in perspective – and other than his symphonies I can think of no other cycle of his works that lends itself as easily to such an exercise.

Bronfman has a natural and well-known affinity for Russian music, but his interpretations here progress beyond the merely good to the almost revelatory. His performances of Six, Seven and Eight, capturing the almost clinically cold nature of the discord while providing a clear lyrical melodic line, are very possibly the best captured on record. This is not to decry his performances of any of the other works – but these three stand head and shoulders above the rest. The liner notes tell us nothing about the dates of the recordings, but looking at the original releases in the Sony catalogue reveals they were probably made over a seven or eight year period. This may explain the identifiable changes in style between some of the sonatas – or it may be Bronfman’s conscious efforts to reflect Prokofiev’s developing musical personality. Whichever the case may be, these are recordings that should be at the top of every piano lover’s Want List – and Sony are to be congratulated for releasing them under their "Essential Classics" imprint. ---Tim Mahon, musicweb-international.com

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