

Pierre Rode - 24 Caprices for Solo Violin (1992)

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1. 24 caprices en formes d'etudes: No. 1 in C major 3:27 2. 24 caprices en formes d'etudes: No. 2 in A minor 1:37 3. 24 caprices en formes d'etudes: No. 3 in G major 2:36 4. 24 caprices en formes d'etudes: No. 4 in E minor 3:17 5. 24 caprices en formes d'etudes: No. 5 in D major 3:51 6. 24 caprices en formes d'etudes: No. 6 in B minor 3:56 7. 24 caprices en formes d'etudes: No. 7 in A major 3:58 8. 24 caprices en formes d'etudes: No. 8 in F sharp minor 1:49 9. 24 caprices en formes d'etudes: No. 9 in E major 4:35 10. 24 caprices en formes d'etudes: No. 10 in C sharp minor 1:56 11. 24 caprices en formes d'etudes: No. 11 in B major 3:58 12. 24 caprices en formes d'etudes: No. 12 in G sharp minor 1:15 13. 24 caprices en formes d'etudes: No. 13 in G flat major 4:11 14. 24 caprices en formes d'etudes: No. 14 in E flat minor 3:51 15. 24 caprices en formes d'etudes: No. 15 in D flat major 1:50 16. 24 caprices en formes d'etudes: No. 16 in B flat minor 4:50 17. 24 caprices en formes d'etudes: No. 17 in A flat major 1:39 18. 24 caprices en formes d'etudes: No. 18 in F minor 1:24 19. 24 caprices en formes d'etudes: No. 19 in E flat major 5:31 20. 24 caprices en formes d'etudes: No. 20 in C minor 4:29 21. 24 caprices en formes d'etudes: No. 21 in B flat major 3:35 22. 24 caprices en formes d'etudes: No. 22 in G minor 2:44 23. 24 caprices en formes d'etudes: No. 23 in F major 2:30 24. 24 caprices en formes d'etudes: No. 24 in D minor 2:44 Oscar Shumsky – violin

Jacques Pierre Joseph Rode was born in Bordeaux on 16 February 1774. The son of a perfumer, he showed early musical precocity and was taken to Paris at the age of thirteen by his teacher, Flauvel. Shortly after his arrival in Paris, Rode became the star pupil of Giovanni Battista Viotti, the foremost violinist of the day and the founder of the modern French violin school. In 1790 he made his solo début in Viotti's Violin Concerto No. 13; he also joined the orchestra at the Théâtre de Monsieur, where he met his longtime colleague Pierre Baillot.

Rode's "breakout" year was 1792. During the traditional Holy Week concerts, Rode performed six times between the 1 and 13 April, these performances included two Viotti concertos, one a première. During the next sixteen years Rode lived the life of a travelling virtuoso, though he also joined the violin department of the newly organized Paris Conservatoire. There he

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collaborated with Baillot and Kreutzer on a manual of instruction for the violin. Rode was named solo violinist for the musique particulière of the First Consul, Napoleon, and was briefly solo violinist at the Opéra.

Rode spent the years from 1804 to 1808 in Russia, where he was appointed court violinist to the Tsar. His return to Paris after his Russian sojourn marked a change in his fortunes. Instead of the wave of success he had ridden since he emerged from Bordeaux at the age of thirteen, the public responded only tepidly to his playing. Spohr, who heard him both before and after his Russian adventure, wrote that after Russia he found Rode's playing "cold and full of mannerism".

Rode again began travelling across Europe in 1811. In Vienna at the end of 1812, he gave the première of Beethoven's Violin Sonata, Op. 96 with Archduke Rudolph. He spent the years 1814 to 1821 in Berlin, where he met and married his wife and became an intimate friend of the Mendelssohn family. The mother of Felix and Fanny Mendelssohn wrote that, when Rode and his wife left, the "charm of our musical winter evenings...dwindled completely." In 1821 Rode returned to the Bordeaux area where he now lived in semi-retirement. In 1828 he made a last attempt at a public concert in Paris. The concert was such a fiasco that some commentators believed it hastened his death on 25 November 1830. --- naxos.com

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