

Rachmaninov – Romances (Hvorostovsky) [2012]



1. 15 Songs, Op. 26: No. 3. *Mi otдохnym (We shall rest)* 2. *Ti pomnish' li vecher (Do you remember the evening?)* 3. 6 Songs, Op. 4: No. 1. *O net, molyu, ne ukhodi (Oh no, I beg you, do not leave!)* 4. 6 Songs, Op. 4: No. 2. *Utro (Morning)* 5. 6 Songs, Op. 4: No. 3. *V molchan'i nochi taynoy (In the silence of the mysterious night)* 6. 6 Songs, Op. 4: No. 5. *Uzh ti, niva moya (Oh you, my corn field!)* 7. 6 Songs, Op. 8 (text by H. Heine): No. 2. *Ditya kak tsvetok ti prekrasna (My child, you are beautiful as a flower)* 8. 6 Songs, Op. 8 (text by H. Heine): No. 5. *Son (A dream)* 9. 12 Songs, Op. 14: No. 4. *Ya bil u ney (I was with her)* 10. 12 Songs, Op. 14: No. 1. *Ya zhdu tebya (I am waiting for you)* 11. 12 Songs, Op. 14: No. 7. *Ne ver' mne, drug (Do not believe me, my friend)* 12. 12 Songs, Op. 14: No. 9. *Ona, kak polden', khorosha (She is as beautiful as noon)* 13. 12 Songs, Op. 14: No. 11. *Vesenniye vodi (Spring waters)* 14. 12 Songs, Op. 14: No. 10. *V moyey dushe (In my soul)* 15. 12 Songs, Op. 14: No. 12. *Pora (It is time!)* 16. 12 Songs, Op. 21: No. 4. *Oni otvechali (They replied)* 17. 12 Songs, Op. 21: No. 6. *Otrivok iz A. Myusse (An excerpt from Alfred de Musset)* 18. 12 Songs, Op. 21 (text by G. Galina): No. 7. *Zdes' khorosho (How nice this place is)* 19. 12 Songs, Op. 21 (text by G. Galina): No. 12. *Kak mne bol'no no (How much it hurts)* 20. 15 Songs, Op. 26: No. 2. *Vsyo otnyal u menya (Everything I had)* 21. 15 Songs, Op. 26: No. 13. *Vchera mi vstretilis' (Yesterday we met)* 22. 15 Songs, Op. 26: No. 15. *Prokhodit vsyo (Everything passes)* 23. 15 Songs, Op. 26: No. 12. *Noch' pechal'na (Sad night)* 24. 15 Songs, Op. 26: No. 9. *Ya opyat' odinok (Once again, I am alone)* 25. *U vrat obiteli svyatoy (At the gates of the holy cloister)* 26. 15 Songs, Op. 26: No. 6. *Khristos voskres (Christ is risen!)* Dmitri Hvorostovsky - baritone
Ivori Ilja - piano Ondine, 2012

This recording should come with the warning "too hot to handle", such is the combustible combination of Dmitri Hvorostovsky's heroic baritone with the flaming passion of intensely romantic Russian poetry. Rachmaninov wrote more than 80 settings, each a miniature drama and more often than not a story of heartbreak; put 26 of them together, as in this selection, and the listener is left quite drained but also lost in wonder at the beauty of the melodic line. Highlights include trademark Rachmaninov harmonies in "Do not believe me, my friend" and "Yesterday we met" and some virtuosic piano writing in "Spring Waters", played with elan by Hvorostovsky's longtime collaborator, Ivori Ilja. ---Stephen Pritchard, theguardian.com

Now in his fiftieth year, Dmitri Hvorostovsky has been singing internationally for almost a quarter of a century. It would be reasonable to expect some small signs of wear in his vibrant baritone. There is perhaps now a trace of roughness where before all was smooth, uninterrupted tone and the top can become decidedly a little rocky when he leans into the note but all in all his baritone remains in remarkably fine shape. The bottom notes are dark and resonant, the middle only a little grainy when he sings *mezza voce* (as at the end of no.5) and the top G's continue to ring out thrillingly with only a hint of a flap. Any signs of stress are, in any case, hardly inappropriate in music as desperately passionate as this.

Perhaps it is too much to listen to the whole programme at one sitting, given that the preponderance of the music is so melancholy and soul-sifting in that famous Russian idiom. I don't say that there is a lack of variety in the programme, especially when both singer and pianist interpret with such commitment and passion. Rachmaninov's melodic gifts are in such evidence but over an hour of such intensity can be wearing. My favourite items so far are the mounting ecstasy of the second song, "Do you remember, the evening?", the haunting "She is as beautiful as the moon", opening with strummed arpeggios reminiscent of Schubert's "Dioskuren" and continuing with melismata in a distinctly Polovtsian minor mode, and "In the silence of the mysterious night" climaxing with a magnificent G-flat and a long-breathed piano D to conclude. I also love the dignified restraint of no.6, so Russian with its rolling underlay and punctuating chords, building to a great cry of pain.

This is Hvorostovsky's first recording on the Finnish Ondine label, with whom he has signed a long-term contract. Although he has recorded some of these songs before, his voice is now perfectly weighted and his artistry honed by long experience sufficient to give them his finest interpretation. It helps to have a native speaker intone texts by some of Russia's greatest 19th century Romantic poets.

The recording is perfect; there is a lovely balance between the singing tone of the piano and the singer's sonorous baritone. Estonian pianist Ivari Ilja is Hvorostovsky's regular accompanist and plays wonderfully, with agogic freedom, shaded nuance and great variety of colour. ---Ralph Moore, musicweb-international.com

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