

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Albert Combrink takes us *Inside the Concert* with notes on the programme

Introduction

Daniel Kharitonov – From technical rigor to magic and wonder

Russian pianist Daniel Kharitonov will present a technically rigorous and demanding programme of magic and wonder, in sets by Chopin and Rachmaninov.

Kharitonov sprang to fame when he won Bronze Medal in the 15th Tchaikovsky International Competition, one of the most demanding competitions in the world. What brings wonder and magic to this achievement, is that he was only 15 at the time.

His programme explores the first mature set of masterpieces by his compatriot Rachmaninov: the *Six Moments Musicaux Op.16*, where the composer waves a firm but gentle goodbye to the Chopin-inspired romanticism of his early works, in order to embrace the steely new Russian Virtuoso which he was becoming. Kharitonov will balance the Russian composer-pianist's works with Chopin, the very composer-pianist by whom he himself was so inspired. The *12 Études Op.25* provide the litmus test for any pianist: flawless technique has to be employed, to elevate these Études to the works of poetry they were intended to be. Held in the heart between these two towering challenges, will be two of Chopin's most famous Nocturnes.

Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943)

Six Moments Musicaux Op.16



As we can tell through his legacy of recordings, Sergei Rachmaninov was one of the great pianists of history. In his own works he was incomparable and for many, still sets the benchmark of performance of his works – a reputation not held by many composer-pianists (Scriabin, Prokofiev and Shostakovich, for example). His charming student-works reveal his admiration for, and close study of, Chopin and Schumann, as well as strict academic teaching that would encompass the Baroque dances: Gavottes and the like, Canons and Fugues. We encounter the *Morceaux* – literally “morsel” – in sets (Op. 3 at age 19, and Op.10 at age 21). A break from solo-piano writing followed: he worked on his Symphony No.1 and composed almost 30 songs, a much neglected part of his output, and one can trace in these songs, an ever-bolder voice in the piano-writing.

In 1896, Rachmaninov found himself in grave financial difficulty: his father had gambled out the family livelihood and the family turned to Rachmaninov for help. He borrowed some money, and he was mugged and robbed on a train. He managed to sell an (as yet) unwritten set of piano-pieces to match the popular early sets, and thus sat down to write the set of pieces in great haste. Somewhere between October and December, in addition to teaching, performing and learning new pieces for concerts, Rachmaninov found the time to complete the *Six Musical Moments*, at once looking back on his past pianistic inspiration, but also opening the door to the modern post-romantic composer he was to become. The difficulty of the writing reaches unprecedented virtuosity, and shows the composer in a more emotional and intuitive creative space than before.

1. Andantino, B \flat minor (Slightly faster than a walking pace)

The longest piece of the set, this “generic hybrid” combines elements of the Nocturne and the “Theme and Variation” genres. Opening with a typical Nocturne arpeggio accompaniment, over which a melody flows gently, the piece initially resembles a Chopin Nocturne, or a Schubert “Moments Musicaux”. A second part

starts building towards emotional climaxes and exotic turns of harmony and an odd assortment of time-signatures that refuse to settle in a calming lullaby, which leave the model of Chopin far behind. A cadenza outburst leads to the third variation of the theme: fast, running semi-quavers. The piece ends in a Coda that returns to the opening tempo, while revisiting some of the highlights from the variations.

2. Allegretto, E \flat minor (Moderately fast)

A breathless, chromatic melody emerges from a tumultuous torrent of notes, like a bird startled from a nest. Written in the style of a 19th-Century Etude (Liszt, Thalberg or Chopin would have been proud to stand as model), the melody is interspersed in torrents of raining semiquavers. It is in strict ternary form. Sudden Sforzando outbursts announce the dramatic middle-section where continued cross-rhythm patterns add drama while the harmonies momentarily become more heroic. The torrential filigree reappears until the piece winds down to an exhausted close, the irritable bird of the opening, closing its wings on itself to block out the world.

3. Andante cantabile, B minor (At a walking pace, in a singing style)

We see a glimpse of the Romantic Rachmaninov, in this introspective reverie. Another “generic hybrid”, we have here, in essence, a funeral march blended with a “song without words” inspired by his other hero, Mendelssohn. The sonorous Bass and the melody which resembles something which could be at home in a Russian Orthodox church service, makes this the most “Russian” of the set. Again written in ternary form (ABA), the outer A sections has the melody harmonised in close thirds, and the middle section (B) in wider intervals of minor sixths while heavy detached octaves in the base create a dirge-like staccato stomp of mourners. With an echo of an Orthodox Chant from centuries ago, the work comes to a moving end.

4. Presto, E minor (Very Fast)

A clear grand-child of Chopin’s *Revolutionary Etude*, this work, the shortest of the set, is also one of the most technically demanding. Again in ternary form with Coda, the A-section is dominated by a quasi-military feel over thundering lefthand cascades. A brief respite is promised in the B section: the dynamic is now pianissimo (very soft) but soon the *Piu Vivo (With More Life)* thickens the pace, the texture and the volume, throwing the material into all the registers of the piano until all the bells of Moscow starting pealing together and the piece comes to an inevitable crashing halt on the final E Minor bell.

5. Adagio sostenuto, D \flat major (Slow and sustained)

A wide-spread triplet accompaniment pays homage to the great Barcarolle composers Mendelssohn and Chopin, paying musical tribute to those traditional love-songs sung by the Venetian gondoliers as they rowed lovers gently into the night. Rachmaninov enjoys the lyricism in this simple ternary homage to a beautiful genre from the past, and is never tempted to unleash the storming floods of virtuosity we meet elsewhere in this set. This piece has also been described as a “Tropical Tango”: it is in a rich D Flat Major, but it is clear that if you were to open your mind to the idea, that you could hear Jazz chords and blues notes inserting themselves into the picture. And at the end, that turn of the Major suddenly going to the Minor? That is pure Mozart, but also pure Piazzolla. A glimpse of sadness, and an awareness that a lazy afternoon of forbidden pleasure has come to an end. The excursion was not without risk, but the participants made it home without incident. We shall all be caught out by death one day, but not today...

6. Maestoso, C major (Majestically)

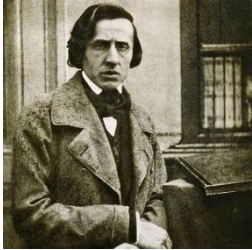
Some characterise this work as a virtuoso etude, as it is quite reminiscent of Chopin’s big C major *Arpeggio Etude from Op.25*, where Octave melodies are enlivened by the notes of the chord being activated in *arpeggio* style in between. One of the most exhausting pieces in the piano repertoire, it places intense

demands of physical strength and stamina on the performer. The dynamics are mostly Loud (*Forte*) and Very Loud (*Fortissimo*), making shaping and musical sense an even bigger challenge for the performer. The heroic vision is maintained throughout the piece and excitement remains at fever-pitch while the Gondola-turned-Titanic sails into the harbour to deliver every-one safely back home. This was still Rachmaninov’s

Russia, under Tsar Nicholas II, when Russia's industrialisation was in full swing and held nothing but promise for the future.

Although it is unknown whether the financial reaction of this composition recouped his stolen money, the emotional reaction to it would be overshadowed for the following years by the catastrophic premiere in 1897 of his two-years' labour: the Symphony No. 1, Op. 13, (1895)

Frédéric François Chopin (1810-1849)



Chopin wrote Nocturnes throughout his career, and they were his most popular works while still alive. Although they had influential predecessors – Irish pianist John Field, for one – and a tonne of imitators, Chopin still defines the form of the dreamy night-piece for a poet using the piano to give sound to their dreams.

Nocturne in D Flat Major Op. 27 No. 2, Lento Sostenuto (Very Slow and Sustained)

This Nocturne was performed often by Chopin himself on tours to London, Scotland, and of course in Paris. It was dedicated to *Countess Thérèse d'Appony*, in whose salon Chopin often appeared as soloist. There are two alternating melodies, of which the first is a long sung-like aria with no repetitive sections, but which become more ornamented on each return, and a second idea in double-notes. At the same time a homage to Bel-Canto Opera and setting the new standard in pianistic Cantabile – the art of making a hammer and metal string sound as close to a human voice as possible, made this one of Chopin's biggest hits in his lifetime, even played live in concert by young Felix Mendelssohn who had met the composer on a tour to Leipzig.

Nocturne in C minor Op. 48 No. 1 (Lento – very Slow)

Rather than tranquil waves of arpeggios, the accompaniment of the Nocturne starts in the simple of "Oom-Pah" patterns, above which floats one of Chopin's most hypnotic melodies. A lofty, inspired song filled with pathos and gravity gives way to a solemn chorale, when the surprising intrusion of double-octave patterns interrupts like wind-blasts, driving the once-comforting lullaby into a desperate and heroic plea. Paderewski called it Chopin's "Eroica", making an unmistakeable link to Poland's unfortunate military turmoil from which Chopin fled to Paris.

Chopin: Trois Nouvelles Études & 12 Études Op.25

There are three sets of Études by Chopin (12 Études Op.10, 12 Études Op.25 and 3 Études Op. Posthumous) These formed the basis for what was – at the time – a revolutionary style of playing the piano. Chopin and Liszt were the historic winners of the title "Romantic Virtuoso", but there were many contenders: Hummel, Weber, Field, Kalkbrenner, Kuhlau, Thalberg, Czerny, Moscheles, Clementi, von Henselt, Alkan, Brahms... All left voluminous quantities of Études – study-material designed to push technical limits to the extreme, and with the express purpose of doing for the piano what Paganini had done for the violin. What set the music of Liszt and Chopin apart, was their poetic and artistic content, and these works soon became part of the virtuoso concert-repertoire while many an Étude by Cramer and Burgmüller, sank into oblivion. The impact of Chopin was so big, that after hearing him play, Franz Liszt set about a project of revising his own Études.

Chopin's second set of Études was published in 1837, and dedicated to Franz Liszt's mistress, Marie d'Agoult, the reasons for which are a matter of speculation.

The date of composition of all Op. 25 Etudes is before June 30, 1835, the date of a contract between Chopin and Breitkopf & Hartel (awarding the publisher the rights for Germany).

Trois Nouvelles Études Op. Posthumus

No. 1 - Andantino in F Minor (At an easy walking pace)

- a Four-against-Three cross-rhythm Nocturne

No. 2 - Allegretto in A-flat Major (Fast and Lively)

- Bringing out different melodies in chords, with simple two-against-three cross-rhythms.

No. 3 - Allegretto in D-flat Major (Fast and lively)

- Playing legato (smooth and connected) and staccato (detached) in the same hand at the same time

12 Études Op.25

Études Op.25 No. 1 in A Flat Major - Allegro Sostenuto (Fast and Sustained)

- Nicknamed "Aeolian Harp" It is also sometimes known as "The Shepherd Boy," following an unsupported tale by Kleczyński that Chopin advised a pupil to picture a shepherd boy taking refuge in a grotto to avoid a storm, playing the melody on his flute. The work consists entirely of rapid arpeggios and harmonic modulations based on A-flat major. Technically, the piece requires dexterity to play the six-tuples fast enough, and to be able to move the hand across intervals as large as a 13th in the middle.

Études Op.25 No.2 in F Minor – Presto (Very Fast)

- Nicknamed "The Bees", it is composed in the relative Minor key of the 1st piece in the set. A polyrhythmical study, It is based on a polyrhythm, with pairs of quaver triplets in the right hand against crotchet triplets in the left.

Études Op.25 No.3 in F Major – Allegro (Fast and Lively)

- Four different voices have to be balanced at the same time, while maintaining a steady "Toy Horseman" beat. The technical figure consists of lateral movements of the hand that must be played with flourish and refinement.

Études Op.25 No.4 in A Minor – Agitato (Agitated)

- This Polka exploits off-beat staccato chords that jump at very fast speed creating syncopation which must be managed in a lyrical style. The 5th finger in each hand is put under extreme pressure, both from leaps, as well as maintaining the vocal line.

Études Op.25 No.5 in E minor – Vivace (Brisk and Lively)

- Nicknamed "Wrong Note", the hand is put under extreme pressure to perform the deliberate dissonance-resolution pattern on every single beat of the piece. The patterns change from section to section, occasionally being a sea-sick little waltz and growing to a sweet little love-song in the middle section. Each repetition of any material involves a variation of technical style and difficulty.

Études Op.25 No.6 in G# Minor – Allegro (Brisk and Lively)

- Nicknamed "Thirds" – high-speed double thirds provide an extreme challenge for any virtuoso.

Études Op.25 No.7 in C# Minor - Lento (Very Slow)

- Nicknamed "The Cell": Expecting from the left-hand a perfect legato singing style and quality of tone, is the main difficulty of this work. Very fast Left Hand Cadenza work in the middle section, adds to the challenge.

Études Op.25 No.8 in D Flat Major – Vivace (Very Brisk)

- Nicknamed "Sixths": One of the hardest of the set, awkward spacings of intervals of a sixths, dominate every bar of this work.

Études Op.25 No.9 in G flat Major – Assai Allegro – (Very Fast)

- Nicknamed "The Butterfly": The melody is created by playing a detached octave, then two non-detached octaves. This makes a four-note group, the structure of which is used during the whole piece to convey the

melody. The structure of rapid octaves can pose a challenge to the less technically experienced. Another difficulty is in the constant switching of solid octaves to detached octaves. It is much more straightforward to simply play one or the other for the whole piece.

Études Op.25 No.10 in B Minor - Allegro con fuoco (Fast with Fire)

- Nicknamed "Octaves": Unusually, Chopin marked minimal volume indications and no pedal, indicating that this is a study in Finger Legato first-and-foremost. The octaves are further complicated by the melodic notes being used in the middle of the hand and that octaves occasionally go in their own directions. A gentler middle-section exploits creeping finger-legato patterns and grace-notes. Pianists are relieved that the recapitulation is shortened.

Études Op.25 No.11 in A Minor – Lento.. Allegro con brio (Slow.. Very fast with life)

- Nicknamed "Winter Wind": The étude is a study for developing stamina, dexterity, accuracy and technique – essential skills for any concert pianist. Tumultuous cascades of semiquaver-tuplets and a leaping figure for the left hand form the building blocks of an exciting but challenging showpiece: a study of right hand dexterity and left hand flexibility. Each hand has intense challenges, ranging from brilliant runs and multi-octave leaps to tricky articulations which must be phrased correctly so the melody becomes audible.

Études Op.25 No.12 in C Minor – Molto allegro con fuoco (Very fast with Fire)

- Nicknamed "The Ocean": based on iterations of a C minor Arpeggio, with the melody outlined in the thumbs this homage to Bach's little **C Major Prelude** which starts the **Well-Tempered Clavier**, brings one of the great Romantic cycles to a close.

ABOUT THE ARTIST:

Born in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk in the Russian Far East, Daniel Kharitonov emerged as one of the brightest talents of the 15th Tchaikovsky International Competition in 2015 at the age of 16, when his triumphant performance brought him the Third Prize.

Since his successful debut with The Mariinsky Orchestra under Valery Gergiev in 2013, Kharitonov became a regular with the orchestra and has already toured with them to China and Italy, and performed across Russia on the Moscow Easter Festival tours in 2014 and 2015. Other highlights in his native Russia include concerts with the State Academic Symphony Orchestra "Evgeny Svetlanov" and National Philharmonic of Russia, and recitals in halls such as the Tchaikovsky Concert Hall, Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory and Moscow International Performing Arts Center. He has participated at festivals such as Stars of the White Nights, Stars on Baikal and Crescendo, and regularly works with the Spivakov International Charity Foundation in Moscow.

Elsewhere, Kharitonov gave an electrifying performance at Carnegie Hall in 2013 as part of the Musical Olympus International Festival's gala concert and has also appeared at the Annecy Classic and International de Colmar festivals in France.

He studied in the class of Professor Valery Piassetski at the Central Music School in Russia. Since 2016, he is studying at the Royal College of Music in London with Professor Dmitri Alexeev and exclusive representative of Daniel Kharitonov is the International Music Agency Harrison Parrott Ltd.