

A man with grey hair and glasses is playing a Steinway & Sons piano. He is wearing a dark suit and a blue shirt. The piano is black with the Steinway & Sons logo and name visible on the fallboard. The background is dark.

SCHERBAKOV *24 Transcendental Etudes*

LISZT & LYAPUNOV



STEINWAY & SONS

SCHERBAKOV 24 Transcendental Etudes

LISZT & LYAPUNOV

Disc 1 Franz Liszt (1811–1886)

Études d'exécution transcendante, S 139

- I. Preludio 0:55
- II. Molto vivace 2:16
- III. Paysage 5:08
- IV. Mazeppa 7:17
- V. Feux follets 4:07
- VI. Vision 5:52
- VII. Eroica 4:48
- VIII. Wilde Jagd 5:42
- IX. Ricordanza 9:59
- X. Allegro agitato molto 4:48
- XI. Harmonies du Soir 9:11
- XII. Chasse-neige 5:23

Playing time: 65:32

Disc 2 Sergei Lyapunov (1859–1924)

Études d'exécution transcendante, Op. 11

- I. Berceuse 4:00
- II. Ronde des fantômes 3:09
- III. Carillon 6:13
- IV. Terek 4:02
- V. Nuit d'été 8:22
- VI. Tempête 4:27
- VII. Idylle 5:02
- VIII. Chant épique 8:30
- IX. Harpes éoliennes 6:10
- X. Lesghinka 7:04
- XI. Ronde des sylphes 3:58
- XII. Elégie en mémoire de François Liszt 11:48

Playing time: 72:53

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LISZT & LYAPUNOV

THE LISZT-LYAPUNOV CONNECTION

Sergei Mikhailovich Lyapunov (1859 –1924) was born into an intellectually and artistically bourgeois household in Yaroslavl. As the son of astronomer Mikhail Lyapunov he and his older brother Aleksandr (who would go on to become a famous mathematician) were home-schooled until the father died when Sergei was eight. (The third and youngest brother Boris became a linguist.) His mother, who was the musical influence in the home, took them to Nizhny Novgorod, where young Sergei attended his first serious music lessons. His talent eventually came to the attention of Nikolai Rubinstein who encouraged him to apply to the Moscow Conservatory. There he became a student of Liszt's former pupil Karl Klindworth (piano) and Tchaikovsky's former pupil Sergei Taneyev (composition).

After moving to St. Petersburg, Lyapunov became the sixth digit to Mily Balakirev's "Mighty Handful" group of composers. When he set about to compose his *Douze études d'exécution transcendante*, Op.11 in 1897, they were meant as a complement to Franz Liszt's *Transcendental Études* and dedicated to his memory. More than that, the Russian romantic composer, who adored Liszt, meant not just to pay homage with his *Études* (which he completed in 1905) – he meant to finish what Liszt had started.

LISZT

These original twelve pieces of Liszt's, originally named *Étude en douze exercices*, were a set that the teenage Franz had begun in 1826 (around the age of 15) with the ambitious goal of twice going 'round the Circle of Fifths, pairing the corresponding major and minor keys (C major – A minor, F major – D minor, B-flat major – G minor, etc.) for a set of short and very difficult *Études*. He only got a quarter through this project but went on to revise and re-arrange those twelve *Études* – for a second time – 25 years later. Apart from making the works more focused, more inward-looking, less flashy and finger-crunching, he transposed and extended

the Étude originally in E-flat to replace the erstwhile D-flat Étude, then wrote a new E-flat Étude which, in keeping with the style of the others, was also based on earlier material of his.

Composed while Liszt was under the spell of the Parisian salons and the performances of Paganini (but still free of the influence of Chopin), they can be considered among the very best that were written in a quest for sheer pianistic brilliance. Like a musical Rorschach test, they are capable of providing as much depth as the artist wishes to see in them. To some, they are “defined entirely by external virtuosity” (Hans Gál/Olga Kurt-Schaab), to others they are “virtuoso poems about the journey and development of a hero; existential meditations” (Daniil Trifonov).

Konstantin Scherbakov himself cautions not to consider the Liszt Études just as superficial exercises that wanted to please and dazzle: “[These works are] the quintessence of his artistic vision. Liszt tried and succeeded in composing pieces where his spirit – which knew no boundaries – went into spheres where only artistic beings are allowed to enter... while using the language he adopted from the romantics around him. And the technical difficulties the *Transcendental Études* pose are actually minor in comparison to the musical and artistic ideas that are incorporated into that cycle.”

LYAPUNOV

Whether Lyapunov did not outright refer to his own set as a “completion” of the venerated Liszt’s works because he was too modest, or for fear of seeming presumptuous, the source for his inspiration was always clear enough: Apart from choosing the same title for his dozen Études and writing them in exactly the keys Liszt didn’t get to (picking up after Liszt’s B minor “Chasse neige” with the F-sharp major “Berceuse”), he outright titled the last piece in E minor “Elegy in memory of Liszt”. This would leave little doubt as to their intention, explicit or not. (Evidently Lyapunov enjoyed working off the inspiration his teachers and idols provided: he also orchestrated Balkirev’s *Islamey*.)

“It is a very unusual thing to do”, suggests Konstantin Scherbakov (who has recorded the Lyapunov once before for Marco Polo – although without the accompanying Liszt) in an interview about the project: “to

compose works in your own style but devoted to the style of your idol. In many instances the Études by Lyapunov represent the same ideas as those of Liszt – but being very [much the product of the composer's background and influences], they are very original and very authentically Russian and that makes them very special. At the same time the resemblance to Liszt's works and the titles of the works (like "Ronde des sylphs" and "Ronde des fantômes") make the similarity quite obvious..."

According to Scherbakov, the challenge when performing these two semi-circles as one is to "aim at some sort of unity of style – since that was the idea of Lyapunov's. But that is in fact rather difficult, because two worlds – the cosmopolitan romanticism of Liszt and the Russian romanticism of Lyapunov – are very different. Both cycles can be performed together – although it takes 130 minutes altogether, which places quite strenuous demands on the performer as well as the audience. Still, it should be a very rewarding experience, because only that allows the realization of a very unique and very important compositional piano project."

Yet for all the difference in accents – Liszt's internationalist bravura style and Lyapunov's westward-looking Russian intensity, the result of the latter's demi-cycle is "totally in tune with Liszt's writing. Granted, one can say that there are many more notes." (Indeed, it's been said that Lyapunov never was satisfied to use one note when 10 would do.) "But eventually some of the pieces that look so monstrous on paper actually don't represent that many difficulties to the pianist. And musically they are very descriptive; much more accessible than the Études written by Liszt."

Among the challenges for any pianist tackling the Lyapunov Études (and only a few pianists have recorded them to date) is to avoid making them sound like "a sprawling ersatz Liszt *Hungarian Rhapsody*" (Jed Distler); to combine the influences not just of Liszt but of Balakirev (whose protégé Lyapunov had become) and Rimsky-Korsakov (whose successor Lyapunov would end up being at the Saint Petersburg Court Capella). One must, according to Scherbakov, combine Lyapunov's Russian accents, his use of authentic folk melodies, his interest in fairy tales from the Caucasus and Russia, and his fascination with the Orient with the work's western "grand style concertante" piano romanticism and its classical clear forms: "In Lyapunov, whose personality equates that very Russian spirit, these two lines exist simultaneously. They do not resist or oppose each other, but, on the contrary, are united by musical contemplation and by the absence of an active, heroic

of an active, heroic impulse. And at the end of the cycle this successful union is proclaimed most convincingly in the splendid and magnificent “Elegy in memory of Liszt”, in which both themes merge within an apotheosis symbolizing the union between European and Russian artistic traditions.”

The idea, to paraphrase Scherbakov, is to “rediscover and recognize music long considered inconsequential, if not outright inferior – and which has therefore remained in the shadow of works of great and more renowned composers – and to reveal its true and lasting artistic value.” Consequently it only makes sense to present Lyapunov’s Études in the Lisztian context they were always meant to stand. Given the dyadic nature of those two cycles, it’s quite surprising that they have never been presented together. Konstantin Scherbakov has now mended that with this project, which has long been dear to his heart.

—Jens F. Laurson

¹ Apart from Scherbakov, they are Louis Kentner, Antonio Pompa-Baldi, Etsuko Hirose, and Vincenzo Maltempo

KONSTANTIN SCHERBAKOV

Once a “Superstar for insiders” (*Die Welt*), Konstantin Scherbakov is today one of the internationally renowned pianists who holds a special place in the modern piano world. His artistry and large contribution to the piano repertoire and recording catalogue are undisputed. “One of the most capable, daring and interesting musicians of these days” – Peter Cossé, the famous German critic once described him.

Uncompromising responsibility and selfless dedication to music and piano repertoire set Scherbakov’s priority throughout his thirty-five-years-long career. The insatiable musical curiosity, an analytical mind and unlimited virtuosity have accompanied Scherbakov on his journey across the ocean of piano literature. The 20-year-old pianist’s phenomenal victory at the Rachmaninoff Competition (Moscow, 1983) with Rachmaninoff’s less known 4th Piano Concerto carried a symbolic sign: it made the pianist aware of his interests and set his future artistic goals. His mission to promote the forgotten, unknown but no less beautiful music has become apparent.

After the pianist moved to Switzerland in 1992, he received an invitation from the founder of Naxos, Klaus Heymann, to make a CD with repertoire that had not been recorded before. The release of the CD (*Lyapunov's Douze études d'exécution transcendante*, Op. 11) was a genuine sensation which not only started Scherbakov's long and successful recording career, but also determined its direction and perspectives, both in the studio and on stage. ("This disc is a must for pianophiles... Alpine level of pianism." *American Record Guide*; "This is one of the best solo piano records ever made." *Amazon.com*; "Outstanding. No, more than that – superlative." CD Review.) This recording instantly established Scherbakov as an exceptional and distinguished pianist and shaped his artistic profile as an intelligent virtuoso who, despite all his pianistic grandeur, never flaunted this, but used it as a means to penetrate into the essence of the performed music.

The other important invitation of this kind came in 1995 from the record label EMI Classics, which recognized Scherbakov's sophisticated virtuosity, musical sensitivity and artistic adventurousness. Asked once again to record something "unusual", Scherbakov put together a programme of Strauss Waltzes (in arrangements by great virtuosos of the "Golden Age"). This release was also a phenomenal success: "Scherbakov is giving a real boost to the stuffy piano scene!" wrote *Der Spiegel* enthusiastically.

Since then Scherbakov has worked intensively in the studio, producing one CD after another, well over 40 in total. He recorded all of the works for piano and orchestra by Arensky, Medtner, Respighi, Tchaikovsky and Scriabin and piano concertos by Rachmaninoff. Among other large scale projects there are the complete works for piano solo by Shostakovich, complete Liszt transcriptions of Beethoven's nine symphonies and a unique complete set of Godowsky's piano works for Marco Polo on 15 CDs. The Liszt/Beethoven series received high critical acclaim, with the Ninth being awarded the German Critics' Prize 2005; his recording of Godowsky's Sonata in E minor for Marco Polo also won this prize in 2001. Scherbakov's recording of the 24 Preludes and Fugues of Shostakovich for Naxos received the Classical Award 2001 at Cannes.

In 1990, Scherbakov made his European debut at the XX Music Festival in Asolo, Italy where he played the complete works by Rachmaninoff in four evenings. Sviatoslav Richter was there and praised the playing. Concert engagements in Western Europe immediately followed.

In 1993, Scherbakov made his Lucerne Festival debut, where he was described by the press as the "Rachmaninoff

of today". Boasting a phenomenal concerto repertoire of around 60 concertos, Konstantin Scherbakov performed as soloist with some of the world's best orchestras and conductors such as Georg Alexander Albrecht, Rudolf Barshai, Aldo Ceccato, Arnold Katz, Andrei Boreiko, Yoel Levi, Dmitri Liss, Cristian Mandeal, Kirill Petrenko, Nello Santi, Juri Simonov, Vassily Sinaisky and Christian Thielemann.

Konstantin Scherbakov has given solo performances in over 50 countries on all continents. He has played in prestigious concert halls and at important international music festivals such as Salzburg, Frankfurt, Bregenz, Bodensee, Lucerne, Klavier-Festival Ruhr, Beethoven Festival Bonn, Bad Kissingen, Schubertiade Feldkirch and Schwarzenberg, Singapore Piano Festival, Piano Rarities Husum, Beethoven Festival Krakow and Warsaw, Lebanon Music Festival, "Primavera concertistica" Lugano, Evian, Comar, Liszt Festivals in Raiding and Weimar, Piano Festival Lucerne, and among others - numerous festivals in Italy, France, New Zealand, USA, Russia, Sweden and Switzerland.

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LISZT & LYAPUNOV

Recorded January 20 – 23, 2018 at Steinway Hall, New York City.

Producer: Jon Feidner

Engineer: Lauren Sclafani

Assistant Engineer: Melody Nieun Hwang

Editing: Kazumi Umeda

Production Assistant: Renée Oakford

Mixing and Mastering: Daniel Shores

Equipment: Pyramix using Merging Technologies Horus Converters; mixed and mastered through Merging Technologies Horus Converter

Microphones: DPA 4006A, Schoeps MC6/MK2

Piano Technician: Lauren Sclafani

Piano: Steinway Model D # 597590 (New York)

Executive Producers: Eric Feidner and Jon Feidner

Art Direction: Jackie Fugere

Design: Cover to Cover Design, Anilda Carrasquillo

Photo of Konstantin Scherbakov: Jen-Pin Lin

“To my Fair Lady whose unfailing love and support accompanied my work on this project.” – Konstantin Scherbakov

SCHERBAKOV *24 Transcendental Etudes* LISZT & LYAPUNOV

Lyapunov's *Douze études d'exécution transcendante* were meant as a complement to Liszt's *Transcendental Études* and dedicated to his memory. But more than an homage, they finish what Liszt had started. Russian virtuoso Konstantin Scherbakov brings these two great works together for the first time.

Disc 1 Franz Liszt (1811–1886)
1–12 Études d'exécution transcendante, S 139

Playing time: 65:32

Disc 2 Sergei Lyapunov (1859–1924)
1–12 Études d'exécution transcendante, Op. 11

Playing time: 72:53

Konstantin Scherbakov, piano



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