



Anton  
**RUBINSTEIN**

**Piano Music**

**Three Caprices, Op. 21 • Six Pieces, Op. 51**

**Sergio Gallo, Piano**



## Anton Rubinstein (1829–1894)

### Piano Music

Despite incurring the hostility of the Russian nationalist composers, led by Balakirev, during his lifetime Anton Rubinstein gained a considerable reputation as a piano virtuoso the equal of Liszt, and for a stream of distinctive compositions, among them symphonies and operas. He was also responsible for revolutionising standards in Russian teaching and performance. It is an irony of the history of taste that the nationalist composers should have explored a vein of material that has won continued popularity, whatever technical shortcomings their music may have contained, while Rubinstein has been regarded by some as a mere craftsman. Whatever detractors have had to say, it is only now, some 125 years after his death, that it is becoming possible to reassess his very real achievement as a gifted and original composer whose works are notable for their melodic memorability and extraordinary variety of textures.

Anton Rubinstein was born in the Podolsk District of Russia in 1829. His first music lessons were with his mother, followed by study under Alexander Villoing, with whom he embarked on a concert tour at the age of eleven, playing for Chopin and Liszt in Paris and for Queen Victoria in England, and impressing members of the Russian Imperial family. In 1844 his family settled in Berlin, where he took lessons from Glinka's composition teacher, Siegfried Dehn, and was able to associate with Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer. The death of his father in 1846 led to the return of his mother and his brother Nikolay to Russia and to his own move to Vienna, after playing to Liszt in Weimar. From the latter he received little encouragement, when it was most needed, and Liszt was later to refer to Rubinstein as 'a Pseudo-musician of the Future'.

Returning to Russia in 1848, Rubinstein won the patronage of the German-born Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna, the sister-in-law of the Tsar, and formerly Princess of Saxe-Altenburg. The relationship was to prove an important one both for Rubinstein and for the future of Russian music. With the support of the Grand Duchess he was able to start a series of concerts in St Petersburg in 1859 and three years later to establish the St Petersburg Conservatory. A similar institution was founded in Moscow in 1864 by his brother Nikolay.

After years spent abroad, return to Russia in 1848 presented some difficulties. Rubinstein had been abroad as a child, with his mother. With her earlier return to Russia, Rubinstein, now an adult, had problems with officials when challenged at the frontier for his documents. His difficulties, all too characteristic of Russian officialdom, were in part resolved when he was told to show his musical abilities, playing a ramshackle piano for the secretary of the Governor General, upon whose word Rubinstein's admission to Russian territory depended. In his autobiography Rubinstein adds to this episode the loss of his own papers and music, his box confiscated and never returned, apparently advertised in the police gazette and then sold for scrap. In 1854 Rubinstein continued his career abroad, with compositions including the *Three Pieces, Op. 16, Impromptu in F major, Berceuse in D major* and *Serenade in G minor*.

Throughout his life Anton Rubinstein had to cope with a certain hostility because of his Jewish origins, although the Rubinsteins, like the Mendelssohns before them, had become Christians, accepting what the German-Jewish poet Heine had described as 'a ticket of admission to European culture'. Jewish emancipation was relatively recent, and there was always a lurking suspicion that no Jew could properly represent the national spirit of the time, whether in Russia or Germany or anywhere else. The Jewish reaction to this was often to become *plus royaliste que le roi*, more German than the Germans, a phenomenon particularly evident in the significant Jewish support for Wagner, a composer known for his anti-Semitic ideas. Sacheverell Sitwell, indeed, is prepared to perpetuate the myth of the Jews not as creators but as interpreters, with 'a faculty of providing the almost perfect counterfeit'. Others have been able to understand Jewish pre-eminence in performance as a reflection of the social and educational restrictions placed on the Jewish community by a hostile society.

The early 1850s had brought the Crimean War, with Russia, self-proclaimed defender of Orthodox Christians, pitted against Western powers – France and England, allied with the Ottoman Empire – with some degree of military ineptitude on both sides. Rubinstein's *Three Caprices, Op. 21* are dated 1855; the first, marked *Allegretto scherzando* and in F sharp major, leads to an F major *Allegro* and a final *Allegro risoluto* in E flat. The following year brought *Two Pieces, Op. 28, a Nocturne* and a *Caprice*, in G flat and E flat, respectively.

The *Six Pieces, Op. 51*, dated 1857, mark the end, for the time being, of Rubinstein's career abroad, a period that had brought time spent in Weimar (where Liszt reigned supreme), recitals in Paris and London and in the various German principalities. The *Six Pieces* are characteristic of the composer, a useful and occasionally demanding addition to his own concert repertoire and a token of his ambition for recognition as a composer. Tchaikovsky regarded Rubinstein's compositions written during this particular period as his best.

It was largely racial hostility that led Rubinstein, in 1867, to resign as director of the concerts of the Russian Music Society that he had founded and as director of the St Petersburg Conservatory. His career thereafter was spent in international concert tours as one of the greatest pianists of the age and as a composer who could please the general public. In 1887 he resumed the position of director of the Conservatory and two years later celebrated his jubilee. By this time his fame was a legend, attested by the popularity of his historic concerts, in which he offered a discerning public a remarkably diverse diet of keyboard music.

Rubinstein died in 1894. For the younger generation of composers he seemed the epitome of the superficial – '*C'est du Rubinstein*' was the highest dispraise, while, with Balakirev, the new generation were happy to refer to him as 'Tupinstein' (Block-head), punning on his name. Nevertheless, however blind they may have been to his work as a composer, it was necessary to acknowledge the debt of Russian music to his efforts in establishing professional public concerts in the country, and providing the beginning of a system of professional musical education that has borne remarkable fruit in more recent times.

**Keith Anderson**

## Sergio Gallo



A Steinway artist, Sergio Gallo specialises in the repertoire of the Romantic period. He has also championed the work of composers from Brazil, the nation of his birth. Gallo has recorded several acclaimed albums for the Eroica, Naxos, Grand Piano and Quartz labels, with recent releases critically acclaimed by *BBC Music Magazine*, *Gramophone* magazine and *American Record Guide*. In 2011 he won the Global Music Award of Excellence for his album, *Mostly Villa-Lobos: 20th Century Piano Music from the Americas*. Gallo has performed with orchestras worldwide, and his work has been regularly played on international classical music radio outlets. Gallo is the winner of concerto competitions of the São Paulo Symphony Orchestra and of the University Symphony in Santa Barbara. He was the recipient of a grant from the Henry Cowell Incentive Funds at the American Music Center in New York to record works by that composer, with the subsequent recording featuring on *The Piano Matters* with David Dubal on WWFM. Gallo twice toured North Dakota with a Challenge America Fast-Track Grant award from the National Endowment for the Arts. He holds the Diplôme d'Excellence from the Conservatoire Européen de Musique de Paris (1987), a Postgraduate Certificate

from the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest (1992), a Master of Music and Artist Diploma from the University of Cincinnati (1994 and 1995 respectively), and a Doctorate of Musical Arts from the University of California, Santa Barbara (1998). Gallo resides in the US where he is professor of piano performance at Georgia State University in Atlanta, and is on the affiliated artist staff of the Rocky Ridge Music Academy in Estes Park, Colorado.

[www.drsergiogallo.com](http://www.drsergiogallo.com)

Anton Rubinstein occupied an uneasy place in the history of Russian music, largely because of his Jewish origins and the perception of him as a ‘German in Russia’. In recent years his solo piano music has begun to be re-evaluated. This album focuses on the series of works written in the mid-1850s and reveals music of charm and flair. The *Three Pieces, Op. 16* are conventional in form but attractive, and the *Two Pieces, Op. 28* contain a strongly contrasted *Nocturne* and *Caprice*. More ambitious, and intended to be performed in his concert repertoire as one of the greatest virtuosos of the age, are the *Six Pieces, Op. 51*.

# Anton RUBINSTEIN

(1829–1894)

## Piano Music

|  |              |                                  |              |
|--|--------------|----------------------------------|--------------|
| <b>Three Pieces, Op. 16</b>                      |              | <b>Two Pieces, Op. 28 (1856)</b> | <b>13:19</b> |
| (1855)   | <b>15:51</b> | 7 No 1. Nocturne                 | 5:19         |
| 1 No. 1. Impromptu                               | 4:09         | 8 No 2. Caprice                  | 7:58         |
| 2 No. 2. Berceuse                                | 5:27         |                                  |              |
| 3 No. 3. Serenade                                | 6:14         | <b>Six Pieces, Op. 51 (1857)</b> | <b>30:08</b> |
|  |              | 9 No. 1. Mélancolie              | 5:35         |
| <b>Three Caprices, Op. 21</b>                    |              | 10 No. 2. Enjouement             | 5:06         |
| (1855)   | <b>13:02</b> | 11 No. 3. Rêverie                | 5:53         |
| 4 No. 1. Allegretto scherzando                   | 2:39         | 12 No. 4. Caprice                | 3:23         |
| 5 No. 2. Allegro                                 | 5:39         | 13 No. 5. Passion                | 5:29         |
| 6 No. 3. Allegro risoluto –<br>Andante – Tempo I | 4:43         | 14 No. 6. Coquetterie            | 4:36         |

## Sergio Gallo, Piano

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