

JORGE BOLET

The Ambassador Auditorium Recitals
Pasadena, California, USA, 1981 and 1986

11 NOVEMBER 1981

CD1

[72:38]

Felix MENDELSSOHN (1809–1847)

Fantasia in F sharp minor, Op. 28, 'Sonate écossaise' (1833)

[13:43]

1 I. Con moto agitato – Andante

[5:57]

2 II. Allegro con moto

[2:47]

3 III. Presto

[4:59]

Robert SCHUMANN (1810–1856)

Fantasy in C major, Op. 17 (1838)

[33:16]

4 I. Durchaus phantastisch und leidenschaftlich vorzutragen
– Im Legendenton – Erstes Tempo – Adagio – Im Tempo

[12:57]

5 II. Mässig

[8:29]

6 III. Langsam getragen

[11:50]

Interval

Franz LISZT (1811–1886)

Schubert Song Transcriptions

[21:49]

7 12 Lieder, S558: No. 2. Auf dem Wasser zu singen (1838)

[5:09]

8 6 Müllerlieder, S565: No. 2. Der Müller und der Bach (1846)

[6:23]

9 Winterreise, S561: No. 7. Der Lindenbaum (1839)

[5:11]

10 Schwanengesang, S560: No. 3. Aufenthalt (1839)

[3:44]

11 12 Lieder, S558: No. 4. Erlkönig (1838)

[5:06]

11 NOVEMBER 1981 (continued)

CD2

[68:17]

LISZT

- [1] Der Tanz in der Dorfschenke, S514, 'Mephisto Waltz No. 1' (1861) [11:32]

Encores:

Frédéric CHOPIN (1810–1849)

- [2] Nocturne No. 5 in F sharp major, Op. 15, No. 2 (1832) [4:06]

Abram CHASINS (1903–1987)

Preludes, Book 3, Op. 12 (1928) [3:37]

- [3] No. 2 in E flat minor [2:13]

- [4] No. 3 in B flat minor [1:24]

Moritz MOSZKOWSKI (1854–1925)

- [5] La Jongleuse, Op. 52, No. 4 (pub. 1894) [2:08]

CHOPIN

- [6] Nocturne No. 2 in E flat major, Op. 9 (1832) [5:23]

3 DECEMBER 1986

CD2 (continued)

Edvard GRIEG (1843–1907)

7 Ballade in G minor, Op. 24 (1876) [18:45]

Johannes BRAHMS (1833–1897)

4 Ballades, Op. 10 (1854) [22:34]

8 No. 1 in D minor: Andante [4:14]

9 No. 2 in D major: Andante [6:20]

10 No. 3 in B minor: Intermezzo: Allegro [3:47]

11 No. 4 in B major: Andante con moto [8:13]

3 DECEMBER 1986 (continued)

CD3

[61:48]

LISZT

- [1] Ballade No. 2 in B minor, S171 (1853) [15:00]

Interval

CHOPIN

4 Ballades [38:49]

- [2] Ballade No. 1 in G minor, Op. 23 (1835) [9:54]

- [3] Ballade No. 2 in F major, Op. 38 (1839) [8:14]

- [4] Ballade No. 3 in A flat major, Op. 47 (1841) [8:34]

- [5] Ballade No. 4 in F minor, Op. 52 (1843) [12:08]

Encores:

Georges BIZET (1838–1875)

L'Arlésienne Suite No. 1 (1872)

- [6] III. Adagietto (arr. 1927, Leopold GODOWSKY, 1870–1938) [2:42]

CHOPIN

12 Études, Op. 25 (1837) [5:10]

- [7] No. 1 in A flat major, 'Harp Study' [2:37]

- [8] No. 2 in F minor [2:32]

TOTAL TIMING

[03:22:57]

JORGE BOLET

The Ambassador Auditorium Recitals, Pasadena, California, USA, 1981 and 1986

The two recitals in this collection come from the last decade of Jorge Bolet's career. During the 1980s Bolet had a contract with Decca, initiated by producer Peter Wadland, that resulted in 25 discs of solo and concerto material encompassing much of his repertoire. While his Carnegie Hall recital from 1974 was recorded and released by RCA, very few other live performances of Bolet recorded under professional conditions have been released commercially. The recitals presented here were not recorded for release, but purely for archival reasons. However, with modern restoration tools, they now sound perfectly acceptable and give us a wonderful opportunity to hear Bolet performing for an audience—something he preferred to working in the recording studio. Bolet was a strict, controlled and serious musician who could sometimes sound emotionally constrained in his studio recordings. On occasion though, he would give a recital performance that transcended his studio work with everything seeming to fall into place, and this first concert from 11 November 1981 has that quality to it. Bolet was evidently on form as he gave five encores to an enthusiastic audience.

Bolet opens with a work popular with his generation of pianists – the *Fantasia in F sharp minor* by Mendelssohn. His classmate Shura Cherkassky recorded it as did Maria Grinberg and it was later taken up by Nikolai Petrov and Murray Perahia. Mendelssohn had been inspired by the landscape of Scotland

on a visit in 1829 resulting in the *Scottish Symphony* and *Hebrides Overture*. Although he began work on the *Sonate écossaise* in 1828, before his visit to Scotland, he revised it in 1833 and decided to publish it, but without the Scottish connotation, as a *Fantasia*.

The main work of the first half of the programme was the *Fantasy in C major* by Schumann in which we hear Bolet's signature tone, flights of fantasy and solid technique. The middle movement is taken at a tempo that allows an unclipped delivery of the dotted rhythm yet still retains energy and drive. It also allows for Bolet to be as accurate as possible in the final pages, which contain large leaps in both hands. In the third movement Bolet spins the music of the spheres with the separate voices and accompaniment all delineated to perfection.

After the interval, a group of five contrasting Schubert songs arranged by Liszt again afford the opportunity to hear the quality and variety of Bolet's tone. Less than two weeks later, Bolet would be at Kingsway Hall in London recording twelve of these Schubert transcriptions for Decca.

While he normally kept a work such as Liszt's *Mephisto Waltz* under strict control, here Bolet is more inclined to raise the temperature by taking a few risks with tempo – risks that pay dividends.

Chopin's *F sharp Nocturne* from *Op. 15* was another favourite of Bolet's generation as well as the previous one – a generation of pianists he emulated. Indeed, the work was recorded by all the great pianists of that era including Busoni, Josef Hofmann, Paderewski, de Pachmann, Rachmaninov, d'Albert, and one of Bolet's teachers, Leopold Godowsky.

After Bolet gave a Carnegie Hall recital in 1951 critic Howard Taubman felt that Bolet did not provide musical satisfaction with deficiencies in imagination and sensitivity. 'It may be that Mr Bolet, if he could turn to the proper sources for advice and inspiration, could put his brilliant technique to equally brilliant use.' In those days of constructive criticism, Bolet took Taubman's advice and asked for help from Abram Chasins who himself had been a pupil of Josef Hofmann. Not only did Chasins help Bolet's pianism, he also helped his career by giving him the opportunity to record the soundtrack for a biopic about Franz Liszt titled *Song Without End* starring Dirk Bogarde. As a composer Chasins' *Three Chinese Pieces* were very popular in the 1930s, but the *24 Preludes* (comprising *Opp. 10–13*) are rarely heard, so it is good to hear two of them played by someone closely associated with the composer, especially as these two *Preludes* do not appear in Bolet's commercial discography. Indeed, Bolet was always grateful to Chasins for advice and help with his playing and career. Chasins himself recorded six of his *Preludes* for HMV in London in 1931.

La Jongleuse was a favourite encore of Bolet. This composition of Moszkowski, and his *Caprice espagnole*, were extremely

popular with pianists of the Golden Era; both pieces were recorded by Josef Hofmann.

Located on the campus of Ambassador College in Pasadena, California, the 1262 seat Ambassador Auditorium was a major West Coast concert hall between 1974 and 1995 presenting around 2,500 concerts. It attracted the greatest instrumentalists and orchestras including Shura Cherkassky, Arthur Rubinstein, Herbert von Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, and singers Luciano Pavarotti and Plácido Domingo, as well as Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra. The property, operated by the Worldwide Church of God, was sold in the late 1990s. Harvest Rock Church purchased the venue in 2004 and since then, some concerts have been presented at the venue.

Most concerts at the Ambassador Auditorium were recorded for archival reasons and not intended for commercial release. Therefore, the sound of each is variable and not necessarily of high fidelity.

The other concert from five years later was a recital entirely of *Ballades*. It commences with another rarely heard work – the *Ballade in G minor* by Grieg. For Grieg the miniaturist, this is a long work at nearly 19 minutes, but it is really a set of variations on a theme. Indeed, the full title of the work is *Ballade in the form of Variations on a Norwegian Folksong* and it consists of the theme, 14 variations and a coda. The work was first recorded by Bolet's teacher Leopold Godowsky in 1929 then by Eileen Joyce in 1943. Never a popular work with pianists, Bolet

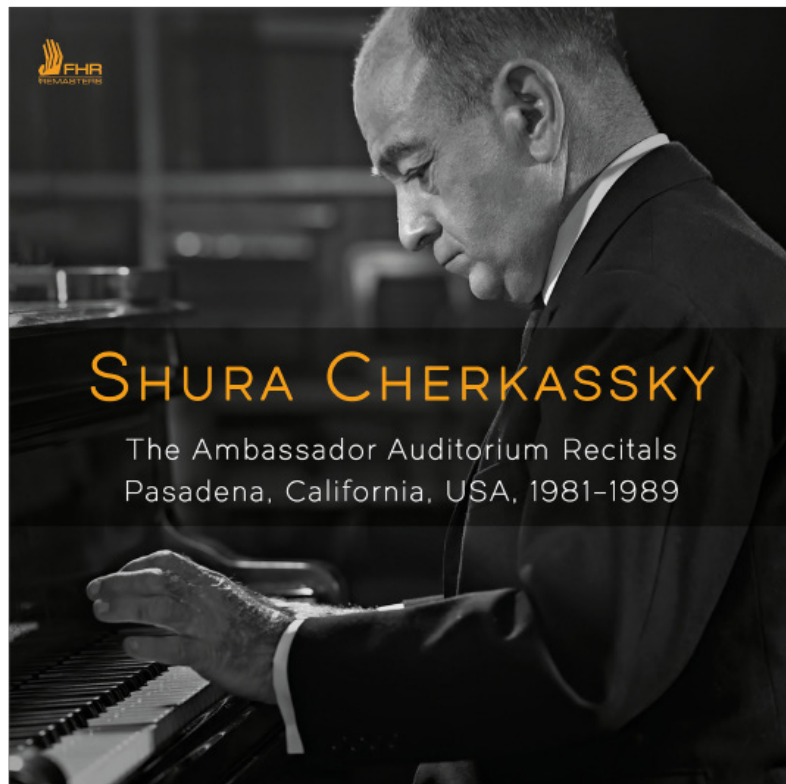
makes a good case for it and it is a good curtain raiser. Although Bolet recorded the Brahms *Handel Variations* for Decca he did not record the *Op. 10 Ballades* so this is a welcome opportunity to hear him in this repertoire which suits his style and sonority.

The first half of the programme ended with the second *Ballade* by Liszt, far more popular than his first *Ballade* and a work championed by Vladimir Horowitz in his later years. Bolet gives the work nobility, command and sweep while creating the impression of a story unfolding.

After the interval Bolet played all four of Chopin's *Ballades*, something he had done for many years. The highlight of the set was the fourth *Ballade in F minor* at turns rhapsodic, wistful and elegiac in Bolet's hands, while in the final pages he never sacrifices nobility for violence and histrionics.

The first encore, a gem of a transcription by his teacher Leopold Godowsky of music from the first *L'Arlésienne Suite* by Bizet, is a lesson in *legato* playing and pedal control. The recital ends with the first two Chopin *Études* from *Op. 25*, which surprised the audience as Bolet played them without a break.

©2026 Jonathan Summers



[FHR99]

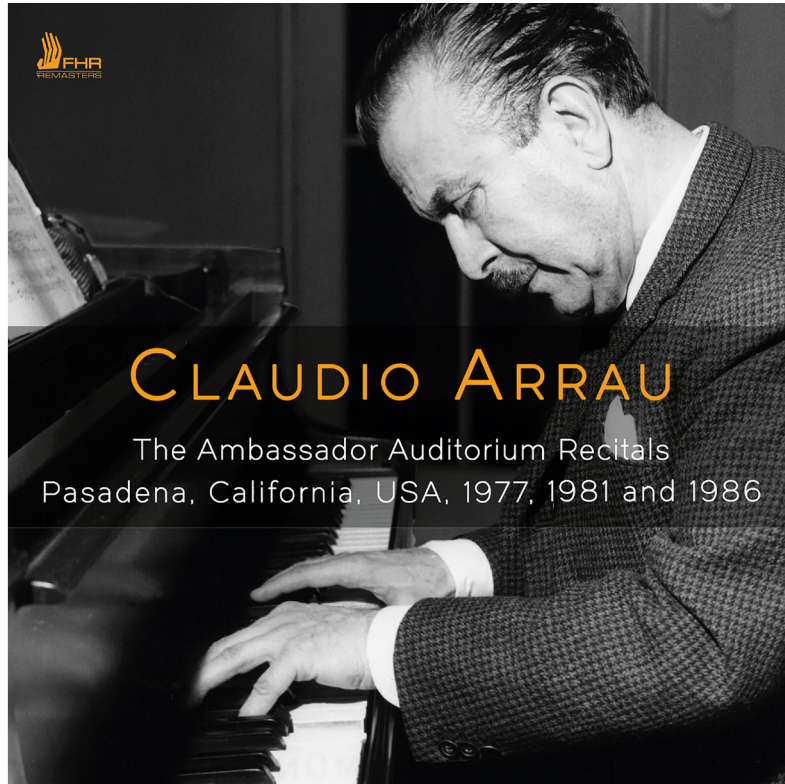
SHURA CHERKASSKY

The Ambassador Auditorium Recitals, Pasadena, California, USA,
1981–1989 [5CD]

First release

**ALBÉNIZ • CHERKASSKY • CHOPIN • FRANCK • HOFMANN
LISZT • LULLY • MENDELSSOHN • RACHMANINOV**

Available on physical CD and all digital platforms (streaming and download)



[FHR172]

CLAUDIO ARRAU

The Ambassador Auditorium Recitals, Pasadena, California, USA,
1977, 1981 and 1986 [5CD]

First release

**BEETHOVEN • BRAHMS • CHOPIN • DEBUSSY
LISZT • SCHUMANN • TCHAIKOVSKY**

Available on physical CD and all digital platforms (streaming and download)



First release [FHR44]

YOURI EGOROV

The 1980 Ambassador Auditorium Recitals, Pasadena, California, USA

MOZART: Fantasie in C minor, K475

SCHUMANN: Fantasy in C major, Op. 17

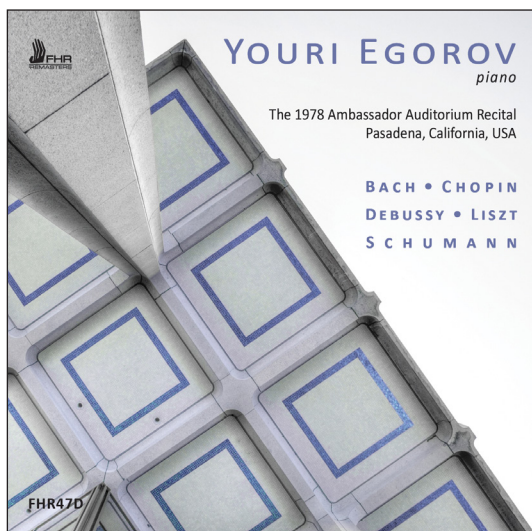
CHOPIN: 12 Études, Op. 25

Encore:

DEBUSSY: Images, Book 1: I. Reflets dans l'eau

Bonus track:

LISZT: Grandes études de Paganini, S141: III. La Campanella
(recorded in 1978 at the Ambassador Auditorium)



The 1978 Ambassador Auditorium Recital, Pasadena, California, USA

BACH: Italian Concerto, BWV 971

CHOPIN: 12 Études, Op. 10: Nos. 1 & 3-6

CHOPIN: Scherzo No. 2 in F minor, Op. 31

MOZART: Fantasie in C minor, K475

SCHUMANN: Carnaval, Op. 9

Encores:

DEBUSSY: Images, Book 1: I. Reflets dans l'eau

LISZT: Grandes études de Paganini, S141: III. La Campanella

Bonus track (rehearsal performance)

CHOPIN: 12 Études, Op. 10: No. 8

Recorded at the Ambassador Auditorium Pasadena, California, USA

11 November 1981 (CD1–2) *

3 December 1986 (CD2–3) †

Jorge Bolet recorded performances. Boxes 468 *, 557 † and 558 †.
Ambassador Auditorium Collection. Courtesy of the Stanford Archive of Recorded Sound,
Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, California, USA

24bit, 96kHz high resolution transfers by
Kabir Hermon (Stanford University Libraries) from open reel tapes

24bit, 96kHz high resolution remastering by
John Croft (Chiaro Audio)

Album photo: Jorge Bolet, Paris, 1988, taken by **Wilhelm Fröling**
used with kind permission from the family of Wilhelm Fröling

Artwork by **David Murphy**

Recording released with the approval of the estate of Jorge Bolet

Jorge Bolet was an exclusive Decca artist at the time these live recordings were made,
and we thank Decca Music Group for permission to release them

FHR thanks Douglas Cairns, Francis Cociata, Houston A. Cummings,
Mathias Donderer, Hayden Jones, Donald Manildi and Cyrus Meher-Homji

