

Ghosts
FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN
Preludes Op. 28
Nino Gvetadze - piano



SUPER AUDIO CD

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FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN

Preludes Op. 28

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FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810 - 1849)

Preludes Op. 28

- [1] Agitato in C Major, C.166
- [2] Lento in A Minor, C.167
- [3] Vivace in G Major, C.168
- [4] Largo in E Minor, C.169
- [5] Molto allegro in D Major, C.170
- [6] Lento assai in B Minor, C.171
- [7] Andantino in A Major, C.172
- [8] Molto agitato in F# Minor, C.173
- [9] Largo in E Major, C.174
- [10] Molto allegro in C# Minor, C.175
- [11] Vivace in B Major, C.176
- [12] Presto in G# Minor, C.177
- [13] Lento in F# Major, C.178
- [14] Allegro in E# Minor, C.179
- [15] Sostenuto in D# Major, C.180
- [16] Presto con fuoco in B# Minor, C.181
- [17] Allegretto in A# Major, C.182
- [18] Molto allegro in F Minor, C.183
- [19] Vivace in E# Major, C.184
- [20] Largo in C Minor, C.185
- [21] Cantabile in B# Major, C.186

0:38
2:36
0:58
2:24
0:38
1:52
0:57
1:52
1:23
0:38
0:37
1:22
3:07
0:43
5:52
1:10
2:48
1:04
1:31
2:21
2:03

- [22] Molto agitato in G Minor, C.187
- [23] Moderato in F Major, C.188
- [24] Allegro appassionato in D Minor, C.189

0:46
0:53
2:30

[25] Etude in E-flat Minor Op. 10, No. 6

3:33

[26] Waltz in A flat Major Op. 69, No. 1

4:04

[27] Waltz in A Minor Op. 34, No. 2

5:08

[28] Waltz in B Minor Op. 69, No. 2

3:07

[29] Scherzo No. 2 in B-flat Minor Op. 31

10:03

total time 66:53

There comes a point in life when we look back, trying to gain a sense of perspective, and we see ourselves in a different light. We are haunted by memories and doubts, whirring around our minds like ghosts. They tell us of past hopes, love, admiration, but also loneliness, pain and despair. We stand at the edge, looking back, contemplating those moments, wondering, what if? And we realise: there is no turning back.

Chopin looked back and evoked for us the story of his life in his 24 Preludes. Through the medium of these works, he revealed his deepest fears and sorrows, but also the beauty and integrity of his heart. The story of these ghosts culminates in tolling bells which are, in Cortot's words, "Of blood, of earthly pleasure, of death..." But what follows? A pause: silence, timeless solitude, in the *Etude Op.10, No.6*. Then, suddenly, the soul wakes up and waltzes into space.

The album ends with the *Scherzo No.2*, "like a charnel house", or house of the dead, as Chopin apparently described the opening – yet the finale sounds like a celebration of life. And so our ghostly journey ends with fireworks, with smiling and shining, looking far into the future...

Nino Gvetadze

"... it is a consolation to be able to hear you sometimes; in the hard times that threaten, only art as you feel it will be able to unite men divided by the realities of life; people love each other, people understand each other in Chopin".

So wrote the Marquis de Custine in a letter to Chopin dating from 1848, the year before the composer's death. This intimacy in Chopin's music was acknowledged by the man himself when he confided to his friend, Titus Woyciechowski: "I now tell my piano things which I once used to tell you." Both as a pianist and as a composer, Chopin exuded a vulnerability that was and is deeply affecting; an ethereal quality that was increasingly evident as tuberculosis took its toll during the course of his life, giving him a ghostly pallor and fragile aspect. He would be found by pupils and friends "pale in front of the piano, with wild eyes and his hair on end", and even described himself as feeling "like steam", regarding his acquaintances as the walking dead, his own existence haunted by a "cohort of phantoms".

Chopin's mode of expression frequently tended in this direction. When teaching piano technique, he warned: "Every difficulty slurred over will be a ghost to disturb your repose later on." His sense of looking beyond earthly things was made explicit when he wrote, after completing his *Fantasy in F minor, Op.49*: "... the sky is beautiful, a sadness in my heart – but that's alright. If it were otherwise, perhaps my existence would be worth nothing to anyone. Let's hide until death has passed."

Even in his heyday, Chopin was drawn to the remote, the otherworldly. Preferring the refinement of Mozart to the drama of Beethoven, Chopin shied away from the more flamboyant sensibilities fashionable in Paris, at which musical hub he arrived in the autumn of 1831, meeting Liszt, Mendelssohn and Berlioz. Like Liszt, Chopin was lauded for his pianistic skill. Yet, in contrast with the pyrotechnics of such virtuosi, Chopin favoured a more restrained approach, preferring the delicacy of a square piano to the resonance of the grand, and eschewing the programmatic titles which others attached to his works, insisting that the music should speak for itself.

Chopin's prodigious skill had earned him a reputation as the next Mozart, but it was J.S. Bach, another composer he admired, who provided the model for several of his Études and for his Preludes. Bach's two monumental books of Preludes and Fugues set a vital precedent; in Chopin's case, the *24 Preludes, Op.28*, do not precede anything, but are stand-alone pieces in every available key, composed between 1836 and 1839.

Partly composed in Majorca, their publication met with mixed responses, Robert Schumann dismissing them as "sketches, beginnings of études, or, so to speak, ruins, individual eagle pinions, all disorder and wild confusions." Although intended critically, Schumann touched upon some key traits in Chopin's Preludes – traits which have since been recognised as innovative rather than chaotic. They are often unpredictable, fragmentary, daring pieces, their structural skeletons laid bare, their unearthly explorations never balked at, as though those "cohorts of phantoms" are urging the composer to new and giddy heights of invention.

Chopin alternated Preludes in major keys with pieces in their relative minor, a device which brings with it alternations of mood. The animated first *Prelude in C Major* is apparently sunny but with an unsettling restlessness; and is over almost as soon as it's begun. The sombre second *Prelude in A Minor* is full of chromaticism and melancholy, and the *Vivace G major Prelude* is, like the first, so rapid as to feel almost skittish, followed by the deeply-moving E minor *Largo*.

The D major *Prelude, No.5*, is another adventure in whirling textures, its major-minor tussles hinting at tensions beneath the frenetic activity; tensions which we are never given time to explore but which are shut down by a defiant perfect cadence. In the B minor Prelude the left hand is given the plangent melody, accompanied by light chords.

The A major *Andantino* and F-sharp minor Prelude which follow reverse the textural pattern heard so far: the feverish rapidity of the major-key Preludes is reserved for the F-sharp minor piece, whereas the A major Prelude is a gem of beautiful simplicity. An almost childlike melody is accompanied by apparently straightforward chords, which are transformed by a radiant harmonic progression at the heart of the piece into something sublimely beautiful. The *molto agitato* F-sharp minor Prelude lives up to its description, plunging us into a turbulent soundworld which Chopin takes time to explore at greater length than many of the quicker major-key Preludes, ending the piece with enigmatic gentleness.

Having disrupted the initial pattern, Chopin continues to surprise us, exploiting the piano's deeper registers in the noble E major *Prelude, No.9*, its fascinating harmonic progressions used to majestic effect. The concise C sharp minor Prelude is characterised by cascades of notes, followed by the equally brief but charming, waltzing B major Prelude. The G sharp minor Prelude packs in a remarkable amount, the right hand's intricate chromatic ascents enabling the music to venture in different harmonic directions, the seemingly unrelenting forward-motion eventually running out of steam before being brought to a definite halt by the final cadence.

A lilting, nostalgic F sharp major *Prelude, No.13*, is juxtaposed with the tumultuous and harmonically dense E flat minor Prelude, so brief as to be almost Impressionistic; a quick daub of dark colour – a spectre briefly glimpsed. The long and lyrical D flat major Prelude, often known as the '*Raindrop*', is, in its outer passages, wistful and poignant with a brittle delicacy, offset by funereal minor-key material which builds to a climax of powerful chords.

The breathtaking B flat minor *Prelude, No.16*, opens with an arresting chordal call-to-attention before Chopin unleashes a fiendishly virtuosic piece, its frantic pace never letting up until the very end. The irresistibly romantic A flat major Prelude follows, and then comes the stop-start, metrically ambiguous F minor Prelude, its elliptical phrases abruptly answered – even interrupted – by terse chords which ultimately prevail in an apparent battle between the two contrasting types of material. The waltzing E flat major

Prelude is, at first, more conventional, but the music tapers off before beginning again, Chopin exploring subtle harmonic permutations before bringing the piece to a prompt close. Resonant chords dominate the Prelude No.20 in C minor, creating a sombre, funereal atmosphere.

The *cantabile* B flat major *Prelude, No.21*, is richly-textured, Chopin relishing the piano's spatial properties by building up layers of resonant chords. The dramatic force of the G minor Prelude is in contrast with the wit and delicacy of the penultimate Prelude, in F major. The set closes with the Prelude in D minor, marked *appassionato*. Will Chopin shift to the major during the final bars, offering us gentle solace, a happy ending? No. Chopin ends this extraordinary set with a devastating and brilliant conclusion. Three deep Ds toll out: a haunting death knell.

Chopin's 12 *Études, Op.10*, begun in 1829, were composed in Warsaw and Vienna before being completed in Paris in 1832. They were published in 1833, dedicated to Liszt, and are considered to be Chopin's first masterpiece. His approach was sufficiently revolutionary to provoke scorn from critic Ludwig Rellstab, who puffed: "A player with crooked fingers will straighten them by playing these studies, but other players should be put on their guard against them". Schumann's verdict has been more widely accepted: "...imagination and technique share dominion side by side".

The *Étude Op.10, No.6* is an astonishing piece, almost Impressionistic in its tonal ambiguities, its gently insistent rhythms and plaintive melody creating

an otherworldly, eerie mood. The final note, shifting the tonality from minor to major at the very last moment, is an exquisite touch.

Chopin was initially dismissive of waltzes, regarding them as mere trifles. While a young man in Vienna in 1831, he observed with surprise to his Warsaw teacher Elsner that “waltzes are regarded as works here!” Chopin’s waltzes are usually divided into the categories ‘brilliant’ and ‘lyric’, and they possess a greater profundity than the genre’s reputation might suggest, looking beyond earthly pleasures to something less tangible. As Schumann put it, Chopin wrote “waltzes for souls much more than waltzes for bodies”.

The Op.69 waltzes were posthumously collected by Chopin’s childhood friend Julian Fontana. The numbers are rather misleading; Chopin’s last published work during his lifetime was the *Cello Sonata, Op.65*. The *Waltz Op.69 No.2*, dating from 1829, is Chopin’s first surviving waltz, and explores unexpected realms of chromatic dissonance. The first copy of the piece is marked *dolente* (‘sorrowful’), making explicit its mournful qualities, although the austere aspects of the opening melody are contrasted with a light, dancing second subject. The *Waltz Op.34 No.2* – a *valse brillant* – comes from a set of three, published together but written between 1831 and 1838. Its memorable theme begins with a sinuous line which then blossoms into more wide-ranging material, eventually floating towards heaven with wonderful serenity, before the enigmatic opening theme is reprised.

There are no fewer than three extant manuscripts of the *Waltz Op.69, No.1*, reflecting Chopin’s surprisingly frequent practice of writing out a piece several times and presenting it to different recipients. The first version of this, the ‘Farewell’ Waltz, was presented in September 1835 to Maria Wodzińska, to whom the composer had been engaged. The title provides an apposite indication of the waltz’s valedictory air; marked *con espressione*, a poetic opening is thrown into relief by a central section, *con anima*.

Schumann regarded the *Scherzo No.2, Op.31* (1837) as Byronic in the grandeur of its passion, and Chopin himself was insistent that the ominous opening triplets must be as ghostly as possible. According to his pupil Wilhelm von Lenz, “For Chopin it was never questioning enough, never soft enough... It must be a charnel-house” – in other words, as quiet as a vault in which corpses are buried. There are strong dynamic contrasts throughout, and the searching opening dialogue evolves into a long-breathed melody, before an economical central trio in A major that grows into urgently virtuosic material. The opening ideas are reprised almost exactly but with touches of decoration, before the various elements are drawn together in a thrilling coda. Warmth breaks into the chill of the tomb at last. A hopeful ending to this collection of some of the composer’s most profound works, which establish with the listener a very particular and powerful intimacy: one which looks beyond life itself. As Custine wrote to Chopin: “You have gained in suffering and poetry; the melancholy of your compositions penetrates still deeper into the heart; one feels alone with you in the midst of a crowd; it is no longer a piano, but a soul, and what a soul!”

Joanna Wyld



Nino Gvetadze

Born and raised in Tbilisi, currently based in Amsterdam, Georgian pianist Nino Gvetadze leads a busy international career. Her performances have been praised by many critics throughout the Europe and Asia. Nino received various awards, the most important were the Second Prize, Press Prize and Audience Award at the International Franz Liszt Piano Competition 2008. She became the winner of prestigious Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award in 2010.

Nino Gvetadze has performed with many outstanding conductors such as Michel Plasson, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Michel Tabachnik, John Axelrod and Jaap van Zweden and with orchestras such as the Rotterdam, The Hague, Brussels, Seoul and Netherlands Philharmonic, Bergische and the Rheinische Philharmonie, Münchner Symphoniker and Warsaw Philharmonic amongst others. She went on tour with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra, Kammerakademie Potsdam and Amsterdam Sinfonietta.

Nino has given various recitals all over the world, among those in Hannover (PRO MUSICA Preisträger amKlavier-Zyklus), Bayreuth, Herkulessaal and Prinzregententheater Munich, Wigmore Hall London, Bozar Brussels, Tonhalle Zurich, the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, with Jean-Yves Thibaudet at the Spoleto Festival, Lucerne Piano Festival, Bunka-kaikan Hall Tokyo, the Festival Piano aux Jacobins (Toulouse), Kuhmo Chamber Music Festival (Finland). In August 2017 Nino performed on famous Prinsengrachtconcert in Amsterdam, where she played chamber music together with Brodsky Quartet.

Nino Gvetadze was featured in BBC4 documentary "Story of Music" and played Live on Dutch National Television on the instruments of Hector Berlioz and Vladimir Horowitz.

Her repertoire stretches from Mozart and Beethoven to Chopin, Liszt, Debussy, Prokofiev and further to contemporary music. The St. Gallen Tagblatt wrote: "absolutely thrilling ! ...poetry and Fantasy dominated indefatigably over the pure brilliance.." about her performance of Tchaikovsky's 2nd Piano Concerto. Concertonet reviewed the Toulouse recital: "Schubert's Wanderer Fantaisie was expressed with a total and admirable knowledge of the architecture of the score, enthralling with an outstanding feeling for timbre and color."

Nino's previous CDs include : *Piano works by Mussorgsky* (Brilliant Classics), Rachmaninoff *Preludes op 23 and op 32* (Etcetera), "Debussy" *Préludes book I, Estampes and Claire de Lune* (Orchid Classics) and "Widmung" *Liszt piano works* (Orchid Classics). Her recordings and interviews are often broadcasted on European radio and TV Stations. The Debussy CD was editor's choice of the International Record Review (April 2014) and also of the Dutch National Radio and at Classic FM. Nino's recorded recital at the Sendesaal Bremen has been chosen for the "ARD-Radiofestival" (broadcast 31 July 2014).

Nino Gvetadze studied in Tbilisi with Veronika Tumanishvili, Nodar Gabunia and Nana Khubutia. After her graduation Nino moved to the Netherlands to study with Paul Komen and Jan Wijn. Since 2008 Nino plays in "Arosa Trio"

with violinist Frederieke Saeijs and cellist Maja Bogdanovic. Nino plays on a Steinway Grand Piano, kindly lent to her by the Dutch National Music Instrument Foundation.

www.ninogvetadze.net

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