



Volume 4



Shura Cherkassky

Nimbus
Rediscovered Recordings

Nimbus - Rediscovered Recordings

Shura Cherkassky, piano (1909-1995)

J.S. Bach

Fantasia and Fugue in G minor BWV 542 arr. Liszt S.463

- | | | | |
|---|----|----------|------|
| 1 | I | Fantasia | 7:52 |
| 2 | II | Fugue | 5:32 |

Franz Liszt

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|-------|
| 3 | | Concert Paraphrase on Wagner's Overture to Tannhäuser | 17:38 |
|---|--|---|-------|

Ludwig van Beethoven

Sonata in F minor Op. 57 'Appassionata'

- | | | | |
|---|-----|--------------------------------|-------|
| 4 | I | Allegro assai | 10:39 |
| 5 | II | Andante con moto | 6:56 |
| 6 | III | Allegro ma non troppo - Presto | 9:15 |

Frédéric Chopin

- | | | | |
|---|--|--------------------------------------|-------|
| 7 | | Ballade No. 3 in A-flat major Op. 47 | 7:21 |
| 8 | | Ballade No. 4 in F minor Op. 52 | 11:26 |

Total playing time 76:41

The present release is part of a short series of recordings sitting on the shelves of the Nimbus archive that were 'rediscovered' during the 2020 COVID shutdowns. In those quiet days idle hands and minds posed the question: 'So, do we have anything unissued that we can use to construct a release programme?' This casual enquiry initiated a full investigation that has continued for five years and revealed more than fifty recording projects that, for one reason or another, never made it into the world. Some of these recordings go back to the founding of Nimbus in the late 1960s. There is no single reason to account for their neglect, and in every case we have found no justification for holding them back any longer. The original analogue tapes, typically one-inch, four track, 30ips, transferred to a digital medium with no problem. We decided to archive them at 192k, thus preserving them for next generation use. Early digital tapes, from 1981/82, using U-matic cassettes, sometimes required surgical intervention to repair passages of lost signal, but having been stored in the same warm, dark room for their entire lives also transferred reliably for the most part.

Shura Cherkassky 1909 - 1995

Shura Cherkassky was introduced to Nimbus by Wilfred Stiff, then a director of the London agent Ibbs & Tillett. Wilfred recognised a young label pushing ahead fast at the transition point between LP and CD, one with a fondness for artists whose careers were waning. Accordingly, he dispatched one of his most prestigious names to the Nimbus Studio. Cherkassky was at that time acknowledged as one of the 'great' generation whose undoubted king was Horowitz, but after a long, notable career that began in his mid-teens, his popularity in the concert hall and recording studio had fallen. Shura's late career was in need of a final boost.

Cherkassky's first visit lasted four days - 31 January to 3 February 1981, the results of that session were released on LP, but never on CD. They are once again available in Volume 1 of this series (NI 7112). For this second session once again he stayed in the big house, having taken one look at Monmouth's finest hotel - The King's Head - and declared 'Oh no, I won't be happy here!'. The studio and piano, a 1969 Hamburg

Steinway, were set up as before. It was a studio so completely unlike the characterless spaces he had famously grown to decry. Here there was no sterile barrier to his inspiration. The grand Victorian reception room at Wyastone Leys served as a spectacular performance space, its full-height windows framing commanding views down the Wye Valley. Shura loved it, signing a copy of his *Picture at an Exhibition* LP, 'To everyone in Nimbus with love and the most wonderful feeling of inspiration'.

Shura's behaviour in the studio was entirely his own. He usually began with a very, very slow warm up, consisting of the work he was about to record, played at a quarter speed, or slower. I once heard him play the Liszt Sonata at this agonisingly slow speed. Why? He was planning his arm, hand and finger movements, a real choreography that at speed helped to eliminate unnecessary movement and aided accuracy.

Shura preferred not to repeat a piece in the same session, being happier to move on, coming back to have another go later in the day, or on the next day. Performances of the same work, while all being uniquely his, rarely matched each other, making the process of editing very difficult. Shura seemed entirely unbothered by this, happier to tolerate a rare slip rather than ruin a phrase with a clumsy cut.

Shura was both a delight and a demon. He could infuriate with demands for peaches in winter (part of a supposed diet) or stand by the front door with arms out-stretched like a child, waiting for someone to put his coat on. His regular demand at all sessions was for hot tea 'Hot, from the microwave', accompanied with raw carrots, 'washed'. It seems petty to mention such small demands but cumulatively they could bring the production team to the edge of despair. The delight came, of course, when he played: that rich, beautifully varied sound, always singing, never mechanical, never allowing virtuosity to dominate for its own sake. At the end of a Chopin Nocturne silence would fill the control-room, Shura's voice eventually breaking through with 'Oh, that was good'. On one occasion even rising to unselfconscious praise, as after a playback, 'I didn't know I could play so well'.

He could also be very capricious, especially given the opportunity to tease and potentially embarrass a young man. On this second visit I became his target. The morning we were due to record the Tchaikovsky Sonata he arrived for breakfast with unusual excitement, declaring that he had had a revelation. The jist of this was that he would play the Sonata 'without pedal'. It would be better, cleaner, he explained. We dutifully recorded this execrable performance, all thirty minutes. As the final chord slunk away, knowing I would have to say something my confidence faltered and I heard myself suggest we should 'have a listen'. This foolishness cost us another agonising thirty minutes after which Shura, having said nothing, looked directly at me. Digging deep I said 'Shura, its horrible'. His smile was all innocence 'Yes' he said 'I didn't know I could play so badly'. I must have looked confused. He gripped my arm 'affectionately, offering only a simple explanation 'You must always tell me the truth'. Lesson learned.

Between 1981 and 1987 Cherkassky came to the studio every year, sometimes twice. In these visits he delivered his entire current recital repertoire. He, very sensibly, offered only two programmes to concert promoters in each season. From this eclectic mix of pieces we would do our best to make attractive, sensible, selections for release. Our approach to programming was traditional – a Chopin Album, a Russian Album, a grouping of lighter 'encore' style pieces. Any repertoire that was difficult to programme tended to collect in a corner, at a time when a catch-all release of 'Shura Cherkassky plays ...' was not particularly attractive to consumers. Looking back on forty-five years in the studio I can with confidence exclaim that Shura was unique, his imagination, humility, and daring allied to matchless command of colour put him in a class of one.

Adrian Farmer. Creative Director, Nimbus Records

Digital recording
Recorded at Wyastone Leys,
Track 3, 15 March 1984 Engineer Gerald Reynolds Producer Adrian Farmer
Track 1-2, 16 October 1985 Engineer Jonathan Halliday Producer Adrian Farmer
Track 4-8, 9-10 February 1987 Engineer Jonathan Halliday Producer Nina Walker

Photography by Gerald Reynolds, taken during the recording sessions

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In 2003 Nimbus gathered together all of Cherkassky's released material in a 6 CD set (NI1733) which is still available. The present CD release, and the 3 others in the series do not duplicate any of those recordings, apart from Mussorgsky 'Pictures', which has been remastered. The repertoire for the new 'Rediscovered' releases is as follows:

Shura Cherkassky Volume 1 NI 7112/13 2 CDs

Mendelssohn. Prelude & Fugue in E minor Op. 3
Chopin. Ballade No. 1 in G minor Op. 23, Scherzo No. 2 in B-flat minor Op. 31
Nocturne in B major Op. 9, Nocturne in F minor Op. 55,
Mazurka in F-sharp minor Op. 59
Schumann. Der Kontrabandiste
Rimsky-Korsakov. 'Flight of the Bumble-Bee' arr. Rachmaninoff
Debussy. Arabesque No. 1 in E major
Gould. Boogie-Woogie Etude
Stravinsky. Trois mouvements de Pétrouchka
Mussorgsky. Pictures at an Exhibition

Nimbus – Rediscovered Recordings

Shura Cherkassky Volume 2 NI 7119

Balakirev. Tarantella in B major Islamey: Fantaisie orientale Op. 18
Tchaikovsky. Grand Sonata in G major Op. 37
Prokofiev. Sonata No. 7 in B-flat major Op. 83
Chopin. Ballade No. 4 in F minor Op. 52

Nimbus – Rediscovered Recordings

Shura Cherkassky Volume 3 NI 7125

Liszt. Réminiscences de Don Juan (Mozart)
Chopin. Nocturne in F minor Op. 55 No. 1, Polonaise in A-flat Op. 53 'Heroique'
Gershwin. Three Preludes
J.S. Bach. Toccata, Adagio and Fugue in C BWV 564 arr. Busoni
Beethoven Sonata in A Op. 101

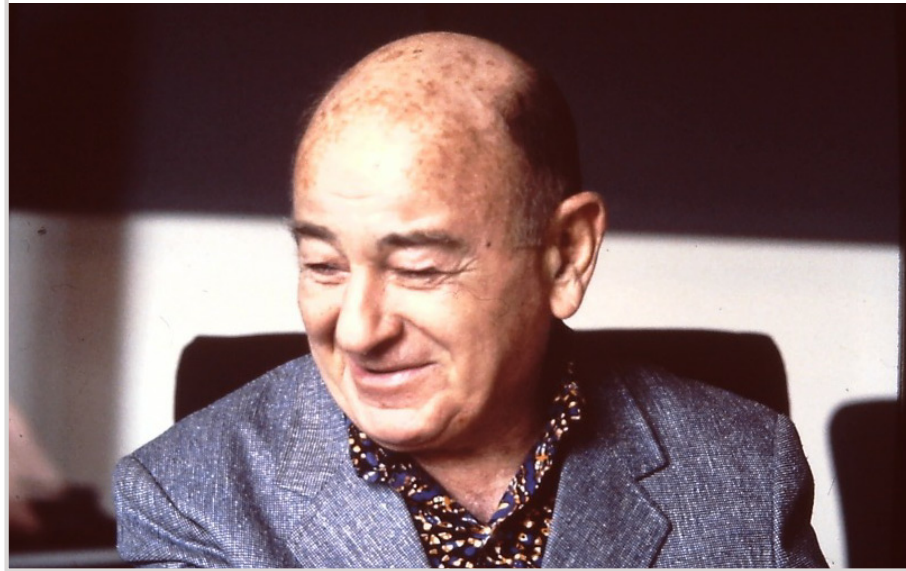




Also available from Nimbus Records

Shura Cherkassky (1909-1995)

Solo piano works by Chopin, Mussorgsky, Berg, Bernstein, Brahms, Schumann, Beethoven, Liszt, Stravinsky, Grieg & Rachmaninoff



The published Nimbus Recordings - 6 CD Set

Disc One Total playing time 76.08

BEETHOVEN Sonata in E flat, Op. 27, No. 1 'quasi una Fantasia'

SCHUMANN Etudes Symphoniques, Op. 13

RAHMS Variations on a theme of Paganini, Op. 35

HOFMANN Kaleidoscope, Op. 40

CHASINS Rush Hour in Hong Kong

Disc Two Total playing time 78.29

BACH (arr. Busoni) Chaconne from Partita in D minor for violin

SCHUBERT Impromptu No.2 in E flat & No.3 in G flat Op. 90

SCHUMANN Kreisleriana, Op.16

BERG Sonata, Op. 1 9.52

STRAUSS / GODOWSKY Wine, Women and Song

Disc Three Total playing time 74.38

CHOPIN

Scherzo in B minor, Op. 20

Andante Spianato & Grand Polonaise in E flat, Op. 22

Nocturne in D flat, Op. 27, No. 2

Mazurka in B minor, Op. 33, No. 4

Sonata in B minor, Op. 58

Nocturne in E, Op. 62, No. 2

Mazurka in C sharp minor, Op. 63, No. 3

Nocturne in E minor, Op. 72

Disc Four Total playing time 75.30

CHOPIN Variations on 'Là, ci darem la mano,' Op. 2

LISZT Sonata in B minor & Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2

STRAVINSKY Trois Mouvements de Pétrouchka

Disc Five Total playing time 75.20

FRANCK Prélude, choral et fugue

LISZT Funérailles Harmonies Poétiques et Religieuses No. 7

GREIG Sonata in E minor, Op. 7

RACHMANINOFF Variations on a theme of Corelli, Op. 42

MESSIAEN Quatre Études de rythme - Ile de feu I and II

Disc Six Total playing time 76.56

SCHUBERT Sonata in A major, Op. 120

MUSSORGSKY Pictures at an Exhibition

PABST Concert Paraphrase on Tchaikovsky's Eugene Onegin, Op. 81

BERNSTEIN Touches

"He might be termed the last of the great individualists among the pianist fraternity, an artist whose credo stems from his teacher, the great virtuoso Josef Hofmann. It is a school of personal quirk and technical brilliance that has seemed out of kilter with our era of po-faced accent on authenticity and perfect manners, all tending towards uniformity of execution... Nimbus is to be congratulated for taking charge of Cherkassky during the 1980s and offering him the company's Welsh headquarters to record in at will on his own time scale. As a result of long takes and pleasant surroundings in which Cherkassky thrives, this collection is truly representative of a player who hasn't always had his due." *The Daily Telegraph*, 1999

