



Anton
RUBINSTEIN
Fantasia in E minor
Five Pieces • Trot de cavalerie
Regina Chernychko, Piano



Anton Rubinstein (1829–1894)

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Anton Rubinstein was born in Vkhvatintsī (Podolia), Ukraine, on 16 (28, New Style) November 1829 and died at Petergof on 8 (20) November 1894.

Rubinstein's career coincided almost exactly with the final development of the piano, and his enormous popularity was undoubtedly aided by the piano's trajectory to stardom as the most played musical instrument. Born into a middle class Jewish family in Imperial Russia it was almost inevitable that his rapid musical development into a child prodigy should embrace the piano as his chosen medium.

Accompanied by his mother, younger brother Nikolay and piano teacher Alexander Villoing, he toured Europe from 1840 to 1843 meeting many from the pianistic pantheon including Chopin, Liszt and Mendelssohn. Hard times followed his father's death in 1846 but he persisted in music, no longer a prodigy, and found favour with Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna who patronised his work. It was also almost inevitable he should compose, following the long-established tradition of composer-pianists. Indeed, his concerts frequently comprised his own music.

With his reputation in Russia rapidly in the ascendant Rubinstein then took his biggest step beyond the inevitable, founding the Russian Musical Society which led to the establishment of the St Petersburg and Moscow Conservatories, modelled on European conservatories then in existence. In the long term this was perhaps Rubinstein's greatest achievement, eventually bringing enormous prestige through performers and composers trained in them and in the many other conservatories that were also established in Russia.

European and North American concert tours followed that cemented Rubinstein's place at the very forefront of pianists of his age. To Rubinstein's mortification however, his success as a composer could not compare with his indisputable achievements as a pianist and a musical pedagogue. During his lifetime works such as his *Piano Concerto No. 4* and orchestral piece *Ivan IV Groznyy* ('Ivan IV the Terrible') found favour but subsequently have not stood the test of time.

The grande dame of 19th-century piano playing, Clara Schumann, was scathing in her criticism of Rubinstein's pianism. Conversely, English pedagogue and musical sage Tobias Matthay wrote: 'I made a study of Rubinstein's playing, for I found he played a great deal better than I did'. Liszt referred to Rubinstein as 'Van II' (not just because of Rubinstein's Beethovenian hairstyle) and clearly audiences across the globe were astonished by his volcanic sound spectrum and peerless technique.

The piano music itself provides a melange of Mendelssohnian tonalities and Schumannesque solidity in layout although stretching across a wider range of the keyboard. Rubinstein does not routinely follow Liszt's predilection for repeated accompanimental chords, perhaps because pianos were developing increased sustaining power by this time.

Rubinstein famously wrote that 'Russians call me German, Germans call me Russian, Jews call me a Christian, Christians a Jew. Pianists call me a composer, composers call me a pianist. The classicists think me a futurist, and the futurists call me a reactionary. My conclusion is that I am neither fish nor fowl – a pitiful individual.' Thoroughly international, his steadfast opposition to the pursuit of a Russian nationalist musical style in the manner of Balakirev and his circle aroused enmity in some musical quarters and it must be acknowledged that works such as the *Fantasia* (1866) and the *Five Pieces* (1867) show no nationalist characteristics whatsoever. Indeed, in this context some have criticised Rubinstein's style for a certain blandness and lack of unique character.

Fantasia in E minor, Op. 77 (1866)

The *Fantasia* commences with an emphatic announcement of a rising second interval in chordal form, followed a short time later by a more contemplative treatment of a falling second interval. This short motif of a second occurs throughout the *Fantasia* in various guises adding a sense of cohesion to the grand, somewhat disparate canvas.

I. Adagio – Allegro con fuoco

The defiant and fiery introduction leads to a conflicted and tempestuous first subject group in E minor. As a contrast the second subject group in G major is very Romantic and warm-hearted with a lyrical line in the manner of grand opera of the time. The *animato* development section concentrates on exploring the first subject motifs, and, reversing the usual order, the second subject announces a return to E major followed by the first subject in E minor which concludes the movement in coda-like fashion.

II. Moderato assai

The solemn, earnest character of this movement stems from its single Bachian chromatic main motif upon which everything is built. Counterpoint prevails in the opening bars in E minor but more Romantic figuration and harmonies take over with a move to G major. Arpeggiated writing and large chordal formations build momentum, before a return to E minor and plainer statements of the main motif that re-establish a reflective mood.

III. Allegro molto – Moderato – Allegro molto – Poco meno mosso – Presto

This joyous waltz in scherzo and trio form exudes energy and vivacity. Even the main theme in C major contains a passage that ascends like a rocket. This material dominates a brilliant C major opening section before a sudden change to A flat major for the slower trio section. The ebullient C major waltz then returns to complete the movement.

IV. Molto lento – Vivace assai – Tempo rubato – Quasi presto

The distinctly Beethovenian introduction with echoes of the *Sonata 'Pathétique'* leads to an urgent, dramatic and often effervescent first subject group in E minor containing a wealth of material, some jaggedly syncopated. The majestic and warmly lyrical second subject is in G major and the first subject returns prior to a lengthy development section which is heralded by quiet, subdued rolling arpeggios. The recapitulation first and second subjects are in C minor and C major respectively, but the tonality settles back to E minor for a vividly dramatic coda.

Five Pieces, Op. 69 (1867)

No. 1. Caprice

This impulsive work uses 6/8 time for a balletic effect and is structurally in ternary form. The spirited A flat major first section contrasts with a quieter E major middle section full of sudden, almost quixotic pauses.

No. 2. Nocturne

Unsurprisingly, there is a Chopinesque quality about the lyrical 3/4 G major opening section. A more chordal *più mosso* middle section becomes rather agitated as it modulates around C major before a return of G major and the first section material.

No. 3. Scherzo

This skittish, lively work is in rondo form with the dramatic, fast flowing 12/8 A minor opening material appearing three times interspersed with two contrasting sections. As a result, the work feels quite episodic, showing an affinity with some of Robert Schumann's character pieces.

No. 4. Romance

There is a sure-footed, simple and direct quality to the music in this movement, tinged with sepia colouration. The B minor opening theme is shot through with flashes of D major providing a variegated sonic effect. The middle section moves to B major with a rather more majestic theme, and the final section of this ternary structure repeats the opening B minor material.

No. 5. Toccata

This 6/8 *presto* binary-form piece in D minor assumes a brilliant concert *étude* character with its agitated rapid semiquaver rhythm. Towards the end of the first part the tonality moves to B flat major, using more chordal and lyrical material. The second part reiterates the original D minor fast semiquaver material but moves to D major instead of B flat major for the more chordal and lyrical material that follows.

Trot de cavalerie (1850) (simplified version in D major)

For mounted troops, the musical equivalent of the march was the 'cavalry trot', a popular genre in the 19th century. Rubinstein's original jaunty 1850 solo piano version was written in E flat major, and contained his customary big stretches which he would have managed easily. The version heard here was published in 1889 by Edition Europa and arranged for smaller hands. It is in D major and typifies arrangements of the day made for drawing room pianists. Rubinstein's even more popular *Melody in F* (Naxos 8.570942) appeared in an enormous number of arrangements for players of all instruments and standards.

Rodney Smith

Regina Chernychko



Photo: Mikhail Yasnev

Winner of the 60th Maria Canals International Piano Competition, concert pianist Regina Chernychko was born into a family of musicians in Kharkiv, Ukraine, and continues the traditions of the piano school of Regina Horowitz (sister of Vladimir Horowitz). Chernychko possesses outstanding technical brilliance and virtuosity combined with a sensitive musicality. Engagements have taken her to the Sala Verdi in Milan, Philharmonie Berlin, Salle Cortot in Paris, Tianjin Grand Theatre, Stiftung Mozarteum Grosser Saal, Smetana Hall in Prague, Palacio Euskalduna in Bilbao, Reduta Concert Hall in Bratislava, Auditorio de Tenerife Adán Martín in Santa Cruz, Brucknerhaus Linz, Teatro de la Maestranza in Seville and L'Auditori and Palau de la Música Catalana in Barcelona, among others. Chernychko made her orchestral debut at the age of seven, and has over thirty piano concertos in her repertoire, including all by Rachmaninov. She has been broadcast live at Radio 80 (Holland), SWR, Bremen Zwei, Radio Vaticana and Catalunya Música.

Anton Rubinstein always regretted that his status as an elite pianist eclipsed his reputation as a composer. Recent recordings have shown that his music is melodically distinguished and attractive, as these two major works from the mid-1860s show. Cast on a wide canvas, the *Fantasia in E minor* conforms to Romantic grandeur in its gestures, which also include Beethovenian echoes in the finale. The *Five Pieces* are condensed character studies, evoking Chopin and Schumann, and ending with a brilliant *Toccata*. The *Trot de cavalerie*, a march for mounted troops, was a popular genre in the 19th century.

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|---|--------------|
| Fantasia in E minor, Op. 77 (1866) | 44:56 |
| ❶ I. Adagio – Allegro con fuoco – | 13:30 |
| ❷ II. Moderato assai | 6:46 |
| ❸ III. Allegro molto – Moderato – Allegro molto – Poco meno mosso – Presto – | 7:34 |
| ❹ IV. Molto lento – Vivace assai – Tempo rubato – Quasi presto | 16:56 |
| Five Pieces, Op. 69 (1867) | 24:32 |
| ❺ No. 1. Caprice | 4:30 |
| ❻ No. 2. Nocturne | 3:41 |
| ❼ No. 3. Scherzo | 6:07 |
| ❽ No. 4. Romance | 6:08 |
| ❾ No. 5. Toccata | 4:06 |
| ❿ Trot de cavalerie (1850) (simplified version in D major) | 5:49 |

Regina Chernychko, Piano

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