

Anton
RUBINSTEIN

Piano Works

Six Preludes and Fugues in Free Style, Op. 53

Three Pieces, Op. 71

Concert Étude in C major 'On False Notes'

Martin Cousin, Piano

Anton
RUBINSTEIN

(1829–1894)

Piano Works

Six Fugues en style libre introduites de préludes, Op. 53
(‘Six Preludes and Fugues in Free Style’) (1857)

59:50

- | | | |
|---|--|------|
| ❶ | Prelude No. 1 in A flat major – Lento – Moderato (À Édouard Lalo) | 3:04 |
| ❷ | Fugue No. 1 in A flat major – Allegro risoluto (À Édouard Lalo) | 6:46 |
| ❸ | Prelude No. 2 in F minor – Moderato assai. Tempo rubato (À Edouard Silas) | 3:03 |
| ❹ | Fugue No. 2 in F minor – Moderato (À Edouard Silas) | 6:28 |
| ❺ | Prelude No. 3 in E major – Allegro con fuoco e risoluto (À Hans von Bülow) | 2:28 |
| ❻ | Fugue No. 3 in E major – Con moto (À Hans von Bülow) | 6:35 |
| ❼ | Prelude No. 4 in B minor – Largamente (À Camille Saint-Saëns) | 3:52 |
| ❽ | Fugue No. 4 in B minor – Allegro moderato (À Camille Saint-Saëns) | 7:28 |
| ❾ | Prelude No. 5 in G major – Allegro moderato (À Theodor Kirchner) | 2:37 |
| ❿ | Fugue No. 5 in G major – Con moto moderato (À Theodor Kirchner) | 7:32 |
| ⓫ | Prelude No. 6 in C minor – Adagio espressivo (À Selmar Bagge) | 2:23 |
| ⓬ | Fugue No. 6 in C minor – Andante (À Selmar Bagge) | 7:12 |

Three Pieces, Op. 71 (1867)

18:20

- | | | |
|---|---|------|
| ❿ | No. 1. Nocturne in A flat major – Andante | 5:47 |
| ⓭ | No. 2. Mazurka in F minor – Allegro | 6:37 |
| ⓮ | No. 3. Scherzo in D flat major – Allegro vivace | 5:50 |

Concert Étude in C major ‘On False Notes’ (1868)

8:05

- | | | |
|---|----------|--|
| ⓯ | Moderato | |
|---|----------|--|

Anton Rubinstein (1829–1894): Six Preludes and Fugues in Free Style, Op. 53

Three Pieces, Op. 71 • Concert Étude in C major ‘On False Notes’

Anton 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.

With 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 US 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 Groznyi* (‘Ivan IV the Terrible’) found favour but subsequently have not stood the test of time.

Viewed from the present, Rubinstein’s compositions are less significant than either his titanic pianism or his work founding the Russian Conservatory system. However, hindsight can skew the picture and during Rubinstein’s lifetime his easily appreciated musical style and dramatic sense ensured wide popularity for his compositions. The previously mentioned *Piano Concerto No. 4* and *Ivan IV Groznyi*, alongside *Don Quixote* and opera *The Demon*, were admired by Tchaikovsky, and widely performed.

Despite Rubinstein’s high hopes, however, other works such as his six symphonies, chamber music and songs sometimes exhibit fewer elements of real value, given his, on occasion, less than original development of what are often promising initial ideas. Undoubtedly the influences of Mendelssohn and Schumann are most obvious, as well as Rubinstein’s adherence to the ‘German School’ rather than the ‘Russian School’ of Balakirev, Cui, Mussorgsky, Borodin and Rimsky-Korsakov.

Rubinstein’s piano music is extensive and includes four sonatas. His *Six Preludes and Fugues* date from 1857, the *Three Pieces* from 1867 and his *Concert Étude* from 1868. By this time Rubinstein had established and directed the St Petersburg Conservatory, and was about to embark on important concert tours of Europe and the United States. During those tours he gave a formidable series of historical recitals, and undoubtedly the *Preludes and Fugues* are precursors of a developing interest in earlier keyboard composers such as J.S. Bach, whose *48 Preludes and Fugues* were almost as famous in Rubinstein’s day as they are now.

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 an arresting melange of Mendelssohnian tonalities and a Schumannesque solidity in layout although stretching across a wider range of the keyboard. The musical language restricts itself to Mendelssohn’s harmonic vocabulary, eschewing many of Schumann’s vaulting melodies and chromaticism. Nevertheless, in small scale works such as the *Preludes and Fugues* and associated pieces Rubinstein infuses many creative and attractive nuances into the main motifs that provide sufficient momentum in themselves to carry the music through to a convincing conclusion.

Six Preludes and Fugues in Free Style, Op. 53 (1857)

'Free style' refers to the fugues containing episodes when the composer abandons the strict contrapuntal manner for more Romantic flowing or chordal writing.

1–2 *No. 1 – Prelude and Fugue in A flat major*

Dedicated to Édouard Lalo, of *Symphonie espagnol* fame, this is a large-scale canvas. The massive chords of the triple-time *Prelude* introduce a theme that is carried over into the *Fugue* and characterised by downwards swooping sixths and sevenths. The high-spirited *Fugue* is in three parts during its contrapuntal sections.

3–4 *No. 2 – Prelude and Fugue in F minor*

Dedicated to Edouard Silas, a well-known 19th-century composer of Dutch origin working in London, this is an altogether more ruminative and sepia-flavoured work. A motif with a dotted quaver and dropping semitone in the *Fugue's* main subject occurs first in the triple-time *Prelude*, and both movements maintain a lyrical and rather serious mood.

5–6 *No. 3 – Prelude and Fugue in E major*

Dedicatee conductor, pianist and composer Hans von Bülow was a key figure in the 19th-century German music scene. An energetic *Prelude* prepares for the *Fugue* by announcing the *Fugue's* main theme halfway through in heavy bass octaves. The triple-time *Fugue* is more thoughtful, and alternates strict tripartite fugal writing with freely arpeggiated passages.

7–8 *No. 4 – Prelude and Fugue in B minor*

Dedicated to French composer Camille Saint-Saëns, famed for his *Carnival of the Animals*, the big, four-sectioned *Fugue* is written in fairly strict counterpoint throughout. It contains a second main theme (with triplets) which Rubinstein combines with the first using a wide variety of fugal devices showing off his compositional skills.

9–10 *No. 5 – Prelude and Fugue in G major*

Dedicatee Theodor Kirchner was a well-known German composer, pianist and organist, and there is an undeniable organ feel to this work. The *Prelude* contains triple metre heavy bass octaves that persist doggedly in semitones, while the tripartite *Fugue* main subject projects a semi-tonal character. The whole *Fugue* is fairly strictly contrapuntal.

11–12 *No. 6 – Prelude and Fugue in C minor*

Dedicatee Selmar Bagge was a composer and music editor, managing a number of distinguished German and Austrian music journals throughout his career. The rather wistful *Prelude* contains only one characteristically Rubinstein outburst. The spacious *Fugue* shares its main theme with the *Prelude* and the theme undergoes myriad differing iterations during Rubinstein's lengthy development process. A number of fairly colourful chromaticisms occur which might have caused the conservative Bagge a little discomfort!

Three Pieces, Op. 71 (1867)

13 *No. 1. Nocturne in A flat major – Andante*

14 *No. 2. Mazurka in F minor – Allegro*

15 *No. 3. Scherzo in D flat major – Allegro vivace*

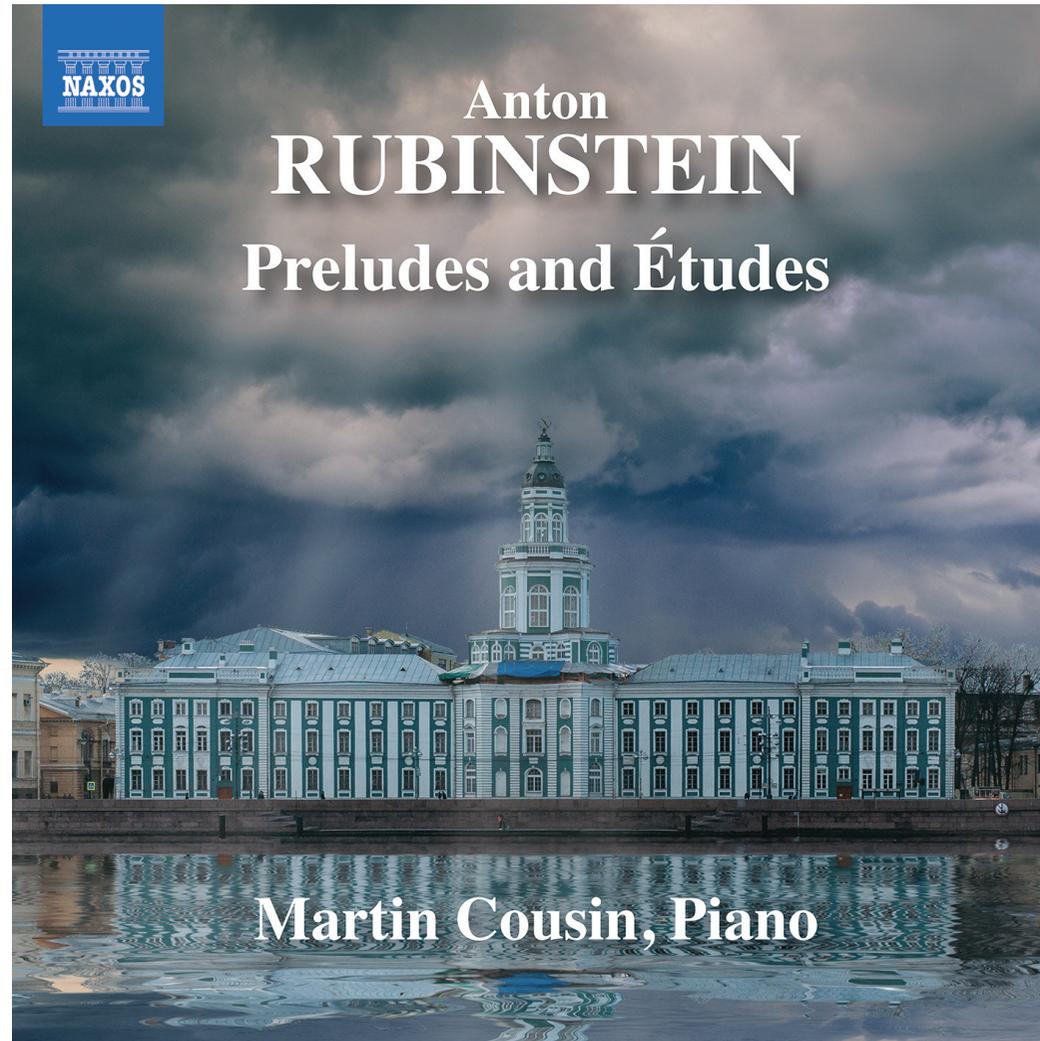
Described in Alphonse Leduc's edition as *Trois Morceaux*, these are indeed small-scale character works well suited for performance in drawing rooms of the day. Their thematic material charms and entertains, perhaps, rather than plumbing the deepest emotions, although they are written with the greatest skill and refinement, far above the average Romantic salon music. The musical language of all is Mendelssohnian, with *Nocturne* displaying some delightful rhythmic inflexions caused by triplets in the accompaniment and duplets in the themes. *Mazurka* springs a surprise with a harp-like coda section in F major, while the gentle syncopations of *Scherzo's* middle section contrasts pleasantly with its deliciously rhythmic main theme.

16 Concert Étude in C major 'On False Notes' (1868)

A display piece with both visual and sonic entertainment value, fast rolling arpeggios are consistently interrupted by the opposite hand reaching over to a 'wrong note' appoggiatura that is instantly corrected, like an errant pupil attempting to disguise mistakes.

Rodney Smith

Also available



8.574426

Martin Cousin



Photo: Jack Liebeck

Martin Cousin is regarded as one of the most exceptional pianists of his generation, having been awarded First Prize at the 2005 Ettore Pozzoli International Piano Competition and the Gold Medal at the 2003 Royal Over-Seas League Annual Music Competition. Cousin regularly appears at major British music venues, and has performed internationally since graduating from the Royal College of Music, making his London solo debut at the Purcell Room in 1998. He has appeared as a soloist with the London Philharmonic, Hallé, Royal Philharmonic, Philharmonia and BBC Concert orchestras. 2006 saw the release of his debut album of Rachmaninov's *Sonata No. 1* and *Morceaux de salon* (SOMM Recordings), which was selected as 'classical CD of the week' by the *Daily Telegraph*, and his 2014 release of Rachmaninov's *Études-tableaux* was acclaimed by *The Observer*, receiving a five-star review. Cousin is also a member of the Aquinas Piano Trio, and his hands were featured in the Oscar-winning film *Shine*.

www.martincousin.com

Anton Rubinstein's remarkable virtuoso career during the 19th century coincided almost exactly with the final developments of the modern piano. The increasing popularity of the instrument combined with Rubinstein's formidable execution earned him enormous popularity as a performer. The *Six Preludes and Fugues in Free Style* are major works, each piece dedicated and alluding to famous composers and performers of the day. The charming *Three Pieces* are small-scale character works, while the *Concert Étude in C major* is a witty display piece in which 'wrong notes' are instantly corrected, like an errant pupil attempting to disguise mistakes.

Anton
RUBINSTEIN
(1829–1894)

Piano Works

- | | | |
|--------------|--|--------------|
| 1–12 | Six Fugues en style libre introduites de préludes, Op. 53
(‘Six Preludes and Fugues in Free Style’) (1857) | 59:50 |
| 13–15 | Three Pieces, Op. 71 (1867) | 18:20 |
| 16 | Concert Étude in C major ‘On False Notes’ (1868) | 8:05 |

Martin Cousin, Piano

A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet.

Recorded: 6–7 January 2022 at Trinity Recital Hall, Trinity School, Croydon, UK

Producer, engineer and editor: Jim Unwin • Booklet notes: Rodney Smith

Publishers: W. Bessel & Cie. / Edition Peters Leipzig **1–12**, Éditions Alphonse Leduc **13**,

E. Gérard et Cie. **14 15**, Muzgiz –Urtext edition by Konstantin Igumnov (1945) **16**

Cover photograph: *The Gulf of Finland, St Petersburg* by Zolich (www.shutterstock.com)

© & © 2023 Naxos Rights (Europe) Ltd • www.naxos.com