



TOCCATA
CLASSICS

Recorded on 23 May 2013 (Sonata No. 4) and 7–8 January 2014 in the Murchison Performing Arts Center
at the University of North Texas, Denton

Producer-Editor: Matt Bowers

Engineer: Blair Liikala

Tuner: Cyrillus Aerts

Booklet essay by Paul Conway

Design and layout: Paul Brooks, paulmbrooks@virginmedia.com

Executive producer: Martin Anderson

TOCC 0216

© 2014, Toccata Classics, London

© 2014, Toccata Classics, London

Come and explore unknown music with us by joining the Toccata Discovery Club. Membership brings you two free CDs, big discounts on all Toccata Classics recordings and Toccata Press books, early ordering on all Toccata releases and a host of other benefits, for a modest annual fee of £20. You start saving as soon as you join. You can sign up online at the Toccata Classics website at www.toccataclassics.com.

Toccata Classics CDs are also available in the shops and can be ordered from our distributors around the world, a list of whom can be found at www.toccataclassics.com. If we have no representation in your country, please contact:

Toccata Classics, 16 Dalkeith Court, Vincent Street, London SW1P 4HH, UK

Tel: +44/0 207 821 5020 E-mail: info@toccataclassics.com



TOCCATA
CLASSICS

Anatoly ALEXANDROV



Piano Music Volume Two

Piano Sonata No. 1, Op. 4
Piano Sonata No. 2, Op. 12
Piano Sonata No. 4, Op. 19
Piano Sonata No. 6, Op. 26
Lyric Suite No. 1, Op. 33
Two Passages, Op. 16a
Two Pieces, Op. 3

Kyung-Ah Noh, piano

INCLUDES FIRST RECORDINGS

ANATOLY ALEXANDROV: PIANO MUSIC, VOLUME TWO

by Paul Conway

In 1927 the critic Viktor Belyayev wrote: 'Whenever discussion turns to most modern Russian composers who are working today within the borders of their motherland, it is above all the names of Myaskovsky, Feinberg and Alexandrov that are mentioned as the most outstanding representatives of the new era.'¹ When these words were written, Anatoly Alexandrov was at the height of his fame and, although his reputation subsequently declined, he continued to compose up to the end of his very long life. One of the neglected figures of the Russian school of pianism that includes Balakirev, Taneyev, Skryabin, Medtner, Rachmaninov, Myaskovsky, Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Gilels and Richter and many others, his distinctive, wide-ranging and prolific output warrants thorough investigation. This second volume in the first-ever comprehensive conspectus of his piano works focuses on the first two decades of his mature creativity as he adopts and adapts various existing models, eventually transcending them to forge his own personal style.

Anatoly Nikolayevich Alexandrov was born in Moscow on 25 May (18 May Old Style) 1888. His mother, a piano teacher, had been a pupil of Tchaikovsky at the Moscow Conservatoire. She provided her son with his earliest musical education before sending him in 1907 to study counterpoint and composition privately with Tchaikovsky's protégé Sergei Taneyev, which resulted in further lessons with Taneyev's pupil Nikolai Zhilyayev. Taneyev's reactionary outlook and instruction and Zhilyayev's avidly progressive attitude, embracing the most recent scores by Skryabin and Debussy, were antithetical but equally formative influences on the young Alexandrov and he endeavoured to reconcile them throughout his career. His earliest works, such as the Six Preludes, Op. 1, were admired by Myaskovsky, Rachmaninov and Medtner, who became a friend.

Alexandrov attended the Moscow Conservatoire from 1910 to 1915, where he studied theory with Sergei Vasilenko, composition with Alexander Ilyinsky and piano with Konstantin Igumnov. He graduated with a gold medal. In addition to the continuing influence of Skryabin and Medtner, Alexandrov was also affected by the music and personality of his fellow-student and close friend Alexei Stanchinsky (1888–1914), a troubled and unstable character whose tragically early death by drowning was possibly suicide.

¹ As quoted by Christoph Flamm in the notes for *Piano Music by Anatoly Alexandrov* (Hyperion CDA67328, released in 2002).

Kyung-Ah Noh was born in 1982 in Seoul, South Korea. She started to play the piano at the age of seven and studied with Eun Kyung Park at Deokwon Art High School, playing in the KBS (Korean Broadcasting System) Exhibition Hall in Seoul as a representative of the Music Department. From 2001 until 2005 she took a Bachelor's degree at the Kyung Hee University with Leda Kim and Joo Hyun Cho and received her Master's degree at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, with Bruce Brubaker, in 2008. There she was a winner in the Honor Competition, playing Busoni's Toccata in Jordan Hall – a performance included on a CD of the New England Conservatory in 2009, *NEC: It's about the music*. She participated in a Messiaen centenary concert in Jordan Hall and played as a representative of the piano department in an NEC 'Commencement' concert. She continued her studies with Joseph Banowetz at the University of North Texas in Denton, where she held a teaching fellowship for three years.



At home she has won a number of piano competitions, including those held by *The Korea Daily News*, the National Filial Piety Music Contest and the Korean Piano Academics Association in South Korea. Further afield, she won first prize in the International Piano Workshop Competition in Varna, Bulgaria, in 2010.

Her interest in chamber music was encouraged by coaching from Mai Motobuchi and Stephen Drury at the New England Conservatory of Music and with Igor Borodin, George Papich and Susan Dubois at the University of North Texas. She has participated in master-classes with Balázs Fülei, Joseph Standford, Mihail Milkov and Murray McLachlan. She holds the Peggy Boston Duggan piano scholarship at the University of North Texas, where in August 2014 she was awarded a doctoral degree, with a dissertation on *Gordon Binkerd's Intermezzo from Essays for the Piano (1976): A Comprehensive Analysis of Brahmsian Compositional Influence and Stylistic Elements*.

The first volume of her survey of the piano music of Anatoly Alexandrov was received with universal applause. Philip Buttall's reaction, in a review for MusicWeb International, was typical:

Kyung-Ah Noh does a splendid job throughout. Technically unflawed, she plays with immense power when called for, but is equally able to command the subtlest 'pianissimo'. She has a real empathy for the style, and certainly as a musical ambassador for this underrated composer, Toccata Classics has come up with a truly first-rate and well-qualified exponent.

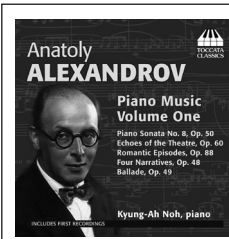
culminating in the welcome recurrence of the memorable main theme. After a touch of apprehension, the closing bars are coolly serene.

Following two movements of melodic fecundity, the third [12] introduces some grit. But before this finale gets fully underway, there is a brief prefatory statement in the form of a rhetorical flourish. The main material, presaged in the introduction, is a spiky, march-like motif rather than a broad theme and its mercurial nature impacts upon the subsidiary ideas, which include a fugal passage and various dance-like episodes. The light-hearted conclusion relates back to the untroubled mood of the opening bars of the work.

Neoclassical in feel, the Sixth Sonata signals a paring back of some of the excesses of Alexandrov's earlier style. Listeners may hear shades of Prokofiev in the slow movement and Shostakovich in the finale, Alexandrov having apparently reoriented his primary sources of inspiration from venerated older figures to younger contemporaries.

The *Little Suite No. 1, Op. 33*, dates from 1929 and consists of four short character pieces. In the first, 'Fairy Lullaby' [13], a gentle and measured *berceuse* is set against a mock-menacing *staccato* figure in the bass. The following 'Etude' [14] is a motoric toccata with a contrasting folk-like central episode marked '*come una canzonetta popolare*'. The most substantial piece in the set is an expressive 'Mélodie' [15] which incorporates a capricious middle section and ends in quiet reverie. Entitled 'A Joke', the finale [16] features a barbed idea with scrunchy semitonal chords accompanying a scurrying main theme. A trio-like segment is florid and elaborately ornamented, and the tautening of the tempo near the end adds sparkle to a good-humoured romp. The first, second and fourth pieces in the Suite have knowing, throwaway endings suggesting that the composer does not expect this collection, though crafted with his customary fastidiousness, to be taken too seriously.

Paul Conway is a freelance writer specialising in twentieth century and contemporary British music. He has reviewed regularly for The Independent and Tempo, provided programme notes for The BBC Proms and the Edinburgh, Spitalfields and Three Choirs Festivals and contributed chapters to books on John McCabe and Robert Simpson.



Previously from Toccata Classics...

‘It’s always refreshing to discover a new composer, especially one like Alexandrov who still holds an honoured place in Russia, yet remains virtually unknown elsewhere. [...] In terms of the pure pianism, South Korean-born Kyung-Ah Noh does a splendid job throughout. [...] The piano affords all the necessary depth of tone at the bass end, with glittering clarity in the treble register, while the recording itself has faithfully captured every nuance and dynamic to perfection.’

Philip Buttall, MusicWeb International

TOCC 0186

From 1916 Alexandrov was active as a pianist, giving many recitals. In 1923 he joined the faculty of Moscow Conservatoire. He was appointed Professor of Composition in 1926 and remained in that post until his retirement. It was perhaps during the mid-1920s, before the rise of Shostakovich and the homecoming of Prokofiev, that his reputation was at its height in the USSR.

From the beginning of the 1930s he began to write in a more traditional late-Romantic idiom than hitherto. Early modernist tendencies – intense dissonance and chromaticism, as part of a Skryabinesque expressionism – were subsumed within more established forms.

In his later years he received several state awards, culminating in People's Artist of the USSR in 1971, but he held no political posts and, apart from giving song-recitals with his wife, the singer Nina Alexandrova, withdrew from public musical life. He died in Moscow, aged almost 94, on 16 April 1982.

Alexandrov's prolific output contains two symphonies, a piano concerto, five operas (one of them for children), four string quartets and a considerable number of songs. He also edited the music of other composers, including Tchaikovsky's string quartets for the complete edition of his works. But it is his piano music, and in particular the fourteen piano sonatas composed between 1914 and 1971, that most comprehensively map his evolution as a creative artist. Together with his songs, the sonatas form the core of his output. The first three are all compact, single-movement structures, influenced by Lisztian models and, more immediately, by Skryabin. The composer himself indicated² that up to the Eighth Sonata (1939–44), the odd numbers reflect 'modernism' and the even ones 'Medtner', though having experienced the music itself, listeners may not agree with this sweeping assessment.

The *Two Pieces, Op. 3*, were written in 1913, while Alexandrov was studying at the Conservatoire, and revised six years later. The first, a deeply expressive Nocturne [1], gains in intensity and complexity as it unfolds. An agitated central section has a nightmarish quality, suggesting a scaled-down descendent of such proto-Expressionist works as Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* and the central movements of Mahler's Seventh Symphony. After a central climax is attained, the opening material returns, now in the left hand with filigree right-hand adornments. The second of the pieces, a Waltz [2], is an elegant, balletic miniature with a contrasting idea of eloquent simplicity.

Composed in 1914 at the same time as Alexandrov was working on his First String Quartet, the *Piano Sonata No. 1 in F sharp minor, Op. 4* [9], was known by its Russian title 'Sonata-Skazka' or the German 'Märchen-Sonate'. The first of three consecutive single-movement examples in the genre, it is concise and fluent, with a marked delicacy and subtlety of expression. The main theme is so all-pervasive that the piece is virtually monothematic, although the variety of accompanying textures and rhythms ensures there is no risk of monotony. In particular, an undulating five-note *ostinato* seems to haunt the work, lending it the fairy-tale quality alluded to in its subtitle. Medtner's influence, as well as that of Skryabin, was detected by contemporary commentators,

² Quoted without further attribution in *ibid*.

and not only in relation to its title and single-span format. Perhaps because of the conspicuousness of its models, Alexandrov became dissatisfied with the piece and in 1964 reworked the material into an entirely new sonata, his Thirteenth, Op. 90, which preserves from the original its principal theme, coda, subtitle and dedication, to the composer's brother.

The **Piano Sonata No. 2 in D minor, Op. 12**, dates from 1918 and is marked *Allegro agitato* [3]. As it is dedicated to Medtner, the single-movement form might be regarded as a tribute to the older composer's own one-movement sonatas. Though not overtly programmatic, its deeply expressive nature, sense of conflict and ultimate triumph could be regarded as Alexandrov's personal response to societal changes at the start of the Soviet era.

The Second Sonata is an advance over its predecessor both in technical virtuosity and clarity of purpose. It has more sharply defined themes and develops protean material with wider-reaching powers of invention. Its taut construction evolves organically, taking most of its material from the opening theme, an ardent and impetuous idea given rhythmic bite by its accompanying syncopated chords. This expressive potential of the principal subject is exploited thoroughly before the song-like secondary theme appears, in F major. Stark juxtapositions of contrasting material characterise the strikingly volatile development section, which ranges in spirit from baleful to tranquil and includes a vigorous march-like section underpinned by a crabbed *ostinato* in octaves. The cathartic, dance-like coda brings the piece to a celebratory close with both chief subjects transformed into D major.

Alexandrov's **Piano Sonata No. 4 in C major, Op. 19**, was completed in May 1922 and revised in 1954. It marked a new departure in his approach to the medium in that from now on he abandoned the single span in favour of multi-movement structures. The majority of his remaining eleven examples are in three movements, which allows him a wider range of expression and the opportunity to explore more fully divergent moods. The Fourth Sonata nevertheless has an overridingly dramatic character, reminiscent of the Second in its passionate struggles and culminant euphoric optimism. The differences between the various musics within the piece are even more clear-cut, with effulgent, song-like episodes contrasted with fevered marches and victory hymns. This more direct approach was continued by Alexandrov for the ensuing decade.

The character of the piece is crystallised in its commanding opening statement [6] which acts as a motto-theme, inaugurating and rounding off the score. On its first appearance, it is marked *provocatamente*, capturing a sense of upheaval and personal striving. Contrasting episodes imbue the piece with emotional depth. After a short transition, the secondary material is diverse, consisting of a grim march-like section, a sardonic dance-like idea and a quiet but unsettled passage. In the eventful development section, this rich expository material is fully worked out in a contest between forces of good and evil. A climax is reached with the first theme triumphing over the antipathetic secondary ideas, which are sidelined in the recapitulation. In the trenchant coda, the main theme once again predominates.

The slow movement, combining elements of ternary and sonata form, begins in darkly introspective and probing mood [7]. A second theme takes the form of a wistful and warm melody. A leisurely *fugato* launches the

central section, exploiting both main subjects. A brash march-like idea, in the nature of a revolutionary song, momentarily disrupts the contemplative atmosphere. The material of the first section returns but traces of the march resurface in the coda.

The tempestuous, minor-key finale [8] begins with a dramatic and stormy theme, implying that the first movement had ended with a pyrrhic victory. The second theme has a sorrowful quality intensified in the recapitulation. The central section begins in contemplation but becomes gradually more animated. After a series of dramatic tussles, the opening theme reappears in a gesture of thematic unity and soon gains ascendancy to triumph decisively over the forces of darkness.

The Fourth Sonata indicates a development in terms of concision of form and intensity of feeling. Any textural extravagance now feels more affiliated to the main argument rather than being merely decorative in function. Bravura elements remain in evidence, though again these are subsumed compellingly into the ongoing musical narrative. This high watermark in Alexandrov's considerable corpus of keyboard pieces was widely admired and critically acclaimed, and is surely deserving of an occasional performance, if not a place in the international repertory.

In the *Two Passages from the Music to M. Maeterlinck's Drama 'Ariana and Bluebeard', Op. 16a* (1923) – Alexandrov had written the incidental music for a production in 1920 – the first piece, 'Amethysts' [4], is an evocative *cantilena* with delicate tracery and a hypnotic, *ostinato* accompaniment. The following toccata-like vignette, entitled 'The Enchanted Castle' [5], features another repeated figure, this time in the right hand. A charming theme, in the manner of a folksong and a relative of the main melody of 'Amethysts', is stated twice, deftly placed in the inner voices upon its second appearance.

The **Piano Sonata No. 6 in G major, Op. 26**, dates from 1926. Here Alexandrov finds a new simplicity – which does not preclude passages of considerable intricacy. There is an unforced elegance which is partly the result of airy and limpid textures. Allied to this approach is a concision and restraint in Alexandrov's treatment of his distinctive ideas.

The graceful opening movement [10] is a cogent and easily assimilated sonata-allegro the formal proportions of which are as satisfying as its well-defined themes. The memorable opening main subject is relaxed and spontaneous. Its crisp, attenuated lines are a significant shift from the thicker sonorities of the preceding sonatas and point the way forward to the generally lighter textures of the eight examples to come. Expansive and ornate, the second subject maintains the buoyant mood already established. In the development section and twice during the condensed recapitulation, a motif appears in the lower reaches of the keyboard which prefigures the principal theme of the finale (it also appears in the second movement, becoming something of a motto-theme and lending the sonata a convincing thematic unity).

The Romance-like central slow movement, in E flat minor [11], opens with an eloquent, lyrical utterance of touching directness. At its centre lies a darker, more unsettled subject which attains an expressive peak