

*EARLY
DEPARTURES*

MATEI VARGA

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TUDOR DUMITRESCU (1957-1977)

7 Preludes

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| 1 | I. Lento languido | 2:30 |
| 2 | II. Allegro impetuoso | 1:35 |
| 3 | III. Andante molto rubato | 1:26 |
| 4 | IV. Allegretto (Tempo di valzer) | 1:07 |
| 5 | V. Molto animato ed agitato | 2:32 |
| 6 | VI. Sereno | 2:17 |
| 7 | VII. Largo e sonoro | 1:57 |
| 8 | Prelude in C-sharp Minor | 1:49 |
| 9 | Prelude in B Minor | 6:12 |

DINU LIPATTI (1917-1950)

10 Sonata Romantica, WoO. – B.13 5:58

11 Little Suite: Prelude, WoO. – B.35 0:46

12 Nocturne in A Minor (on a Moldavian theme), WoO. – B.14 3:14

13 Nocturne in F-sharp Minor, Op. 6 - B.20 5:28

LEOŠ JANÁČEK (1854-1928)

In the Mists

14 I. Andante 3:58

15 II. Molto adagio 5:13

16 III. Andantino 4:32

17 IV. Presto 4:54

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)

18 Concerto in D Minor (after Allesandro Marcello), BWV 974: II. Adagio 4:27

total time 60:02



My teachers used to tell me that music is always sad. No matter how elating, how luminous, or how joyful - there is always an undercurrent of regret and sadness in any great piece of music. Perhaps this mirrors a characteristic Eastern European outlook on life, or maybe I just had professors in need of anti-depressants... As a teenager I had trouble grasping this concept and I complained (sometimes *whined*) to my parents that I was misunderstood and stopped cold in the tracks of my youthful enthusiasm. As time went by, I whined less... and eventually I decided to dedicate my first recital album to the exploration of this idea.

As if the melancholy and longing mood of my musical roots weren't sufficiently gloomy, I decided to pay homage to pianists who died young and who, while showing tremendous gifts, could not fulfill their entire potential as composers. We all know Dinu Lipatti, whose centenary we celebrated in 2017, as one of the truly great piano masters of all time. Fewer of us are aware, though, of his great desire to become a respected composer and his few but vivid attempts to fulfill that dream. He grew up surrounded by some of the most prominent names of that era: he was George Enescu's godson, Nadia Boulanger's pupil in Paris, and met Paul Dukas and Maurice Ravel during his student years at Ecole Normale. His writing borrows the subtle folklore undercurrent so typical of Enescu's writing, the crisp and elegant suppleness of Ravel and occasionally the more adventurous and daring gestures of Dukas. I am honored to present here two little gems that have never

been recorded before: the *Little Suite: Prelude*, WoO. – B.35 (none of the other projected movements were ever completed) and the *Sonata Romantica*, WoO. – B.13 which, in under 6 minutes, is a marvelous mixture of Lipatti's best attributes as both composer and performer: elegance, nobility, graceful fire and authenticity.

Tudor Dumitrescu is much less known, but I dare say that is only because he died much younger (he was only 19 when the big 1977 earthquake in Bucharest literally crushed him under the ruins). I first saw Tudor in a faded black-and-white video recording in which he was performing the Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 1 with the youthful exuberance of a young Van Cliburn and the perfect technical command of a mature Pollini. That recording was my first *professional crush* and one that inspired me to reach for new horizons in my first years of study. Tudor didn't leave us much music, but the 9 *Preludes* recorded



here are proof enough of his genius. I remember going to visit his mother - a picture of serene resignation - in order to receive from her own hands the score of these Preludes. She would move quietly through the rather austere apartment (I can see her whenever I play *Prelude VI*), pointing to pieces of fabric and broken objects which she saved from the debris of the earthquake. She would go at least once every day to the cemetery to visit his grave. And yet, with the exception, perhaps, of the *B minor Prelude*, finished days before the earthquake and unsettlingly premonitory, Tudor's music has a youthful glow quite untouched by bitterness and tragedy.

These two stories are why it felt necessary to include the Janáček suite, which in my view represents *the other half* of young death: the tragedy felt by those who survived, parents who lost their children and had to embrace grieving and find their way out of the mists of despair. For me, the hardest thing I ever had to do was tell my spouse that her son had died. That agonizing experience forced me to find my way through the emotional swamp of *In the*

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Mists (V mlhach) in a way that was, I imagine, similar to Janáček's complex emotional response to the death of his 21 year old daughter, Olga. Janáček wrote *In the Mists* soon after her death of typhoid fever, pouring into this strange music feelings of anger, confusion, regret and inconsolable loss—not only related to the death of his child but also to his frustration of not receiving the professional recognition he rightly deserved.

Aside from Janáček, this evocation of the early departed has surprisingly little harshness. What comes through while listening to Lipatti, Dumitrescu and the ever serene Bach is more the soothing and embracing voice of love - love of life, love of music and love of giving something of yourself to others - rather than the lament of pain. And yet, I believe this particular program makes a strong case for my teachers' belief: great music always comes from pain, even when it (almost) fully transcends it. The album is dedicated to all my mentors, past, present and future.

—Matei Varga



MATEI VARGA

Matei Varga’s artistry has received standing ovations from audiences around the world and superlative reviews from prominent critics. Noting that “it is hard to find the right words to describe the beauty” of Mr. Varga’s playing, *Corriere della Sera*’s chief critic Paolo Isotta praised the young artist as a “true poet of the keyboard, a musician of depth, and a genuine artist.” Other critics have found his performances “impressive” (*Gramophone*, 2016), “magical” (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 2009), “colorful, vivacious [and] engaging” (*Le Diapason*, 2012).

Discovered at age 10 by soprano Mariana Nicolesco, he went on to win top prizes at the *George Enescu International Piano Competition* and the *International Maria Canals Piano Competition*. Mr. Varga is also a recipient of the *Salon de Virtuosi* Career Grant and a runner-up at the Vendome Prize in Lisbon, where he was singled out

by Elisabeth Leonskaja who awarded him a special prize. He has appeared as a soloist and recitalist in many of the world’s leading concert halls, among them Carnegie Hall and Alice Tully Hall, Konzerthaus Berlin, the Auditorium du Louvre, National Center for the Performing Arts Beijing, Palau de la Música in Barcelona, the Romanian Athenaeum and Radio Hall in Bucharest. He is a frequent collaborator of cellist Laura Metcalf, violinist Gregory Harrington and recently has joined star ballerina Alina Cojocaru in performances at New York City Center and Jazz at Lincoln Center.

Mr. Varga holds degrees from the Romanian National University of Music, where he studied with Sandu Sandrin, Ana Pitis and Ioana Minei, and the Mannes School of Music, where he studied with Pavlina Dokovska. He lives in New York City and is an avid collector of plush bunnies.





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