

Brahms: Sonata in C major, Op. 1

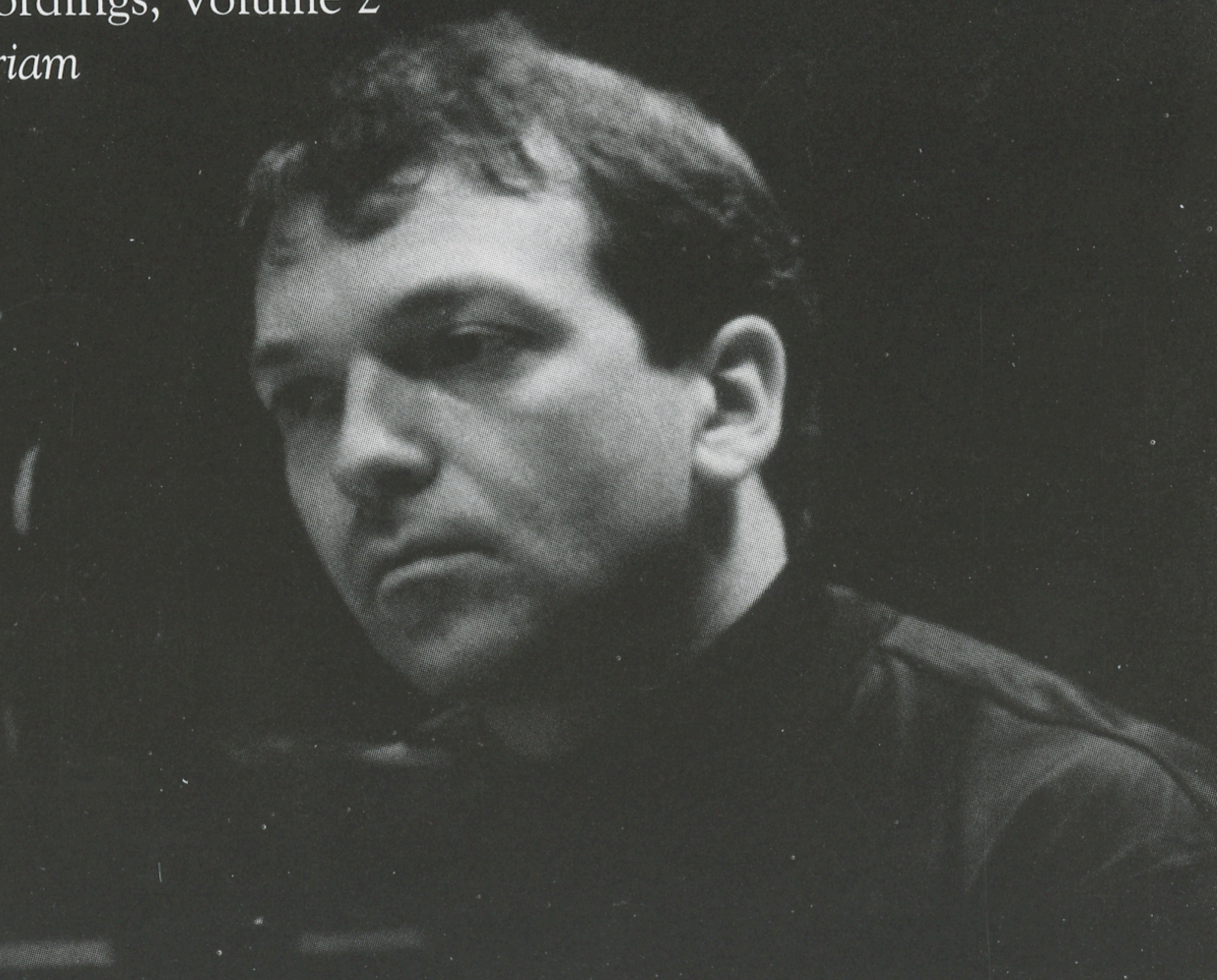
Chopin: 2 Preludes; Impromptu;
Grande Valse Brillante

Prokofiev: Sonata No. 6 in A major, Op. 82



CRC 2770

Andrew De Grado, piano
Live Recordings, Volume 2
In Memoriam



Brahms—Sonata in C major, Op. 1

In 1848, fifteen-year-old Brahms gave his first piano solo recital, followed by another the next year, in which he performed Beethoven's Waldstein Sonata. His performances were not well received, and as a result his career as a virtuoso had to come to an end. It was at that time that he realized that composition, not performance, was his real vocation, as he strongly felt that he could offer much more in that venue. The years that followed were years of personal and professional growth, during which Brahms virtually devoured every book he could lay his hand on. He also began work on several compositions, among them the Scherzo in E-flat minor, Op. 4, the Piano Sonata in F-sharp minor and the Sonata in C major, which he completed in 1853 (the first, second, and fourth movements were created that year, the second the year before.) The resemblance of the first theme to the beginning of Beethoven's Hammerklavier Sonata, and its repetition a tone lower (a harmonic feature present in the Waldstein Sonata), betray the young composer's devotion to Beethoven. A dense development section, the contrapuntal elaboration of the main theme in the transitional passage, and the powerful coda that is attached to the recapitulation are other features that can be traced back to Beethoven. The slow movement incorporates free variations on the old Minnelied, *Verstohlen geht der Mond auf*. This movement comes in sharp contrast with the following boisterous and extroverted Scherzo, which also features a soaring, very romantic trio. The theme from the first movement is

rhythmically transformed in the very vivid and energetic Finale, while an interjected folk-song melody provides a short, momentary relief. According to Brahms himself, Robert Burns's poem, *My Heart's In The Highlands* inspired him in this movement.

Chopin—Prelude in A-flat major, Op. Posthumous—Prelude in C-sharp minor, Op. 45

Chopin's short solitary Prelude in A-flat major was composed in 1834, two years before the set of Preludes, Op. 28. Although a sparkling, dashing miniature, it is rarely performed. The Prelude, Op. 45, on the other hand, is very much in the reflective yet flowing character of the nocturne. The melancholy and almost undefined melodic line is enveloped in descending arpeggiated eighth-note figures that constantly glide through different keys, imbuing the theme in new light and shades. The chromatic cadenza in double notes is very reminiscent of a like section in Chopin's Etude Op. 10, No. 3 preceding the restatement of the main melody.

Chopin—Impromptu in G-flat, Op. 51

The great piano master experimented with the Impromptu form as early as 1834, with his Fantaisie-Impromptu, which he didn't publish because of its plagiarism of Moscheles's Impromptu in E-flat, Op. 89. The three impromptus, Op. 29, 36, and 51 were composed in 1837, 1839, and 1842 respectively. The subtle, rich in chromatic twists soprano *cantilena* of the side sections is opposed by

the gorgeous tenor descending lines of the middle one. This cello-like line gains dramatic power in each restatement, masterfully leading back to the tenderness of the first theme. Andrew thought of this Impromptu as one of Chopin's most poetic inspirations.

Chopin—Grande Valse Brillante, Op. 34, No. 1

In August of 1835, Chopin's parents made their first trip abroad, first to Carlsbad, where Chopin soon joined them and spent a month together with the Marquis de Custine at Enghien. Later in September, they went to Tetschen where they were guests of the Thun-Hohensteins, a rich and cultivated family. It was on the 15th of that month, after his parents had left for Poland, that Chopin composed his luscious A-flat major Waltz for the Hohenstein ladies. During the same time, Chopin fell under the spell of Maria Wodzinska, the sister of three of his boyhood friends, sons of a wealthy landowner. This Waltz reflects the aristocratic milieu, which surrounded the composer, mixed with his exuberant, youthful romantic inclinations and light-hearted spirits.

Prokofiev—Sonata No. 6 in A major, Op. 82

In 1939, Prokofiev sketched three of his late sonatas, Nos. 6, 7, and 8, often referred to as "war sonatas". The sixth was completed in 1939 and was broadcast on Radio Moscow in a premier by the composer. The Great Russian pianist Sviatoslav Richter writes in his memoirs: "I was amazed with the singular clarity and constructive perfection of

his music, I never before heard the like. With great boldness the composer broke with romantic ideals and imbued in his music the stormy pulse of the 20th century." The first and fourth movements are the most powerful emotionally. The first starts with a rhythmic and angular three-note descending scalar figure in thirds, outlining both the A major and A minor modes. This motive serves as a unifying element for the entire movement, continuously interacting and with other themes and surrounding them in extreme registers of the piano. The second movement displays a light and typically ironic scherzo quality, while the third is a slow, deeply lyrical waltz. The fourth movement, entirely energetic and explosive, brings back one of the main thematic ideas of the first movement, as well as the initial motive, which is boldly stated in the final conclusion, in a way that gives the sonata a cyclical character.

References by Christos Tsitsaros

Geiringer, Karl. *Brahms, His Life and Works*.

George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1948.

Hedley, Arthur. *Chopin*. J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., London, 1963.

Nestyev, Israel V. *Prokofiev*, Trans. Florence Jonas. Stanford University Press, San Francisco, CA, 1960.

Andrew George De Grado

Andrew George De Grado (1960-1998) was a virtuoso – a world-class pianist, a brilliantly gifted collaborator, and a beloved, inspiring, teacher and mentor.

Mr. De Grado was born in Paterson, New Jersey on September 15, 1960, the son of Libby and Costabile De Grado, and sister of Deborah Susan. At the age of four, he started formal piano studies and began giving solo recitals by the age of twelve. Through Mr. De Grado's early years, he dazzled judges at competitions with great technical skill as well as heartfelt expression. Carol Ferri, former adjunct professor of piano at Kean University's Department of Music, first heard him play at the Music Educators' Association of New Jersey Annual Audition when he was ten. Realizing his talent, Ms. Ferri and her husband Gustave Ferri were instrumental in sending him to study with Russian pedagogue Genia Robinor, teacher of many fine artists including Ms. Ferri and André Watts.

At the age of 12, Andrew was winner of the Foundation For The Performing Arts, Recital Stage, Inc., and performed a full concert at Union High School. This was indeed a proud moment for him to play on the Union High School Stage, as had his idol, Artur Rubinstein, just three months earlier. Other early performances included recitals at New York's Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, and in New Jersey at the Great Falls Festival, Drew

University, and Fairleigh Dickinson University.

During his concert career, Andrew performed as a soloist, recitalist, and chamber musician in the United States, Europe, Asia, and South America. He appeared in such prestigious venues as the Phillips Art Gallery and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington D.C. and the Chicago Cultural Center. He was also a soloist with major orchestras in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Washington D.C.

With an impeccable ear and great feeling for music, Andrew was a much sought-after collaborator for dozens of highly respected artists, including violinist Joshua Bell, pianist/conductor Ian Hobson, pianist/narrator Richard Glazier, cellists Steven Isserlis, Nathaniel Rosen and Emilio Colon, bassist/composer Edgar Meyer, clarinetist Howard Klug and saxophonist Debra Richtmeyer.

He was also one of the most respected collaborators in the studio of Distinguished Professor of Violin Josef Gingold at Indiana University, where he first became acquainted with Joshua Bell. Mr. De Grado and Mr. Bell's close friendship and mutual artistic talents eventually resulted in a music partnership that took Mr. De Grado to major concert halls throughout the world. Mr. De Grado gave several performances on WNYC's "Young American Artists" series and NPR's "Performance Today." He appeared three times with Mr. Bell on "The Tonight Show" with Johnny Carson.

Over the years, Mr. De Grado received numerous awards and honors, including a scholarship from Kean University, a fellowship from Indiana University School of Music and the prestigious Walter and Dorothy Robert Scholarship at Indiana University. He was a prizewinner at the Helen Hart International Piano Competition and the Washington International Piano Competition, and won the Indiana University Concerto Competition twice.

Mr. De Grado received a Bachelor of Arts degree, magna cum laude, from Kean University in Union, New Jersey, where he studied with Carol Ferri. He received a Master of Music degree, cum laude, in piano performance, and the highly coveted Performer's Certificate from Indiana University School of Music in Bloomington, Indiana, where he studied with Zadel Skolovsky, Michel Block, and Menahem Pressler. Andrew served as associate instructor in piano tutoring under Menahem Pressler. After completing his doctoral course music requirements, he started touring with Joshua Bell in 1990. Mr. De Grado was a member of the faculty for the String Academy at Indiana University School of Music in Bloomington, Indiana. Beginning in 1991, he served as Assistant Professor of Piano at the University of Illinois School of Music in Urbana-Champaign, Illinois.



Photo by George Rehrey

Special letter of homage and admiration by pianist Anna Klein*

This disc of piano music is a treasured gift from the mother of a remarkable artist, who exited life's stage at intermission, never to return for the second half of his program. For those of us left grieving, her work and effort in bringing Andrew's live recordings to compact disc have provided a beautiful encore from the musician and man whom time cheated.

As a former student of Andrew's, I hear his musical advice and expertise in every track. He possessed brilliant technical prowess, sophisticated agility and sheer power at the keyboard, all of which he

employed with unmatched ease and lack of pretense. Our lessons were not filled with chatter and words, rather playing a game of manual banter at the pianos. We would repeat one phrase back and forth, searching for exactly the right color and shade to bring each note's dimension and harmony to life, until one of us found it, or he decided I just needed to practice more and bring the piece back the following week. He told me one time, "Any idiot can sit and learn the right notes, but a true musician knows better. The purpose of practice is to discover. It is a process of experimenting at the keyboard." I came to understand this is how one claims ownership of the piece. Andrew truly owned the Brahms Sonata.

Paramount to any performance is sound, especially in the arena of solo piano. Every week at the start of my lesson, I loved to talk with Andrew about various recitals performed at school over the weekend. We would discuss who had the best Bach interpretation, Beethoven subito, Rachmaninoff phrasing, or sarcastic Prokofiev. Finally, he would look at the clock and tell me, "Quit procrastinating. Stop talking and start playing!" But somehow before I began that week's assignment, we always ended our recital wrap session discussing the Romantic era. He adored a rich and robust Romantic performance, one with organic rubatos, melodies full of life and flavor. His ideals and concepts are captured exquisitely in the Chopin selections.

I remember well Andrew's recital in which he

played the Prokofiev Sonata. A rainy and cold evening, audience members drearily shuffled to their seats but the moment Andrew touched the keys a blanket of warmth covered the concert hall. Our attendance that evening was indeed rewarded by a performance in which Andrew gave his all. We were treated to some of the most musically explosive, spontaneous, witty, fiery, and sensitively intimate Prokofiev interpretations I have ever heard. Andrew was shy by nature, yet on stage he became gregarious, revealing more of himself in an hour of music than an entire year's worth of private lessons. Perhaps it was the bleak weather or the fact that he knew his favorite bar/restaurant was closing soon for the night, but Andrew played the last movement of the Sonata at a terrifically fast tempo. It was exactly that edgy unpredictability which made Andrew's performances exciting and always unexpected.

Seven years have passed since Andrew's death, yet it feels like only yesterday I saw him. He was walking on campus, a large cup of coffee in hand, telling me about what music he was playing for an upcoming concert, and reminding me to practice. Taking another sip of coffee, he smiled and said, "Isn't this a beautiful day?"

We waved goodbye.

To my teacher, my mentor, my friend, I miss you.

— Anna, Monday 4 pm

*Note: Anna was a student of Professor De Grado

at the University of Illinois School of Music, Urbana-Champaign from 1996 until his death in 1998.

Andrew De Grado, piano, Live Recordings, Volume 2, In Memoriam, is the second compact disk released in cooperation with the Andrew George De Grado Foundation, Inc. Volume 2 is a wonderful follow-up to the previous compact disc, Volume 1, Robert Schumann's Humoreske, Op. 20 and Symphonic Etudes, Op. 13, which was received by all with great enthusiasm. Andrew was a romantic at heart, with a love of classical music. He always took his music very seriously and was very selective about the music he chose to perform. His playing was always sincere, heartfelt and beautifully natural.

The Andrew George De Grado Foundation, Inc. continues to pass on Andrew's musical legacy by providing opportunities for talented pianists to perform in recitals. Information about the Foundation can be found by visiting: www.andrewdegrado.org.

Recently, two Andrew George De Grado Piano Scholarship Funds were set up – one at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign and the other at Kean University in Union, New Jersey. I'm so very pleased that these scholarships will live on in perpetuity to honor my son Andrew.

The continued support, inspiration and musical input offered in memory of Andrew from his many

colleagues are very much appreciated. May the sounds of beautiful music always be with us forever.

—Libby De Grado-Condo
March, 2005

Andrew George De Grado, piano



CRC 2770

DDD

Johannes Brahms: Sonata in C major, Op. 1*	(28:24)
1 I Allegro	10:24
2 II Andante	6:14
3 III Scherzo: Allegro molto e con fuoco	5:16
4 IV Finale: Allegro con fuoco	6:23

Frédéric Chopin: 2 Preludes; Impromptu; Grande Valse Brillante**	
5 Prelude in A-flat major, Op. Posthumous	0:47
6 Prelude in C-sharp minor, Op. 45	4:40
7 Impromptu in G-flat, Op. 51	5:52
8 Grande Valse Brillante, Op. 34, No. 1	5:04

Sergei Prokofiev: Sonata No. 6 in A major, Op. 82***	(27:11)
9 Allegro moderato	7:59
10 Allegretto	4:33
11 Tempo di valzer lentissimo	7:34
12 Vivace	7:05

Total Duration: 72:03



Recorded Live, June 28, 1997*, June 28, 1996** and March 19, 1997*** at the Foellinger Great Hall of the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, Urbana, Illinois. Engineered by Jon Schoenoff. Master prepared by Joseph Patrych. Executive Producer: Victor E. Sachse. Cover: Photograph of Andrew De Grado by Rafa Martín, taken the day before his last concert on January 17, 1998.