



Anton Rubinstein
COMPLETE HARPSICHORD WORKS

Daniela Cammarano, violin
Alessandro Deljavan, piano

Cat. No.: OC139SET3
Barcode: 720189873096

Anton Grigorevich Rubinstein (Anton Grigor'evič Rubiņštejn) (1829–1894) was a Russian pianist, composer and conductor who became a pivotal figure in Russian culture when he founded the Saint Petersburg Conservatory. This 3-CD set includes all the violin and piano works including the transcription of the famous Romance.

Featured OnClassical/Ævea violinist Daniela Cammarano "produces a generally rich and fluid tone from the 1948 Vittorio Bellarosa violin". "The engineers have captured her at a close enough distance to pick up some breathing as well that varies in its obtrusiveness; and they've maintained a natural balance between the two instruments." – Robert Maxham, Fanfare.

Track-list

3 disc set

1	Sonata No. 1 in G major, Op. 13 – I. Moderato con moto	14:33:34
2	Sonata No. 1 in G major, Op. 13 – II. Moderato	02:25:82
3	Sonata No. 1 in G major, Op. 13 – IIa. Var. 1 – Allegro non troppo	02:24:20
4	Sonata No. 1 in G major, Op. 13 – IIb. Var. 2 – Moderato assai	08:23:66
5	Sonata No. 1 in G major, Op. 13 – III. Scherzo. Prestissimo	07:12:98
6	Sonata No. 1 in G major, Op. 13 – IV. Finale. Adagio non troppo. Tempo I.	11:09:73
7	3 Salon Pieces Op. 11 – I. Allegro appassionato	05:31:59
8	3 Salon Pieces Op. 11 – II. Andante. Piu mosso. Meno mosso. Tempo I	10:41:13
9	3 Salon Pieces Op. 11 – III. Allegro	06:21:33
1	Sonata No. 2 in A minor, Op. 19 – I. Allegro non troppo	12:44:44
2	Sonata No. 2 in A minor, Op. 19 – II. Scherzo. Allegro assai	07:00:08
3	Sonata No. 2 in A minor, Op. 19 – III. Adagio non troppo	14:12:61
4	Sonata No. 2 in A minor, Op. 19 – IV. Allegro	11:50:94
5	Romance in E flat major, Op. 44 No. 1	03:33:12
1	Sonata No. 3 in B minor, Op. 98 – I. Lento. Allegro vivace	13:10:47
2	Sonata No. 3 in B minor, Op. 98 – II. Moderato assai. Meno mosso. A tempo con moto	20:08:33
3	Sonata No. 3 in B minor, Op. 98 – III. Moderato assai	08:29:28
4	Sonata No. 3 in B minor, Op. 98 – IV. Allegro moderato. Presto scherzando. Tempo I...	12:35:84

Anton Rubinstein: music as a story

In many respects Anton Grigor'yevich Rubinstein (1829–1894) personifies the history of music and the role it played in Europe and beyond during the second half of the 19th century. To appreciate to what extent this is true would call for a complex analysis, which would be out of place in this brief note. One point that calls for emphasis, however, is the fact that throughout the continent musicians of the period could rely on a dynamic network of contacts and communications that allowed them to exchange experiences, knowledge and indeed scores.

Rubinstein was an *enfant prodige* whose early musical education took place in Moscow. He first performed in public at the age of ten, and a year later, in 1840, undertook his first concert tour in Europe. His performances met with remarkable acclaim, leading to encounters with Liszt and Chopin. Along with his brother Nikolai, who also played a major role in the musical history of the time, between 1844 and 1846 he studied composition in Berlin. Two years of specialisation were to follow in Vienna, before he returned in 1848 to St Petersburg, which was unquestionably the most European of the tsarist cities. His training as a musician was thus thoroughly European, and continued to be nurtured on his return to Russia, as his excellent skills as a pianist were to show. In time he won recognition

both as a composer and as one of the great virtuoso pianists, on an equal footing with famous contemporaries such as Thalberg.

Italian music played a major role in St Petersburg, where the architecture and urban layout were also distinctly Italian in style. Indeed, when Rubinstein founded the St Petersburg Conservatoire, the first of its kind in Russian history, he chose as his assistant the Italian flautist Cesare Ciardi (1818–1877). Ciardi had originally been sent there by the Tsarina Catherine to replace another Italian, Antonio Sarti, as chapel master at the imperial court. Numerous Italians had held this post in the past, including some outstanding names, such as Paisiello and Cimarosa. It was Italian opera that held sway, enjoying great success in Russia, so it is not surprising that Rubinstein should also have devoted his attention to the genre, composing a total of 17 operas, of which one, *The Demon*, based on a famous poem by Lermontov, is still part of the repertoire in Russian opera houses.

The culture of St Petersburg was also in close contact with that of France, Germany and Austria, however, which made it a unique melting pot for all the arts. In this highly European environment, almost by way of a reaction to such openness towards other cultures, the very years in which Rubinstein was reaching his artistic maturity also marked a new and fruitful return to what was indigenous and local. This was based on a constructive appreciation of the complex and articulated heritage of traditions and cultures that coexisted within the vast empire of the tsars. In 1867, the critic Vladimir Stasov coined the expression 'Group of Five' in reference to a concert in Moscow that included works by Glinka, Dargomyzhsky, Balakirev and Rimsky-Korsakov, who was later to play a fundamental role in the history of music. One important connection between him and Rubinstein lay in the fact that in 1871 he took up a teaching post at the St Petersburg Conservatoire, where his lessons became a point of reference for students of composition throughout Europe. The other musicians who ultimately made up the definitive group were Cui, Mussorgsky and Borodin, who also had strong ties with the artistic life and developments in St Petersburg that largely revolved around Rubinstein.

Rubinstein's involvement in musical education also had an entrepreneurial side to it that he passed on to his brother Nikolai, persuading him to found a music conservatoire in Moscow in 1866, along the lines of the one already active in St Petersburg. A further example of the rich cultural humus typical of that city was Rubinstein's recommendation of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, who had studied with him in St Petersburg, for a teaching post at the new musical academy in Moscow. St Petersburg was a city that attracted and trained some of the foremost Russian musicians, many of whom, like Rubinstein himself, were to influence and shape later developments in music in Russia and beyond. As for Rubinstein himself, he did not subscribe to the indigenous focus of the Five, though he did nothing to hinder them. Instead, he opted to pursue a Russian approach to composition, rather as Glinka (1804–1857) had done before him, aiming to establish a place for it within the wider context of European music.

To this end Rubinstein also composed several chamber works. Alongside some important works for the piano and a certain amount of salon pieces, he also wrote some fine trios, quartets, quintets and violin sonatas as well as the Violin Concerto

Op.46. The Violin Sonatas were written and published over a period of more than 20 years. Op.13 saw the light in 1851, to be followed four years later by No.2 Op.19. Two decades were then to pass before Rubinstein returned to the violin/piano duet. In 1878 No.3 was published as Op.98, while the Fourth and last was Op.119.

Rubinstein's maturity as a composer was particularly fruitful. Following the Violin Sonata No.3 came a Quintet for piano and strings, the fourth of his Piano Sonatas (Op.100), an impressive series of Lieder on texts by Tolstoy, his Fifth Symphony, a major oratorio, and even a Fantasy for orchestra (Op.110) called the 'Eroica', of unmistakably Beethovenian memory. This output reveals his constant connection with European musical culture, which is also evident in his choice of certain themes dear to the German-speaking world of the 19th century: that of the hero and the demon, for a start. The influence of Central Europe was also essential to his approach to the sonata, as a performance or a glance at the score clearly reveals. The three Sonatas are all extensive works, each one divided into four movements, and the alternation of the tempo indications for the individual movements appears to be far removed from the classical tradition. Moreover, the opening indications are always followed by changes in tempi (*accelerando* or *rallentando*) that almost appear to accentuate a focus on musical prosody that is lyrical but also narrative. Indeed, although Rubinstein was more than familiar with the virtuoso tradition, not least that of his own time, he rarely used the violin beyond its natural tendency towards melody. In fact, he was more inclined to entrust passages of a certain technical complexity to the piano, an instrument at which he excelled.

For all his virtuoso skill, however, Rubinstein never exaggerated. As for his thematic material, he largely turned in the direction of Brahms (1833-1897), his younger contemporary, though the way he handled themes and harmonic developments was notably different. In all three Sonatas, Rubinstein followed an approach of his own, exalting the melody and showing little interest in complex formal constructs or the sort of harmonic texture that was gaining ground in Germany at the time. From this point of view, he showed a remarkable degree of stylistic and compositional autonomy, at least with respect to tendencies in chamber music typical of Central Europe in the post-Schumann age. Instead, he tended to focus on melody, more along the lines of Chopin, contributing to a current that became influential with composers and performers of varied provenance – especially those who preferred playing their own compositions, rather than those of others, in concert performances. In this respect he had something in common with Henry Vieuxtemps (1820-1881), for example, whose Elegia Op.30 for viola and piano makes for a telling comparison. At all events, these compositions are rarely performed and have often been reductively relegated to the 'minor works' category.

The narrative ideal pursued by Rubinstein actually transcended the individual score as such. The First and Third Sonatas are clearly related, almost as though the composer wished to link up a time span that covered over 20 years, or create a sort of sequel, a conclusive second part. The

thematic material in the first movement of the First Sonata features anew in the first movement of the Third, harmonically embedded in two compatible keys: G major in the First, B minor in the Third. What is more, G major turns up again in the fifth bar

of the first movement of the Third, as though the composer wished to recall not only a motif, but also a harmony. The choice of the B minor key simply reinforces the idea that Rubinstein wanted to conclude a lengthy discourse by employing a key that was closely connected with the G major of the original sonata, in other words with the original proposition: B minor is the relative minor of D major, which in turn is the dominant of G major; this means that it is in the middle of the fifth that separates G and D (a major third above, and a minor third below), and together the three notes – G, B and D – make up the triad of the G major chord. Granted, there is something a little Proustian about this way of reconstructing history and retracing time past, or indeed lost. But Rubinstein's tempo specifications in the first bars seem to justify the approach.

A solemn piano solo in arpeggio chords precedes the exposition of themes borrowed from the First Sonata and entrusted to the violin. Like a sort of prelude, the interplay between the two instruments leads into the Allegro vivace (and appassionato, as the indication on the violin part reads), on which the composer constructs the new theme, here again derived from that of the first movement of the First Sonata. The magnificent Third Sonata emphasises in its entirety the sensation that Rubinstein's approach to music was narrative in conception. This is further reinforced by the tempo indications, which all utilise the adjective 'moderato': Moderato con moto in the first movement; Allegro moderato in the fourth; while the two central movements, both in 6/8 time, are Moderato assai at the dotted crotchet and Moderato at the quaver. In this there is something reminiscent of the novels of Turgenev (1818-1883), Rubinstein's contemporary: the image of a Russia far removed from the drama of Dostoyevsky, but nevertheless interwoven with emotional turmoil. Rubinstein's well-mannered romanticism leads to reflection, finding solace, it would seem, in the contemplation of hospitable nature.

Fabrizio Festa

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Recorded at: Teatro 'La Nuova Fenice', Osimo (Ancona), 2012
Engineer: Alessandro Simonetto
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Artwork: OnClassical.