

MARCO POLO

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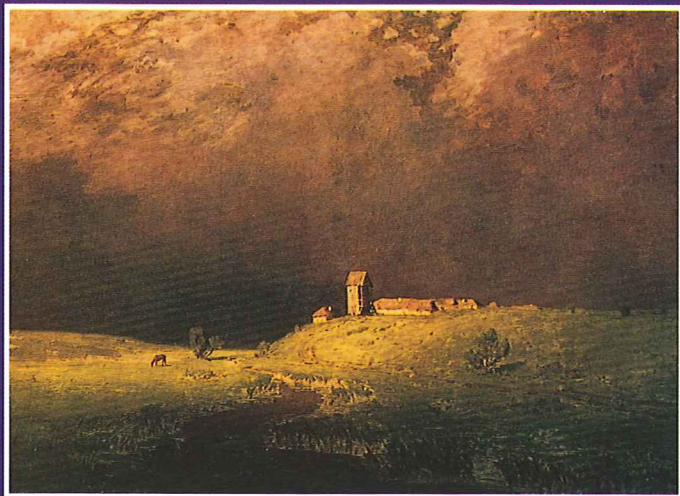
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Sergei Mikhailovich  
**LIAPUNOV**

**Piano Works**

**Sonata in F Minor • Variations on a Georgian Theme**  
**Rêverie du Soir • Toccata and Fugue in C Major**

**Dorothy Elliott Schechter**



## **Sergei Mikhailovich Liapunov (1859-1924)**

### **Piano Works**

Sergei Mikhailovich Liapunov belongs to the second generation of Russian nationalist composers, who followed in the wake of Balakirev, Rimsky-Korsakov, Borodin and Mussorgsky. His contemporaries were Liadov, Arensky, Ippolitov-Ivanov, Taneyev, Grechaninov and Glazunov. As a group they were well versed in technical skills, generally eclectic and usually less adventurous than their immediate predecessors. Their music shows a decline in the Italian influence found in Glinka, Tchaikovsky and Cui and a cultivation of German forms and styles with greater attention to the symphony, chamber music, the Lisztian symphonic poem and Wagnerian music drama.

Liapunov was born on 30 November 1859 into a cultured family in Yaroslavl, 250 kilometres northeast of Moscow. His mother, an amateur pianist, began his musical education. Later he studied at the Imperial Music School in Nizhni Novgorod (Balakirev's birthplace), and at the age of 19 he enrolled in the Moscow Conservatory on Nikolai Rubinstein's advice. There he studied piano with Karl Klindworth and Paul Pabst, both pupils of Liszt. Tchaikovsky and Taneyev taught him composition. Liapunov became enthralled with the music of the nationalist school--Balakirev's *Islamey* and Borodin's second symphony were particular favourites--and his growing dissatisfaction with the conservative Moscow curriculum led him after graduation in 1883 to St. Petersburg the following year. There he joined Balakirev's second-generation circle. A devoted disciple and lifelong friend, he became Balakirev's last major representative.

In 1893 with Balakirev and Liadov, Liapunov travelled to three northern provinces on a mission to collect folk songs for the Imperial Geographical Society. As a consequence authentic folk material soon found its way into Liapunov's compositions and became a permanent feature of his style. From 1894 onward Liapunov held various posts: assistant director of the Imperial

Chapel, Inspector at the Elena Institute, director and later head of the Free School of Music, professor of piano and theory at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, and lecturer in 1919 at the newly organized State Institute of Art. Unable to adjust to the ways of the communist regime, Liapunov chose voluntary exile in Paris and died there on 8 November 1924. Earlier he had made several tours of Western Europe as a pianist, and Soviet officialdom perpetuated the myth that he had died while away on a concert tour.

Liapunov's music encompasses two symphonies, orchestral works, two piano concertos and a Rhapsody on Ukrainian Themes, a violin concerto, numerous songs and folk song arrangements. Piano music forms a very significant part of his work. Qualitatively as well as pianistically it compares favourably with the music of Scriabin, Balakirev and Rachmaninov. His brilliant, virtuosic style has roots in Balakirev, Henselt and above all in Liszt. It is not by chance that Liapunov's magnum opus is *Douze études d'exécution transcendante*, a gigantic cycle designed as an appendix to Liszt's similarly named work and covering the remaining tonalities not treated therein. Liapunov's wonderfully sensitive harmonic colour derives from the Russian nationalists. But his primary hallmark is his innate lyricism and its narrative quality: characteristics that seem to stem from a love of the Russian land and its ancient epics. His long, expressive melodies convey a Russian, Ukrainian, Polish or even Caucasian flavour.

Nowhere in the piano music is Liapunov's fascination with the Caucasus--an enthusiasm he shared with Balakirev--more apparent than in *Variations on a Georgian Theme*, op. 60. In pianistic exploitation it has much in common with *Islamey*. Its composition occupied Liapunov almost a full year, from 23 June 1914 until 9 June 1915. The theme, stated softly at the outset, is based on a two-bar idea expanded through harmonic manipulation into a fuller statement. Variation 1 in 3/4 time has a scherzando character with a strumming effect in the left hand. The lyrical Variation 2 has a dual time signature: 3/4 in the right hand and 9/8 in the left. Busy octave figurations, interspersed with lyrical

sections, form Variation 3, in 6/8, which alternates between A minor and C major. Variation 4 comprises two distinct, alternating ideas, the first languorous and the second marchlike with a semiquaver figuration in the left hand. In 6/8 time, Variation 5 is light and airy with a dotted rhythm. In Variation 6 the theme appears in octaves in the right hand, accompanied in the left by octave jumps, again with a dotted rhythm. With enharmonic modulation this leads without break into Variation 7, in 12/8 time, where the melody appears first in unadorned single notes, then chordally, then in octaves. Variation 8, following without pause, has a dual metre 6/4 in the right hand (which has the melody in octaves) and cut time in the left (with a triplet figure and octaves); midway the right and left hands abruptly reverse roles. Variation 9, in 4/4, follows directly. Here the triplet figure of the preceding variation becomes part of the melody. In the mounting excitement Liapunov returns to the tonic key of A major for Variation 10, presto, and pulls out all the stops. The melody becomes an ostinato figure, punctuated with sforzandi reminiscent of the opening of Islamey, and alternates abruptly with delicate cascades, all the while rushing toward a prestissimo coda.

Chant d'automne, op. 26, dates from 1906; Rêverie du soir, op. 3, was composed in 1880 and revised in 1903. Both are mood pieces reminiscent of Chopin's Nocturnes. Notable in Chant d'automne is the left-hand arpeggiation that accompanies the initial theme in a direction contrary to what is deemed usual pianistic practice. Rêverie du soir is distinguished by its glorious melody.

Liapunov's Sonata in F Minor, op. 27, is a worthy successor to the single-movement sonatas of Reubke and Liszt. Composed between 1906 and 1908, it suggests in overall structure a three-part plan of linked sonata-allegro, slow movement and finale. A resolute first subject and a songlike, Chopinesque second theme are the main ideas of the first part, Allegro appassionato. During the course of development the material undergoes constant transformation, and the climax is reached with appearance of the second theme, now grand and impassioned. After restatement of the first

subject, further developed, there follows a transitional episode that can be viewed as a coda to what has gone before or as an introduction to the central section of the sonata, *Andante sostenuto e molto espressivo*. This vies with any Chopin nocturne in terms of sheer beauty and conjures up visions of ancient bards and rhapsodic tales. A triple forte climax near the end ushers in the *Allegro vivo* finale, brilliantly virtuosic and based on the opening themes following a majestic coda in F major, which comes to a sudden halt, the folkloric theme of the central section bringing the sonata to a quiet conclusion.

In the late Toccata and Fugue of 1920, Liapunov's skills remain glorious and undiminished. Every pianistic device imaginable occurs, including extensive employment of the *sostenuto* pedal, indicated in the score with great care and specificity. The idea of a toccata and fugue may be baroque in concept, but Liapunov's spectacular piano writing most emphatically belongs to the 20th century by way of Liszt. A simple two-measure subject forms the basis of the four voice fugue and makes constant reappearances throughout in the absence of much countersubject material. Liapunov utilizes all the customary fugal devices, such as inversion and augmentation, creating a forward drive toward the octave figuration that emerges in both hands near the end. Finally, he reintroduces the *sostenuto* pedal point on C major as a unifying device.

## **Dorothy Elliott Schechter**

A native of Southern California of Norwegian descent, Dorothy Elliott Schechter has performed extensively as a concert pianist in Norway, Denmark and throughout the southwestern United States. She was the author of "Nationalism in Music", a segment of the PBS television series "From Chant to Chance", in which she also appeared as a solo performer. She was featured in a California-produced film *The Norway of Edvard Grieg*. She has given solo recitals on the Norwegian State Radio, and for two successive years she was the featured pianist at the Edvard Grieg Festival in San Diego, California.

Dr. Schechter is an Associate Professor and currently the Department Chair of Music at California Lutheran University. After earning her baccalaureate and master's degrees from the University of Southern California, she matriculated as a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Oslo to research the music of Edvard Grieg and to further her piano studies with Robert Riefling. She earned her doctorate from the University of Southern California, having studied with and taken private instruction from, among others, Daniel Pollack and the legendary Mme. Rosina Lhevinne. She participated as soloist for Mme. Lhevinne's master classes at the University of Southern California.

Dr. Schechter performs a wide repertoire from Bach, Scarlatti and Mozart to Ginastera. She is a specialist in the music of Grieg, and the Russians figure prominently in her repertoire, especially Scriabin, Rachmaninov and Shostakovich.

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LIAPUNOV: Piano Sonata in F Minor

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STEREO

Sergei Mikhailovich  
**LIAPUNOV**  
 (1859 - 1924)  
 Piano Works

Dorothy Elliott Schechter

 Playing  
 Time :  
 69'26"

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|----------|---------------------------------------|----------------|
| <b>1</b> | <b>Variations on a Georgian Theme</b> | <b>(14:09)</b> |
| <b>2</b> | <b>Chant d'Automne</b>                | <b>(9:34)</b>  |
| <b>3</b> | <b>Sonata in F Minor</b>              | <b>(31:56)</b> |
| <b>4</b> | <b>Rêverie du Soir</b>                | <b>(6:51)</b>  |
|          | <b>Toccata and Fugue in C Major</b>   |                |
| <b>5</b> | <b>Toccata</b>                        | <b>(3:03)</b>  |
| <b>6</b> | <b>Fugue</b>                          | <b>(3:18)</b>  |

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