

Produced by Andrew Kazdin

Side 1
SCRIBIN: SONATA NO. 3 IN F-SHARP MINOR, Op. 23
I—Dramatico (2:46)
II—Allegretto (2:41)
III—Andante
IV—Presto con fuoco (2:20)

Side 2
PROKOFIEV: SONATA NO. 7 IN B-FLAT MAJOR, Op. 83
I—Allegro inquieto (3:30) (ASCAP)
II—Andante caloroso (1:30)
III—Prestissimo (1:15)
GLENN GOULD, Piano

The development of Russian music in the 19th century can be divided into three distinct phases. Phase One was the important era—the consequence of all those court-sponsored productions of Italian opera and French farce that constituted salon-culture, Petersburg-style, circa 1800. This phase culminated in the early works of Michael Glinka, those facile composites of the *allegro-furioso* galops of middle-period Beethoven, of the harmonic method of Ludwig Spohr and of the better tunes of Fanny Mendelssohn. All that czar Peter had commended to his people was accomplished—their music, like their architecture, had become a pale but impeccable copy of the best that the West could use no longer.

Glinka provided a bridge to Phase Two—a brooding identity-quest that distinguished the work of his immediate successors, such as Modest Mussorgsky with his singular search for the Russian soul. Mussorgsky's instincts were those of the coffee-house aesthete, the good-hearted but irrevocably disolute fellow who, in rare moments of lucidity, would seize some noble idea, and, uninhibited by considerations of technique, set it down in one mad burst of creative enthusiasm. For all the unashamed awkwardness of his style, Mussorgsky was Russia's musical coming-of-age.

Then, overlapping Mussorgsky, came Phase Three—the export generation. The most successful artist of the period and, indeed, the only Russian composer of his time with a universal appeal was Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky. A man of absolutely superior facility, he could adopt or disdain the influence of nationalists like Mussorgsky as occasion demanded, and he remains to this day Russian music's chief tourist attraction. Tchaikovsky's career was a triumphant refutation of the concept of Russian insularity, as was that of the 20th-century cosmopolitan, Sergei Prokofiev. Yet even in Tchaikovsky's time, the true ramifications of Russian music had not yet found an end, and, in a certain sense, the partiline protocol of the post-revolutionary generation is a throw-back to, and/or an extension of, the Mussorgskyan quest.

But, straddling some fine personal line, a few Russian artists have managed to combine the introspection of Mussorgsky and the extroversion of Tchaikovsky in a style that perhaps can best be described as "mystic." Chief among these is Alexander Scriabin, who was twenty-five when he wrote his Third Piano Sonata in 1897 and who was then on the brink

of some of the most fascinating harmonic experiments attempted in modern times. (His later work, including the last half-dozen of his ten piano sonatas, through a curious blend of determination and spontaneity explores an attitude to harmony and its interaction with melodic figuration that supplements, if it doesn't exactly foreshadow, the work of Arnold Schoenberg.) The Third Sonata, however, is an exercise in more conventional design. A work of only moderate length (its running time is slightly over twenty minutes), the four movements of this sonata offer a profile of imposing gravity without at any time—barring perhaps a few sequences in the finale—managing to confuse busy-ness with complexity, size with grandeur, or repetition with unity, as the sonatas and symphonies of such more recent composers as Miaskovsky and Shostakovich tend sometimes to do.

According to many analysts, the early work of Scriabin betrays the influence of Chopin—a fondness for languorous cantilenas and noodling alto-tenor figurations. But if it does, then surely Chopin with a difference! The worthy Frédéric scarcely ever kept a large-scale structure going with the impetus Scriabin gives to this sonata, solving the architectural problems posed by interpretive rubato, embroidering with intrapara-graph ambiguity the sure, clean key-shifts of his primary modulations.

The first movement is typical. It's an expansive and declaratory sonata-allegro in which the bitter-sweet nostalgia of the secondary thematic group is held in check by the foreboding double-dot interpolations of the primary theme's chief rhythmic component. It's "music-to-read-Wuthering-Heights-by"—a hypnotic, self-centered piece of doom-foretelling.

The second movement is a scherzo with an angular barline—defying primary motive in the left hand and with a Vincent D'Indy-like series of harmonic twists in both. In the third movement, Scriabin turns his unerring harmonic sense to the task of undercutting the expected cadential climaxes. Whenever the gelatinous, post-Wagnerian chromatic texture seems to augur some emphatic Heideleben-ish climax, Scriabin demurely steps aside, reiterates the just-concluded phrase with elaborations, just so that he can step aside again.

There's a remarkable, almost Pavlovian, insight into the psychology of denial in this music. Despite all euphonic resemblance, it's the antithesis of the quasi-improvisatorial method of Richard Strauss—even if on first hearing it does suggest the sound of cocktail-hour piano as played in the better bars on 99th Street. ("And I said to her, 'Marsha, my dear, the outfit is absolutely stunning.' 'Waiter, check please!'—'Yeah, well, Harry, as I see it, J. D. is on his way out at Consolidated Consternation.'") Anyhow, there's no talking allowed by Scriabin's finale, an elaborate treatise on the vertical possibilities of a rhythmic continuum.

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When Sergei Prokofiev completed his Seventh Piano Sonata in 1942, Soviet music was enjoying unprecedented acclaim in the major music centers of North America. Those were the days when Wall Street tycoons stumped the country talking

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up subscriptions for Russian war relief, when Stalin briefly metamorphosed into "Uncle Joe" and when the score of that motoric monstrosity, Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony, was flown to New York so that Stokowski and Toscanini could vie for the honor of its premiere. Toscanini won!

Well, The American enthusiasm for such less-distinguished products of that period as the Shostakovich Seventh went out with the era of Joseph McCarthy, and most of those bloated Slavic tone poems with first themes depicting front-line heroism and subsidiary motives doing homage to the gallant sacrifice of maidens gored in premature widow's weeds have long since disappeared from the standard repertory. But there are exceptions, and, like his Fifth Symphony, composed in 1944, Prokofiev's Seventh Sonata is built to last. He began working on it during that uneasy truce bought by the 1939 Non-Aggression Pact of Comrade Molotov and Herr von Ribbentrop, and kept at it, off and on, until 1942 when, with Field Marshal von Bock's retreat from the suburbs of Moscow, "Operation Barbarossa" had sustained its first real setback—an omen of the prospects for "Testing" Europa itself.

And the sonata, with its schizophrenic oscillation of mood and its nervous instability of tonality, is certainly a war piece. It is full of that uniquely Prokofievian mixture of bittersweet lamentation, percussive intensity and "there-with-the-grace-of-a-more-judicious-foreign-policy-go-we" lyricism.

But for all its heterogeneous extravagance, this is an extraordinary work. Its first movement contains not only some of Prokofiev's best music but, in open defiance of the instant-accessibility credo of Soviet musicology, perhaps the closest thing to an atonal harmonic plan that has ever employed. By comparison, the second movement with its rather cloying main theme helps fulfill the quota of the composer's collective, and the finale, in 7/8 time, is one of those "just-as-our-lines-are-beginning-to-crumble-comes-another-column-of-our-impregnable-tanks-even-if-they-do-happen-to-be-Shermans-and-to-have-arrived-lendlease-at-Murmansk-last-week" toccatas.

The tempo subtitles that Prokofiev provides for these movements are singularly evocative, both of the piece and of its era: Allegro inquieto; Andante caloroso; and, finally, for the toccata, Precipitato.

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Scriabin: Sonata No. 3

Prokofiev: Sonata No. 7

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Alexander Scriabin 1872–1915

Piano Sonata No. 3 in F-sharp minor op. 23

fis-Moll · en *fa* dièse mineur

1	I. Drammatico	8:04
2	II. Allegretto	2:47
3	III. Andante – <i>attacca</i>	5:13
4	IV. Presto con fuoco – Maestoso	7:10

Sergei Prokofiev 1891–1953

Piano Sonata No. 7 in B-flat major op. 83

B-Dur · en *si* bémol majeur

5	I. Allegro inquieto – Andantino	8:24
6	II. Andante caloroso	7:39
7	III. Precipitato	3:21

Total Time 42:50

Glenn Gould piano

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