Produced by Andrew Kazdin

M 32040

G0100032907545

GLENN GOULD'S FIRST RECORDINGS OF GRIEG AND BIZET

Side 1
GRIEG: SONATA IN E MINOR, Op. 7
I—Allegro moderato (8:38)
II—Andante molto (5:39)
III—Alla Menuetto ma poco più lento (5:42)
IV—Finale: Molto allegro (7:46)

Side 2
BIZET: PREMIER NOCTURNE (6:44)
BIZET: VARIATIONS CHROMATIQUES (16:14)

The selections are in the public domain.

Edvard Grieg's Piano Sonata was written in 1865; Bizet's *Nocturne* and *Variations Chromatiques* three years later. For those who subscribe to the theory that recording is an inherently archival, as opposed to miscellany-gathering, activity, our text on this occasion will be drawn from Century 19, Decade 7, Part 3.

Unfortunately for the undersigned, the text, as opposed to the theory above-mentioned or, indeed, the music at hand, is uncongenial. If I were to deal with it explicitly, invoking appropriate parallels, stressing pertinent contradictions—acknowledging, in effect, the "compare and contrast" commandment of academia—I should be required to emphasize that both composers operated within a milieu that, according to all subsequent wisdom, was dominated by the very fact of that most upheaval-inducing phenomenon of the "romantic" age—*Tristan und Isolde*.

Now, as it happens, I love *Tristan*. I was 15 when I heard it first, and wept. These days, needless to say, the tear ducts are out of practice—the psychologically meddlesome, and medically unsound, prohibitions inspecting approved emotive patterns for the Occidental male have seen to that. Yet, given a hard day, a late night, and a sequence or two from the "Liebestod," the spine tingles and the throat is seized by a catch that no other music, this side of Orlando Gibbons' anthems, can elicit with equivalent intensity and predictability.

The trouble is: To acknowledge *Tristan* without qualification—to ascribe to it more than subjective impressions —tacitly suggests that one acknowledges as well what I should like to call the "Plateau, Peak, and Precipice" concept of history. Oh, no one else calls it that; but, however unwittingly, most folk effect it accreditation, and *Tristan*, for this century at least, has served the concept as linchpin.

Another servant of the concept and, by no coincidence whatever, worshipper of *Tristan*, was one Arnold Schoenberg—a gentleman persuaded that his own evolution was possessed of Darwinian inexorability (which it may well have been), that *Tristan* provided the incentive for that climate of ambiguity that eventually led to his personal rejection of tonal orientation (which is quite probably the case), and that, by inference, his relationship to Wagner, and any other elder masters you'd care to weigh into the bargain, was one of mantle-ee to mantle-or. Most devout Schoenbergians reasoned similarly, and the list of linchpins grew accordingly—Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, Bach's *Kunst der Fuge* or any half-dozen Stamitz symphonies (select one only, or move directly to jail; do not pass 'Go' and do not collect 200 florins). The converted patriarch, Igor Stravinsky, nominated Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge*, and, in perhaps the most memorable of all linchpin pronouncements, Ernst Krenek avowed that Gesualdo's chromaticism might, but for the inconsiderate intervention of three centuries, have led directly to Wagner. This latter statement, to be fair, and if judged according to the lights of its own *Zeitgeistlich* standards (it was issued, after all, some thirty years ago when Gesualdo's crimes and times were less exposed to public scrutiny), contained a real measure of insight. It did, however, like all such proclamations, impose long-range linear goals as ultimate criteria and, however inadvertently, convey the impression that God is on the side of enharmonic relationships.

Needless to say, such relationships abound in each of the works included in this album, with Bizet's self-advertising *Variations* understandably taking a commanding lead in the "accidentals" sweepstakes. None of these works, however, achieves or, more to the point, strives for, that state of ecstatic prolongation that is the true legacy of *Tristan*, and to judge any of them according to such criteria would be akin to the demand that Sibelius' Fifth Symphony (1914) abandon its suave, romantically cultivated, syntax in favor of the motoric punctuation of *Le Sacre* (1913), or that *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (1918) relinquish its amiable evocation of the rococo past in order to sample the expressionist 'present' of *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912). The calendar, after all, is a tyrant; submission to its relentless linearity, a compromise with creativity; the artist's prime responsibility, a quest for that spirit of detachment and anonymity that neutralizes and transcends the competitive intimidation of chronology.

In any event, whatever the expectations, the facts are as follows: Grieg's Op. 7 is a secure, smoothly articulated, post-graduate exercise in which chromatic embellishments enliven an occasionally complacent paragraphic symmetry. The composer's confidence with large-scale forms—in later years, always the effective miniaturist, he became estranged from the sonata concept per se—peaked early in his career and, indeed, the celebrated Piano Concerto (1868) was a product of his 25th year. Like the latter work, the E Minor Sonata best conveys its author's geographic distinction—i.e. independence from Austro-German symphonic tradition—by frequent, though entirely non-virulent, resistance to the proclivities of the leading-tone and appropriate amendments to the motivic conceits involved. Whatever the mood prevailing in these early works, the innovatory content—the quirk quotient, to re-coin one of my own pet phrases—is introduced, much as in the case of Dvořák, with beguilingly unassertive good humor.

Bizet's *Variations Chromatiques* is, in my opinion, one of the very few masterpieces for solo piano to emerge from the third quarter of the 19th century; its almost total neglect is a phenomenon for which I can offer no reasonable explanation. Like every opus by this extraordinary composer, from that posthumously discovered teen-age gem—the Symphony in C—onwards, the *Variations Chromatiques* is a work that, harmonically, never puts a wrong foot forward. And the harmonic path chosen (one suspects primarily as an experiment, since Bizet could utilize, with equal effect, idioms of relatively unencumbered distinctism) is a trail strewn with chromatic detours, and on which the possibility of landslide is an ever-present threat. That all such roadblocks are deftly circumvented is a tribute not only to the composer's supremely efficient technique but also to the imaginative, and picturesque, route that he charts and follows throughout.

Even when divorced from the music it maps out, this route is a logician's delight. The "theme"—in essence, a chaconne motif—is simplicity itself: Two chromatic scales —one upward-bound, the other inverted—are punctuated cadentially by open octaves delineating the tonic triad of C minor. The first seven variations—there are fourteen in all—uphold the minor mode, and, in a gesture befitting the even-handed disposition of the theme, the remaining seven adhere to the major. A coda ensues, apparently intent upon lending support to the C major set; then, almost absent-mindedly at first, but, subsequently, with increasing emphasis and conviction, E-flats and A-flats are added to the texture; in due course, D-flats and G-flats flip the balance unequivocally, moody remnants of the "theme" reappear, and the work has come full circle to C minor. The D Major Nocturne, though a less adventuresome composition, is no less sophisticated. Chiefly concerned with frustrating the cadential inclinations of a melody of Methodistic primness, and coyly telegraphing this intention by an introductory four-bars' worth of arpeggiated diminished-sevenths, it achieves its aim—one can't say with adversary directness, since exemplary directness is the very quality Bizet seeks to deny the work—with, let's try it on its own terms, exemplary indecisiveness.

—Glenn Gould

A Confidential Caution to Critics

Gentlemen:

For many of you, this disc may well constitute a first exposure to the piano works of Bizet; it did for me, and I share with you the joy of discovery. This repertoire, however, lacks representation in the Schwann catalog and —although I do not attend recitals—turns up, I should guess, infrequently, if at all, on concert programs. You may, consequently, be at a loss for a yardstick with which to evaluate the performances contained herein.

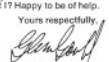
For those of you who greet the release with enthusiasm, therefore, I should like to propose a phrase such as "—vividly and forcefully, as only a first reading can, it partakes of that freshness, innocence and freedom from tradition that, as the late Artur Schnabel so deftly remarked, is but a 'collection of bad habits.'" On the other hand, for those in doubt as to the validity of the interpretations involved, I venture to recommend a conceit such as "—regrettably, a performance that has not as yet jelled; an interpretation that is still in search of an architectural overview." And, of course, for those who prefer to remain, so to speak, on the fence, a structure along the lines of "—though, regrettably, a performance that has not as yet jelled, this is, nonetheless, an interpretation that partakes of that freshness, innocence and freedom from tradition of which the late Artur Schnabel so deftly—" etc., should serve.

The burden of this memorandum, however, is to direct your attention to one aspect of the relatively more familiar music contained on Side 1 that may well have escaped your notice and that could, potentially, lead to an embarrassing incident: Edvard Grieg was a cousin of my maternal great-grandfather. My mother, née Florence Greig, maintained, as did all the Scotch branch of the clan, the 'el' configuration, while Grieg's great-grandfather, one John Greig, crossed the North Sea in the 1740's, settled in Bergen, and inverted the vowels so as to afford a more appropriately Nordic ring to the family name. As will be readily apparent, any intemperate critical discussion of the performance at hand, therefore—especially along the lines adopted by the Bizet disparagement (see Phrase Sample Two above)—would be tantamount to a suggestion that Clara Schumann was misinformed about the inner workings of the worthy Robert's 'A Minor' Concerto.

The Sonata, of course, though hardly a repertoire staple, is played and recorded from time to time, and some of you may well feel that my response to it is at almost perverse pains to underline those dour, curiously dispassionate qualities of Ibsenesque gloom that I feel to be on predominant display in even the earliest works of cousin Edvard. Consequently, for those who would espouse a more up-tempo, quasi-Lisztian rendition of the work, such epithets as "presumably authentic" or "nonetheless, unquestionably authoritative," will suffice; and, needless to say, in the comments of those inclined to a genuinely enthusiastic response, I look forward to such encomiums as "the very stuff of history," "a truly legendary encounter," or, perhaps, "never, in the annals of recording, has the generation gap been bridged with such unquestionable authority, such incontrovertible authenticity."

Well, I can dream, can't I? Happy to be of help.

Yours respectfully,



Engineering: Kent Warden, Frank Dean Dennowitz
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M 32040
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MASTERWORKS

Glenn Gould's First Recordings of Grieg and Bizet

Edvard Grieg 1843–1907

Piano Sonata in E minor op. 7

e-Moll · en *mi* mineur

1	I. Allegro moderato	6:42
2	II. Andante molto	5:59
3	III. Alla Menuetto, ma poco più lento	5:45
4	IV. Finale. Molto allegro	7:44

Georges Bizet 1838–1875

5	**Nocturne in D major** D-Dur · en *ré* majeur	4:42

Variations chromatiques (de concert) op. 3

6	Thème. Moderato maestoso	1:07
7	Var. 1. Un pochissimo più allegretto	0:53
8	Var. 2. a tempo rubato	0:45
9	Var. 3. a tempo risoluto	0:38
10	Var. 4. Con fuoco	0:31
11	Var. 5	0:44
12	Var. 6. Agitato	0:49
13	Var. 7	0:51
14	Var. 8. Con espressione	0:47
15	Var. 9. Un peu plus vite	0:34
16	Var. 10. Alla Polacca	0:33
17	Var. 11. Andante	0:56
18	Var. 12. Plus animé	0:40
19	Var. 13. Mouvement. des Ires Variations	0:48
20	Var. 14. appassionato	0:44
21	Coda. semplice – Un peu plus lent – Quasi recitativo – a tempo	2:48

Total Time 45:20

Glenn Gould piano

Original LP: M 32040 · Released March 2, 1973
Recording: Eaton Auditorium, Toronto,
March 13/14, 1971 [1–4]; December 13, 1972 [5]; May 2/3, 1971 [6–21]
Producer: Andrew Kazdin · Recording Engineers: Kent Warden & Frank Dean Dennowitz
Cover Design: Henrietta Condak · Cover Art: Robert Andrew Parker
Liner Notes: Glenn Gould · LP Matrix: AL 32040 [1–4], BL 32040 [5–21]

The original LP release erroneously billed Bizet's Nocturne in D major as his Premier Nocturne *on front and back covers.*

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