

Bon Voyage

Igor and Olga
Piano Duo

BERNSTEIN
BRAHMS
RACHMANINOV
GRAINGER
RAVEL
MOSZKOWSKI
GAVRILIN

MD 3185



Bon Voyage

Igor and Olga Piano Duo

Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990)

1 America from West Side Story
1'51"

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Walzer Op. 39 15'23"

- 2** No. 1 (B major)
- 3** No. 2 (E major)
- 4** No. 3 (G sharp minor)
- 5** No. 4 (E minor)
- 6** No. 5 (E major)
- 7** No. 6 (C sharp major)
- 8** No. 7 (C sharp minor)
- 9** No. 8 (B flat major)
- 10** No. 9 (D minor)
- 11** No. 10 (G major)
- 12** No. 11 (B minor)
- 13** No. 12 (E major)
- 14** No. 13 (C major)
- 15** No. 14 (A minor)
- 16** No. 15 (A major)
- 17** No. 16 (D minor)

Sergei Rachmaninov
(1873-1943)

Three duets from Op. 11

- 18** Barcarolle 6'14"
- 19** Scherzo 3'04"
- 20** Valse 3'45"

Valery Gavrilin (b. 1939)
Four pieces from Sketches

- 21** Troika 2'00"
- 22** March 1'58"
- 23** The Little Clock 2'12"
- 24** Tarantella 2'19"

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) Rhapsodie
Espagnole

- 25** Prélude à la nuit 3'56"
- 26** Malagueña 2'09"
- 27** Habañera 2'41"
- 28** Feria 6'21"

Moritz Moszkowski
(1854-1925)

Dances Espagnoles Op. 12

- 29** No. 1 1'44"
- 30** No. 2 3'37"
- 31** No. 3 2'18"
- 32** No. 4 2'54"
- 33** No. 5 (Bolero) 2'58"

Percy Aldridge Grainger
(1882-1961)

34 Let's Dance Gay in Green
Meadow 3'23"



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The life of a contemporary concert musician is inseparably tied up with travelling. Unfamiliar landscapes passing by in the window of a train or a bus, endless waiting in airports, meetings with new people, never-ending preparations and packing — these are the daily fare of a wandering artist. A glance at the memoirs of any famous musician will reveal similarities to a guidebook or travel book. Such a life involves constant change and can demands a power of endurance few are blessed with. Historically there have been few occasions when musicians have withdrawn from the performing circuit of their own free will, and the reappearance of an artist after a prolonged absence will cause much excitement.

A closer look reveals that this appeal of travel is not necessarily the result of the advent of aviation. Although the speed and the length of trips have changed dramatically with aviation, it does not mean that this passion for travel is a recent phenomenon. “I enjoyed every moment of our trip and it was getting unbearable when we stopped for a day or two”, wrote Brahms about a trip in Hungary in 1868. When the young Arthur Rubinstein was asked why he was always on the move,

he replied “If I stop I will die”.

Furthermore, this wanderlust is so irresistible that composers seem to be able travel without leaving their writing desks. Sometimes it has nothing to do with reality, for example in Verdi’s *Aida*. Sometimes it is an interest in different national styles or schools schools of composition, such as the music of J S Bach, where he wrote music in the French, English or Italian manners. There are also amazing instances when it seems the composers understood more about foreign nations than those nations’ own composers, for example *Carmen* by Bizet, the Hungarian *divertissement* by Schubert, or *Sheherazade* by Rimsky-Korsakov and so on. These and other examples show that the art of music has not changed much since the cosmopolitan wandering troubadours of the Middle Ages.

I believe the collection of music on this CD is a confirmation of this idea.

1 The first piece we perform is a version of the famous “America” from *West Side Story* by Leonard Bernstein transcribed for piano duet. This fragment from a musical has long had a life of its own and has become a symbol of America, which in turn has become a symbol of any trip or journey. I recall a story I heard from an Italian

friend. A relative of his who had been living in Australia for many years was describing Australia, which he believes is wonderful. When he finished he was so excited that he raised his hands in the air and shook them, exclaiming “It’s America! It’s America!”

2 The set of sixteen waltzes by Johannes Brahms that comes next is in a completely different spirit. These waltzes were not conceived for public accolades; their mood is intimate and delicate, and their sentiment is neither full-blooded nor rich. Brahms wrote his opus 39 after his first visit to Vienna in 1863, a journey that changed his life. He returned to Vienna to live a few years later. Brahms modestly called these waltzes “small *ländler* in the style of Schubert” and dedicated them to Eduard Hanslick.

18 Of necessity there must be some Russian music. Firstly, because now we live in Australia, playing Russian music is a sort of a return journey for us. Secondly, Russians have to travel long distances even when travelling domestically. Sergei Rachmaninov composed his opus 11 while on holidays in Ivanovka, his favourite retreat, a long way from Moscow. In 1894 Rachmaninov was young and

practically unknown despite having won a Gold Medal for composition from the Moscow Conservatory after his graduation. We have chosen three pieces from Op. 11, his only composition for piano duet. The Barcarolle, like others by Rubinstein, Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov, is written in G-minor; the Scherzo is unexpectedly reminiscent of some symphonic scherzos by Borodin; and the Waltz is strongly influenced by salon pieces of Tchaikovsky and Arensky.

Incidentally, we have travelled twice to the place where opus 11 was written. All the buildings were ruined during the revolution, and a lot of restoration work was needed before the mansion could be opened as a museum. Sadly, I had the impression that even though the surroundings must have looked the way they did a century ago, something is gone forever.

21 The new post-revolutionary Russia of this century is represented by Valery Gavrilin's Sketches for piano duet written two decades ago. From the 24 pieces we chose "Troika", "March", "A Little Clock" and "Tarantella". The first impressions of this music are of light pieces full of humor, but a hidden irony and dissonance remind us that this music was written at the same time

as the masterpieces by Schnittke and Gubaidullina.

25 The journey continues from Russia to Spain, one of Europe's popular tourist attractions. It is really amazing how many times the country was discovered by Europeans. Spain was relatively isolated for many years until de Falla and Granados appeared and Spanish music merged with mainstream Western music. Maurice Ravel, whose Rhapsodie espagnole we perform, could not be considered an outsider to Spain: he was born near the Spanish border and his mother was Spanish. Even native Spaniards were struck by "a free use of rhythms, modal melodies and all the ornamental embellishments of [Spanish] popular songs" (Manuel de Falla), when the Rhapsodie was published in 1907. Although it was the first published orchestral work, this version for piano duet transcribed by the author himself seems to me quite convincing because of the pianistic nature of Ravel's music.

29 Another excursion into Spanish music was made by Moritz Moszkowski, a Polish pianist and composer who was living in Berlin at the time. His Spanish Dances (1878) are full of Spanish rhythms, melodies

and a Spanish sense of excitement. But Moszkowski's music was as far away from the real spirit of Spain as ballroom dancing is from the art of Flamenco. The Spanish Dances are undoubtedly intended for the salon, with their precise rhythms, their elegant turn of melody and their willingness to please.

34 To complete the circle we play the work of the Australian composer Percy Grainger whose interest was drawn by the folk material of the Faeroe Islands. It is a most unusual approach to folk material: in Let's Dance Gay in Green Meadow, Grainger used a real Faeroe tune, but created his own weird reality in his inimitable style. His aim was to give "an impression of large-size continuity and unbroken form-flow". When we played this music for the first time we were amazed by its strange beauty.

I hope you enjoy your journey. Bon voyage!

IGOR MACHLAK

Olga Kharitonova began playing the piano at the age of six and studied at the State College of Music in Moscow. She went on to gain her Masters degree after further study at the Moscow Conservatorium.

Igor Machlak was born in Belarus and after graduating from the State College of Music in Minsk continued his study at the Moscow Conservatorium, where he gained a Magna Cum Laude Diploma (Diploma with Distinction).

After their marriage, it seemed natural to the young couple to add musical harmony to their domestic harmony, and they formed a husband and wife duo team. They did two years of postgraduate study as a piano duo under the guidance of Professor Tigran Alikhanov at the Moscow Conservatorium. Looking back, Olga says: "We absolutely fell in love with two piano playing. It has doubled the pleasure, felt enormously rewarding and served as an incessant stimulus for further work".

Over the past years they have been prize winners at five competitions, including first prizes at the All-Russian Balakirev Competition in 1990, the international *Musica da Camera* competition in Italy in 1991 and the International Piano Duo

Competition in Japan in 1994. These successes have led to concert invitations in Italy, Bulgaria, Hungary, Germany and Japan, and they have enjoyed numerous tours within Russia. They have performed with the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra, the Ural State Orchestra and Moscow Chamber Orchestra. Many television and radio recordings have been made during their brilliant recitals at both all-Russian

and international festivals. They often play their own transcriptions of pieces by Rachmaninov, Schumann, and Bizet at their concerts, and one of these transcriptions was among the winners at the International Composers Competition in Japan.

Since moving to Australia in 1995 the Igor & Olga Piano Duo has given a series of piano recitals and has drawn immediate attention of both professional musicians and musical critics. "It was a world class!", said *The Age* after their concert at Monash University. An enthusiastic admirer wrote "Their playing was brilliant, sensitive, almost sensuous. I was hooked!" in a letter to *Music* magazine. The Piano Duo has performed in major venues throughout Victoria, including recitals at Melba Hall, the National Gallery of Victoria, the Castlemaine Festival and the ABC's *Sunday Live* program.

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