

PASSIONS & REFLECTIONS

Piano music by
CHOPIN
DEBUSSY &
RACHMANINOV

KASPARAS UINSKAS





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SERGEI RACHMANINOV (1873–1943)

Sonata No.2 Op.36 revised 1931 version

1	i	Allegro agitato	8'14
2	ii	Non allegro	7'16
3	iii	Allegro molto	5'15

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810–1849)

Douze Études Op.25

4	i	A \flat major	2'36
5	ii	F minor	1'45
6	iii	F major	1'50
7	iv	A minor	1'39
8	v	E minor	3'41

9	vi	G# minor	2'16
10	vii	C# minor	5'26
11	viii	Db major	1'17
12	ix	Gb major	0'59
13	x	B minor	4'31
14	xi	A minor	3'44
15	xii	C minor	2'56

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862–1918)

16	Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut (<i>Images</i> , Book 2 No.2)	5'20
17	Ondine (<i>Préludes</i> , Book 2 No.8)	3'52
18	Reflets dans l'eau (<i>Images</i> , Book 1 No.1)	4'44
19	Clair de lune (from <i>Suite Bergamasque</i>)	5'42

73'06

KASPARAS UINSKAS piano

Kasparas Uinskas is an internationally-acclaimed pianist, praised by critics for his virtuosity and romantic style. He has played at the world's most important concert halls, including New York's Carnegie Hall, Berlin's Philharmonie, London's Wigmore Hall, Madrid's Auditorio Nacional, and Washington's J.F. Kennedy Center, where his performances have been received to great acclaim by public and critics alike. He was born in Lithuania, and began studying the piano at the age of six. He studied at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre, where he graduated his Doctoral studies, the Frédéric Chopin Music University in Warsaw (with Professor Bugajii) and The Juilliard School, New York (with Professor Kalichstein) as a recipient of the Vladimir Horowitz Scholarship. Recent highlights include his concerts with the Royal Chamber Orchestra of Wallonia (Belgium), the Lithuanian State Symphony Orchestra, the North Czech Philharmonic Orchestra (Czech Republic), the Philharmonie Südwestfalen (Germany), the Liepaja Symphony Orchestra at the Piano Stars Festival (Latvia) and the Krakow Philharmonic Orchestra (Poland), as well as solo recitals at the Wigmore Hall, the Baerum Kulturhus as part of the Piano Master Series (Norway), the BoZar concert hall in Brussels, the Brussels Piano Festival, the Festival Nordland Musikkfestuke in Bodø (Norway), and the Fantastic Pianist Series tour in Japan. He also regularly collaborates with other renowned musicians: he is appearing in a chamber recital tour of Norway and Lithuania with the International Tchaikovsky Competition laureate, violinist Nikita Boriso-Glebsky; he is undertaking a piano duo concert tour with pianist Evgeni Bozhanov; and he is making a chamber concert tour with one of the world's greatest cellists, Alexander Kniazev. He is a frequent guest at many international music festivals throughout Europe and the USA, including the Aspen Music Festival, the Music Festival of the Hamptons, the South Shore Music, and the Holland Music Sessions. He has also appeared as a soloist at the Verbier Festival as a recipient of the Reuter's Grand Prix, awarded by the festival. He is a frequent guest on Radio and TV programmes, including BBC Radio 3, The New York Times classical music radio station, WQXR, and Lithuanian National Television and Radio. In 2010 he became an artistic director of the New Musical Generation summer festival and academy. He regular teaches students in masterclasses and, alongside his concert career, participates in outreach programmes to promote classical music for young people. Since 2006 he has run a classical music educational programme in Lithuanian high schools.

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Rachmaninov began work on his **Piano Sonata No.2 Op.36** in early 1913 during a family stay in Rome. Lodging in the very apartment Tchaikovsky had taken during his own Italian adventure, Rachmaninov sketched his choral symphony *The Bells* (Op.35) and began work on the sonata. The idyll was cut short however by the sudden onset of typhoid fever in both Rachmaninov's daughters and the family returned to the Ivanovka country estate, where the sonata was completed and later premiered in St Petersburg in December 1913.

Composed during the height of Rachmaninov's career as soloist, conductor and composer, the second sonata was conceived as a mighty work in both length and breadth, and demonstrates a clear association with *The Bells* in its dense bell-like sonorities. Indeed, the composer himself declared the firm impression chiming bells had made on his music, not only from this spell in Rome, stating: 'The sound of the church bells dominated all the cities of the Russia I used to know – Novgorod, Kiev, Moscow. They accompanied every Russian from cradle to grave, and no composer could escape their influence.' However, Rachmaninov was to grow dissatisfied with the richer sonorities of the sonata and in 1931 abridged the work substantially, thinning the texture in various passages and omitting a block of some 120 bars from the first movement among other edits. The score for this later edition (as heard here) included a note from the composer tersely stating: 'The new version, revised and reduced by author.'

The opening *Allegro agitato* commences with a thunderous descending theme. Following a major-key restatement of this first subject and a brief cadenza, a tranquil second theme in D^b major is introduced, hinting at a *sicilienne* in its lightly-dotted compound rhythm. The movement glides into the second movement *Non allegro* with a series of modulations that settle into a tender E-minor *lento* theme, here based around the interval of a falling third. The finale comprises an explosive *Allegro molto*, the fierce descent of its opening motif met by bullet-like repeated chords which are quickly swept into a passage of playful rhythmic propulsion. The

movement darts between tumult and lyricism, with passages of glittering virtuosity, mischievous syncopation and restatements of motifs from the first movement, before concluding emphatically in B \flat major.

Published across the 1830s, Chopin's three sets of **Études** (Op.10, Op.25 and the *Trois nouvelles études*) defined a new epoch of pianistic virtuosity, reimagining the technical exercise as serious concert piece. The rising popularity of the 'domestic' piano in nineteenth-century Europe saw growing numbers of didactic study books composed, but it was Chopin who propelled the *étude* into the concert hall with an approach that recalls the term's twelfth-century origins, where *étude* denoted not only the idea of studious 'application' but also artistic 'taste'. Composed between 1832-36, the twelve Op.25 *Études* were published in 1837 and bear a mysterious dedication to Liszt's then partner Marie d'Agoult (eventually to be better known by her pseudonym, Daniel Stern). Having dedicated his Op.10 *Études* to Liszt himself, Chopin evidently held the fellow virtuoso in high, if conflicted, esteem, noting in 1833 that 'I should like to steal from him the way to play my own *études*.'

The collection opens with the undulating *Étude* No.1 (A \flat major), often dubbed the 'Aeolian Harp' in response to its rippling arpeggiation, and described by Schumann as 'rather a poem than a study.' An exercise in cross-rhythms, No.2 (F minor) unfolds in lightly-frantic triplets and is marked *piano* throughout, while No.3 (F major) was once known as 'The Cartwheel' in response to its scurrying pace and strong accents. The subsequent three *études* are among the most fiendish of the collection, beginning with the *agitato* No.4 (A minor) where *staccato* off-beat chords in the right hand are underpinned by an exactly agile line for the left-hand. No.5 (E minor) is one of few Chopin *études* to be cast in ternary form, its mercurial opening and closing passages characterised by impish minor-second hops (whose crafty figuration has earned the piece a nickname as 'the Wrong Note Study'), balanced by a lyrical E-major middle section. No.6 (G# minor) is similarly wily, featuring playful strings of thirds in the right hand.

No.7 (C# minor) is much the gravest of the collection, its sorrowful melody in the bass suggestive of the later B-minor Prélude (Op.28, No.6). With a right-hand line composed almost entirely of consecutive sixths, Étude No.8 (D♭ major) was described by pianist and conductor Hans von Bülow as the most useful in the repertoire, recommending that any serious pianist to perform it six times daily 'as a remedy for stiff fingers'. Études No.9 (G♭ major) and No.10 (B minor) both feature demanding octave figuration, as part of a twirling four-note motif throughout the former and in relentless legato octaves across the latter. The iconic Étude No.11 (A-minor), popularly known as 'The Winter Wind', opens to a sparse, solemn theme before the tumultuous chromaticism of the *Allegro con brio* section, grounded by a fierce march-like rendition of the theme in the left hand. Mirroring the opening C-major étude of the Op.12 collection, the final étude (No.12, C minor) of Op.25 comprises similarly magisterial arpeggios, here scored for both hands. Also known as 'The Ocean', the étude demands a breadth and depth of sound from the piano that is near-orchestral in scale and brings the collection to an ardent, dazzling close.

From Debussy's earliest days as a student of the piano, his teachers remarked on the nascent composer's often unorthodox approach to the instrument: a report from the Paris Conservatory in 1879 highlighted Debussy's extraordinary sensitivity to texture and timbre, noting a 'considerable gift for harmony' but also a 'desperately careless' attitude. Debussy went onto transfigure the expressive scope of the instrument, creating works that drew on the full capacity of the piano's dynamics, articulation, pedalling and palette of tonal colours. Often twinned with the so-called Impressionist painters, Debussy famously rejected the association, drawing instead on writers from Baudelaire to Edgar Allan Poe and celebrating in music 'a freedom which it possesses perhaps to a greater degree than any other art, not being tied to a more or less exact reproduction of Nature but to the mysterious correspondences between Nature and Imagination.'

Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut is taken from Debussy's second book of *Images*, composed in 1907. The title (*And the moon descends on the temple which is no more*) was suggested by the piece's dedicatee, friend and musicologist Louis Laloy, who was also a renowned authority on 'Oriental' and ancient Greek music. The piece accordingly glimmers with hints of a somewhat imaginary East in its use of whole-tone scales and parallel fourths and fifths, perhaps echoing something of the Javanese gamelan Debussy encountered at the 1889 Paris Exposition Universelle. **Ondine**, from Book 2 of *Préludes* (1912-1913) depicts the world of the mythical water spirit, alternating capricious *scherzando* outbursts with dreamlike, arpeggiac passages. **Reflets dans l'eau** (*Reflections in the water*) is taken from the first book of *Images* (1905). Its shimmering chordal progressions and vivid chromatic and pentatonic scoring mark the piece as among the most evocative of Debussy's piano works, the composer himself describing the piece as a summation of 'the most recent discoveries of harmonic chemistry.' Published some fifteen years after Debussy began its composition in 1890, *Suite Bergamasque* was written as a tribute to the harpsichordists of the French Baroque and crisp neoclassical technique underpins its first, second and fourth movements. The title of the suite's much-loved third movement **Clair de lune** is taken from Verlaine's poem of the same name, evoking a moonlit night of love, loneliness and untamed revels.

This recording is dedicated to Ms. Sheryl Gold.

Produced, engineered and edited by Martin Rust.

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