



Mikhail
Shilyaev

Debussy

Ravel

Scriabin

Mompou

Piano (Bechstein, 1897)

Claude Debussy (1862–1918)

Suite bergamasque (1890–1905)	17:20
1 Prélude	4:37
2 Menuet	4:24
3 Clair de lune	4:50
4 Passpied	3:59

Federico Mompou (1893–1987)

Variations on a Theme of Chopin (1938–1957)	19:34
5 Theme. Andantino	0:45
6 Variation 1. Tranquillo e molto amabile	0:49
7 Variation 2. Grazioso	0:50
8 Variation 3. Lento	1:04
9 Variation 4. Espressivo	1:16
10 Variation 5. Tempo di Mazurka	1:00
11 Variation 6. Recitativo	1:21
12 Variation 7. Allegro leggiero	0:47
13 Variation 8. Andante dolce ed espressivo	1:57
14 Variation 9. Valse	1:47
15 Variation 10. Évocation. Cantabile molto espressivo	2:30
16 Variation 11. Lento dolce e legato	2:11
17 Variation 12. Galope	1:57
18 Epilogo	1:20

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

19 Jeux d'eau (1901)	5:45
20 Pavane pour une infante défunte (1899)	6:16

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Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915)

Trois Morceaux, Op.52 (1906)	4:37
21 Poème	2:36
22 Énigme	1:04
23 Poème languide	0:57
Deux Morceaux, Op.57 (1907)	2:50
24 Désire	1:19
25 Caresse dansée	1:31
26 Sonata No.5, Op.53 (1907)	12:43
Deux Danses, Op.73 (1914)	5:23
27 Guirlandes	3:19
28 Flammes sombres	2:04

TOTAL TIME: 75:05

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Piano: Bechstein, Berlin, 1897, No.44160 from the collection of Bonarius & Van Poppelen

Piano Tuning: Baart Houtgraaf

Recording Engineering & Production: Slava Poprugun

Executive Producers: John Balsdon & Mark Hartt-Palmer

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The choice of instrument for this recording is the result of my personal fascination with the spirit of *fin de siècle*, that period when so many musical styles emerged, co-existed, fused and challenged each other. It was an era in which the art of piano playing truly blossomed, and fortunately for us, the newly emerged recording technology documented and preserved this blossoming. It is these early recordings that are a continuing source of inspiration for me. At the time, Bechstein pianos were highly favoured by the greatest musicians, and such was the demand that Bechstein became the pre-eminent instrument of the concert world. This situation rapidly

changed with the end of World War 2, when the rise of Steinway and the dramatic alteration of musical aesthetics put an end to Bechstein's dominance. Leaving aside the fierce historical rivalry between these two biggest piano makers, it has to be said that the development and construction of musical instruments goes hand in hand with developmental changes in musical aesthetics. It is difficult to say whether instrument makers are responding to changes in musical taste, or if the new capabilities of succeeding instruments themselves change musical styles. One thing is clear. The developments in piano manufacturing since World War 2 have brought about a new conception of what the concert piano should be, but in embracing that new conception, the piano world has undoubtedly lost some of the unique sound qualities of the earlier Bechstein era.

The works recorded on this CD (with the exception of Mompou's Variations) were composed around the time this particular Bechstein was being built. So the pianistic sound worlds of Debussy, Ravel, Scriabin and Mompou are reflected in the sound world of this, their contemporary (or near contemporary) instrument.

Suite bergamasque by Debussy owes its enigmatic title to Paul Verlaine's poem *Clair de lune* – which also happens to be the title of the suite's third movement. The form of the *Bergamasque*, originally an Italian dance, is not used in the suite, instead the title comes from Verlaine's poem, which can perhaps be regarded as a hidden epigraph to the work:

*Your soul is a chosen landscape
Where roam charming masks and bergamasques
Playing the lute and dancing and seeming almost
Sad under their whimsical disguises.*

In the opening *Prélude* Debussy uses the Baroque concerto form characterised by several returns of the initial statement.

The *Menuet* is a strange revival of an old genre with some harmonic turns that owe more to Borodin than to Haydn. Perhaps it is a result of Debussy's interest in the legacy of the Russian group of composers known as *The Five*.

Clair de lune, which became Debussy's signature piece and the symbol of an epoch, is the most Impressionistic piece of the whole cycle, and appears to lack any Classical or Baroque references.

The final *Passepied* is curiously written in four time, rather than the more usual three of this Baroque dance. Perhaps the composer was just interested in a title that simply sounded oddly old-fashioned. Surprisingly for Debussy, the piano texture here is rather dry, more typical of, and perhaps prefiguring, the Neo-Classicism which was to develop two decades later.

Although Mompou's **Variations on a Theme of Chopin** were written much later than the other pieces recorded on here, they seem to have genuine connection with the French music of the beginning of the 20th century. Mompou studied at the Paris Conservatoire and was once proclaimed, by a French critic, to be "the only disciple and successor to Claude Debussy". In Mompou's very distinct composing style one can trace influences of Satie, Fauré and Debussy. He remained faithful to his style until the end of his long life, by which time many features of it had become noticeably outdated following the development of Modernism and Avant-gardism. He uses Chopin's A Major Prelude as a Theme for his Variations.

This cycle is a collection of miniatures, rather than a cycle with a tangible inner dramatic development. It is a remarkable tribute to Chopin and to his beloved genres of *Mazurka* and *Waltz* (Variations 9 and 14), along with a few variations in the character of the *Nocturne*.

In *Evocation* (Variation 10) Mompou quotes his own nostalgic *Cancion y Dansa No.6*, along with the middle episode from Chopin's *Fantasia-Impromptu* that conjures up the latter's hidden presence, and justifies the title of the variation. After a virtuosic *Galop*, which could be regarded as a brilliant Finale, Mompou returns to the Theme, now treated with greater harmonic complexity, for a distant-sounding postscript.

Ravel's **Jeux d'eau** was composed while he was Fauré's student at the Paris Conservatoire, and was inspired by Liszt's *Les jeux d'eau à la Villa d'Este*. It has a motto from Henri de Régnier: *River god laughing as the water tickles him...* which is probably sufficient to give us a hint about the content of this piece, as long as one remembers that words always fail to fully express the meaning of music... This piece is pianistic in its very essence, and is difficult to imagine it as an orchestral version.

The **Pavane pour une infante défunte**, on the other hand, another work from Ravel's student years, and again a revival of disused Baroque dance form, was subsequently orchestrated by the composer and has undergone many iterations for a range of instruments – famously including an electronic rendering by Isao Tomita. Ravel once said of this piece: "Do not be surprised that the title has nothing to do with the composition. I simply liked the sound of those words and I put them there, *c'est tout*".

Alexander Scriabin composed the majority of his works on the Bechstein piano that is now on display in the Museum (which was formerly his house) in Moscow. This place was also a much-loved concert venue for Vladimir Sofronitsky, a unique pianist and arguably the best interpreter of Scriabin's music. Luckily, many of Sofronitsky's performances were recorded and reveal, through the composer's often painfully out of tune piano, that magical sound which can only be heard within the intensely intimate setting of a domestic recital.

The **Three Pieces, Op.52**, as well as the **Two Pieces, Op.57**, belong to the so-called "middle period" of Scriabin's creative life. At this time he pursued a further expansion of chromatic harmony, and ultimately found his unique harmonic language that does not fully abandon tonality just yet. Many of his harmonic discoveries were later adopted by jazz musicians of the 1950s, which goes some way to explaining why, to a contemporary ear, his *Poème, Op.52* can sound like a Bill Evans improvisation.

The scherzo-like *Énigme* is thought to be a musical portrait of a "barbed and wriggling creature", a fantasy of the composer, whereas the following, *Poème languide* is a Wagnerian miniature, exploring eroticism through chromaticism.

The **Two Pieces, Op.57**, which possess an almost Mozartian perfection, are in fact variations on the same chord. *Désire* unexpectedly avoids the tonic chord at the end – suggesting the desire in question remains unfulfilled. *Caresse dansée*, a little choreographic fantasy, ends on a C major tonic chord which, being the only consonance in the whole piece, sounds no less surprising.

In his **Fifth Sonata**, Scriabin abandons the sonata cycle typical of his previous work and explores the romantic type of sonata, a form in one movement. This was an idea first introduced by Liszt, and one that Scriabin would use for all subsequent sonatas. There is an epigraph to the Sonata taken from Scriabin's own mystical essay *Poem of Ecstasy*:

*I call you to life, oh mysterious forces!
Drowned in the obscure depths
Of the creative spirit, timid
Shadows of life, to you I bring audacity!*

Its structure is woven with *leitmotifs*, each of which has its own symbolic meaning, and all of which undergo substantial change as they appear in the contrapuntal development section. But the most noticeable transformation happens to the fragile introduction, which returns at the end of the sonata as a sweeping ecstatic climax before ending abruptly in a reiteration of its initial chaotic statement across the whole keyboard – a transformation which constitutes the perfect embodiment of Scriabin's motto "From the highest finesse to the highest grandeur".

The music of his late period, such as **Deux Danses, Op.73**, could be regarded as one of the first occurrences of atonality in musical history. The work was composed while working on the *Prefactory Action* to his synthetic project called *Mysterium*, which aimed to fuse music, dance, light, aromas and even sense of touch together. The aim of this work was to transform the world through the medium of art, and derived from Scriabin's deep interest in mysticism.

The *Prefactory Action* was never completed, due to the Scriabin's untimely death at the age of 43.

The *Deux Danses* have a deep spiritual and stylistic connection with the *Prefactory Action*, and are included in its reconstruction as completed by A. Nemtin in 1996.

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Mikhail Shilyaev was born in Izhevsk, Russia. He started learning piano at the age of six and won several regional piano competitions at a young age. He studied in Russia, Germany and in the UK.

As a soloist with orchestra, he has recently performed with Musikkollegium Winterthur, the London Soloists Chamber Orchestra, RNCM Concert Orchestra, the Georgian Philharmonic Orchestra and with the Gulbenkian Symphony Orchestra.

He has worked with leading conductors including Christopher Warren-Green, Pascal Rophé and Nikoloz Rachveli.

In July 2010 Mikhail won the Bronze Medal at the prestigious Vianna da Motta International Piano Competition in Lisbon.

Mikhail lives in London and plays mostly in the UK and Europe. He has been taking part in numerous festivals across Europe including Zaubерsee festival in Lucerne. Among his chamber music partners are Boris Brovtsyn, Anastasia Kobekina and Natalie Clein. He is interested in historical performance practice and often gives recitals on fortepianos.

Mikhail is also known for his collaboration with singers including the rising stars Anna Gobachyova, Nardus Williams and Tuuli Takkala. Mikhail's repertoire stretches from early Baroque to contemporary music.

He has recently released two critically acclaimed CDs on Toccata Classics and Stone Records.