

A Cavaille-Coll

Paris

Sophie Rétaux
Cavaillé-Coll Organ, Saint-Omer

Dmitry Shostakovich / Sophie Rétaux (Arr.)

String Quartet No. 8, Op. 110

- I. *Largo* 4:59
- II. *Allegro molto* 3:46
- III. *Allegretto* 5:09
- IV. *Largo* 5:19
- V. *Largo* 4:56

Sergej Prokofiev / Sophie Rétaux (Arr.)

Visions fugitives, Op. 22

- XVIII. *Con una dolce lentezza* 1:35
- IV. *Animato* 1:08
- III. *Allegretto* 1:00
- I. *Lentamente* 1:29
- XVI. *Dolente* 1:45
- XVII. *Poetico* 0:50
- XII. *Assai moderato* 1:29
- XI. *Con vivacita* 1:33
- XX. *Lento* 2:15

Sergei Rachmaninoff / Gordon Balch Nevin (Arr.)

Prelude in G minor, Op. 23 No. 5 5:05

Pyotr Tchaikovsky / Reginald Goss-Custard (Arr.)

Tanz der Rohrflöten aus 'Nussknacker', Op. 71 No. 12 2:33

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov / Sophie Rétaux (Arr.)

Scheherazade, Op. 35 14:46

Pyotr Tchaikovsky / Sophie Rétaux (Arr.)

'Swan Lake' Act II Scène 10 2:44

Sergei Rachmaninoff / Frederick G. Shinn (Arr.)

Prelude C-sharp minor, Op. 3 No. 2 4:47



To Jean Boyer ...

Speaking to Ferruccio Busoni, who in 1909 proposed to make a transcription of Arnold Schoenberg's Op. 11 No 2, the Austrian composer made this sharp remark: "You do not want to adopt the author's point of view, but rather look to find yourself – to find yourself completely in the work of another", thus setting out the nature of his demands concerning an exercise of which he himself was particularly fond.

The risk of usurpation – inherent in any process of transcription and which overly personal intentions cannot avoid – comes from the dual need to respect the work while altering it, to project "the author's point of view" in a metamorphosis that does not distort it.

Conceived this way, transcription can reveal its true significance: an active relationship to the work, a way of experiencing it in its crafting and plasticity, "writing by listening", i.e. a way of listening which, through a new instrumental embodiment, experiences its own resistance. The transcription is thus likely to bring out what is irreducible in the work, to bring to light an identity that would remain veiled if not confronted with its "transpositions".

The transcriptions carried out by Sophie Rétaux clearly stem from an attentive and scrupulous hermeneutic with regard to each score to the extent that the works seem to unfold naturally in their new, unexpected destination. The organ combines ideally with Shostakovich's harmonic balance and demanding and ascetic four-part writing, the pianistic idioms of Prokofiev and Rachmaninov² as well as the orchestral profusion of Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky (studded with many heterogeneous and independent individual elements aspiring to unity). The various means used – distribution of the quartet's dialogues between keyboards, dynamic and structural procedures for registration, strengthening a part by doubling it at the octave, replacing an overly idiomatic way of playing, omission of a given orchestral part in the interests of polyphonic clarity etc. – give each transcription the character of an enlargement that allows the work to remain the same while being metamorphosed. It is then clear that "the author's point of view" can be clarified from the transcription's point of view in a relationship determined by an unwavering faithfulness to meaning. Here the analogy with literary translation goes a long way: "The overt fidelity of translations is not the criterion that guarantees the acceptability of the translation. Fidelity is rather the conviction that translation is always possible if the source text has been interpreted with a passionate complicity, it is the commitment to identifying what for us is the deep meaning of the text and the ability at every moment to work out the solution which seems to us the most appropriate."³

Explicitly claimed as being autobiographical, the eighth quartet of **Dmitri Shostakovich** seems to be the epitome of a first-person utterance. On July 19, 1960 the composer wrote to his friend Isaac Glikman: "I told myself that after my death, doubtless nobody would compose a work in my memory. So I decided to compose one myself ... Its first theme is made up of the notes DSCH, that is to say my initials. In this quartet I recall themes of other personal works as well as the revolutionary song *Tortured to death in a cruel captivity*. Here are my themes: they are taken from the First Symphony, the Eighth Symphony, Trio, Cello Concerto, Lady Macbeth, [...] without forgetting my Tenth Symphony [...] The pseudo-tragic character of this quartet comes from the fact that in composing, I shed as many tears as urine after half a dozen beers. [...] At home, I tried twice to play the quartet, and my tears began to

1 Peter Szendy: *Listen: A History of Our Ears*. Paderborn 2015.

2 The Prelude Op. 3 No 2 and the Prelude Op. 23 No 5 are presented here in approved transcriptions by Frederick G. Shinn and Gordon Balch Nevin.

3 Umberto Eco: *Saying Almost the Same Thing. Experiences in translation*.

flow again. But it was not only because of this pseudo-tragic character: it was out of admiration for the marvellous clarity of the form. Perhaps a kind of rapture regarding my own person played a role here, the kind of feeling that quickly fades, leaving you with a hangover in the form of self-criticism.“ In transposing his initials into music Shostakovich appears as the narrator of his anxieties and aspirations. The whole theme is based on this first generative pattern (D-E flat-C-B natural). Bathed in tragedy from the opening largo onwards, it gradually enters all the voices, being stated in melodic and rhythmic variants during the five movements, encompassing the various quotations of which it is the unifying element. If the theme of death constitutes a latent leitmotiv in Shostakovich’s work, it here seems to be shot through with the obsessive image of the void engulfing life’s sweetness. Extraordinarily concentrated in its expression, “the work demonstrates an incomparable pessimism in being devoted, well in advance, to the erection of a tomb with the effigy of its author“.⁴

Sergei Prokofiev’s opus 22 cycle was written sporadically between 1915 and 1917. The composer found the inspiration for its title *Mimolyotnosti* in lines of the poem *I do not know wisdom* by the symbolist author Konstantin Balmont, but the title has been translated somewhat inaccurately as *Visions fugitives* [Fleeting Visions] whereas it would be better to say “Fleeting Instants“ or “Moments“. More than the title, it is the poem itself that seems to have inspired these twenty miniatures for piano: “I do not know wisdom: leave that to others. I only change fleeting visions into lines. In every fleeting vision, I see worlds, full of the changing play of rainbows. Do not curse me, you who think yourselves wise. I carry within me the flame and am only a cloud [...] And like the cloud, stormy and so tender, I only speak to the dreamers, who alone can hear me.“ Prokofiev noted in his diary: “I sat down at the piano and decided to write little explosions ... they began to come to me more and more easily, I like them very much and they come out with an impeccable finish“. The work presents itself as a very fine succession of preludes of the soul, “a psychological inventory of its private emotions“, as his fellow student Myaskovsky wrote, little vignettes of melodic and harmonic alchemy whose changing character (sweet, dreamy, mocking, mischievous or tender) seems determined by the poetic intention giving them life. Their lyrical charm and sometimes dizzy playfulness so pleased the Russian violist Rudolf Barshai that he made a partial transcription for string quartet in 1945. The cycle of “Fleeting Visions“ is actually very rarely played in its entirety. The well thought-out selection proposed here does not break with the habit of performers in rummaging through this “herbarium“ of emotions according to their moods.

The four-movement *Scheherazade* suite composed by **Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov** in 1888 was inspired by that most famous collection of oriental tales, *The Thousand and One Nights*. As he pointed out, *Scheherazade* does not attempt to tell a particular story, and he had initially envisaged dropping the narrative titles: “In composing *Scheherazade* I only sought through these indications to guide the imagination of the listener a little on the path that my own had followed, while leaving more precise representations to each person’s freedom and feelings. I only wanted listeners, if they like my piece as symphonic music, to perceive it as a specifically oriental narration on various different wondrous legends, and not just as four pieces played one after the other and composed on common themes [...] The suite should therefore be understood as a kaleidoscope of Oriental images and fairy-tale drawings“. Like many nineteenth-century Russian composers, Rimsky-Korsakov succumbed to the charms of the East, a magic kingdom as they saw it of imagination and dreams, colours and warmth, exotic adventures and passionate sensuality. Orien-

⁴ Liouba Bouscant: *Les quatuors à cordes de Chostakovitch* [The string quartets of Shostakovich]. *Pour une esthétique du Sujet*. Paris 2003.

talism in Russian music has little to do with reality. It was an artistic convention partly inspired by a general aspiration towards a distant ideal. The structure of the work is particularly flexible: a series of episodes, each characterized by striking melodies, a subtle rhythmic sense and a bold use of orchestral colours. The episodes are repeated and alternate in a sort of musical mosaic which, by means of accumulations and contrasts, manages to create its own dramatic impetus. The excerpt presented here is the last movement of the suite, a colourful tableau depicting three successive episodes: "Festival at Baghdad – The sea – The ship breaks on a rock topped by a bronze warrior". Scheherazade's theme and the sultan's angry melody are mixed with clear reminiscences of the themes of the first three movements.

"My music is the product of my temperament, and consequently is Russian music. [...] I try to say in a simple and direct way what is in my heart. If there is love, bitterness, sadness or religion, these states of mind become part of my music", **Sergei Rachmaninov** confided in 1941, shortly before his death. The "Russian soul" is made up of depth, sentimentality, anxiety verging on *morbidezza*, and is superbly embodied in Rachmaninov through the piano, his *alter ego*, an intimate vessel for the musical expression of his thoughts. His 24 Preludes, if they naturally recall Chopin, differ considerably from the latter by their larger dimensions. The famous Prelude in C sharp minor, Op. 3 No 2 (transcribed by Frederick G. Shinn), which Rachmaninov himself was forced to perform as an encore at the end of almost all his recitals, is a work of his youth (1892) composed well before the rest of the cycle but nevertheless one of the most representative of the style of its author with its splendid bell-like sonorities, enclosing a poignant cantabile, which have lost nothing of their power. The *Alla marcia* Prelude, Op. 23 No 5 in G minor (transcribed by Gordon Balch Nevin), combines an implacable $\frac{4}{4}$ rhythm with the accents of a heroic polonaise with a particularly nostalgic central section.

It was in 1875 that **Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky** began writing *Swan Lake*, the first of his three ballets. After sketching two acts, he explained to Rimsky-Korsakov: "I began this work partly for the money and partly because I have long wanted to try my hand at this kind of music." The ballet in the nineteenth century was above all a decorative spectacle and the music was generally mediocre. Through his contribution to the world of dance, Tchaikovsky brought the Russian ballet out of a rut in which old-fashioned academicism could have kept it, but he clearly found (in the margins of his symphonies) a space where his melodic genius, orchestral sense and extreme sensitivity could be set free. If *Swan Lake* has created its own myth it is also because of being stamped by a deep nostalgia, as if echoing the composer's own experience, in which love dreamed of remains impossible. The *Danse des mirlitons* is taken from what is perhaps Tchaikovsky's most famous score: *The Nutcracker*, a veritable jewel of melodic and orchestral invention and which, in its own way, through a lightness not customary for the composer, reveals the intentions from which his music never really departed: "Without any doubt I would have gone mad without music. Music is truly the most beautiful of the gifts which heaven has given to a humanity wandering in darkness. She alone calms, enlightens and soothes our souls. She is not the straw to which a drowning man clings; she is a true friend, a refuge, a consoler, who makes life worth living. Perhaps there will be no music in heaven. So let us devote our mortal life to it as long as it lasts."⁵

Dominique Vasseur
Translation: Peter Bannister

⁵ Tchaikovsky in a letter to Nadezhda von Meck in 1877.

THE CAVAILLÉ-COLL ORGAN OF SAINT-OMER CATHÉDRALE

A precious testimony to the art and work of the famous organ-builder Aristide Cavallé-Coll (1811-1899), the organ of Saint-Omer Cathedral is a model of sonic refinement and splendour. Its characteristic aesthetic naturally destines it for Romantic repertoire, but the various stops preserved from the classical period (*récits de cromorne*, *basses de trompette*, *dessus de nazard*, “*Grands-Jeux*”), combined with solid experience of the art of registration and with some real knowledge about the science of organology, give it full legitimacy in the symphonic and modern repertoire, and make it the ideal medium for the musical and sonic mutations to which the present recording invites the listener.

I Positif

Montre 8'
Bourdon 8'
Salicional 8'
Prestant 4'
Dulciane 4'
Flûte douce 4'
Nazard 2²/₃
Doublette 2'
Plein jeu III + II
Cornet 5r
Trompette 8'
Clairon 4'
Cromorne 8

II Grand Orgue

Montre 16'
Montre 8'
Bourdon 8'
Gambe 16'
Viole de gambe 8'
Bourdon 16'
Prestant 4'
Flûte octaviante 4'
Cornet 5r

III Bombarde

Flûte harmonique 8'
Octave 4'
Doublette 2'
Fourniture 5r
Cymbale 4r
Bombarde 16'
Trompette 8'
Clairon 4'
Basson 8'

IV Récit expressif

Voix humaine 8'
Basson et Hautbois 8'
Viole de gambe 8'
Voix céleste 8'
Flûte harmonique 8'
Viole de gambe 4'
Bourdon 16'
Flûte octaviante 4'
Octavin 2
Bombarde 8'-16'
Trompette 8'
Clairon 4'

Pédalier

Flûte 16'
Flûte 8'
Flûte 4'
Bombarde 16'
Trompette 8'
Clairon 4'

SOPHIE RÉTAUX

Sophie Rétaux is titular organist of the Aristide Cavaillé-Coll organ of the Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Saint-Omer (France). To promote this exceptional instrument, she began transcribing major works of the chamber music and symphonic repertoire from the post-romantic and modern periods for her instrument.

A First Prize at the International Organ Competition Nijmegen (Netherlands) in 1992, and a Second Prize at the International Organ Competition Toulouse (Xavier Darasse Organ Competition, France) in 1996 launched Sophie Rétaux's concert career in France and abroad. In Paris, she has performed in Notre-Dame, La Madeleine, Les Blancs Manteaux, St Séverin and the Basilica of St Denis; concert tours led her in France to cities such as Epernay, Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert, Cannes, Laon, Vannes, Quimper, Toulouse, and abroad to Vienna (Austria), Nijmegen (Netherlands), Esch/Alzette (Luxembourg) and Brussels (Belgium).

Thanks to her passion for chamber music, she performs as frequently on the piano as on the organ, as well as on the harpsichord and, in recent years, also on the fortepiano. Together with her chamber music partners she recorded several CDs. She also appears on occasion with larger ensembles, for example the Orchestre National de Lille, Orchestre de Chambre Amadeus, Chœur de l'Opéra de Lille and the Vocal Ensemble *Les Eléments*.

Sophie Rétaux studied organ, piano and piano accompaniment and completed her artistic training at the Conservatory of Lille, finishing her studies with distinction. Jean Boyer (organ) and Jean Koerner (piano accompaniment) had essential impact on her artistic development and profoundly marked her career.

Having held the position of accompanist at the Conservatoire de Lille for several years, Sophie Rétaux was appointed Professor of Organ in 2012 at the same institution. At ESMD (École Supérieure Musique et Danse) in Lille, she teaches organ and fortepiano.





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August 2 - 4, 2017

recording location:

Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Saint-Omer

disposition:

see page 6

equipment:

dpa 4006 & 4011, Sennheiser MKH 800 Twin,
RME Micstasy M & Fireface UFX+
ME Geithain RL 901K & 903K

recording format:

pcm, 96 kHz / 24bit

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Dipl.-Tonmeister Ludger Böckenhoff

registrants:

Marie Alabau & Adelya Fayrushina

organ tuner:

Quentin & Floriane Requier

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