

audite

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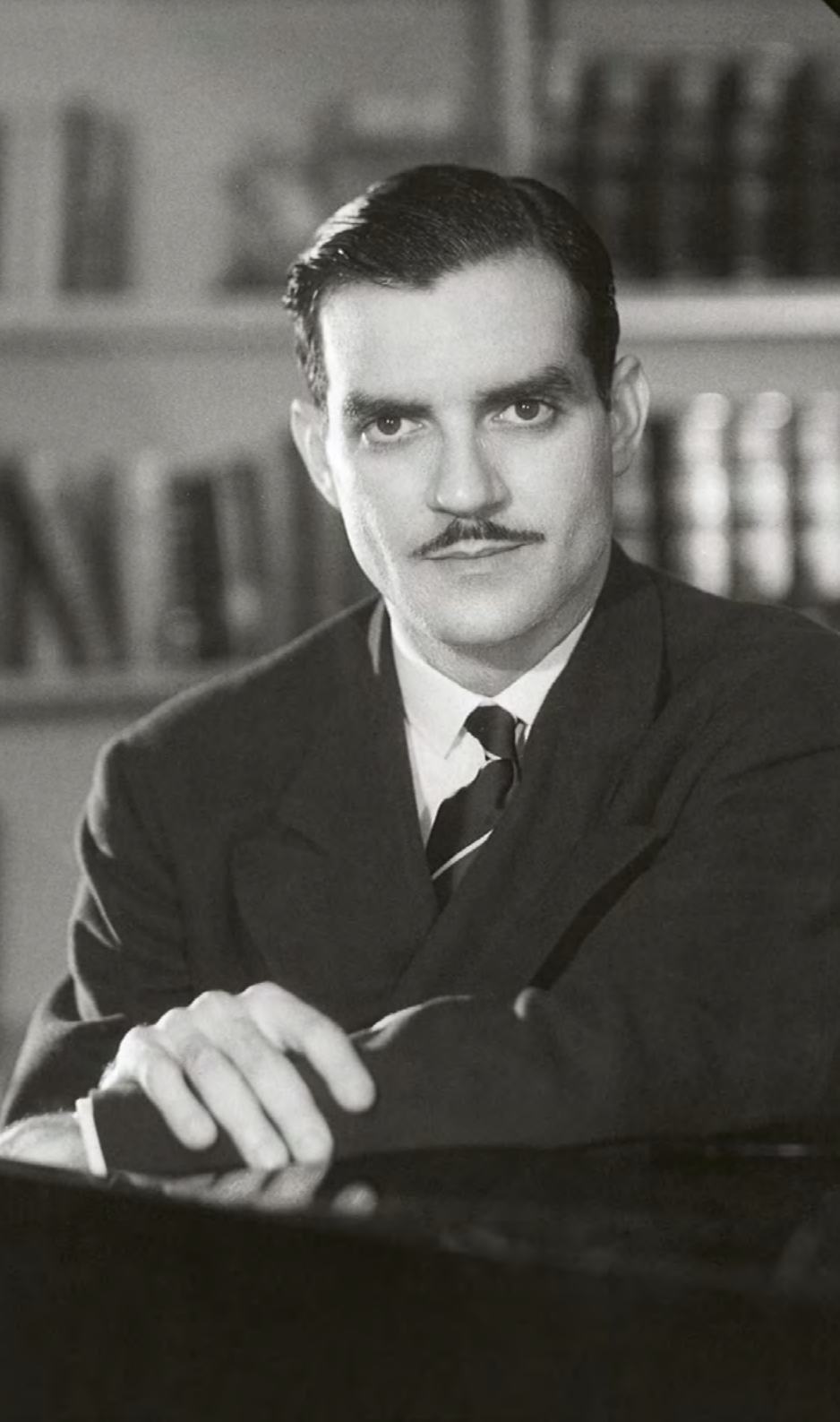


JORGE BOLET

Beethoven | Chopin | Debussy | Schumann
Franck | Grieg | Godowsky | Liszt | Dello Joio

Vol. III

Berlin, 1961 - 1974



FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810-1849)

12 Études, Op. 25

- Étude in A-flat major, Op. 25/1 'Aeolian Harp' • Allegro sostenuto 2:37
- Étude in F minor, Op. 25/2 • Presto 1:36
- Étude in F major, Op. 25/3 • Allegro 2:15
- Étude in A minor, Op. 25/4 • Agitato 2:03
- Étude in E minor, Op. 25/5 • Vivace 3:25
- Étude in G-sharp minor, Op. 25/6 • Allegro 2:03
- Étude in C-sharp minor, Op. 25/7 • Lento 5:29
- Étude in D-flat major, Op. 25/8 • Vivace 1:18
- Étude in G-flat major, Op. 25/9 • Allegro assai 1:01
- Étude in B minor, Op. 25/10 • Allegro con fuoco 4:54
- Étude in A minor, Op. 25/11 'Winter Wind' • Lento 4:03
- Étude in C minor, Op. 25/12 • Allegro molto con fuoco 2:42

recording: April 24, 1968 • Haus des Rundfunks, Saal 3 (stereo)

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat major, Op. 73 'Emperor'

- I. Allegro 23:29
- II. Adagio un poco mosso – attacca: 8:24
- III. Rondo. Allegro 10:19

Radio-Symphonie-Orchester Berlin
Moshe Atzmon, conductor

live recording: December 3, 1974 • Paris ORTF (stereo)

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810-1856)

Piano Sonata No. 3 in F minor, Op. 14

- I. Allegro 7:48
- II. Scherzo. Molto comodo 4:46
- III. Quasi Variazioni. Andantino de Clara Wieck 8:50
- IV. Finale. Prestissimo possibile 5:26

recording: March 11, 1964 • Haus des Rundfunks, Saal 3 (mono)



EDVARD GRIEG (1843-1907)

Ballad in G minor, Op. 24 (excerpts)

- I. Andante espressivo 1:11
- II. Poco meno andante, ma molto tranquillo 0:47
- III. Allegro agitato 0:35
- IV. Adagio 1:30
- V. Allegro capriccioso 0:27
- VI. Piu lento 1:27
- VII. Allegro scherzando 0:53
- VIII. Lento 1:57
- IX. Un poco andante 1:30
- X. Un poco allegro e alla burla 1:17
- XI. Piu animato 1:57
- XIII. Allegro furioso – Prestissimo – Andante espressivo 1:58

recording: October 2, 1961 • Haus des Rundfunks, Saal 3 (mono)

CÉSAR FRANCK (1822-1890)

Prélude, Aria et Final, FWV 23

- I. Prélude. Allegro moderato e maestoso 10:22
- II. Aria. Lento 6:30
- III. Final. Allegro molto ed agitato 7:08

recording: March 26, 1962 • Haus des Rundfunks, Saal 3 (mono)

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810-1849)

Fantaisie-Impromptu in C-sharp minor, Op. 66 4:55

recording: February 21, 1963 • Haus des Rundfunks, Saal 3 (mono)

Grand Polonaise in E-flat major, Op. 22 13:21

- I. Andante spianato 4:04
- II. Polonaise 9:17

recording: March 3, 1971 • Haus des Rundfunks, Saal 3 (stereo)

Polonaise No. 3 in A major, Op. 40/1 'Military' 4:54

Polonaise No. 4 in C minor, Op. 40/2 6:18

Polonaise No. 6 in A-flat major, Op. 53 'Heroic' 7:06

recording: December 2, 1966 • Haus des Rundfunks, Saal 3 (stereo)



ROBERT SCHUMANN, arr. **FRANZ LISZT** (1811-1886)

'Frühlingsnacht', S 568 (Liederkreis, Op. 39/12) 2:42

recording: December 2, 1966 • Haus des Rundfunks, Saal 3 (stereo)

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862-1918)

Images pour Piano II

- I. Cloches à travers les feuilles (Bells through the leaves) • Lent 4:46
- II. Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut
(And the moon descends on the temple that was) • Lent 5:31
- III. Poissons d'or (Golden fishes) • Animé 3:56

Masques

Très vif et fantasque 5:33

recording: October 2, 1961 • Haus des Rundfunks, Saal 3 (mono)

NORMAN DELLO JOIO (1913-2008)

Sonata for Piano No. 2

- I. Presto martellato 2:46
- II. Adagio 5:40
- III. Vivace spiritoso 3:50

recording: January 6, 1966 • Haus des Rundfunks, Saal 3 (stereo)

LEOPOLD GODOWSKY (1870-1938)

Symphonic Metamorphosis of themes by Johann Strauss

No. 2 'Die Fledermaus' (The Bat) 10:47

recording: February 21, 1963 • Haus des Rundfunks, Saal 3 (mono)

Open-minded about all music – Jorge Bolet’s recordings at Sender Freies Berlin

“I believe a musician is a person who, first of all, has an open mind about everything in connection with music [...], willing to study and consider all angles and approaches to music.” This is how Jorge Bolet defined the role of a musician during a 1978 interview with Adele Marcus. First and foremost, of course, he was characterising his own goals and ideals. These were rooted in the “golden age” of the piano, the nineteenth century that had produced romantic piano heroes such as Chopin, Liszt and Schumann; however, the way in which Bolet realised them demonstrates the lasting influence of an objectivising interpretational approach which had started to manifest itself after the First World War. Ingo Harden concisely summarised this ambivalence in Bolet’s artistry: “Even at a younger age, he showed little interest in the circus effects and idiosyncracies which characterised the playing of many ‘old school’ virtuosos. In contrast to this, his playing, although he was strictly against superficial ‘faithfulness to the text’, was always determined by a straightforward sincerity towards the score which, stylistically, seems quite ‘modern’ and which lends his playing a sense of classical modernity. This becomes all the more apparent as musical elements in Bolet’s playing, which can be described as ‘eloquent’, ‘expressive’ or even ‘symphonic’, took a back seat to an apparently controlled interpretation. Bolet was a serious, strict virtuoso who primarily sought to elucidate compositional architecture.”¹ Bolet’s determination to explore repertoire away from the well-trodden paths of traditional concert programmes, and his unprejudiced attitude towards diverse styles (including contemporary music), depict a musician who put his superior talents into the service of conveying the most diverse soundworlds and modes of expression from the classical age up to modernism, thus demonstrating to his listeners the incredibly manifold nature of piano music since the baroque period. In this respect, Bolet was surpassed only by Shura Cherkassky, five years his senior, who had also been taught by the famous piano pedagogue David Saperton at Philadelphia’s Curtis Institute, and who sometimes even programmed pieces by Boulez and Stockhausen. (This openness did not always prove popular: the German critic Joachim Kaiser, who tended to represent fairly dogmatic aesthetics, did not mention Bolet at all in any of the editions of his influential book *Große Pianisten der Gegenwart* [Great Pianists of the Present], published for the first time in 1965; Cherkassky was snubbed with an aside claiming that his playing demonstrated nothing but “fast industry”).

This third and final volume of Jorge Bolet’s (West) Berlin recordings and concert recordings made between 1961 and 1974 shows his choice of music and its execution to be characteristically inquisitive and stylistically assured. Whilst the first two boxed sets (audite 21.438 and 97.738) present RIAS recordings, this one focuses on the recordings made by the Sender Freies Berlin, at the Haus des Rundfunks (Masurenallee, in the Berlin district of Charlottenburg) in 1957, after the withdrawal of the Soviet Kommandatura. On the other side of the cultural-political consequences of the Cold War, which saw many American musicians travel to Berlin, it is amazing to note Bolet’s continued presence in the concert schedule and radio programmes of the divided city; on 7 April 1954 he appeared in a “Concert with five American soloists” under the baton of Arthur Rother at the newly opened concert hall of the Hochschule für Musik,

¹ Ingo Harden, “Jorge Bolet” in: *Pianisten-Profile. 600 Interpreten: Ihre Biografie, ihr Stil, ihre Aufnahmen*, ed. by I. Harden and G. Willmes, Kassel, 2008, p. 91.

performing Rachmaninov's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*. As chance would have it, Bolet also gave the final recital of his 63-year concert career in Berlin. This took place at the Berlin Philharmonie on 8 June 1989, only a few months before the Fall of the Wall, the programme featuring Schubert's Piano Sonata in D major, D850, Liszt arrangements of Schubert songs as well as Wagner's *Tannhäuser* overture. If the last work – Bolet's possibly most impressive warhorse – closed a circle, then his choice of the Schubert sonata revealed that he had never lost sight of musical classicism. This release also includes a work from the classical era – namely an excellent performance of Beethoven's Fifth Piano Concerto, Op. 73, with the RSO Berlin and the Israeli conductor Moshe Atzmon, in a Paris concert recording from 1974. (Bolet had played the concerto for the first time in 1960 in Berlin alongside the Berliner Symphonisches Orchester, conducted by Carl August Bunte.) The recording is a valuable new addition to Bolet's discography; other first releases include twentieth century music: perfectly shaped and clearly defined recordings of Debussy's *Masques*, a subtle interpretation of the French composer's *Images* (Vol. 2), as well as the Second Piano Sonata (1943) by the American composer Norman Dello Jojo (1913-2008), whose rugged – partly modernist, partly expressionist – soundscape Bolet mastered with aplomb. But his main repertoire, romantic piano music, can also boast several new additions, such as Schumann's Third Piano Sonata in F minor, Op. 14, Chopin's Polonaises Nos 3, 4 and 6 and, particularly, the complete cycle of his Op. 25 *Études*. (The *Andante spianato et Grande polonaise brillante*, Op. 22, as a concert recording made in Bloomington in 1971, and the *Impromptu Op. 66* are already available as part of the Marston Records Bolet Edition, catalogue no 52035-2.) On top of that, Bolet also recorded romantic piano gems in Berlin, such as Grieg's 1876 *Ballade i form av variasjoner over en norsk folkevis* ("Ballad in the form of variations on a Norwegian folk tune") in G minor, Op. 24, and César Franck's *Prélude, Aria et Final* (1886/87), not to mention a further *pièce de résistance* in his repertoire, Leopold Godowsky's *Symphonic Metamorphoses* on themes from Johann Strauss II's operetta *Die Fledermaus*. Comparing the SFB recording of February 1963 with the RIAS recording (audite 21.438) made one year later, it is astonishing to observe how Bolet, maintaining almost identical overall durations, produced two completely different readings of this work, whose horrendous technical difficulties are never perceptible. It becomes apparent that he employed an older performance tradition of the *tempo rubato* and quasi improvisatory use of tempi specifically to create a sense of vivacity and spontaneity in his performance which would soon have the listener forget about the fact that it was a studio recording. (The immense work and reflection preceding such peak performances is documented in *Jorge Bolet Memorial Editions* featuring works and transcriptions by Chopin, Liszt, Grieg and Schumann, which are based on Bolet's interpretational notes and fingerings and which were published by his longstanding friend, the Cuban pianist Dr Teresa Escandon [1940-2001]).

The recordings of works by Godowsky, Grieg and Franck attest to Bolet's fondness for densely intricate textures, rich in contrasts. Especially impressive in this respect is his interpretation of Franck's late masterpiece *Prélude, Aria et Final*, whose piano writing imagines the organ, anticipating Max Reger's experiments of merging harmony and linearity into an indivisible entity. Bolet – who also played the equally demanding partner work, *Prélude, Chorale et Fugue*, and produced a reference recording of Reger's *Telemann Variations* – did not, of course, intend merely to demonstrate his impeccable virtuosity for its own

sake, but instead used it to emphasise the colours and the diversity of this music, and to make it shine. And thus for him, one of the most important pianistic descendants of Franz Liszt (to whom he pays tribute with an arrangement of Schumann's *Frühlingsnacht* from the *Eichendorff Liederkreis*), these works posed a particular challenge, virtuosity poetically elevating the musical content. That is why Bolet's interpretations of Beethoven, Chopin and Schumann are of great interest to all admirers of his art. In Beethoven's Fifth Piano Concerto Bolet opts for a three-stage perspective, adapted to each of the movement characters. He is therefore, in the opening movement, able to integrate the sound of the piano into the broadly conceived, almost symphonic, overall architecture. In the second movement, meanwhile, he delicately continues the romantic aura developed by the orchestra, and only in the rondo finale does he firmly assume leadership, bestowing the theme with triumphant lustre thanks to his inimitable technique. In Chopin's Op. 25 *Études*, however, we find an entirely different approach. Compared to Claudio Arrau's famous Columbia recording of 1956, or Géza Anda's impressive WDR recording of 1955 (audite 23.409), Bolet's playing appears more "complete", in terms of ultimate technical security, faithfulness to the original, and tone modelling (which also involves subtle use of the pedals). But whilst Arrau exposes existential precipices in the last three minor-mode *Études*, and Anda, in *Études* Nos 4, 5 and 8, brings all the sophistication and elegance of this music to the fore, Bolet's performance aims at balance and a luminous sound quality – paying tribute not only to Chopin's genius as a composer, but also to the classicist core of the music.

A third aspect of Bolet's art is revealed in his interpretation of Robert Schumann's third (strictly speaking his second) Sonata in F minor, Op. 14, the so-called "Concert sans orchestre" (1836/1853). Schumann revised this work several times: with the exception of the central movement, a set of variations on a theme by Clara Wieck, this recording is based on Schumann's initial version and features a cut in the final movement. In this magnificent performance, risking everything (even though it was a studio recording), Bolet plunges himself with incredible intensity into a fantastical soundworld, ranging between the extremes of ecstasy and melancholy. And yet Jorge Bolet, grand seigneur of the piano, manages to tame even those passages of the sonata which seem to burst all limits, anticipating Scriabin, thanks to his infallible sense of proportion and beautiful sound. It was the preserve of only a very small number of twentieth century pianists to attain such a perfect balance.

Wolfgang Rathert

Translation: Viola Scheffel

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photos: IPAM

p. 9: Francesco Scavullo

p. 11: photographed by Jorge Bolet

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