

ALEXANDER GLAZUNOV

(1865-1936)

The Complete Music for Piano, Volume 1 Duane Hulbert, piano

TWO IMPROMPTUS, OP. 54 (5:02)

- 1 Impromptu No. 1, D-flat major (1:41)
- 2 Impromptu No. 2, A-flat major (3:18)

SONATA NO. 2, E MINOR, OP. 75 (22:00)

- 3 I. Moderato (7:47)
- 4 II. Scherzo: Allegretto (6:08)
- 5 III. Finale: Allegro moderato (8:03)

THEME AND VARIATIONS, F-SHARP MINOR, OP. 72 (17:20)

- 6 Theme: Andante (:23)
- 7 Variation 1, Piu mosso (:20)
- 8 Variation 2, L'istesso tempo (:23)
- 9 Variation 3, Andante (:27)
- 10 Variation 4, Poco piu mosso (:31)
- 11 Variation 5, Andante sostenuto (:34)

- 12 Variation 6, Largo (:56)
- 13 Variation 7, Allegro (:36)
- 14 Variation 8, Vivo (:39)
- 15 Variation 9, Adagio tranquillo (2:00)
- 16 Variation 10, Allegro assai (:38)
- 17 Variation 11, Allegretto (1:33)
- 18 Variation 12, Andante sostenuto (1:54)
- 19 Variation 13, Allegro (1:04)
- 20 Variation 14, Andante tranquillo (2:57)
- 21 Finale: Variation 15, Allegro moderato (2:17)

SONATA NO. 1, B-FLAT MINOR, OP. 74 (21:40)

- 22 I. Allegro moderato (8:15)
- 23 II. Andante (5:50)
- 24 III. Allegro scherzando (7:34)

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ALEXANDER GLAZUNOV

The Complete Music for Piano, Volume 1

Duane Hulbert, piano



Notes by Harlow Robinson



TWO IMPROMPTUS, OP.54 (1896)

SONATA NO.2 IN E-MINOR, OP.75 (1901)

THEME AND VARIATIONS IN F-SHARP MINOR, OP.72 (1900)

SONATA NO.1 IN B-FLAT MINOR, OP.74 (1901)



The St. Petersburg street where Alexander Konstantinovich Glazunov (1865-1936) lived for nearly his entire life has seen many changes over the years. Located in a fashionable central neighborhood of the Tsarist Imperial capital, it originally took its name—Kazanskaya Street—from the neo-classical Russian Orthodox Kazan Cathedral that dominates the corner where the street meets the city's main thoroughfare, Nevsky Prospect. Soon after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, however, the new (and fiercely anti-religious) Communist government changed the name to Plekhanov Street, in honor of Georgii Plekhanov, one of the founders of the Russian socialist movement. Plekhanov Street it remained until the early 1990s, when another frantic wave of name-changing swept over Russia in the wake of the incredible collapse of the Communist regime and the USSR. Today, it is once again Kazanskaya Street, and church services have resumed in Kazan Cathedral, which was during the Soviet era an infamous Museum of Religion and Atheism—with crude emphasis on atheism.

Glazunov was born in a building owned and occupied by his father's family for several generations. Owners of a successful publishing business housed next door, the prosperous Glazunovs were well-known among the Russian nineteenth-century intelligentsia. Alexander's mother, an accomplished pianist, studied with Mily Balakirev and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, who frequently visited their home. Apple of his mother's eye, Glazunov grew up in a supportive atmosphere of refinement and creativity during one of the most brilliant periods in the history of Russian culture. The brand-new St.Petersburg Conservatory and glittering Mariinsky Opera and Ballet Theater were just a short walk away.

From an early age, every effort was made to encourage and develop Glazunov's obvious musical talent. He began studying the piano at age nine and composing at eleven. After a few years of private study with Rimsky-Korsakov, the precocious Alexander produced his First Symphony (at age 16) and his First String Quartet. Eventually, Glazunov completed eight symphonies and seven string quartets, although he is best-remembered today for his Violin Concerto (1904) and the ballets *Raymonda* (1896-7) and *The Seasons* (1899). Like his early mentor Rimsky-Korsakov, Glazunov also worked selflessly to bring the works of other significant Russian composers to the attention of audiences. In 1888, he completed and orchestrated Act III of Alexander Borodin's unfinished historical epic opera *Prince Igor*.

In style, Glazunov's own music belongs to the world of late Romanticism. It is closer in spirit to the aristocratic elegance of Tchaikovsky than to the more gritty "realism" of Mussorgsky or the self-conscious ethnographic aesthetic of the other (mainly self-taught) members of the "Mighty Handful" (Rimsky-Korsakov, Balakirev, Cui and Borodin). Significantly, Glazunov never attempted opera, the favorite genre of the programmatically-minded "Mighty Handful" composers, instead preferring "pure" forms like symphonies, concerti and quartets, a fact that led some critics to label him old-fashioned and excessively academic. Like Sergei Rachmaninoff (eight years his junior), Glazunov looked to the past for guidance and inspiration, and his music possesses a strong sense of nostalgia, decorum and tradition. This set him at odds with the tradition-smashing artistic avant-garde that arose in Russian music and culture in

the early years of the twentieth century. Glazunov had no use for the harmonic and mystical experimentation of Alexander Scriabin (seven years his junior), rejected the Futurism of composers like Nikolai Roslavets, and found Stravinsky's ground-breaking early compositions alien and too modern. When Sergei Prokofiev's raucous *Scythian Suite* was performed for the first time in St.Petersburg in 1916, Glazunov made a great show of leaving the concert hall just before the end to convey his distaste.

After 1899, when Glazunov was appointed professor at the St.Petersburg Conservatory, less of his energy went into composing and more into teaching. In 1905, he was appointed director of the conservatory after a political crisis, and retained this powerful position for the next 25 years. Despite his own artistic and personal conservatism and traditionalism, Glazunov encouraged and trained at the Conservatory such important innovators as Prokofiev and Dmitri Shostakovich, both of whom retained a lifelong affection for their generous former teacher.

Glazunov was 52 years old when Lenin and the Bolsheviks assumed power in Russia in late 1917. Unlike the younger Rachmaninoff, Stravinsky and Prokofiev, who almost immediately decamped (along with many other leading cultural figures) to the West, Glazunov remained in St. Petersburg through the terrible and impoverished years of the Civil War and the New Economic Policy, still living in the increasingly shabby and often unheated flat on Kazanskaya Street. In 1928 Glazunov made an official trip to Vienna and never returned to Russia. In 1929, Russian-American impresario Sol Hurok brought Glazunov (who had taught Hurok's second wife at the St. Petersburg Conservatory) to the United

States for a tour that included appearances with orchestras in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit and Boston. En route, Hurok took Glazunov to see Niagara Falls. "I've dreamt for many years of seeing Niagara, and at least my dream has come true," the composer told Hurok. "Now I can die in peace." That would happen in Paris seven years later.



Glazunov wrote much less music for the piano than Rachmaninoff, Scriabin or Prokofiev. His output includes two rarely heard piano concerti, several dozen small pieces, two sonatas and one set of theme and variations. An active pianist since childhood, Glazunov loved to play Bach, Liszt and Chopin. Chopin's influence can be strongly felt in all of his music for the instrument, especially in his mazurkas, nocturnes and waltzes, as well as the strikingly Chopinesque **Two Impromptus, Op. 54** (1896). Russian composer and critic Boris Asafiev wrote this description of Glazunov's own performing style at the keyboard: "Glazunov's tone was rich, soft and warm, his fingers 'dug into' the keys, so the resonance could be at the same time massive and rumbling and tenderly song-like and soaringly romantic. At the same time, you could feel an intimate Russian simplicity and spaciousness, a freshness of sentiment and a shy lyricism." Glazunov never pursued a career as a composer-pianist, however, as Prokofiev, Scriabin and Shostakovich did.

Around the year 1900, in his mid-30s, Glazunov's interest in composing for the piano intensified. First, during three inspired weeks in August, 1900, he completed the charming and impeccably balanced **Theme and Variations in F-sharp Minor, Op.72**, a set of 15 variations on a simple soulful

tune of folk character. In spring, 1901, Glazunov wrote his only two piano sonatas one immediately after the other, finishing the **Sonata No.1 in B-flat Minor, Op.74** in April and the **Sonata No.2 in E Minor, Op.75** in late May.

Glazunov dedicated the First Piano Sonata to Nadezhda Rimsky-Korsakov, the wife of his Conservatory colleague and herself a serious pianist. In three movements of nearly equal length, the Sonata harmoniously balances themes filled with romantic fervor (especially the main theme of the first movement) with more serene, even restrained, episodes. Especially in the first movement, sixteenth-notes dominate in the accompaniment, providing an emotional and rhythmic unity as well as the sensation of emotional pathos. The conclusions of each movement are models of craft, progressing from turmoil to tranquility. In the final measures of the last movement, Glazunov ingeniously brings back the main theme of the first movement, interweaving it with the main theme of the third movement in affirmative major harmony.

Glazunov's friends and colleagues greeted his First Piano Sonata with enormous enthusiasm. Rimsky-Korsakov even admitted to feeling pangs of jealousy after hearing Glazunov play it for an invited audience at his house on Kazanskaya Street. "I must tell you that I left your house with such strong impressions from your Sonata that I couldn't set to work on my own music for several days. This is a superb work both in content and in the virtuoso-like execution of form and technique. Besides that, this is pure music, and as such superior to programmatic music. You cannot imagine what kind of envy and sadness comes over me when I realize that I am incapable of producing anything similar, and even if I

had once been capable, I repressed the impulse, and now it is too late."

If anything, Glazunov's Second Piano Sonata is even more impressive than the First, and elicited even more excited reactions. Here, Glazunov (perhaps following the example of Tchaikovsky in his Fourth and Fifth Symphonies) employs a unifying rising melodic motif that occurs in all three of the Sonata's movements, serving as a musical and emotional focus for the changing moods. In the ingenious and densely contrapuntal third movement, the recapitulation boasts a four-voice fugue reminiscent of Bach; Glazunov also brings back the transformed subsidiary theme from the first movement, interweaving it with the main theme of the second movement Scherzo. As Soviet musicologist Maria Ganina points out in her valuable 1961 book *Glazunov: His Life and Work*, the Scherzo's theme further provides the foundation for the finale's serene hymn-like conclusion, which Glazunov called "a chorale on the theme of the Scherzo." The Second Sonata ends with a final restrained return of the yearning leit-motif theme. Vladimir Stasov, the leading Russian music critic of the era, called this finale "an enormous and marvelous chef d'oeuvre, a thing of genius, and by far the best thing that Glazunov has ever written."

Harlow Robinson, Professor of Modern Languages and History at Northeastern University, is author of biographies of Sergei Prokofiev and Sol Hurok, and editor and translator of Selected Letters of Sergei Prokofiev. His articles and essays have appeared in The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, Musical Quarterly, Musical America, Dance, Stagebill and other publications.

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Pianist Duane Hulbert has toured the United States and Europe, winning enthusiastic audience response and critical praise. Duane Hulbert has been a prize-winner in the Leeds Competition (UK); in Carnegie Hall's American Music Competition; and Grand Prize winner of the 1980 Gina Bachauer International Piano Competition. Dr. Hulbert has been a distinguished soloist with leading American orchestras, including the Seattle, Minnesota, Dallas, Tacoma, and North Carolina Symphonies. His strong commitment to the performance of new music has led to important west coast premieres of works by Takemitsu, Schnittke, and Corigliano. The Minnesota native received Bachelor and Masters degrees from the Juilliard School and his doctorate from the Manhattan School of Music. Dr. Hulbert is presently a Professor of Piano at the University of the Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington. He has previously recorded for the Opus One label.