

## PRIMAKOV IN CONCERT, VOL. 2

Vassily Primakov, piano

FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809–1847)  
LIEDER OHNE WORTE, OP. 30 [17:51]  
(SONGS WITHOUT WORDS, BOOK 2)

- 1) No. 1 Andante espressivo in E-flat major [4:55]
- 2) No. 2 Allegro di molto in B-flat minor [2:09]
- 3) No. 3 Adagio non troppo in E major [2:24]
- 4) No. 4 Agitato e con fuoco in B minor [2:48]
- 5) No. 5 Andante grazioso in D major [2:03]
- 6) No. 6 Allegretto tranquillo in F-sharp minor  
"Venezianisches Gondellied" [3:27]

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685–1750)  
SUITE NO. 2 IN C MINOR, BWV 813 [14:34]

- 7) Allemande [3:28]
- 8) Courante [1:54]
- 9) Sarabande [3:50]
- 10) Air [1:25]
- 11) Menuet [1:37]
- 12) Gigue [2:17]

PHILIP GLASS (b. 1937)

SUITE FROM "THE HOURS" [17:48]  
(COMPILED BY V. PRIMAKOV AFTER THE PIANO  
TRANSCRIPTION BY MICHAEL RIESMAN AND NICO MUHLY)

- 13) 1) The Poet Acts [3:11]
- 14) 2) Morning Passages [4:39]
- 15) 3) Tearing Herself Away [4:36]
- 16) 4) The Hours [5:20]

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862–1918)  
SUITE BERGAMASQUE [17:19]

- 17) Prélude [4:34]
- 18) Menuet [4:01]
- 19) Clair de lune [4:55]
- 20) Passepiéd [3:47]

## PRIMAKOV IN CONCERT, VOL. 2

Notes by David Starobin with Vassily Primakov

It has been a great pleasure to observe the blossoming of Vassily Primakov's music-making. During the past season (2010/11), he has premiered and recorded the Poul Ruders *Piano Concerto No. 2* (2010), recorded five concertos by Mozart, performed and recorded the three Chopin sonatas, and played substantial new solo works by Arlene Sierra, Paul Lansky, William Bland and Poul Ruders, among others. These days, his concerts are likely to feature the great romantics—Schubert, Beethoven, Brahms, Schumann, Chopin, Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff—though he also programs 'surprise' items. While the first CD of this series, "Primakov in Concert, Vol. 1" (BRIDGE 9322), was devoted to composers Vassily has played a lot—Rachmaninoff, Schubert, Brahms and Tchaikovsky—Volume Two adds four new composer names to Primakov's discography. And what four names they are: Johann Sebastian Bach, Claude Debussy, Philip Glass, and Felix Mendelssohn.

Mendelssohn published his *Lieder ohne Worte* (Songs without Words, Book 2, Op. 30) in 1835. He would ultimately publish 8 books of "songs" for solo piano. True to the set's title, Mendelssohn gives the first five pieces no names. Each is known simply by its tempo marking and key signature. The last piece, however, bears the title, "Venezianisches Gondellied" (Venetian Gondolier's Song), the second of three pieces Mendelssohn would compose with this title (the early one was Op. 19, No. 6; the late one, Op. 62, No. 5). Vassily writes about playing Mendelssohn and the performance from 2005 heard on this disc:

"As a young pupil at the Central Special Music School in Moscow, it was fairly common to play Mendelssohn's music as an introduction to the world of Romanticism. Many Russian teachers would never start their students by giving them Chopin, Liszt, Schumann or Brahms. It was always Mendelssohn. I was one of those pupils that craved Romantic music. It was the musical language that I always wanted to learn and speak as well as I could. My first interaction with Mendelssohn's music was when I was assigned Rondo Capriccioso in E major, Op. 14 and Fantasia in F-sharp minor for piano, Op. 28 ("Sonate écossaise"), at age eleven. Years passed without another good dose of Mendelssohn. Then, in 2005 I was planning a program with the guidance of my teacher, Jerome Lowenthal. One of the pieces that I was to perform was Schumann's Fantasia in C Major and I asked Mr. Lowenthal for his suggestions for a good work to play with it. He enthusiastically insisted I play through Mendelssohn's six Songs Without Words, Op. 30. I immediately went to a practice room. It was very different returning to Mendelssohn after having spent so many years playing music by his contemporaries. There is such simplicity in Mendelssohn's lines. Simplicity is a tricky concept. Contrapuntally and harmonically, Mendelssohn's music is far from simple. But, his Songs Without Words are pure and each contains a singular moment that shines through like a ray of light."

Bach's Six Suites for Clavier were written between 1722 and 1725. The suites were later given the name 'French' as a way to distinguish them from the set of English Suites. All of the suites, however, follow largely Italianate conventions. On this disc we hear Vassily opening a 2006 New York concert with Bach's Suite No. 2 in C minor, BWV 813.

Vassily writes: "Sometimes I find myself feeling like I've had a bit too much of the wildness of Schumann, or the lyricism of Chopin. When this happens, I turn to Bach for help—to feel whole again. In many of my recitals, and those of so many other pianists, we begin with Bach. For me, sometimes a Prelude and Fugue, sometimes the Italian Concerto, and, in the concert that this recording is taken from, the C minor French Suite. The lesson is simple—there is nothing more valuable than performing Bach—it teaches you about structure, rhythm, balance, timing, restraint, counterpoint and voicing, and the list goes on. The universe of Bach is endless. This C minor Suite was one of my favorite pieces to begin a concert with. It always helped me to concentrate and fight the emotional disbalance that many performers, myself included, experience when we first come on stage. Bach has always helped me to do that, maybe because his music has been a constant in my life. I remember, as a child, I was given an exercise as a way of learning Bach's Fugues. I had to write them out by hand in different colored pencils (if the fugue had 3 voices—3 different colors, if it had 4 voices—4 different colors and so on). I highly recommend this exercise. By the time you are done, you have memorized the fugue. The only thing left to do is to sit down and play."

Philip Glass and his music are sonic icons of our age. If one is not hearing the genuine item, a spin-off of his easily recognizable motoric signature is on television, in the airports, commercialized, filmed, and humming in the background of our daily stride. In this 2008 performance, Vassily plays a suite drawn from the Glass score for Stephen Daldry's 2002 motion picture "The Hours", based on Michael Cunningham's 1999 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel of the same name. The film starred Meryl Streep, Julianne Moore, Nicole Kidman, and Ed Harris.

Glass's soundtrack score was issued by Elektra/Nonesuch. Vassily's suite is largely based on Michael Riesman and Nico Muhly's 2003 piano transcription.

Vassily writes: "I add some of my own little nuances here and there and perform four pieces from Riesman and Muhly's book, making a little suite of my own: 1. The Poet Acts; 2. Morning Passages; 3. Tearing Herself Away and 4. The Hours. The action takes place within the span of a single day, but during three different years. The three stories are entwined throughout the novel and film.

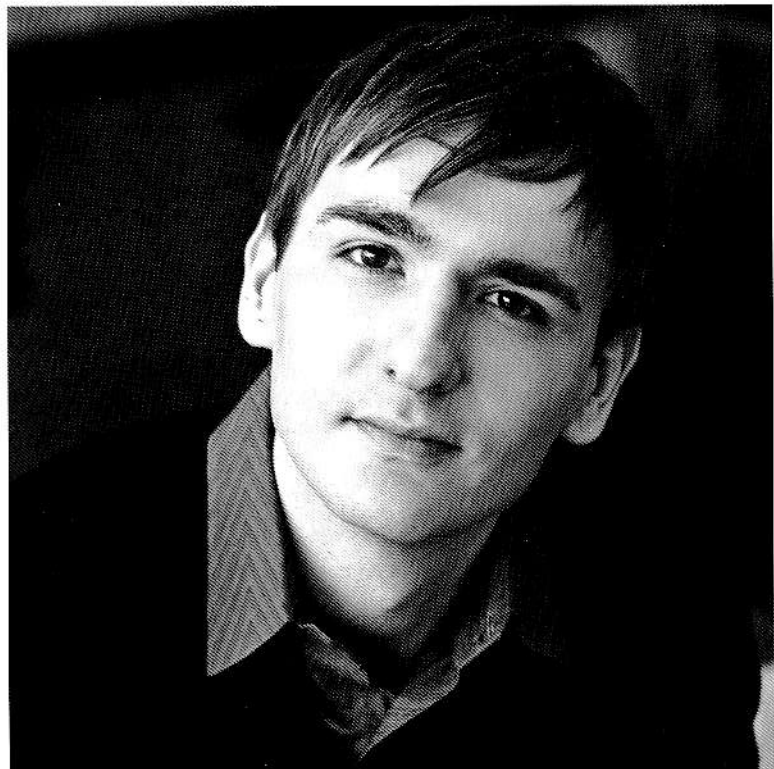
The suite begins as we hear a suicide note narrated: March 28, Sussex, England 1941

Dearest, I feel certain that I am going mad again.... And I shan't recover this time. I begin to hear voices, and I can't concentrate.... I don't think two people could have been happier 'til this terrible disease came. I can't fight any longer... If anybody could have saved me it would have been you... I don't think two people could have been happier than we have been.

Reading and watching that scene unfold with Glass's music instantly made me want to play it."

Debussy's popular *Suite Bergamasque* was composed in 1890, though it was not published in its final revision until 1905. The third movement of the *Suite*, the gorgeous "Clair de lune" ("Moonlight"), is Debussy's signature tune.

Vassily writes: "Debussy's piano writing fascinates me. Sometimes it seems as though one can smell those harmonies—always filled with "spices and fragrances". I love the journey in this suite, from baroque-like Prelude to the mysterious and sometimes comic Menuet, then drowning myself in that moonlight and finishing off with Passepied—a rather peculiar almost medieval dance." Vassily gave this performance in 2008.



The spectacular ascent of Vassily Primakov's international career has been the result of competition victories, prizes in honor of his artistry, and a series of award-winning recordings. Winner of the First Prize in the Young Concert Artist International Auditions and the Audience Prize of the Gina Bachauer International Competition, Primakov was named the Classical Recording Foundation's "Young Artist of the Year" in 2007. His recent recordings have garnered *National Public Radio's* "CD of the Year" (Chopin *Mazurkas*), *American Record Guide's* "Best of the Year" (Schubert *Impromptus*; and Dvořák Piano Concerto) and *BBC Music Magazine's* Music Choice (Chopin *Ballades*, Brahms *Intermezzi*, and Scriabin *Sonata No. 4*). As a teen-aged prizewinner of the Cleveland International Piano Competition (1999), Primakov was praised by Donald Rosenberg of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*: "How many pianists can make a line sing as the 19-year-old Moscow native did on this occasion? Every poignant phrase took ethereal wing. Elsewhere the music soared with all of the turbulence and poetic vibrancy it possesses. We will be hearing much from this remarkable musician."

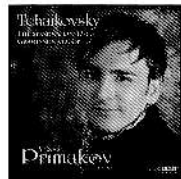
Vassily Primakov's first piano studies were with his mother, Marina Primakova. He entered Moscow's Central Special Music School at the age of eleven as a pupil of Vera Gornostaeva. At seventeen, after a summer at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, he came to New York to pursue studies at the Juilliard School with the noted pianist, Jerome Lowenthal. At Juilliard Mr. Primakov won the Susan W. Rose Career Grant and the William Petschek Piano Recital Award, which presented his debut recital at Alice Tully Hall. More recently he traveled to Norway to play the world premiere and record a new piano concerto written for Primakov by leading Danish composer, Poul Ruders. Vassily Primakov is currently recording the 27 Mozart Piano Concertos with the Odense Symphony Orchestra of Denmark.



**Beethoven:** Sonatas Op. 14, No. 1, Op. 57 "Appassionata", Op. 111  
(BRIDGE 9251)



**Chopin:** Piano Concertos 1 & 2  
Odense Symphony Orchestra, Paul Mann  
(BRIDGE 9278)



**Tchaikovsky:** "The Seasons", Op. 37-bis  
Grand Sonata in G, Op. 37  
(BRIDGE 9283)



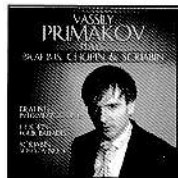
**Chopin:** 21 Mazurkas  
(BRIDGE 9289)



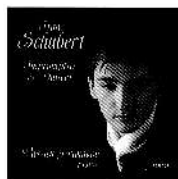
**Schumann:** Carnival, Kreisleriana, Arabeske  
(BRIDGE 9300)



**Dvořák:** Piano Concerto, Op. 33, Odense Symphony Orchestra, Justin Brown, Poetic Tone-Pictures, Op. 85  
(BRIDGE 9309)



**Chopin:** 4 Ballades  
**Brahms:** Intermezzos, Op. 117  
**Scriabin:** Sonata No. 4 (BRIDGE 9315) (DVD)



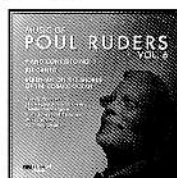
**Schubert:** 4 Impromptus, Op. 90; Impromptus I & 2, Op. 142, 39 Waltzes & Ländler  
(BRIDGE 9327)



**Primakov In Concert, Vol. 1**  
**Brahms, Rachmaninoff, Tchaikovsky, Schubert** (BRIDGE 9322)



**Mozart:** Piano Concertos, Vol. 1, Nos. 24, 25, 26, and 27, Odense Symphony Orchestra, Scott Yoo  
(BRIDGE 9328A/B)



**Poul Ruders:** Piano Concerto No. 2  
Norwegian Radio Orchestra; Thomas Søndergård  
(BRIDGE 9336)



**Mozart:** Piano Concertos, Vol. 2; Nos. 11, 20, and 21  
Odense Symphony Orchestra, Simon Gaudenz  
(BRIDGE 9339)



**Rachmaninoff:** Preludes and Elégie from  
Opp. 3, 23 & 32; Variations on a Theme by Corelli, Op. 42  
(BRIDGE 9348)



**Arlene Sierra:** Birds and Insects, Book I  
on Music of Arlene Sierra, Vol. I  
(BRIDGE 9343)



\*\*forthcoming\*\*

**Mozart:** Piano Concertos, Vol. 3, Nos. 17 & 22  
Odense Symphony Orchestra, Scott Yoo  
(BRIDGE 9351)



\*\*forthcoming\*\*

**Chopin:** Sonatas 1, 2 & 3  
(BRIDGE 9373)

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