Leonard SHURE in Concert at Jordan Hall

DISC A
(49:30)

Piano Sonata No. 2 in B flat minor, Op. 35 (24:39) Frédéric Chopin *(1810-1849)*

1. I. Grave - Doppio movimento (5:44)
2. II. Scherzo (7:25)
3. III. Marche funèbre: Lento (9:33)
4. IV. Finale: Presto (1:54)

Phantasien, Op. 116 (24:43) Johannes Brahms *(1833-1897)*

5. I. Capriccio in D minor, Presto energico (2:05)
6. II. Intermezzo in A minor, Andante (4:06)
7. III. Capriccio in G minor, Allegro passionato (3:09)
8. IV. Intermezzo in E major, Adagio (6:10)
9. V. Intermezzo in E minor, Andante con grazia ed intimisso sentimento (3:22)
10. VI. Intermezzo in E major, Andantino teneramente (3:17)
11. VII. Capriccio in D minor, Allegro agitato (2:30)

DISC B
(48:41)

Fantasy in C major, Op. 17 (34:22) Robert Schumann *(1810-1856)*

1. I. Durchaus fantastisch und leidenschaftlich vorzutragen; Im Legenden-Ton (14:29)
2. II. Mäßig. Durchaus energisch (8:39)
3. III. Langsam getragen. Durchweg leise zu halten. (11:11)

4. **Ballade No. 1 in G minor, Op. 23** (9:32) Frédéric Chopin
5. **Prelude No. 24 in D minor, Op. 28, No. 24** (3:09)
6. **Prelude No. 23 in F major, Op. 28, No. 23** (1:17)

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Leonard Shure (April 10, 1910, Los Angeles–February 28, 1995, Nantucket) was a great musician, an important pianist, and an uncompromising and influential teacher. His legacy as a performer lies in a small but significant number of recordings that represent some of his central repertoire – music of Beethoven, Schubert and Schumann in particular. This release augments that legacy with live performances recorded during his faculty recitals in New England Conservatory's Jordan Hall late in his life. He recorded the Brahms Phantasien *on 78s for Vox in the mid 1940s, but these performances were never remastered for release on LP or CD; he recorded the Schumann* Fantasy *on an Epic LP a decade years later, in the mid-1950s, but this too has never been transferred to CD. In the late 1970s he made a remarkable series of recordings for Audiofon, which were made with Shure performing before an invited audience; Audiofon issued the finale of the Schumann for Audiofon in the late 70s because some time remained after completing another recording, but he never found occasion to record the other two movements. Several choice items that Shure recorded for Audiofon, like the Brahms* Variations on a Theme *by Handel have never been released because problems surrounding the original master tapes have not been resolved. Chopin's* Sonata No. 2 *in B-flat Minor and* Ballade No. 1 *in G Minor, as well as encore performances of the last two Preludes from Chopin's Op. 24, are new to Shure's recorded repertory, although he programmed these works with some frequency during the busiest years of his concert career.*

Notes by Richard M. Dyer

I will never forget my first encounter with Leonard Shure, which took place in the listening room of the music library of the small college in Ohio where my father taught. It was in the late 1950s, when I was still a teenager. I had never heard of Leonard Shure at that point, nor did I know that he had been living and teaching in nearby Cleveland.

I was very curious about Schumann's neglected Piano Sonata No. 3, the so-called "Concerto without Orchestra," which no one programmed in those days. I had recently heard Horowitz's 1951 recording of the slow movement, a set of variations on a theme by Clara Wieck, who later became Schumann's wife; it had come out on an RCA LP called *Horowitz in Recital*. I had hacked away at the other movements, but I needed to hear a better pianist than myself play them.

I went looking for Robert Goldsand's recording on a Concert Hall LP, which was listed in the Schwann Catalogue, but it was not in the library's collection. What the library did have was a recording by Leonard Shure, on a set of Vox 78s, issued in the mid-1940s. I sat in the listening room, transfixed. Through the swish and static, I heard piano playing unlike anything I had experienced before. The sound was granitic, quarried from some deep source and polished

to bring out all of its multiple colors. The energy of the playing, the momentum of the rhythms, the voicing of chords, and the sense of harmonic movement towards some kind of destiny were overwhelming to me.

Of course I wouldn't have been able to articulate this back then, nor had I yet read the description of Sviatoslav Richter by his great teacher Heinrich Neuhaus – "[Richter's] singular ability to grasp the whole and at the same time miss none of the smallest details of a composition suggests a comparison with an eagle who from his great height can see as far as the horizon and yet single out the tiniest detail of the landscape."

But when I did read this remark decades later, I knew exactly what Neuhaus was talking about because I had first experienced it on that recording by Leonard Shure. The other thing I still remember about those 78s is that there was no question that Shure had a strong personality, but there was also no suggestion that he was imposing it on the music; Shure was playing the piano for certain, but more than that, he was playing the music.

What I couldn't have known, or even imagined, that afternoon in the college library was that my path would cross that of Leonard Shure many times in future years. In 1968, when I was still a graduate student in Boston, I heard Shure live for the first time

in recital, and when I returned to Massachusetts in 1972, I heard him play recitals in most subsequent seasons until he retired from public performance in 1990, as well as two concerto performances, a Schubert *Winterreise,* and some chamber music. For nearly two decades Shure was a major figure in the musical life of the area, a teacher both feared and revered, first at Boston University and, after he was forced to retire at 65, at New England Conservatory, and a performer whose appearances were always crowded by enthusiastic students, professional colleagues, and representatives of the city's unusual intellectual, educational, cultural and artistic community.

The main facts about Shure's career were well known, particularly his period as a student and teaching assistant of Artur Schnabel in Berlin, but in this last period, few knew the the full range, extent, and prominence of his earlier performing activites which had been eclipsed by his concentration on teaching.

After Shure's death, one of his former students, Dan Gorgoglione, set himself the task of assembling as much information about Shure as he could; his final compilation of reviews, news stories, interviews and other memorabilia, bridged by his own informed commentary, runs to 233 pages which he has posted on the website www.leonardshure.com. Much of the information in this documentary biography was previously unfamiliar to Shure's students and

admirers and some details were unknown even to members of his family; Gorgoglione's work was an indispensible aid to preparing this note, and listeners to these CDs will especially enjoy looking up the newspaper reviews of the performances preserved here.

Shure was already a performer before he began to study piano. His family moved to Chicago when he was a baby, and as a young child he had a high, accurate soprano voice and made his public debut at 2½, singing popular songs in vaudeville shows, with his mother as his piano accompanist. At 5, he began to study piano with Karl Reckzeh of the Chicago Musical College. He was a child prodigy but his family resisted exploiting him, and for the rest of his life, he was strongly opposed to pushing child prodigies forward. He was 11 at the time of his first concerto performance in Chicago, when he was hailed as a young musician of almost Mozartean gifts. His early recitals featured works by Palmgren, John Alden Carpenter, and Liszt, music he never played as an adult, as well as Mozart, to whom he returned intermittently.

When Shure was 14, the famous virtuoso Misha Levitzki, himself only recently graduated from child prodigy status, recommended that he undertake further study in Europe; Shure enjoyed repeating that Levitzki had suggested that he go to Schnabel "for veneer" – as if any celebrity pianist, then or since, were less interested in "veneer" than Schnabel. The master pianist and pedagogue didn't accept prodigies as pupils, but after the intervention of the celebrated composer (and former prodigy) Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Schnabel agreed to teach Shure, who studied with him for three years; Shure remained in Berlin as Schnabel's teaching assistant for another six years.

In an essay Shure published decades later, he confessed that he had had a difficult time with Schnabel, who always bore down hardest on his most gifted students, a pattern Shure was to replicate in later years with his own students. After Shure's studies, Schnabel did admit what he had deliberately done, and thereafter treated Shure as a colleague and friend.

In Berlin, Shure began to perform again, at first under Schnabel's auspices. In 1932 he played a two-piano recital with Schnabel's son, Karl Ulrich, and there is a souvenir of that occasion in his first recording, Chopin's Rondo, but already he was concentrating on some pieces that remained in his repertory for the rest of his career – the Schumann F-Minor Sonata, Schubert's *Moments Musicaux* and C-Minor Sonata, Brahms's *Variations* and *Fugue on a Theme by Handel*.

Shure was often accused of having a limited repertory, and in public performance he did; like Schnabel, he preferred to con-

centrate on works that were better than they could be played – Beethoven's "Diabelli" Variations and Sonata Op. 109, Schubert's "Wanderer" Fantasy, and the Schumann Fantasy and *Kreisleriana*, in addition to the works listed above. What he actually performed in recital was not the whole story, however. His musical culture was vast, and his study of many works he never performed, but often taught, was profound. There are tantalizing glimpses on early recital programs of works he never returned to, several sonatas of Beethoven, for example, including the "Hammerklavier," a Weber Sonata, and even, of all things, the Tchaikovsky Concerto. Many pianists today program all four Chopin Ballades on recitals, but at the time Shure did it, this was a very unusual project to undertake. He waited until 1967 to play the Schubert Sonata in B-flat, a work he had at that point studied and taught for more than 30 years, but it took that long for him to find his way into it. It became the last of his signature pieces.

In 1933, already aware of the danger of remaining in Germany, Shure returned to America, where he came to the attention of Serge Koussevitzky, the music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Shure met with Koussevitzky several times after concerts to discuss the music performed. Koussevitzky enjoyed this penetrating conversation so much that he engaged Shure to play the Brahms

D-Minor Concerto with the orchestra in Boston and New York without hearing him play; Shure insisted on an audition, but after a few bars Koussevtizky stopped him and said, "See, I told you that I knew how you would play."

That series of performances launched Shure on a brilliant career as a recitalist, concerto soloist, and chamber musician – in the early years, for example, he often played recitals with his first wife, the Argentine violinist Anita Sujovolsky. His keystone concertos were the two by Brahms – he played the Second with Koussevitzky as the first piano soloist to appear at Tanglewood. He played with other conductors of first rank, like George Szell, Artur Rodzinski, and, later, Leonard Bernstein; in addition to the Brahms works, he favored a couple of concertos by Mozart and the Third, Fourth and Fifth concertos of Beethoven. His prestige was such that conductors did not hesitate to hire him to replace pianists of the stature of Horowitz and Rudolf Serkin when they cancelled.

Teaching was a very important part of Shure's musical life, and he never stopped until his health wouldn't permit it any more. He taught at the Longy School of Music, the Cleveland Institute of Music, the Cleveland Music School Settlement, the Mannes College of Music, the Eastman School of Music, the Aspen Festival, the University of Texas at Austin, Boston University, New England

Conservatory of Music (at the beginning and end of his teaching career) and other prestigious institutions as well as in Israel. The list of his prominent pupils is long, and it is also diverse because it includes virtuosos on instruments other than the piano – a short list would include Ursula Oppens, Gilbert Kalish, Jerome Rose, John Browning and Frank Glazer, among soloists; collaborative pianists John Wustman and Phillip Moll; violinist Pinchas Zukerman, cellist Lynn Harrell; and conductors Hugh Wolff, Benjamin Zander, and Lawrence Leighton Smith. The chief music critic of the New York Times, Anthony Tommasini was a Shure student, and David del Tredici has remarked that his lessons with Shure led him to decide to become a composer instead of a pianist. Not everyone was happy with Shure's rigorous approach: Browning told Gorgoglione, "No question about it, Shure was the greatest teacher after Schnabel, but after nine lessons we were still on the first movement of Beethoven's 'Waldstein' Sonata - so I decided to leave him because, well, practically speaking, I decided the day comes when I've just gotta play the ******* piece."

In devoting so much of his time to teaching, Shure followed the example of Schnabel and of Busoni before him, but managers, and he had many of them, didn't like it because teaching tied up his schedule. It was difficult to "sell" a piano teacher. The managers also kept urging him to play more popular repertory – the ferocious Chicago critic Claudia Cassidy unenticingly described one of his programs of Beethoven and Brahms as "esoteric."

At least the managers couldn't complain that Shure played too much contemporary music – for a few seasons Shure played a set of Preludes by Shostakovich, but apart from a couple of ceremonial premieres of a work by a colleague (Gardner Read) and a student (James Randall), Shure played nothing composed after Debussy, and only a little of Debussy.

Shure's performing career consequently went in fits and starts; he was as unhappy with his managers as they were with him, and his contempt for the music business, and for managers in particular, was total. He told me once there was only one of them he would consider letting into his house.

World War II barred Europe to Shure, and he never re-established himself there, and his personal life was complicated and often required his stabilizing presence at home. He was married four times; his most enduring marriage was the last, and his devoted widow Judy died only last year. He also had four children to contend with.

Shure's commitment to chamber music, like Rudolf Serkin's, was unusual among celebrity pianists of his generation. At one

time or another he accompanied singers in the major song cycles of Schubert (his *Winterreise* with the great American baritone Mack Harrell at Aspen, was a signal event in the experience of Harrell's son, the eminent cellist Lynn Harrell). He played the major piano quintets with the Budapest and later the Guarneri Quartets. In 1946, Shure played the complete Beethoven Violin Sonatas with Henri Temianka in three American cities, and the cycle at the Library of Congress was recorded; 65 years later those performances finally appeared on CD.

Chopin figured intermittently on Shure's programs. His first concerto, as a child, was the Chopin F-Minor, which he seems not to have played later. His choice was selective – the 24 Preludes, an occasional etude, waltz, or mazurka as an encore, the Second Sonata, and the Ballades. Apart from the duet with Karl Ulrich Schnabel, he left no commercial recording of Chopin, so the First Ballade, the B-flat Minor Sonata, and the last two Preludes on these CDs of late-career live performances are of great interest and value.

The most striking features of Shure's Chopin playing are its clarity – you can hear *everything* in just proportion - and the strength of its rhythmic impulse, which never falters. One characteristic of the greatest performers or ensembles is they are never like each other; each is immediately identifiable. The only other characteristic that

all of them share is a superior sense of rhythm. This is what unites Maria Callas and the harpsichordist Wanda Landowska, to mention one odd couple. Shure latches onto an interior rhythm with each piece, each movement; his *rubato* in Chopin is subtle, and never distended. To this he adds an understanding of harmony and harmonic movement that may have been equaled by other pianists, but not surpassed by any.

He also boasts an astonishing range of dynamics and tone colors, although mentioning this brings us to a dimension of his playing that was always controversial. At the lower levels of dynamics there is infinite subtlety and variety, but in loud music, and particularly music that is both loud and fast, Shure's tone often hardens. Admirers called this quality visceral, but it is also possible to describe it as brusque and harsh. This characteristic became more exaggerated at the end of his career, when he was suffering from a number of illnesses and experiencing hand problems (for which he underwent surgeries, emerging from it to play fearlessly again). Some people wre disturbed by the number of splintered notes or even whole flurries of wrong notes, and they stood out more than they might with a pianist with a less decisive attack.

Shure was working his marble with a mighty hammer and a sharp chisel, and the chips could fly in every direction. Many of the

splintered notes were not the result of carelessness but instead an inevitable result of throwing caution to the winds and playing with reckless abandon – the gesture was always compelling and right, even if the actual notes weren't. The clarity and complexity of intent was always unmistakable.

Shure was a probing interpreter, and brought many highly individual insights to his interpretations. He was never lazy and never went onto autopilot, rolling at high speed along the well-engineered, smoothly blacktopped turnpike that tradition has built; every performance was a matter of life and death, a battle to the end. His Chopin was never sweet and sentimental, even in the trio in the middle of the Funeral March in the Second Sonata. Here the pathos and the consolation become intense because Shure's hushed simplicity holds such depth of feeling within. The weird finale is also especially remarkable, because there appear to be shards of melody trying to form into patterns while being whirled apart by the famous "wind whistling through the graveyard." This is the result of very careful voicing and pedaling, but most of all it is the result of the pianist's imagination.

Shure's interpretation of the First Ballade by the 26-year old Chopin is also arresting. In 1836, when it first appeared, the publisher felt it necessary to add "Without Words" to the title because

at that time the Ballade was familiar only as a literary and poetic form, often a narrative poem retelling gruesome folk tale. To play a Ballade requires bardic, story-telling qualities and musical declamation. All pianists strive to create singing tone from an instrument that does not permit the real thing; only a few can take the further step of creating a *speaking* tone, a *parlando*. But listen to Shure as he opens the Ballade with those bare octaves – he begins with authority, like a minstrel declaiming "Hearken unto me" as he stakes out the melodic and harmonic territory. What follows is music of kaleidoscopic variety: Shure is attuned to every element – the love theme, the waltz, the slashing octaves, and the whirling vortex of the conclusion, all of it bound together through an unusual 6/4 meter, a mastery of counterpoint, and an irresistible, sweeping forward momentum. The performance is not a series of unrelated climaxes; instead the climaxes build until the paroxysm at the end – a little more cataclysmic than usual, actually. At this point in his career, Shure's memory was not infallible. He seems startled at the very end because he has inadvertently omitted four measures and a keyboard-sweeping scale, so the final rush of octaves is a rough downward tumble.

This is an accident; what is not accidental is that Shure understands the structure of a piece that many pianists assume doesn't have any.

The final two Chopin Preludes offer a study of contrasts – the F Major a sunny, delicate flickering that closes with a famous E-flat that doesn't belong in the harmony and that turns the whole scene into something magical and wondrous. Shure's playful and iridescent performance clearly, and rightly, captivates the audience, while the D-Minor Prelude that follows scares the daylights out of them. Shure's performance is not 100 per cent accurate, but it is apocalyptic, and even the once-notorious orchestration by Leopold Stokowski pales next to what Shure is able to summon from the piano, including a crescendo on the three low Ds at the end that toll the end of the world.

I must have heard Shure's LP of the Schumann Fantasy more than 100 times as an impressionable adolescent, but the recorded sound did not begin to capture the range and depth of the colors Shure could draw out of the piano in live performance. Schumann was bipolar, and Shure was the master of both extremes, of how the music could swing almost instantly from one to the other, but he was even more interesting in his mastery of the mysteries of transition than he was in his control of rude juxtapositions; the seed of

one extreme always lay dormant in the other. To mention only one other element of the first movement, listen to the way that Shure shapes the left hand at the beginning – it isn't just a ripple of accompaniment, but instead contains hints and clues, stabilities and instabilities. He really goes for broke in the second movement and pays a price in precision, but the dotted rhythms are always exact and the excitement is palpable. The audience, full of pianists who "knew better", burst into applause in mid-performance, before Shure could begin the meditative final movement, which was supple in rhythm, warm and velvety in tone across the whole dynamic range, and profound in feeling.

Brahms composed the seven pieces in his Op. 116 when he was 59 – and after he had resolved not to compose any more; these were the first solo piano pieces he had composed in more than a decade, and they stand among his supreme achievements (actually most of the music of the acutely self-critical Brahms represent supreme achievements). He called the whole set "Fantasies," and the individual pieces are entitled Intermezzo (four of them) or Capriccio (three). The Capriccios are agitated, and Brahms's directions for the Intermezzi call for tenderness, intimacy and emotional sentiment (as opposed to sentimental emotion).

The solutions to the complex problems of rhythm and voicing that Brahms set are often elusive. These pieces are full of syncopations and cross rhythms, of important melodic lines that must be mined out of chords; the shifting emotional atmosphere and landscape of each piece are also elusive, the play of light and shade. But Shure's lifelong study of these pieces is evident in every bar, as well as his absolutely polyphonic hands that clarify and illuminate Brahms's interweaving textures. Not to mention the sheer beauty of the sound.

Shure's playing of the stormy Capriccios is formidable, and every chord is voiced; he is predictably impressive in the roiling Bach-like figurations of the closing one. But it is the utter loveliness of the Intermezzos that linger in the mind, the palpitations of the third Intermezzo, for example, the hesitant breathless urgency with which it expresses a state of mind for which there are no words.

By the time of these performances Shure had long since become an Old Master, a role he reveled in because he knew he was still at heart a student.

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Chopin: *Ballade, No. 1,* as part of Chopin Gala Concert, recorded in concert at Jordan Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA; October 27, 1979.

Brahms, Chopin: *Sonata No. 2,* Schumann, Chopin: *Prelude No. 24* (encore), recorded in concert at Jordan Hall, December 3, 1977.

Chopin: *Prelude No. 23* recorded as part of Leonard Shure 70th birthday celebration, in concert at Jordan Hall, April 25, 1980.

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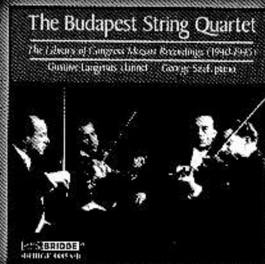

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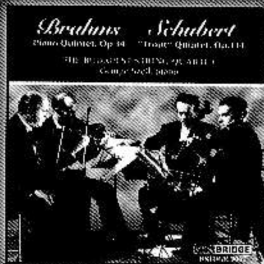

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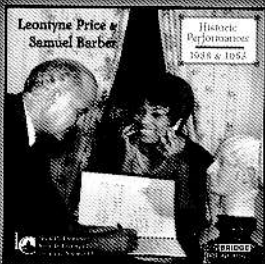

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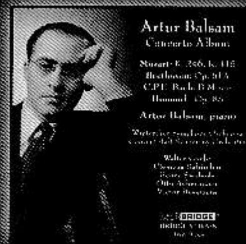

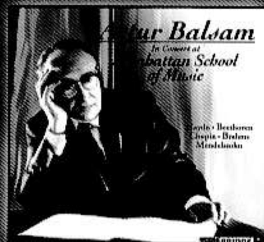

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