

RACHMANINOFF

Earl Wild

Chopin Variations, Op. 22

Corelli Variations, Op. 42

Preludes, Opp. 23 & 32

Sonata No. 2, Op. 36

Piano Transcriptions

2-CD Set

IVORY

CLASSICS

RACHMANINOFF



Earl Wild

Disc I

- | | | |
|----------|--|-------|
| 1 | Variations on a Theme of Chopin Op. 22..... | 26:38 |
| 2 | Variations on a Theme of Corelli Op. 42..... | 17:40 |
| 3 | Rimsky-Korsakov/Rachmaninoff
The Flight of the Bumble-Bee | 1:31 |
| 4 | Mendelssohn/Rachmaninoff
Scherzo from 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' | 4:38 |
| 5 | Kreisler/Rachmaninoff
Liebesleid | 5:21 |

TOTAL TIME: 55:14

DISC II

Sonata No. 2 **in B-flat minor, Op. 36**

- 1** Allegro agitato..... 7:39
- 2** Non allegro 6:18
- 3** Allegro molto..... 5:55

Ten Preludes, Op. 23

- 4** No. 1 in F-sharp minor ... 3:24
- 5** No. 2 in B-flat Major 3:37
- 6** No. 3 in D minor 2:40
- 7** No. 4 in D Major 4:13
- 8** No. 5 in G minor..... 3:35
- 9** No. 6 in E-flat Major 2:35
- 10** No. 7 in C minor 2:22
- 11** No. 8 in A-flat Major..... 2:57
- 12** No. 9 in E-flat minor 1:58
- 13** No. 10 in G-flat Major 3:41

Nine Preludes, Op. 32

- 14** No. 1 in C Major 1:13
- 15** No. 2 in D-flat Major..... 2:56
- 16** No. 3 in E Major..... 2:19
- 17** No. 4 in E minor..... 5:08
- 18** No. 5 in G Major 2:49
- 19** No. 6 in F minor..... 1:28
- 20** No. 7 in F Major..... 2:16
- 21** No. 8 in A minor 1:41
- 22** No. 10 in B minor 2:40

TOTAL TIME - 73:56

RACHMANINOFF

Sergei Rachmaninoff was rare among the great composers of history in that he was also a famed conductor and pianist, in equal measure. On these discs, of course, our attention is on his work as a composer and transcriber, but we must not forget the musical scope of this genius. He was renowned as a conductor and pianist, no less than as a composer, enjoying an international reputation and immense popularity for his work in all three arenas. He was the last great proponent of late Russian Romanticism.

Sergei Vasilyevich Rachmaninoff was the second son born into an aristocratic Russian family in 1873, in the town of Oneg, near St. Petersburg. His father was Vasily Arkadyevich, an army man, and his mother was Lyubof Petrovna Butakova. Both of them were pianists. Vasily proved ill-equipped to manage his wife's five estates, and was inclined to fecklessness and womanizing. He wanted Sergei to follow family tradition and enter the army, but the family fell on hard times and had to auction off their last estate, in Oneg—where they were living. Sergei and two of his siblings later became ill with diphtheria but recovered; their sister died. Their father subsequently left the family, and the children fell to the care of Lyubof alone. Sergei's later bouts with depression and a sense of inadequacy were brought about, in part, by these tumultuous times in his family life.

In his early years at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, Sergei impressed his teachers by his musical acumen, and he played recitals for musical and social celebrities, but in all other subjects he failed, being prone to laziness and mischief.

At the conservatory he studied piano with Alexander Siloti, his cousin, who had studied with Franz Liszt in Weimar from 1883 to 1886. Siloti toured Europe

and in 1898 he toured the United States. From 1901 to 1903 he led the Moscow Philharmonic, and in 1901 he conducted the world premiere of Rachmaninoff's *Second Piano Concerto*. He taught at the Juilliard School in New York from 1925 to 1942 and was a major proponent of the art of transcription.

In the autumn of 1889, Sergei moved to the Moscow home of his uncle Alexander and his aunt Varvara, after Siloti had recommended Sergei to his own former teacher, the autocratic Nikolai Zverev (1832-1893), a prominent piano pedagogue, who accepted into his Moscow home only male students on audition. At age twelve, Sergei moved into Zverev's large apartment and stayed for four years, subjected to a rigorous regimen of piano practice, and obliged to attend opera and chamber music concerts. Alexander Scriabin was another of his more famous pupils.

During his time at the Moscow Conservatory, Sergei studied composition with the pianist, conductor, and composer Anton Arensky, and with Alexander Taneyev, a fine composer but a bureaucrat by day. At age eighteen Sergei graduated from the conservatory as a pianist, and at nineteen (in 1892) he graduated as a composer, successfully submitting his one-act opera *Aleko*, which he composed in only fifteen days.

During the summer of 1890, Sergei's aunt and uncle took him for his first visit to the couple's beautiful and idyllic country estate named Ivanovka, which was over two hundred miles south-east of Moscow. The seventeen-year old Sergei grew to love Ivanovka, which would provide him with twenty-seven years of creative refreshment and musical inspiration. After 1902, the year he married his first cousin, Natalya Satina, with whom he had two daughters, he spent most of his summers at Ivanovka composing. Many of his works were composed there, including the early *Prelude* in C-sharp minor for piano, which would prove to be his most popular work. During the Russian Revolution, in 1917, Ivanovka was burned to the ground by the revolutionaries.

Rachmaninoff completed his *First Symphony*, in D minor, in 1895, when he was twenty-two years old. In 1897 it had a disastrous premiere under Alexander

Glazunov, which plunged the composer into a three-year period of despair, during which he composed nothing of significance. But he emerged from his depression to begin a career as a conductor, directing a number of operas in quick succession, and to compose his *Second Piano Concerto*, probably the most popular of all piano concertos ever written.

In 1909 Rachmaninoff made his first trip to the United States, during which he played the first performance of his *Third Piano Concerto* with the New York Symphony Orchestra and conducted both the Boston Orchestra and the New York Philharmonic. He was offered the post of conductor with the Boston Symphony, but declined. He returned to North America once in every season thereafter, going on exhausting tours as a conductor and pianist.

The Russian Revolution divided Rachmaninoff's compositional career into two parts, each of twenty-six years duration. During the first, from 1891 until 1917, he composed thirty-nine works with opus numbers. But during the second period, from 1917 until his death in 1943, when he lived in exile, he composed only six more. Two principal reasons may be given for his having composed so little after the revolution. First of all, he was not happy with life in exile—mostly in Switzerland and the United States—and it is known that he did his best composing when he was free of tension and turmoil. And secondly, he was forced by circumstances to shift his focus from composing to performance, just to support his family. His career as a concert pianist, therefore, did not begin until after the revolution, and after leaving Russia he never returned. Nevertheless, Rachmaninoff composed a total of six operas, a number of choral works and vocal pieces, in addition to his symphonies, piano concertos, symphonic poems and chamber works, along with his numerous works for solo piano, including his piano transcriptions and arrangements (for example, J.S. Smith's *The Star-Spangled Banner* of 1918).

In November of 1918, after sojourns in Stockholm and Copenhagen,

Rachmaninoff and his family arrived in New York, whereupon he gave forty concerts in four months. In New York his family attempted to recreate the life-style of Ivanovka and follow Russian aristocratic customs. It was there that he worked on his *Fourth Piano Concerto*, giving its first performance in Philadelphia in 1927.

Between 1919 and 1942, Rachmaninoff made a number of recordings (including piano rolls), totaling some fifteen hours and thirteen compact discs. His earliest recordings, in March 1919, when he was nearly forty-six, were made using the piano roll technology of Ampico (the American Piano Company). He continued recording for Ampico for another ten years, until 1929, but in 1919 he also made some recordings for Edison, using hill-and-dale discs, on an upright piano. In 1920 he inaugurated his famous series of gramophone recordings for the Victor Talking Machine Company (later RCA Victor), using only Steinway concert grand pianos. His last recording session for Victor was in Hollywood in 1942, the year before his death. The fidelity of the gramophone recordings was poor in those early years, of course, but the piano rolls captured his performances exactly as he had played them. None of his live recordings survive except for a duet that he played with his wife at a party.

As for the process of composition, Rachmaninoff said, "I hear the music in my head. When the music stops, I write it down." His inspiration was often literary or pictorial, but he was profoundly influenced by the chants of the Russian Orthodox Church, by church bells, and by the music of the Gypsies. He found it difficult, if not impossible, to compose when his emotional life was in disarray.

Although it has been suggested that several of his works betray a kind of "personal neo-classicism" (Francis Crociata), Rachmaninoff was influenced early on by Tchaikovsky, finding his own inimitable style only later. He believed that every worthy piece of music has a single "culminating point," whether in the middle or at the end, which the performer must approach with the greatest care and calculation. Above all, his music exudes characteristic Russian sadness and melancholy, much of

it being dark-hued and nostalgic.

Though he was a gifted pianist, Rachmaninoff never intended to perform as one. But being forced out of Russia by the revolution, he had to re-invent himself as a concert performer—and spend lots of time learning a huge body of new repertoire—so that he could support his family. By the mid 1920s he was an international piano celebrity.

Rachmaninoff had very large hands that were capable of reaching a twelfth at the keyboard (Mr. Wild can stretch to an eleventh), and had a formidable technique. He also had an amazing musical memory and phenomenal sight-reading skills. He approached piano repertoire as a composer, and said: “You must take the work apart, peer into every corner, before you can assemble the whole.” Because of his close adherence to the printed score, his quest for the “culminating point” of a piece, and his aversion to sentimentality, he became known as the “Puritan Pianist.”

A true romantic, however, Rachmaninoff transcribed for the piano an imposing body of works originally intended for other instruments or voice—and idiomatically so. His piano transcriptions and arrangements are worthy of other renowned transcribers, including Franz Liszt, Ferruccio Busoni, and Leopold Godowsky. Believing that transcriptions were a normal part of music-making, he recorded many of them. Besides the three transcriptions that appear on these recordings, he also transcribed J.S. Bach’s Partita in E and the minuet from Georges Bizet’s *L’Arlésienne Suite*. (During the summer of 1981, Mr. Wild transcribed fourteen of Rachmaninoff’s songs for piano.)

Five days before his seventieth birthday, Rachmaninoff died at his home in Beverly Hills, on March 28, 1943, suffering from lumbago, arthritis, extreme fatigue, and cancer. He was buried at the Kensico Cemetery, near Valhalla, in Westchester County, New York.

VARIATIONS ON A THEME OF CHOPIN

After the disappointing premiere and scathing reviews of his *First Symphony*, Rachmaninoff was unable to compose for some three years, but his self-confidence was restored as a result of therapy with the hypnotist Dr. Nikolai Dahl. Moreover in 1901, Rachmaninoff gave a successful premiere of his famous *Second Piano Concerto*. The success of the therapy and the premier, together with his marriage, led to a productive period in Rachmaninoff's life. In the years 1902-3 he composed his *Ten Preludes*, Op. 23, along with the *Variations on a theme of Chopin*, Op. 22, his first large piano work, giving its premiere on February 10, 1903 at a concert for the Ladies' Charity Prison Committee in Moscow.

The theme of the *Variations* is a slight abridgment of the theme from Frédéric Chopin's *Prelude*, Op. 28, No. 20, though Rachmaninoff does not repeat the second half. It is interesting that Rachmaninoff is not known to have performed the Chopin work publicly.

These are the tempo indications and keys for the individual variations: The Theme (Largo), in C minor; Var. 1: Moderato, C minor; Var. 2: Allegro, C minor; Var. 3: Listesso tempo, C minor; Var. 4: Listesso tempo, C minor; Var. 5: Meno mosso, C minor; Var. 6: Meno mosso, C minor; Var. 7: Allegro, C minor; Var. 8: Listesso tempo, C minor; Var. 9: Listesso tempo, C minor; Var. 10: Più vivo, C minor; Var. 11: Lento, C minor; Var. 12: Moderato, C minor; Var. 13: Largo, C minor; Var. 14: Moderato, C minor; Var. 15: Allegro scherzando, F minor; Var. 16: Lento, F minor; Var. 17: Grave, E-flat minor; Var. 18: Più mosso, B-flat minor; Var. 19: Allegro vivace, A major; Var. 20: Presto, C-sharp minor; Var. 21: Andante; Più vivo, D-flat major; Var. 22: Maestoso; Tempo primo; Meno mosso, C major.

The *Chopin Variations* are dedicated to Theodore Leschetizky, the great Polish pianist and teacher whose pupils included Ignace Paderewski and Artur Schnabel.

Apparently Rachmaninoff was not completely satisfied with the *Variations*, as he authorized pianists to omit variations 7, 10 and 12, along with the coda. On this disc, however, Mr. Wild wisely plays the work in its entirety.

The *Variations* are full of tuneful melodies, Rachmaninoff's hallmark melancholy, and his chromatic harmonies, and they demonstrate a mastery of large-scale forms. It has been noted by Robert Matthew-Walker that the twenty-two variations are grouped irregularly, giving the work the outline of a four-movement sonata. Many of the variations are longer than their predecessors, giving the listener the sense of "a cumulative journey of wholly organic growth."

VARIATIONS ON A THEME OF CORELLI

Rachmaninoff composed very little during the 1920s, apart from his *Fourth Piano Concerto*, which received an indifferent reception at its premiere in 1927. The *Variations on a Theme of Corelli*, Op. 42, composed in 1931, is Rachmaninoff's last original work for solo piano, and the only solo-piano work composed between 1917 and his death in 1943. He produced the *Variations* concurrently with his revision of the *Second Sonata*.

Despite their title, the twenty brief variations (plus an Intermezzo and a Coda) are based not on a theme of Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713), but on the popular melody *La Folia* (Madness), which Corelli had used for his *Sonata*, Op. 5, No. 12, for violin. It is actually an old Iberian folkdance tune, and is said to have been introduced to Rachmaninoff by Fritz Kreisler, to whom the *Variations* are dedicated. *La Folia* first appeared in the sixteenth century and has been used by over 150 composers over the course of ensuing centuries. Rachmaninoff played the premiere of the *Corelli Variations* in Montreal on October 12, 1931.

Tempo indications and keys of the individual variations are: Theme (Andante),

D minor; Var. 1: Poco più mosso, D minor; Var. 2: Listesso tempo, D minor; Var. 3: Tempo di Minuetto, D minor; Var. 4: Andante, D minor; Var. 5: Allegro ma non tanto, D minor; Var. 6: Listesso tempo, D minor; Var. 7: Vivace, D minor; Var. 8: Adagio misterioso, D minor; Var. 9: Un poco piu mosso, D minor; Var. 10: Allegro scherzando, D minor; Var. 11: Allegro vivace, D minor; Var. 12: Listesso tempo, D minor; Var. 13: Agitato, D minor; Intermezzo; Var. 14: Andante come prima, D-flat major; Var. 15: Listesso tempo, D flat major; Var. 16: Allegro vivace, D minor; Var. 17: Meno mosso, D minor; Var. 18: Allegro con brio, D minor; Var. 19: Più mosso; Agitato, D minor; Var. 20: Più mosso, D minor; Coda (Andante), D minor. Note that the entire work is in D minor (the key of Corelli's violin sonata), except for variations 14 and 15.

On January 15 of 1931, Rachmaninoff's name appeared in *The New York Times* as signatory to a letter that was critical of the current regime in Russia. He was despondent over the matter when he wrote the *Corelli Variations*, beginning in May, when he was in Clairefontaine, France. Two months later a Moscow review of a performance of his work *The Bells* referred to him as a “violent enemy of Soviet Russia.” As a result there ensued a Russian boycott of his music.

Rachmaninoff sent a copy of the *Corelli Variations* to fellow Russian composer and pianist Nikolai Medtner (1880-1951) who was living in England, writing flippantly that he was “guided by the coughing of the audience” as to how many of the variations he played: “Whenever the coughing increased I would skip the next variation...I hope that you will play them all and won't cough.”

Despite his comment, the *Variations* are among Rachmaninoff's finest work, though they are fiendishly difficult and gnarly in their complexity. They have a large-scale structure and a clarity of line lacking in some of his earlier works, and he handles the sad theme with greater rhythmic and harmonic freedom than elsewhere. Noël Goodwin points out that “it is impossible not to see in these *Corelli Variations* a precursor of the ever-popular *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, for piano and orchestra.”

Earl Wild's astonishing technique and stunning musicianship make light work of these masterful compositions. Rachmaninoff allows performers the option to eliminate variations 11, 12, and 19, but Mr. Wild plays them all.

RIMSKY-KORSAKOFF/RACHMANINOFF: FLIGHT OF THE BUMBLEBEE

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakoff (1844-1908), the Russian composer and conductor, had a penchant for his country's folk tales and legends and he was deeply influenced by his experience of nature during his round-the-world trip on a schooner. He was also an extraordinary orchestrator, perhaps as a result of his having synesthesia. In fact, he wrote a book called *The Principles of Orchestration* (1908). His most renowned pupil was Igor Stravinsky.

Flight of the Bumblebee is an orchestral interlude from Rimsky-Korsakoff's opera *The Tale of Tsar Saltan* (1899-1900), one of his fifteen operas. In the story, the Swan-Bird tells the prince, the son of the Tsar, how to turn himself into a bumblebee so that he can fly off to sting his two villainous aunts and visit his father. The Swan-Bird sings during the first part of the *Flight*, but the line can be excised without doing violence to the work.

Rachmaninoff transcribed the piece for piano probably in 1929 and recorded it on his last Ampico roll in the same year. But besides the piano, *Bumblebee* has been played on everything from the accordion and electric guitar to the xylophone and pipe organ.

MENDELSSOHN/RACHMANINOFF: SCHERZO, FROM A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

The orchestral *Scherzo*, from Mendelssohn's Opus 61, No. 1, comes from the incidental music he composed for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—the play by William

Shakespeare. It is one of Rachmaninoff's "most vivid paraphrases" (Max Harrison). Mendelssohn composed the work on commission from King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia and completed it in 1842. One of its other movements is the famed *Wedding March* used for generations to hurry brides and grooms from churches. The *Scherzo*, transcribed by Rachmaninoff in 1933, is extremely difficult to play on the piano because of the density of the writing; there is so much going on at once.

Mr. Wild's performance has a wide range of articulation and touch, from elfin lightness to dry staccato and muscularity, helping to reveal the shape of the piece, providing a clear sense of Mendelssohn's organization of the work, and showing the relationship of various inner parts...characteristics often lacking in performances where sheer velocity is the only goal. Far from a mere digital exercise, Mr. Wild's rendition is full of sparking wit and brilliance. The work has also been played by flute and string quartets.

KREISLER/RACHMANINOFF: LIEBESLEID

Fritz Kreisler (1875-1962) was born in Vienna and was one of the most distinguished violinists of all time, at least since Paganini. He wrote about sixty original works along with a number of transcriptions and arrangements of existing works, by such composers as Tartini, Corelli, Paganini, Paderewski, Schumann, and Granados, including some which were later discovered to have been original with him—and therefore not transcriptions at all. Kreisler's *Liebesleid* (love song) is one of his original works and was composed for violin and piano.

Kreisler and Rachmaninoff were great friends and together they recorded sonatas by Beethoven, Schubert, and Grieg. Rachmaninoff transcribed *Liebesleid* in 1921 and recorded it for Victor in the same year.

PIANO SONATA NO. 2 IN B-FLAT MINOR

Rachmaninoff composed two sonatas for the piano, and both are considered masterpieces. The *Second Sonata*, composed in 1913, is not as large as the first, and is dedicated to Matvey Pressmann, a long-time friend and fellow student of Rachmaninoff's while at the home of Nikolai Zverev. In the summer of 1931 Rachmaninoff revised the work, and it is the revision that Mr. Wild plays on this recording. Besides the revised sonata, Rachmaninoff composed his *Corelli Variations* during that summer, and performed both works in Montreal later in the year.

The revised version has three distinct sections: Allegro agitato, Meno mosso [attacca], and Non allegro. The original version was longer and considerably more complex, having the following sections: Allegro agitato – Meno mosso; Non allegro – Lento – Più mosso; Allegro molto – Poco meno mosso – Presto. Rachmaninoff said of the original version: “So many voices are moving simultaneously, and it is too long. Chopin's *Sonata* lasts nineteen minutes, and all has been said.” The revision is about nine minutes (and 113 measures) shorter than the original, and the textures—especially in the first movement—are thinned considerably. In the *Second Sonata*, as in the first, the later movements refer to material from the earlier ones.

The passionate and oceanic first movement of the *Second Sonata* begins with an outburst and is characterized by teeming eruptions of power and fancy, one after another, which became increasingly common in his later works. Of its two themes, the first is majestic, with scalar passages and syncopation, while the second is dotted and lilting. The second movement is lyrical and profoundly emotional, while the last, a *tour de force*, is brilliantly effusive and rousing.

TEN PRELUDES, OPUS 23

The *Ten Preludes*, dated 1903 (except for No. 5 which was composed in 1901), range in length from two to nearly five minutes. They are dedicated to Alexander Siloti and they owe much of their style to the *Second Piano Concerto*. While the individual preludes are often played separately, several common features of Opus 23 recommend the performance of all ten preludes as a set. The complete set, for instance, has thematic and harmonic similarities from one prelude to the next, as well as common chords in adjacent preludes, establishing a larger, well-knit structure. The set is also characterized by stepwise motion that falls in the first four preludes, rises in the next four, and both rises and falls in the last two. Moreover, the first and last preludes are marked *Largo*, with the latter in G-flat major and the former in the enharmonic F-sharp minor. Rachmaninoff premiered some of the preludes, from the then incomplete set, on February 10, 1903 at a concert for the Ladies' Charity Prison Committee in Moscow. He often performed the preludes on his tours of America.

The most famous of the ten is the fifth, in G minor, with its brassy, military repetition of chords and its so enthralling middle section. The set of ten is published as a collection, but because of its popularity, and the fact that it was composed two years prior to the other nine, the fifth one is also published separately.

The *Preludes* from Opus 23 and Opus 32, together with the famous *C-sharp minor Prelude* from Opus 3, form a set of twenty-four which cover all the major and minor keys. Frédéric Chopin and Johann Sebastian Bach had composed similar sets, although, unlike those of his two predecessors, many of Rachmaninoff's individual *Preludes* are substantially developed, fairly long, and very demanding. The *Ten Preludes* are sometimes gloomy, sometimes idyllic and lyrical, sometimes ironic or march-like, and sometimes ravishing.

Along with the *Chopin Variations*, the *Ten Preludes* Opus 23 was a result of Rachmaninoff's recovery under treatment by Dr. Nikolai Dahl, engendering a profusion of newly inspired works, nostalgic and Russian to their core.

NINE PRELUDES, OPUS 32

The Opus 32 *Preludes* include thirteen works in the full set, but *Preludes* nine, ten, eleven and thirteen are excluded here, as Mr. Wild did not record them.

Rachmaninoff composed the set within nineteen days in 1910 at Ivanovka and it represents the summit of his compositional work. It is harmonically more daring and original than the Opus 23 *Preludes*, and is noticeably organic, being derived from the famous C-sharp minor *Prelude*. It also demonstrates Rachmaninoff's skill at crystallizing particular moods or sentiments. The *Fifth Prelude* was the first to be written and the composer uses much of its material in the remaining twelve pieces. Some features of the *Third Piano Concerto* are also evident in the set, including its textural and rhythmic characteristics and its pungent harmonies. The composer himself premiered Opus 32 at a recital on December 5, 1911 in St. Petersburg, which he gave on short notice for a concert series organized by Alexander Siloti.

The brief *Prelude No. 1*, is harmonically ambiguous and its chromatic writing is hazardous; the tonality of the free-flowing No. 2 becomes clear only at the end, and with No. 10 it is among "the most searching and harrowing" work that Rachmaninoff ever composed; the virtuosic No. 3 has a jaunty velocity and seems improvisatory, but its beginning is reminiscent of baroque style; the long, immensely dramatic and very difficult No. 4 is the most symphonic of the set; the idyllic No. 5 is more difficult than it sounds and is perhaps the most beautiful of the opus; the stormy No. 6, is devilishly chromatic; No. 7 is gentle and calm; the brief No. 8, "a very difficult trifle" (Ruth Laredo), is a dazzling toccata characterized by sharp suspensions and the descending minor third; one of the most often played, No. 12, is among the finest of the set, with the left hand playing a dark falling melody and the right hand busy with sparkling sixteenth notes.

Earl Wild



Earl Wild is a pianist in the grand Romantic tradition. Considered by many to be the last of the great Romantic pianists, this eminent musician is known internationally as one of the last in a long line of great virtuoso pianist / composers. Often heralded as a super virtuoso and one of the Twentieth Century's greatest pianists, Earl Wild has been a legendary figure, performing throughout the world for over eight decades. Major recognition is something Mr. Wild has received numerous times in his long career. He was included in the Philips Records series entitled *The Great Pianists of the 20th Century* with a double disc devoted exclusively to piano transcriptions. He has been featured in TIME Magazine on two separate occasions; the most recent was in December of 2000 honoring his eighty-fifth birthday. One of only a handful of living pianists to merit an entry in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Mr. Wild is therein described as a pianist whose technique "is able to encompass even the most difficult virtuoso works with apparent ease."

Earl Wild was born on November 26, 1915 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. As a child his parents would often play opera overtures on their Edison phonograph. As the recordings were playing, three year-old Earl Wild would go to the family piano, reach up to the keyboard, find the exact notes, and play along in the same key. At this early age, he displayed the rare gift of absolute pitch. This and other feats labeled him as a child prodigy and leading immediately to piano lessons.

At six, he had a fluent technique and could read music easily. Before his twelfth birthday, he was accepted as a pupil of the famous teacher Selmar Janson, who

had studied with Eugen d'Albert (1864-1932) and Xaver Scharwenka (1850-1924), both students of the great virtuoso pianist / composer Franz Liszt (1811-1886). He was then placed into a program for artistically gifted young people at Pittsburgh's Carnegie Tech (the Institute of Technology) -- now Carnegie Mellon University. Enrolled throughout Junior High, High School, and College, he graduated from Carnegie Tech in 1937. By nineteen, he was a concert hall veteran.

Mr. Wild's other teachers included the great Dutch pianist Egon Petri (1881-1962), who was a student of Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924); the distinguished French pianist Paul Doguereau (1909-2000), who was a pupil of Ignace Jan Paderewski (1860-1941), Marguerite Long (1874-1966), studied the works of Gabriel Fauré and Claude Debussy with Jean Roger-Ducasse (1873-1954 - a pupil of Fauré), and was a friend and protégé of Maurice Ravel (1875-1937). Mr. Wild also studied with Helene Barere, the wife of the famous Russian pianist, Simon Barere (1896-1951), and studied with Volya Cossack, a pupil of Isidore Philippe (1863-1958), who had studied with Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921).

As a teenager, Mr. Wild had already composed many works and piano transcriptions as well as arrangements for chamber orchestra that were regularly performed on the local radio station. He was invited at the age of twelve to perform on radio station KDKA in Pittsburgh (the first radio station in the United States). He made such an impression that he was asked to work for the station on a regular basis for the next eight years. Mr. Wild was only fourteen when he was hired to play Piano and Celeste in the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Otto Klemperer.

With immense hands, absolute pitch, graceful stage presence, and uncanny facility as a sight-reader and improviser, Earl Wild was well equipped for a lifelong career in music.

During this early teenage period of his career, Earl Wild gave a brilliant and critically well received performance of Liszt's First Piano Concerto in E-flat with Dimitri

Mitropoulos and the Minneapolis Symphony in Pittsburgh's Syria Mosque Hall.

He performed the work without the benefit of a rehearsal.

In 1937, he joined the NBC network in New York City as a staff pianist. This position included not only the duties of playing solo piano and chamber recitals, but also performing in the NBC Symphony Orchestra under conductor Arturo Toscanini. In 1939, when NBC began transmitting its first commercial live musical telecasts, Mr. Wild became the first artist to perform a piano recital on U.S. television. In 1942, Toscanini helped Earl Wild's career when he invited him to be the soloist in an NBC radio broadcast of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. It was the first performance of the *Rhapsody* for both conductor and pianist, and although Mr. Wild had not yet played any of Gershwin's other compositions, he was immediately hailed as the major interpreter of Gershwin's music. The youngest (and only) American piano soloist ever engaged by the NBC Symphony and Maestro Toscanini, Mr. Wild was a member of the orchestra, working for the NBC radio and television network from 1937 to 1944.

During World War II, Mr. Wild served in the United States Navy as a musician, playing 4th flute in the Navy Band. He performed numerous solo piano recitals at the White House for President Roosevelt and played twenty-one piano concertos with the U.S. Navy Symphony Orchestra at the Departmental Auditorium, National Gallery, and other venues in Washington, D.C. During those two years in the Navy he was frequently requested to accompany First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt to her many speaking engagements, where he performed the National Anthem as a prelude to her speeches.

Upon leaving the Navy in 1944, Mr. Wild moved to the newly formed American Broadcasting Company (ABC), where he was staff pianist, conductor, and composer until 1968. During both his NBC and ABC affiliations he was also performing and conducting many concert engagements around the world -- at ABC he conducted and performed many of his own compositions. In 1962, ABC commissioned him

to compose an Easter Oratorio. It was the first time that a television network subsidized a major musical work. Earl Wild was assisted by tenor William Lewis, who wrote the libretto and sang the role of St. John in the production. Mr. Wild's composition, *Revelations* was a religious work based on the apocalyptic visions of St. John the Divine. Mr. Wild also conducted its world premiere telecast in 1962, which blended dance, music, song, and theatrical staging. The large-scale oratorio was sung by four soloists and chorus and was written in three sections: *Seal of Wisdom*, *The Seventh Angel*, and *The New Day*. The first telecast was so successful that it was entirely restaged and rebroadcast on TV again in 1964.

Another composition by Mr. Wild, a choral work based on an American Indian folk legend titled *The Turquoise Horse*, was commissioned by the Palm Springs Desert Museum for the official opening and dedication ceremonies of their Annenberg Theater on January 11, 1976.

On September 26, 1992, the Des Moines Symphony Orchestra, with conductor Joseph Giunta, gave the world premiere of Earl Wild's composition *Variations on a Theme of Stephen Foster for Piano and Orchestra* ('Doo-Dah' Variations) with Mr. Wild as the soloist. The composition was recorded by Mr. Wild a year later with the same orchestra and conductor.

Pianist / composer Earl Wild wrote this set of variations using Stephen Foster's American Song *Camptown Races* as the theme. The melody is the same length as the famous Paganini *Caprice* theme that Rachmaninoff used in his *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini* and that Brahms used in his set of Variations for piano solo. Mr. Wild thus became the first virtuoso pianist / composer to perform his own piano concerto since Sergei Rachmaninoff.

Earl Wild has participated in many premieres. In 1944 on NBC radio, he performed the Western World premiere of Shostakovich's *Piano Trio in E minor*. In 1949, he was soloist in the world premiere performance of Paul Creston's *Piano*

Concerto in France, later giving the American premiere of the work with the National Symphony in Washington, D.C. In December of 1970, with Sir Georg Solti and the Chicago Symphony, Mr. Wild gave the world premiere of Marvin David Levy's *Piano Concerto*, a work specially composed for him.

Mr. Wild has appeared with nearly every orchestra and performed countless recitals in virtually every country. In the past ninety years he has collaborated with many eminent conductors including; Toscanini, Stokowski, Reiner, Klemperer, Horenstein, Leinsdorf, Fiedler, Mitropoulos, Grofe, Ormandy, Sargent, Dorati, Maazel, Solti, Copland, and Schippers. Additionally, Earl Wild has performed with violinists: Mischa Elman, Oscar Shumsky, Ruggerio Ricci, Mischa Mischakoff, and Joseph Gingold; violists: William Primrose and Emanuel Vardi; cellists: Leonard Rose, Harvey Shapiro, and Frank Miller; and vocalists: Maria Callas, Jenny Tourel, Lily Pons, Marguerite Matzenauer, Dorothy Maynor, Lauritz Melchior, Robert Merrill, Mario Lanza, Jan Peerce, Zinka Milanov, Grace Bumbry, and Evelyn Lear.

Highlights include a March 1974 joint recital with Maria Callas as a benefit for the Dallas Opera Company and a duo recital with famed mezzo-soprano Jennie Tourel in New York City in 1975.

Mr. Wild has had the unequalled honor of being requested to perform for six consecutive Presidents of the United States, beginning with President Herbert Hoover in 1931. In 1961 he was soloist with the National Symphony at the inauguration ceremonies of President John F. Kennedy in Constitution Hall.

In 1960, at the Santa Fe Opera, Earl Wild conducted the first seven performances of Verdi's *La Traviata* ever performed in that theatre, as well as conducting four performances of Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi* on a double bill with Igor Stravinsky (who conducted his own Opera, *Oedipus Rex*).

From 1954 to 1957 Mr. Wild worked with comedian Sid Caesar on the very popular TV program, *Caesar's Hour*. During those years, he composed and per-

formed all the solo piano backgrounds in the silent movie skits. He also composed most of the musical parodies and burlesques on operas that were so innovative that they have now become gems of early live television.

It was in 1976 that Mr. Wild wrote his now famous piano transcription based on George Gershwin's opera *Porgy and Bess* and also revised his six original 1950's Virtuoso Etudes based on popular songs *I Got Rhythm*, *Somebody Loves Me*, *Liza, Embraceable You*, *Fascinatin' Rhythm*, *The Man I Love*, and *Oh, Lady be Good*. Mr. Wild's Etude No.3 *The Man I Love* was originally written for left hand alone but was revised for two hands in 1976 along with an additional seventh Etude, *Fascinatin' Rhythm*. In 1989 he also composed an Improvisation for solo piano based on Gershwin's *Someone To Watch Over Me* in the form of a Theme and Three Variations.

In 1981 Mr. Wild composed thirteen piano transcriptions from a selected group of Rachmaninoff songs: *Floods of Spring*, *Midsummer Nights*, *The Little Island*, *Where Beauty Dwells*, *In the Silent Night*, *Vocalise*, *On the Death of a Linnet*, *The Muse*, *O, Cease Thy Singing*, *To the Children*, *Dreams*, *Sorrow in Springtime*, and *Do not Grieve*.

A common element among the great pianists of the past and Earl Wild is the art of composing piano transcriptions. Mr. Wild has taken a place in history as a direct descendant of the golden age of the art of writing piano transcriptions. Earl Wild has been called "The finest transcriber of our time." Mr. Wild's piano transcriptions are widely known and respected. Over the years they have been performed and recorded by pianists worldwide.

In 1986, on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the death of Franz Liszt, Earl Wild was awarded a Liszt Medal by the People's Republic of Hungary in recognition of his long and devoted association with this great composer's music.

Liszt is a composer who has been closely associated with Mr. Wild throughout his long career as he has been performing Liszt recitals for over fifty years. In New York City in 1961, he gave a monumental solo Liszt recital celebrating the 150th

anniversary of Liszt's birth. More recently in 1986, honoring the 100th anniversary of Liszt's death, he gave a series of three different recitals titled *Liszt the Poet*, *Liszt the Transcriber*, and *Liszt the Virtuoso* in New York's Carnegie Hall and many other recital halls throughout the world. Championing composers such as Liszt long before they were "fashionable" is part of the foundation on which Mr. Wild has built his long and successful career.

Also in 1986 Mr. Wild was asked to participate in a television documentary titled "*Wild about Liszt*," which was filmed at *Wynyard Park*, the 9th Marquess of Londonderry's family estate in Northern England. The program won the British Petroleum Award for best musical documentary. Mr. Wild's three Liszt recitals performed at Wynyard, as well as the documentary, are now available on a new DVD released by Ivory Classics in 2007 – DVD-77777.

He has given numerous performances of works by neglected Nineteenth Century composers such as: Nikolai Medtner, Ignace Jan Paderewski, Xaver Scharwenka, Karl Tausig, Mily Balakirev, Eugen d'Albert, Moriz Moszkowski, Reynaldo Hahn and countless others.

In addition to pursuing his own concert and composing career, Earl Wild has actively supported and young musicians all his life. He has taught classes all over the world. Highlights include the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, Toho-Gakuen School of Music in Tokyo, and the Sun Wha School in Seoul, as well as numerous US cities.

Mr. Wild has been on the faculty of The Juilliard School of Music, University of Rochester's Eastman School of Music, Penn State University, Manhattan School of Music, The Ohio State University and Carnegie Mellon University.

In 1996, Carnegie Mellon honored Mr. Wild with their Alumni Merit Award, in the fall of 2000 they further honored him with their more prestigious Distinguished Achievement Award and in 2007 he was given an Honorary Doctorate

of Fine Arts.

In 1978, at the suggestion of Wolf Trap's founder and benefactor Mrs. Jouett Shouse, Earl Wild created the *Concert Soloists of Wolf Trap*, a chamber music ensemble based in Vienna, Virginia at the famous National Park for the Performing Arts (Wolf Trap Farm Park). Mr. Wild's idea in forming of the Concert Soloists was to combine mature seasoned performers with talented young musicians. Other Wolf Trap members included violinists: Oscar Shumsky, Aaron Rosand, Lynn Chang and David Kim; cellists: Charles Curtis and Peter Wyrick; harpist Gloria Agostini; guitarist Eliot Fisk; and flutist Gary Schocker. Mr. Wild served not only as the group's founder but also as artistic director and pianist until 1982.

Mr. Wild is also one of today's most recorded pianists, having made his first disc in 1939 for RCA. Mr. Wild has recorded at least one CD per year since 1964 and has recorded with over twenty different record labels such as: CBS, RCA / BMG, Vanguard, EMI, Nonesuch, Readers Digest, Stradavari, Heliodor, Varsity, dell'Arte, Quintessence, Audiofon, Whitehall, Etcetera, Chesky, Sony Classical, Philips, and IVORY CLASSICS.

His discography of recorded works includes more than 35 piano concertos, 26 chamber works, and over 700 solo piano pieces.

In 1997, he received a GRAMMY Award for his disc devoted entirely to virtuosic piano transcriptions titled *Earl Wild - The Romantic Master* (an 80th Birthday Tribute). The thirteen piano transcriptions on this disc comprise a wide range of composers from Handel, Bach, Mozart, Chopin, J. Strauss Jr., Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff, Kreisler, Fauré, and Saint-Saëns. Of these thirteen transcriptions, nine were written by Mr. Wild (eight are world premiere recordings). This disc is now available in its original HDCD encoded sound on Ivory Classics (CD-70907).

For the first official release of the newly formed IVORY CLASSICS label in 1997, Earl Wild recorded the complete Chopin *Nocturnes* (CD-70701), which the emi-

nent New York Times critic Harold C. Schonberg reviewed in the American Record Guide saying, “These are the best version of the *Nocturnes* ever recorded.” Since its inception, IVORY CLASSICS has released over thirty newly recorded or re-released performances featuring Earl Wild.

In May of 2003 the eighty-eight year-old Dean of the Piano recorded a CD of solo piano works that he had never recorded before. Using the new limited edition Shigeru Kawai Concert Grand EX piano, the disc includes Mr. Wild’s piano transcription of Marcello’s *Adagio*, Mozart’s *Sonata in F Major K. 332*, Beethoven’s *Thirty-Two Variations in C minor*, Balakirev’s *Piano Sonata No. 1 in B flat minor*, Chopin’s *Four Impromptus*, and Mr. Wild’s piano transcription of the *Mexican Hat Dance (Jarabe Tapatio)*. This disc was released in November of 2003 by IVORY CLASSICS and titled, ‘Earl Wild at 88 on the 88’s’ (CD-73005).

Earl Wild’s lengthy career as a performing artist began long before his initial Ivory Classics release in 1997; many of his recordings were made available in the CD format by Chesky Records as either original releases or remastered re-releases. These discs included Mr. Wild’s historic 1965 recordings of Rachmaninoff’s complete piano concertos and the *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*. Other Chesky releases which feature Mr. Wild appearing as soloist with orchestra include the piano and orchestra works of: Chopin, Dohnányi (*Variations*), Fauré, Grieg, Liszt, MacDowell, Saint-Saëns, and Tchaikovsky.

Ivory Classics is proud to present several newly remastered CDs featuring Mr. Wild’s performances of some of the world’s greatest repertoire for solo piano. These re-releases began with “Earl Wild’s Legendary Rachmaninoff Song Transcriptions” released in 2004, discs of Chopin’s *Scherzos* and *Ballades* and solo piano works by Nicolai Medtner were released in 2005 and Beethoven’s *Hammerklavier* Sonata, the Complete Chopin *Etudes, Op. 10, Op. 25* and the *Trois Nouvelles* as well as a disc of Mozart for Two Pianos were all released in 2006. Ivory Classics is also looking

forward to re-releasing Mr. Wild's own composition *Variations on a Theme of Stephen Foster for Piano and Orchestra* ("Doo-Dah" Variations) originally recorded in 1992. Each of these original digital recordings will be remastered utilizing the latest 24-bit technology.

In 2005 Ivory Classics released a new disc celebrating Earl Wild's ninetieth birthday! For this special occasion, Mr. Wild selected to record repertoire by Bach (*Partita No. 1*), Scriabin (*Sonata No. 4*), Franck (*Prelude, Chorale and Fugue*) and Schumann (*Fantasiestucke Op. 12*) (CD-75002).

Earl Wild celebrated his ninetieth birthday by performing recitals in many U.S. cities as well as in Amsterdam's Concertgebouw. The tour culminated with an official birthday recital at Carnegie Hall in New York City on November 29, 2005.

In 2005 Mr. Wild received Musical America's Instrumentalist of the Year Award.

In 2007 Ivory Classics released its first DVD, 'Wild about Liszt', a two DVD set - DVD-77777.

Mr. Wild is currently working on his memoirs which he hopes to publish soon.

**Earl Wild's compositions and transcriptions are published by
Michael Rolland Davis Productions, ASCAP
mrdavisprod@sprintmail.com
Telephone: 614-286-3695
Mr. Wild's official website: www.EarlWild.com**

CREDITS

Disc I

Tracks 1 & 2 recorded in Fernleaf Abbey May 12-13 1991
Tracks 3 - 4 - 5 recorded in Carnegie Hall November 1, 1981

Disc II

Tracks 1 - 27 recorded in Fernleaf Abbey October 1993

24/88.2 Remastering using the SADiE High Resolution digital workstation

Original and Remastering Producer: Michael Rolland Davis

Original and Remastering Engineer: Ed Thompson

Baldwin Piano Technicians: Andrei Svetlichny, Greg Comly, Stewart Cole

This recording was made possible through the generous support of
Jason Subotky, Derek Oppen and The Ivory Classics Foundation

Liner Notes: James E. Frasier

Design: Samskara, Inc.

To place an order or to be included on our mailing list:
Ivory Classics® • P.O. Box 5108 • Palm Springs, CA 92263
Phone: 614-286-3695 michaeldavis@ivoryclassics.com
Please visit our website: www.IvoryClassics.com

