



The Legacy of Maria Grinberg vols.1–7

Vista Vera VVCD 00096, 00108, 00119, 00120, 00121, 00130, 00134, seven discs 466 minutes ADD

A hundred years after the birth of Russian pianist Maria Grinberg (d.1978), Russian label Vista Vera continues to release CDs in this series. The first volume features just three of Beethoven's piano sonatas: the 'Pathétique', the 'Moonlight' and the 'Appassionata', recorded 1951–60. Here Grinberg is direct and commanding, with incisive rhythms (double-dotting of the demisemiquavers in the Grave of the 'Pathétique') and brisk tempos (outer movements of the 'Pathétique'; finale of the 'Appassionata'; and the Adagio sostenuto of the 'Moonlight', which has a true *alla breve* feel).

Live recordings of Schubert from two late recitals given in Moscow (1974 and 1976) make up volume 2. By then Grinberg's playing was more introspective, imbued with a heightened sense of spirituality and an expressive palette of subtle colours. Especially telling are the seven Schubert-Liszt songs, which are noble and dark-hued.

Volumes 3 and 4 feature 19th- and 20th-century Russian repertoire. In Rachmaninoff and Medtner (vol.3) Grinberg can be authoritative, impetuous or playful, and she brings rhythmic tautness to the Prokofiev Scherzo from op.12. The highlights, however, are the sharply characterised readings of Shostakovich preludes and fugues from op.87: breakneck precision in the A major Fugue, a mixture of dark irony and ominous build-up in the Prelude and Fugue in F sharp minor, and a razor-sharp D flat major all showcase Grinberg's unique way with this music.

On the fourth disc the rarely heard Piano

Schumann, despite some imperfections, is full of passion, strong conviction and youthful energy, whereas the Rachmaninoff Third, taken from Grinberg's 50th anniversary concert in Moscow, serves as a historical document: she had learnt it only two years earlier, following her stoic comeback after open brain surgery.

On the Brahms CD (vol.6), Grinberg's improvisatory phrasing and delicate colouring in the *Variations on an Original Theme* op.21 no.1 make for an organic unfolding of this piece's rhapsodic nature. Noticeable elsewhere on this disc are her unusually flowing tempos (for example, the precipitous drive in the third Ballade from op.10). The gems here are six of the op.39 Waltzes and some Hungarian dances, in which Grinberg's terse characterisations highlight the essence of each piece.

The Schumann disc (vol.7) features Grinberg's unaffected reading of *Kinderszenen*, spontaneity of approach in the eight pieces from *Bunte Blätter* (gravitas in the E flat minor 'Album Leaf'; the impulsively gushing currents of *Sehr rasch*), and an eloquent *Drei Fantasiestücke* op.111.

The captivating imagery, arching lines, sweeping gestures, and ease and clarity in the *Symphonic Etudes* op.13 all show Grinberg's tendency to look at the score from a bird's-eye view.

DMITRY RACHMANOV

Quintet in C minor by Borodin (with the Bolshoi Theatre Quartet) unusually captures Grinberg as chamber musician, whereas Arensky's *Ryabinin Fantasia* (USSR State Radio Symphony Orchestra under Sergei Gorchakov) showcases the range of her pianistic versatility, from grand statements right down to the most pearled filigree. Here, the little-known solo works by Glinka, Lyadov and Glazunov are brought to life by Grinberg's lightly chiselled articulation, soaring passagework and unaffected lyricism.

Of the two concertos in the series (vol.5), both recorded live in 1958 with the USSR State Symphony Orchestra under Karl Eliasberg, the