

# SAINT-SAËNS

## PIANO CONCERTO NO.2

ARRANGED FOR PIANO SOLO BY GEORGES BIZET

MARIA STEMBOISKAYA *PIANO*

PIANO  
CLASSICS



**Camille Saint-Saëns** 1835-1921

Piano Concerto No.2 Op.22

*arranged for piano solo by  
Georges Bizet*

1. I. Andante sostenuto 11'08
2. II. Allegro scherzando 5'35
3. III. Presto 6'19
4. Aria of Dalila "Mon coeur  
s'ouvre à ta voix" 7'27  
*arranged for piano solo by  
Boris Borodin*

**Piotr Illych Tchaikovsky** 1840-1893

5. Polonaise from Eugene Onegin

S.429 6'19  
*arranged for piano solo by  
Franz Liszt*

6. Concert paraphrase on  
"Eugene Onegin" 12'47  
*arranged for piano solo by  
Paul Pabst*

Maria Stembolskaya *piano*

### **Under their fingers: transcriptions of Saint-Saens and Tchaikovsky**

Before the recording age, which dawned near the beginning of the last century, listeners and performers alike acquainted themselves with symphonic works through the medium of piano arrangements. When Clara Schumann heard a new orchestral piece by Brahms, she remarked that she never felt she knew it properly until she could hear it under her fingers. Through such transcriptions and arrangements, symphonies and tone-poems spread across Europe and farther afield, played and heard in domestic front-rooms and aristocratic salons alike.

Brahms was one of the great composers who took pains over the skill and art of arrangement – of his own music and that of his contemporaries. On this album, we hear the work of his distinguished French and German colleagues in the same field. Most renowned of them all was Franz Liszt, with his dedication to promoting the most talented of his colleagues as well as his own music, through the medium not only of his virtuosity at the piano but his skill at rendering complex orchestral textures and vocal melodies through the essentially percussive medium of the piano.

However, Liszt was not alone. While he inspired countless pupils and grand-pupils to follow in his footsteps as a creative transcriber as well as original composer, many of his colleagues pursued a parallel path, motivated not only by artistic dedication to the music of the past but also by the profitable market for making large-scale music accessible to private consumption. In 1871 Georges Bizet was commissioned to produce a solo-piano version of the Second Piano Concerto by Saint-Saëns which had scored an immediate public success on its premiere three years earlier.

The 33-year-old Bizet may not have had the purest motives for taking on the job: a series of brief triumphs over the last decade such as *Les jolies filles de Perth* did not compensate, either materially or artistically, for the comparative failure of his *Ivan IV* and *Les pêcheurs des perles*: in 1867 he undertook two complete versions of Ambroise Thomas's *Mignon*, in piano solo and duet arrangements, and the following year he performed this arduous but

profitable task on behalf of the same composer's *Hamlet*.

All the same, Bizet was too diligent and too respectful of Saint-Saëns to treat the job as hackwork. He seems to have transcribed the entire concerto for the publishing firm led by Jacques Durand, though Durand did not begin taking over new works by the ever-industrious Saint-Saëns until 1874, and only the central Scherzo appeared in print in February 1876, followed at length by the whole concerto in July 1894, by which time Bizet had been dead for almost 20 years.

At any rate the publisher Hartmann had issued a two-piano version of the concerto – solo part unaltered on one piano, orchestral texture arranged for the other – in the same year as its premiere. Bizet wrote to Hartmann in November 1871: 'It's five in the morning, and I don't have time to make as many corrections [to the proof?] as I would like. The big mistakes have, I believe, disappeared. But some articulation markings and accidentals are still missing. I don't have time to take full responsibility for this. Camille didn't indicate the Pedal (in the main piano) – is that on purpose?'

Even in the first movement's Bachian fantasia, Bizet's arrangement preserves the sense of the concerto's scale, though the tempi are necessarily a little more conservative, especially in the central *Allegro scherzando*, to take account of violinistic figuration which lies less easily under a pianist's fingers, especially while negotiating the not inconsiderable demands of the original solo part.

Bizet died ill, overworked and depressed by the apparent failure of *Carmen* in June 1875, too late to enjoy the return gesture paid to him in 1886 when Saint-Saëns composed a Scherzo (not included here) based on themes from *Les pêcheurs des perles*. This counts as neither a straight transcription nor a free fantasia but a scintillating and formally disciplined piece in its own right, taking Bizet's themes for happy inspiration.

The pair of works based on Tchaikovsky and played by Maria Stembolskaya both fall into the fantasia category. Compared to his concert paraphrases of Verdi and Wagner, Liszt's transcription of the waltz from the third act of

*Eugene Onegin* is a relatively restrained affair, albeit still substantially recast for maximum effect in the hands of a single interpreter with improvisatory divergations, modulations and cadenzas. Liszt wrote it in 1879, and the same year one of his students conceived a paraphrase on the entire opera, in the mould of Liszt's masterful reworkings of *Rigoletto* and *Norma*. This paraphrase is the work of Paul Pabst, Prussian-born, who studied with Liszt in Weimar but settled in Moscow as professor of piano at the Conservatoire in succession to Anton Rubinstein, where he proceeded to produce his own distinguished lineage of students, among them Alexander Goldenweiser and Nikolai Medtner.

Pabst's paraphrase takes two principal themes from *Eugene Onegin*: the waltz played at a party in Tatiana's honour, and secondly the melody which carries a confession of love for her sister Olga from Lensky, Onegin's friend. The waltz theme generates a climax of thunderous intensity before Lensky's aria is heard first in the right hand, then the left and back again. The waltz theme's return generates an exhilarating conclusion.

One industrious successor to Liszt in the field of the paraphrase was Boris Borodin, Russian pianist and arranger of songs and operatic material by Debussy, Puccini, Rimsky-Korsakov and many other masters of the day. 'Mon coeur s'ouvre à ta voix' ('My Heart opens up to your voice') is the erotic heart of Saint-Saëns's operatic masterpiece *Samson et Dalila*, in which the manipulative Philistine woman Dalila beguiles the pure heart of the Hebrew hero Samson. Borodin's transcription begins at the bottom of the keyboard, taking Dalila's melody gradually up through the octaves and decorating it with garlands along the way while retaining its sensuous appeal.

Though they meet only as artistic brothers on this album, Saint-Saëns and Tchaikovsky enjoyed a cordial friendship in real life, perhaps recognising in each other a kindred spirit that manifested itself not only in their destiny as composers but their lives as homosexuals (the French composer much happier in his skin than the Russian). They first met when Saint-Saëns gave a concert tour of Moscow in November 1875, and it was during this stay that

the much-retold encounter occurred, recorded by the usually reliable Modest Tchaikovsky:

'It turned out that the two new friends had many likes and dislikes in common, both in the sphere of music and in the other arts, too. In particular, not only had they both been enthusiastic about ballet in their youth, but they were also able to pull off splendid imitations of ballerinas. And so on one occasion at the Conservatoire [in Moscow], seeking to flaunt their artistry before one another, they performed a whole short ballet on the stage of the Conservatoire's auditorium: Galatea and Pygmalion. The 40-year-old Saint-Saëns was Galatea and interpreted, with exceptional conscientiousness, the role of a statue, while the 35-year-old Tchaikovsky took on the role of Pygmalion. N. G. Rubinstein stood in for the orchestra. Unfortunately, apart from the three performers, no one else was present in the auditorium during this curious production.'

© Peter Quantrell

based on André Peyregne's translation

### **Transcriptions de Saint-Saëns et Tchaïkovsky par Maria Stembolskaïa**

Au cours des siècles passés, quand les enregistrements n'existaient pas, la connaissance des grandes oeuvres symphoniques se faisait, dans les endroits dépourvus d'orchestres, grâce à des transcriptions réalisées au piano.

On jouait ainsi, dans les salons, les grandes symphonies du XIXème. siècle. La musique se répandait de la sorte dans les villes et les campagnes.

De grands compositeurs ont excellé dans l'art de la transcription. Certains ne se sont pas contentés de réaliser des transcriptions strictes mais, réalisant des développements et des variations à partir des thèmes originaux, se sont adonnés à des exercices de style qu'on a appelés des « paraphrases ». Vous en entendrez dans cet enregistrement.

Dans sa façon de jouer, Maria Stembolskaïa leur confère toute leur grandeur orchestrale. La puissance de son jeu et sa variété de couleurs permettent d'imaginer les différents instruments de l'orchestre d'origine.

Le Deuxième concerto pour piano et orchestre de Saint-Saëns, composé en 1868, présente une diversité de styles. Le classicisme de son premier mouvement et la tarentelle de son final ont fait qu'on a dit de lui « qu'il commence comme du Bach et finit comme de l'Offenbach ». Il a été transcrit en 1871 par Georges Bizet, compositeur de l'opéra « Carmen », à la demande des célèbres éditions Durand. Seul le second mouvement fut publié immédiatement. L'oeuvre n'a été éditée dans son ensemble qu'en 1894. Les qualités du transcripateur et de la pianiste font qu'en écoutant cet enregistrement, on arrive à deviner ce qui appartient au piano et ce qui revient à l'orchestre.

Au XIXème. siècle, l'art de la paraphrase a été porté à un sommet par Franz Liszt. Ce génial compositeur pianiste a transcrit ou paraphrasé quantité d'airs d'opéras français, italiens ou allemands – dont quatorze de Wagner. La paraphrase présentée ici porte sur la célèbre polonaise de l'opéra « Eugène Onéguine » de Tchaïkovsky. Cette danse est jouée lors d'une fête où se retrouvent le cynique héros de l'histoire et celle qu'il fait souffrir dans son



amour, Tatiana. Liszt déploie autour de ce thème une débauche de virtuosité. Partant de l'air initial, il lance les mains du pianiste dans des gammes ruisselantes caractéristiques de son style. A l'arrivée, on se demande si cette oeuvre ne tient pas plus de Liszt que de Tchaïkovky!

Parmi les élèves de Liszt se trouve Paul Pabst. Ce pianiste du XIXème. siècle, allemand d'origine, fut professeur au conservatoire de Moscou. Lui aussi a réalisé en 1879 une paraphrase sur « Eugène Onéguine » de Tchaïkosky. Il a utilisé deux thèmes de cet opéra: la valse donnée lors d'une fête en l'honneur de Tatiana et l'air dans lequel Lensky, ami d'Onéguine, déclare son amour à la soeur de Tatiana. Le thème de la valse donne lieu à des débordements pianistiques semblables à ceux de Liszt. L'air de Lensky, arrivant ensuite, est traité tantôt à la main droite, tantôt à la main gauche du piano, orné chaque fois par l'autre main dans le grave ou l'aigu du piano. Dans une coda effrénée réapparaît le thème de la valse.

Au XXème. siècle, on rencontre un autre transpositeur russe émule de Liszt, le musicologue Boris Borodin. Il s'est attaqué à nombre d'oeuvres françaises, allemandes ou russes du XIXème. siècle. Ici, l'air célèbre de « Samson et Dalila » de Saint-Saëns « Mon coeur s'ouvre à ta voix », dans lequel Dalila donne à Samson l'illusion de son amour. On entend monter le chant depuis le grave du piano. Borodin le fait ensuite sonner en octaves, l'ornement de guirlandes de notes, lui donne ainsi un faste et une allure considérables.

Toutes les transcriptions ou paraphrases contenues dans cet enregistrement sont , au final, d'éblouissantes oeuvres de concert, aussi admirables que celles qui les ont inspirées.

© André Peyregne

## MARIA STEMBOISKAYA

Born in Baku, Maria Stembolskaya started piano studies with her mother Natalia Zakharova at the Central Music School in Baku. She then studied in Moscow at the Academic College of Music with Galina Egiazarova, and subsequently at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory under the direction of prof. Elena Kuznetsova.

From 1985 onwards, she has been awarded various national and international prizes, particularly First Prize at the "Pozzoli" international piano competition in 1993, and the Samson François prize in 1998.

After having received the second prize ex aequo at the "Jose Iturbi" competition, she won the "Busoni" international piano competition in 2003, additionally obtaining the Public prize and the special prize for the best performance of Mozart concerto.

Maria Stembolskaya has taken part in many festivals, in particular: Ruhr festival (Germany), Festival of Villores (France), festival "Gradus ad Parnassum" Yamaha (Moscou), "Contemporary piano faces" Mariinsky international festival, festival of Central Europe in Slovakia, festival of Taverny (France), festival "Phillip Lorenz Memorial Keyboard concerts" in USA, Festival Arturo Benedetto Michelangeli (Italy), where she performed as a soloist as part of commemorations to the artist's death.

Her debut album for LIGIA label featuring music by french composer Mel Bonis received the DIAPASON Decouverte award in France in 2010.

Maria Stembolskaya is a soloist-in-residence of the "Société des Interprètes" city of Nice (France).



## MARIA STEMBOISKAYA

Née à Bacou, Maria Stembolskaya a commencé ses études de piano avec sa mère Natalia Zakharova à l'École Centrale de Musique de Bacou (Azerbaïdjan).

Elle étudie ensuite à Moscou, au Collège Académique de Musique, avec Galina Éguiazarova, puis au Conservatoire Tchaïkovsky, sous la direction de prof. Elena Kuznetsova.

Elle a remporté divers prix nationaux et internationaux depuis 1985, notamment le Premier Prix "Pozzoli" en 1993, le Prix Samson François en 1998. Après avoir obtenu en 2002 le deuxième prix ex aequo au Concours "José Iturbi", elle a gagné en 2003 le Concours "Busoni", y recevant en sus le prix du public et le prix spécial pour la meilleure exécution d'un Concerto de Mozart.

Maria Stembolskaya a participé à de nombreux festivals, en particulier : le Festival de la Ruhr (Allemagne), le Festival de Villedieu (France), le "Gradus ad Parnassum" Yamaha (Moscou), "Contemporary piano faces" festival international Mariinsky (Saint-Petersbourg), le festival de l'Europe Centrale en Slovaquie, le festival de Taverny (France), le festival "Phillip Lorenz Memorial Keyboard concerts" aux USA, le Festival Arturo Benedetto Michelangelo où elle s'est produite en soliste dans le cadre de la commémoration de la disparition de l'artiste.

Son premier enregistrement chez LIGIA-label consacré aux oeuvres de Mel Bonis a reçu un DIAPASON Découverte en 2010.

Maria Stembolskaya est soliste en résidence à la Société des Interprètes de Nice (France).