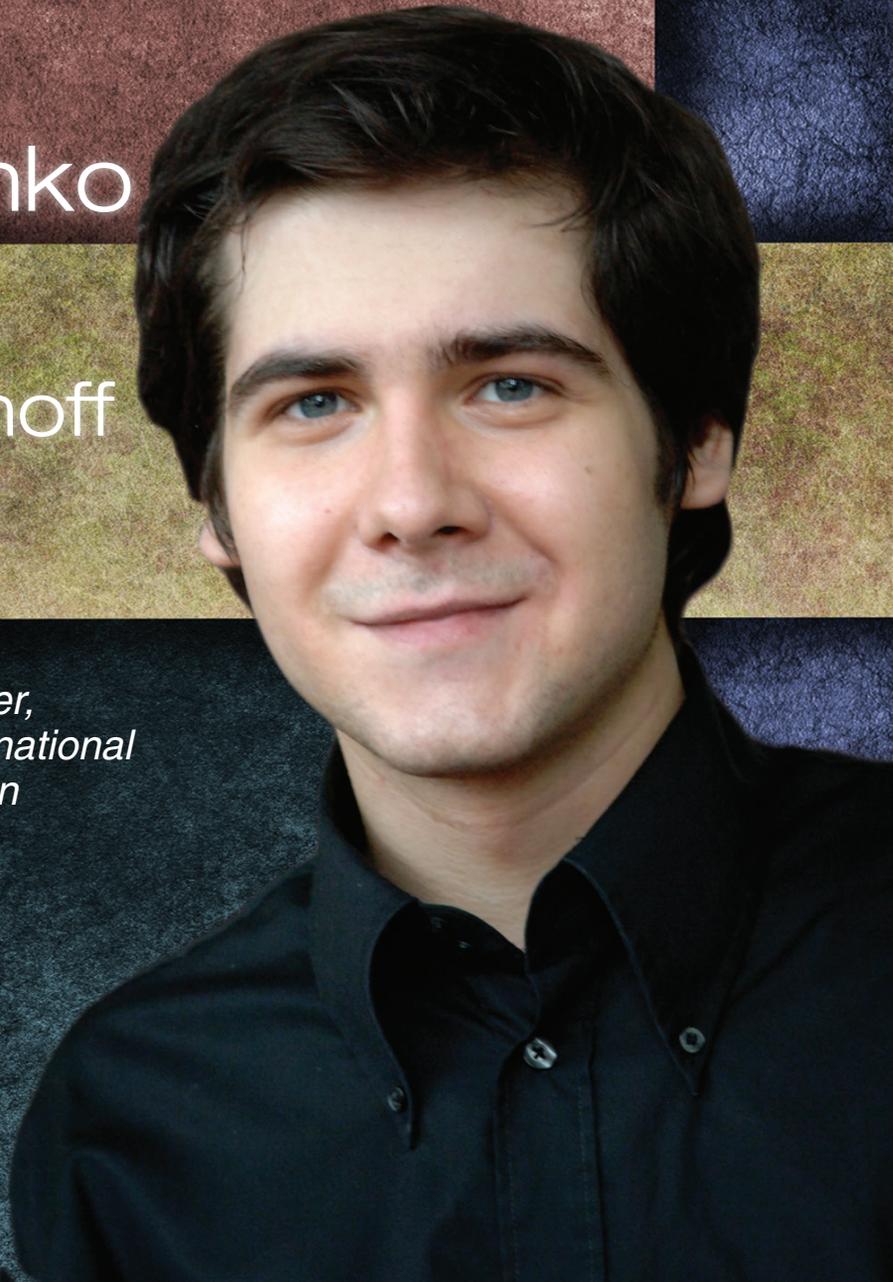


Vadym  
Kholodenko

Rachmaninoff

*Gold Medal winner,  
Van Cliburn International  
Piano Competition*



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# Vadym Kholodenko, piano

Winner, 2013 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition

*"...amazing display of virtuosity...and musical depth...  
music-making as if from another world..."* Scott Cantrell, Dallas News

*"The real gem of the evening was the Rachmaninoff transcriptions.  
As he played them, one could almost imagine the piano rolls of  
Rachmaninoff himself playing."* Culture Spot LA

MEDTNER: Sonata Op. 25, No. 2 in E Minor

RACHMANINOFF: Piano Transcriptions

Bach: Violin Partita No. 3; Prelude • Gavotte • Gigue

Schubert: "Wohin?"

Mendelssohn: A Midsummer Night's Dream, Scherzo

Tchaikovsky: Lullaby

Rachmaninoff: Polka

Kreisler: Liebesleid • Liebesfreud

Total Playing Time: 64:32



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DE 3467



# VADYM KHOLODENKO, piano

## **NIKOLAI MEDTNER: Sonata Op. 25, No. 2 in E Minor, “Night Wind” (30:00)**

1. Introduzione. Andante – Allegro (15:32)
2. Allegro molto sfrenatamente (14:28)

## **SERGEI RACHMANINOFF: Piano Transcriptions**

3. Bach-Rachmaninoff: Violin Partita No. 3 in E Major, Prelude (3:40)
4. Bach-Rachmaninoff: Violin Partita No. 3 in E Major, Gavotte (2:53)
5. Bach-Rachmaninoff: Violin Partita No. 3 in E Major, Gigue (1:39)
6. Schubert-Rachmaninoff: Wohin? (2:24)
7. Mendelssohn-Rachmaninoff: A Midsummer Night's Dream, Scherzo (4:31)
8. Tchaikovsky-Rachmaninoff: Lullaby (4:29)
9. Rachmaninoff: Polka (3:53)
10. Kreisler-Rachmaninoff: Liebesleid (4:42)
11. Kreisler-Rachmaninoff: Liebesfreud (6:08)

Total Playing Time: 64:32

## Vadym Kholodenko

The legendary Russian pianism of yesteryear is alive and well! When I listen to Vadym play the piano, I feel that I am witnessing a musical reincarnation. I am transported to a place that shows me a continuum — from Sergei Rachmaninoff to the present.

It is no surprise to read comments about Vadym's artistry that describe this jaw-dropping phenomenon. Those from the *Dallas News* and *Culture Spot LA* quoted on the back of this package are typical. As the *Montreal Gazette* puts it: "Anyone who supposes that the (Russian) school of pianism collapsed along with the empire will have to find another way of explaining the robust colour, vibrant rhythm and superb ear... grand tone and steely technique... a case study in how to put such attributes to consistently musical use."

Vadym first came to our attention at De-los when he won a Guzik scholarship\* while studying at the Moscow Conservatory. He and fellow-student Andrey Gugin\*\*, another outstanding Guzik Scholarship winner, formed the duo-pi-



ano team known as **iDuo**, and made a stunning recording of Rachmaninoff, Ravel and Debussy Piano-4-Hand music (**iDuo**, DE 3405).

But it is when I heard Vadym encompass, and bring to multi-dimensional life, virtuoso solo piano music written by the Golden Age Russian pianists themselves that I recognized his uniqueness. For the first time in many decades, I am reassured that this particular brand of pianism has indeed survived — or has been reborn.

— Carol Rosenberger

\*Nahum Guzik Scholarships for outstanding young musical talents in the Russian Republics, administered through the Moscow Chamber Orchestra Cultural Exchange Foundation

\*\* Andrey Gugin can be heard on Delos performing Shostakovich Piano Concertos, with the Moscow Chamber Orchestra under Constantine Orbelian (DE 3366)

**Sergei Rachmaninoff** (1873-1943) and his younger friend and colleague **Nikolai Medtner** (1880-1951) were two of the three great Russian composer-pianists who dominated both Russian pianism and keyboard composition at the turn of the nineteenth century; the third was, of course, Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915). While the compositions of all three share certain characteristics, the closest in overall style and sound are Medtner and Rachmaninoff. The similarities (and differences) between them are quite apparent as one listens to this sterling survey of their music – as played with particular idiomatic flair, technical brilliance and fierce interpretive intensity by Russian virtuoso Vadym Kholodenko: the Gold Medal winner at the 2013 Van Cliburn competition.

Some maintain that, as a performing pianist, Medtner was very nearly Rachmaninoff's equal – but they were never rivals. Their strong mutual admiration and friendship bore significant reciprocal fruit for each: Rachmaninoff was the grateful dedicatee of the magnificent Medtner sonata heard here, which he immediately recognized as a truly

great work. In turn, Rachmaninoff tried to boost Medtner's concert career by arranging for the latter's first American concert tour in 1924. But the younger virtuoso never quite adjusted to the life of a touring pianist, and he finally settled in London – where he mostly taught and composed until his death.

Medtner completed his “Night Wind” *Sonata in E minor*, Op. 25/2 (his seventh) in 1911; posterity has declared it his masterpiece. Its name (and its basic nature) come from the 1832 poem by Fyodor Tyutchev, “Of what do you howl, night wind...?” This sprawling pianistic canvas is cast in a single movement of epic design and proportion that – even in a fairly fast rendition (like this one) runs at least 30 minutes. The massive movement can, however, be divided into two distinct sections, as named here: the first (Introduzione. Andante – Allegro), despite the almost “improvisational” impression it makes, is in fact carefully laid out in sonata-allegro form, demonstrating its creator's firm command of traditional structures. The second (Allegro molto sfrenatamente) is more of an unfettered fantasia, ending with a busy, but mystery-laced coda.

Although Medtner was a conservative composer who adhered largely to traditional classical forms, the music sounds quite impressionistic in places. It paints convincing sonic evocations of that ever-shifting phenomenon – the wind – in all its various manifestations and moods. We hear everything from galloping gusts and shrieking blasts to soft breezes, with swirling eddies and pulsing puffs in between. While his textures can be crystal clear, they run more often to thickly opaque, thanks to profusely contrapuntal structures and harmonically dense chords. Medtner was not the sweetly sentimental melodist that Rachmaninoff was, but he knew how to sustain melody lines over often compressed beds of supporting inner voices. Both composers were capable of intense Slavic pathos and melancholy; also thrilling flights of brawny bravura fantasy – but Medtner's comparatively austere and less overtly tuneful approach requires greater concentration and attention to pianistic detail from the listener. Yet – especially for other pianists and keyboard fans – such effort is soon rewarded by profound appreciation for Medtner's unique and rarefied artistry. As pianist Geoffrey Tozer

put it, this sonata “has the reputation of being a fearsomely difficult work of extraordinary length, exhausting to play and to hear, but of magnificent quality and marvelous invention.”

After Sergei Rachmaninoff and his family fled Russia following the 1917 revolution with little more than the clothes on their backs, the great composer/pianist realized that henceforth he would have to support his family as a touring piano virtuoso: the only “salable skill” he had. Even though he thought of himself first and foremost as a composer, he was now obliged to devote most of his time and energy to his new career, and his previously steady flow of new compositions fell off sharply.

Yet, in the process of expanding his (at first) limited concert repertoire and adding variety and spice to his recital programs, he soon turned to a frequent practice of Romantic era instrumental virtuosos: the transcription of well-known works by other composers for their own instruments. He had a sure ear for great melodies and pieces that were already proven public favorites – and

his virtuoso transcriptions added the crowd-pleasing allure of bravura technique, expanding their existing appeal still further. Over the years, he produced thirteen transcriptions in all; nine of the finest are heard here.

While Rachmaninoff went to considerable pains to remain faithful to the original music for his transcriptions, he made exceptions in the case of this program’s transcriptions of three original pieces from J. S. Bach’s *Violin Partita No. 3 in E Major*: the “Prelude,” “Gavotte,” and “Gigue” (1933). Since they were works for solo violin, Rachmaninoff was obliged to expand them with additional contrapuntal lines and enriched harmonies in order to make them suitable for the piano. Still, he avoided cluttering them, and strove to retain the original works’ Bachian spirit and classic purity. In the process of expanding upon the music’s structure, he added embellishments and contrapuntal details that smack of his own compositional voice: stylistic echoes that become readily apparent with close listening.

It is interesting to recall that, when these arrangements were written, Bach’s music

was still practically unknown to the concertgoing public, save perhaps for Leopold Stokowski's comparatively distorted orchestral transcriptions. These pieces therefore could well have been many listeners' initial exposure to the music of the old master. The opening prelude is a light, but busy number, full of Bach's infectiously joyful polyphonic wizardry. The gracefully dainty and playful nature of the Gavotte that follows just might surprise those accustomed to Rachmaninoff's generally heavier hand. The final Gigue is also a delightfully playful little romp, even though the composer adds fresh harmonic color and beefs it up with more forceful sonorities in the bass.

Like Franz Liszt and other composers, Rachmaninoff – himself a supreme melodist – was helplessly drawn to the spontaneously tuneful and harmonically rich art songs of Franz Schubert. “Wohin?” (where to?) – with its opening line, “I heard a brooklet babbling” – is the second song from Schubert's first great song cycle, *Die Schöne Müllerin* (The miller's pretty maid). He was also no doubt captivated by the piano accompaniment's almost impressionistic evocation of the

flowing brook as it supports Schubert's optimistically upbeat melody. It was the perfect candidate for Rachmaninoff's transformation (in 1925) into a particularly evocative virtuoso showpiece, complete with a densely coruscating musical portrait of the brooklet as it tumbles along.

The best-known and most frequently played of Rachmaninoff's transcriptions is his “piano translation” of the blithe and playfully elfin “Scherzo” movement from Felix Mendelssohn's incidental music to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. While the piece is remarkable for its exceptional fidelity to the original score, a piano can only approximate an orchestra, and it must be said that the original orchestral version still can't quite be beat for its nuances of effervescent mood and sprightly, multi-instrumental sonic effect. Still, Rachmaninoff skillfully preserved the music's fleet and witty spirit while transforming it into a breathtakingly difficult showpiece that he (and other pianists) have enchanted recital audiences with since the piece appeared in 1933.



Rachmaninoff crafted his moving transcription of P. I. Tchaikovsky's "Lullaby" in 1941, just two years before his death – it is his final work, and the capstone of his lifelong reverence for the earlier Russian master's music. While his transformation of the original song is reasonably faithful, he gave it a denser harmonic fabric, while adding some hallmark stylistic touches that leave no doubt in the listener's mind that this is just as much the work of Rachmaninoff as it is of Tchaikovsky. While many of the other transcriptions heard

here are uncharacteristically upbeat and optimistic (for Rachmaninoff), the deep Slavic pathos of Tchaikovsky's melody matches the composer's own melancholic nature throughout; still, the sense of pervasive gloom is relieved here and there with fleeting moments of optimism. The music takes on a mystically celestial aura towards the end.

The "Polka" heard here, dating from 1911, is the only one of this album's selection of transcriptions that was written before Rachmaninoff fled his homeland.

It's often listed as "Polka on a Theme by W.R.," as the original tune was believed by many to have been written by the composer's father, Wasily Rachmaninoff – who (being a piano dilettante) had often played it at home. In fact, the original theme comes from a once-popular piece – "Lachtäubchen" – by the now-forgotten German composer Franz Behr. This lighthearted virtuoso exercise comes across as a parody of a typically elegant nineteenth-century salon piece, chock-full of comic (even slapstick) touches – like abrupt tempo shifts, sudden runs, and other quirky flashes of virtuosity – proving that the often dour and melancholic composer indeed had a sense of humor!

The album ends with two more examples of Rachmaninoff's uncharacteristic musical wit and humor: his treatments of violinist extraordinaire Fritz Kreisler's most famous pieces: "Liebesleid" (love's sorrow – 1921) and "Liebesfreud" (love's joy – 1925). Kreisler certainly understood the widespread appeal that tastefully rendered musical "schmaltz" held for audiences of his day – an awareness that his close friend Rachmaninoff also

shared. Considering both musicians' virtuosic flair, it's little wonder that these pieces immediately became cherished concert crowd-pleasers. Rachmaninoff made up for the fact that the piano can't "sing" quite as effectively as the violin by adding profuse and thrilling bravura passages. He further treated the themes in an almost improvisatory manner, with an assortment of cunning little cadenzas and variation-like passages. Like the preceding polka, these are the sorts of pieces that would've been completely at home in intimate, Romantic-era salons – where performers could drop their inhibitions and simply play for the amusement and entertainment of their friends ... and show off a little while they're at it!

— Lindsay Koob

## Biography

In June 2013 Vadym Kholodenko became the recipient of the prestigious Nancy Lee and Perry R. Bass Gold Medal at the Fourteenth Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. This event sparked a busy and exciting time for the young pianist, with extensive touring throughout Europe, Asia and the USA.

Vadym Kholodenko was born in 1986 in Kiev, Ukraine. The first musician in his family, in 1994 he enrolled at Kiev's Mykola Lysenko Special Music School under Prof. Natalia Grydneva and Prof. Borys Fedorov. At the age of 13, Vadym made his first appearances in the USA, China, Hungary and Croatia.

In 2004 Vadym was awarded the Russian Youth National Prize "Triumph," and in 2005 moved to Moscow to study at the Moscow State Conservatory under the tutelage of the Honored Artist of the USSR, Professor Vera Gornostaeva.

In 2011 he won First Prize at the Schubert Piano Competition (Dortmund, Germany) and in 2010 First Prize at the Sendai Piano Competition (2010, Sendai, Japan), preceded by another notable victory at the Maria Callas Competition in Athens, where he received the Grand Prix. The special Maria Callas commemorative concert at the Herod Atticus theatre marked his debut with the "Novaya Rossiya" ("New Russia") orchestra, led by the orchestra's Chief Conductor Yuri Bashmet. Vadym has enjoyed an enriching collaboration with Bashmet and his orchestra ever since.

Vadym has played in recital and as soloist with orchestras throughout the Ukraine, Russia, USA, China, Japan, France, Italy, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Finland, Czech Republic, Romania, Poland, Lithuania and Israel. He has collaborated with many distinguished conductors including Vladimir Spivakov, Constantine Orbelian, Mark Gorenstein, Alexander Rudin, Dmitry Liss, Eugeny Bushkov and Alexander Sladkovskiy. He collaborated in concert and on a recording project with violinist Alena Baeva in Japan. Since 2007 he has been collaborating with pianist Andrey Gugnin, subsequently founding the duet iDuo, touring throughout Europe and Russia; together they have recorded an album for Delos. Vadym has also made a number of other CD recordings, featuring works by Schubert, Chopin and various contemporary composers.

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**Assistant Engineer:** Svetlana Novitskaya  
**Mastering:** Matthew Snyder  
**Art design/layout:** Lonnie Kunkel

**Photo credits**

Cover: Gina Bachauer Competition  
Tray: Ellen Appel-Mike Moreland/The Cliburn  
Inside Tray: Ellen Appel/The Cliburn  
Page 3 & 8: Ralph Lauer/ The Cliburn  
CD: Anna Chobotova

Recorded in Studio No. 5, “Kultura” National TV, Moscow

Vadym Kholodenko would like to thank Novaya Rossiya for their support of this project.

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