

Scriabin □ – Complete Piano Sonatas (2004)



Sonata No. 1 Op. 6, In F Minor (26:14) 1-01 Allegro Con Fuoco 10:00 1-02 (Without Tempo Marking) 6:19 1-03 Presto 3:23 1-04 Funèbre 6:32 Sonata No. 2 Op. 19, In G Sharp Minor (11:47) 1-05 Andante 7:58 1-06 Presto 3:49 Sonata No. 3 Op. 23, In F Sharp Minor (20:32) 1-07 Drammatico 7:23 1-08 Allegretto 2:14 1-09 Andante - Attacca 4:54 1-10 Presto Con Fuoco - Maestoso 6:01 2-01 Fantaisie Op. 28, In B Minor 9:36 Sonata No. 4 Op. 30, In F Sharp Major (8:26) 2-02 Andante 3:22 2-03 Prestissimo Volando 5:04 2-04 Sonata No. 5 Op. 53, In F Sharp Major 13:05 2-05 Sonata No. 6 Op. 62 11:34 2-06 Sonata No. 7 "White Mass" Op. 64 13:37 3-01 Sonata No. 8 Op. 66 14:36 3-02 Sonata No. 9 "Black Mass" Op. 68 9:57 3-03 Sonata No. 10 Op. 70 13:45 3-04 Sonata-fantaisie In G Sharp Minor (1886) 8:14 Sonata In E Flat Minor (18:49) 3-05 Allegro Appassionato 7:42 3-06 (Andantino) - Attacca 6:41 3-07 Presto 4:26 Robert Szidon - piano

Long out of print and desperately sought by fans, Roberto Szidon's legendary recordings of Scriabin's piano sonatas were part of a major revival in the early '70s, which also yielded the celebrated recordings by Ruth Laredo, Michael Ponti, and Vladimir Ashkenazy. With this 2004 reissue, Szidon's performances may be compared to these others and not found wanting. Indeed, Szidon's are superior in many regards, and notwithstanding preferences for more familiar readings, this set will win many converts. Szidon has all the clarity of Laredo, none of the cloudiness of Ponti, and his visceral excitement matches Ashkenazy at every point, though without headlong rushing. The playing is fluid and spontaneous, in keeping with Scriabin's myriad directions on expression and volatile dynamic changes; yet Szidon's interpretations are never so frenetic that the music's rhythms are forgotten. Played precisely, in tempo, the sonatas are often flirtatious and dance-like, and this impulse contributes greatly to the music's delicacy and eroticism. Reissued in Deutsche Grammophon's Trio series, the set also includes the Fantaisie in B minor, which serves as a bridge to Scriabin's mature style and sets up the Sonata No. 4 and the later works nicely. The recorded sound is astonishing for analog, and the splendid digital transfer preserves Szidon's highly nuanced colors and dynamics. ---Blair Sanderson, AllMusic Review

These classic Szidon recordings dating from the late 1960s and early 1970s must surely have won many a listener over to this enigmatic and fascinating composer. Their brief life-span in the catalogue (apart from the appearance of Sonatas Nos. 7-10 in DG's mid-price Collector's series in the 1980s) was long lamented by many a Scriabin enthusiast who had either discovered this addictive composer after the set's demise, or whose original recordings were in dire need of replacement. Their reappearance on CD could not be more timely; Scriabin's music is enjoying a considerable revival at present with more recordings of his music in The Classical Catalogue than ever before. Of course on the down side this means that Szidon's set re-enters the catalogue at a time when the competition is particularly great. Personal reservations regarding these discs almost exclusively concern Sonatas Nos. 1-4, where the superior sound-quality of the CD medium has tended to emphasize the rather brittle and tinny piano sound of the 1968 recordings. Sonatas Nos. 7-10, on the other hand, were recorded in 1971 and can still be regarded as some of the finest on disc.

Sonata No. 1: A dramatic and highly charged account of this youthful and impetuous outburst against life, God, the universe and everything. Szidon is one of the few pianists to observe the first movement repeat. By far the most convincing and compelling No. 1 on disc.

Sonata No. 2: A somewhat underpowered performance which, though not without either beauty or delicacy, still falls some way short of the sheer bravura and 'tingle factor' of Demidenko's performance for Conifer.

Sonata No. 3: Fares better than No. 2, but again the more recent accounts from Graham Scott (Gamut) and Gordon Fergus-Thompson (ASV) ultimately put Szidon out of contention.

Fantaisie in B minor, Op. 28: The only available recording at present of this much neglected and immensely likeable work (who can fail to succumb to the haunting and beguiling second theme?). An exceptionally passionate and virtuosic performance. Sonata No. 4: Szidon's idiosyncratic account of this Icarus-like piece is disappointing. No fear of flying to close to the sun here as we never really get airborne to start with!

Sonata No. 5: A fairly spacious account of Scriabin's most frequently performed Sonata, with

some impressive playing gracing the opening and closing sections. However, Richter's classic DG recording of 1983 remains unimpeachable.

Sonata No. 6: A truly malevolent piece of music. Szidon gives us a chilling performance—when Scriabin writes *l'epouvante surgit* ("the frightening rises up") that's exactly what he gets. Scriabin was apparently scared of this work and never performed it in public. Best listened to in a darkened room.

Sonata No. 7 ("White Mass"): Scriabin saw this Sonata as an antitoxin for the venom of No. 6. Some antidote! Szidon whips the music into an orgiastic frenzy of sound that culminates in a climax that's guaranteed to blow your socks off.

Sonata No. 8: The least well-known of the late sonatas. It also poses the greatest interpretative problems. Ashkenazy's Decca recording remains first choice.

Sonata No. 9 ("Black Mass"): Scriabin's friend Alexei Podgaetsky was responsible for the subtitle Black Mass. Scriabin actually regarded parts of it as "saintly".

There are several fine performances available, but this powerful reading remains a personal favourite. Sonata No. 10: One of the most extraordinary sonatas to have emerged in the early part of this century. Scriabin described it as "a sonata of insects. Insects are born from the sun, they are the sun's kisses". Szidon's performance is exceptionally fine.

Also included in the set are the early Chopinesque works, the *Sonate-fantaisie* of 1886 and the Sonata in E flat minor of 1887-89. These are something of a culture shock heard directly after the Tenth Sonata, but their rarity value adds all the more to the attractiveness of this highly recommendable reissue.' ---Michael Stewart, gramophone.co.uk

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