

Khachaturian Piano Works

Sonata • Sonatina
Children's Pieces
Waltz • Poem

Murray McLachlan

alto



Aram Khachaturian

Piano Music

1	<i>Toccata</i>	4:51
2	<i>Poem</i>	9:29
	<i>Two Pieces</i>	
3	I. Valse-caprice	2:11
4	II. Dance	1:31
	<i>Sonatina</i>	
5	I. Allegro giacoso	1:46
6	II. Andante con anima, rubato	3:56
7	III. Allegro mosso	3:19
	<i>Ten Children's Pieces</i>	
8	I. Skipping Rope	0:35
9	II. An Evening Tale	1:36
10	III. Oriental Dance	1:13
11	IV. Barsik on the Swings	1:08
12	V. Playing the Tambourine	1:36
13	VI. Two Funny Aunties Quarrelling	1:22
14	VII. Funeral Procession	3:48
15	VIII. Rhythmic Gymnastics	1:08
16	IX. Toccata	2:16
17	X. Fugue	2:16
	<i>Piano Sonata</i> (1961 original version)	
18	I. Allegro vivace	7:55
19	II. Andante tranquillo	13:40
20	III. Allegro assai	9:25
21	<i>Maskarade</i> : Waltz	4:16

Murray McLachlan, *piano*

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Aram Khachaturian (1903–78) was born in the Armenian town of Tbilisi and as a child he became familiar with folk music from Armenia and also from the neighbouring states Georgia and Azerbaijan. Whilst at college (1913 – 1920) he played tuba in a wind band and later, having enrolled at the Moscow University to study biology (he originally intended to become a biologist), Khachaturian also began taking cello lessons and then composition with Glière, Gnesin and lastly Myaskovsky. His main period of study at the Moscow Conservatory was from 1929 to 1934, but he then undertook a further three years of post-graduate study. Three of the items in this collection therefore coincide with his student years (*Toccata* 1932; *Poem* 1927 and *Two Pieces* 1926).

Toccata is certainly Khachaturian's most famous work for piano solo and opens forcefully with a foot-stamping rhythm that the composer might well have remembered from Armenia. Murray McLachlan in his original note draws attention to the close similarity between the middle section of this work and Granados' *The Lover and the Nightingale*. Allegedly *Toccata* was composed at a single sitting the night before the premiere and one pities the player with so little time to practise. *Poem* is altogether more delicate with a gently meditative central section and joyous bell-like effects in the outer passages. The short works that comprise *Two Pieces* demonstrate the speed with which Khachaturian found his personal style. The *Valse-caprice* in particular is full of enticing harmonies whilst the dynamic *Danse* is a real foot-tapper, but with strong accents guaranteed to catch out all but the most rhythmically aware.

A considerable time gap separates these works from the remainder of the originally composed piano pieces in this recital. In the intervening period Khachaturian composed the first of two volumes entitled *Scenes from Childhood* (begun in the 1920s but not published until 1947 and often referred to as *Children's Pieces*) and in 1928 wrote seven fugues adding recitatives almost 40 years later, published in 1966 as *Recitatives and Fugues* in 1966 (these works however are not included here). In addition to the *Toccata*, which achieved a certain acclaim in the West, particularly in France where it was published, Khachaturian's fame in his early years of composition rested on his *First Symphony* (this was his graduation piece) and then most spectacularly on his *Piano Concerto* of 1936. This concerto was famously recorded in the days of 78s with William Kapell and Moura Lympany and has remained popular with labels since.

Under Glière he became deputy chairman of the Composer's Union Organising Committee, a post held between 1939 and 1948. In 1948 the Organising Committee was disbanded and Khachaturian and others were

severely criticised by Zhdanov for formalist tendencies. The Composer's Union ALC 1144 Booklet.indd 4-6 then came under the management of the decidedly third-rate composer Tikhon Khrennikov. The denouncing of Khachaturian must have come as a considerable surprise to his colleagues since his music was invariably optimistic and colourful in content. In addition to his *concertos* for *Violin* (1940, if anything *more* popular than the *Piano Concerto*) and *Cello* (1946-ALC 1094), Khachaturian had composed two further symphonies, a number of film scores (film being Stalin's favourite art form) and incidental music to plays including Lope de Vega's *The Widow of Valencia* (1940) and Lermontov's *Maskarad* (1941). Khachaturian's response to the criticism was the tuneful ballet score for *Spartacus*.

Khachaturian's *Sonatina* is a delightful work composed in 1959 and dedicated to the Elementary Music School in Prokopyevsk (about 200 miles south of Tomsk in what was then the centre of the USSR). The brisk opening movement once heard can never be forgotten; the slow movement is in Khachaturian's most achingly lyrical vein whilst the vigorous finale is equally memorable. In 1964 Khachaturian composed a second set of *Children's Pieces*. If children are to play these works then they must be technically proficient beforehand, although the first five pieces are noticeably less demanding than Nos 6 – 10. The ten miniatures are full of variety and hold the attention well. A number of these works are clearly designed directly to appeal to children and are totally charming. Others, like the ninth piece *Toccata*, might just leave the child open-mouthed in amazement at its complexity. The *Fugue* that closes the set was recycled from the group of *Fugues* composed during Khachaturian's student days.

The most substantial work included in this collection is clearly the *Sonata* and here McLachlan plays the original fuller version composed in 1961. It is work composed with great feeling 'In Memory of my teacher Nikolay Myaskovsky' to whom Khachaturian had always remained close and who was also denounced by Zhdanov in 1948. (Myaskovsky, who was born in 1881, was a broken man after this incident and died two years later in 1950). It is undoubtedly one of Khachaturian's most dissonant and angry works, but one which makes increasing sense with each listening. Whereas the outer movements are typically fuelled by an intensely exciting rhythmic drive, the immense central movement mixes sorrow at a noble friend's passing with anger at his unjust treatment many years before. One is left wondering why Khachaturian, who often composed in great haste, delayed writing this wonderful work for so many years after Myaskovsky's death.

Piano arrangements of existing orchestral works are always a bit of a lottery, particularly when the composer paints in such bright colours as

does Khachaturian. As an encore to this collection Murray McLachlan has included a transcription of the popular waltz from *Maskarad* but the obvious fun McLachlan has with this piece is truly infectious and, unlike a film short I once saw of eight pianists playing the *Sabre Dance* from *Gayane* complete with coloured dancing fountains, not at all kitschy!

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NOTES ON THE ARTIST

Murray McLachlan is a pianist with a virtuoso technique and a sure sense of line. His timing and phrasing are impeccable, and his tone-full but unforced in the powerful passages, gentle and restrained in the more lyrical- is a perpetual delight" (BBC Music Magazine) As a concert artist Murray McLachlan has received outstanding critical acclaim for intelligent and sensitive interpretations and superb technical ability. His prolific discography has received long-standing international recognition and includes over thirty commercial recordings, including the complete sonatas of Beethoven and Prokofiev and many rarities. McLachlan's repertoire includes over 40 concertos and he has appeared as soloist with most of the leading UK orchestras. His recognition has been far-reaching, bringing many invitations to perform abroad. In recent seasons his engagements have included performances in the USA, Scandinavia, South Africa, Poland, Byelorussia and Norway. In 1997 he was awarded a knighthood by the Order of St John of Jerusalem in recognition of his services to music in Malta. In 2003 he performed the complete cycle of 32 Beethoven Sonatas to critical acclaim in Manchester, and in 2004 his Wigmore Hall Erik Chisholm Centenary Recital and subsequent national tour attracted superlatives in the national press. His intense schedule continued in 2006 with a 'Shostakovich Centenary Recital tour', including 15 UK concerts.

Murray McLachlan has given first performances of works by many composers, including Martin Butler, Ronald Stevenson, Charles Camilleri, Michael Parkin and even Beethoven! Recordings of contemporary music have won numerous accolades, including full star ratings, as well as 'rosette' and 'key recording' status in *The Penguin Guide to Compact Discs* 2005/6, and 'Disc of the month' and 'Record of the month' in *Music on the web*. He is Head of keyboard at Chetham's School of Music and tutor at the Royal Northern College of Music both in Manchester, as well as Artistic Director of the Chetham's International Summer school and festival for Pianists, which attracts outstanding musicians annually from all over the world.

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