

Daniil Shafran

More Cello Masterworks



Tchaikovsky
Rococo Variations
Popper Vito & Etude
Tsindtsadze 5 Pieces
Saint-Saens The Swan
Prokofiev
Symphony -
Concerto

PARNASSUS

Legendary Recordings

Daniil Shafran

More Cello Masterworks

Piotr Ilich Tchaikovsky

1 *Variations on a Rococo Theme, Op. 33* 18:48

with the **Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra**

Kiril Kondrashin, *conductor*

David Popper

2 *Vito, Op.54 No. 5* 4:03

3 *Concert Etude, Op.55 No. 2* 2:26

Sulkhan Tzintstsadze

Five Pieces on Georgian Folk Themes

4 I. Arobnaya 5:19

5 II. Chonguri 1:15

6 III. Sachidao 2:34

7 IV. Nana 3:19

8 V. Plyasovaya 1:55

with **Nina Musinyan**, *piano*

Camille Saint-Saëns

9 *Carnival of the Animals: The Swan* 2:54

with **Emil Gilels**, *piano*

Sergei Prokofiev

Symphony-Concerto for Cello and Orchestra in E Minor, Op. 125

A I. Andante 9:39

B II. Allegro giusto 16:27

C III. Andante con moto 9:13

with the **USSR State Symphony Orchestra**

Gennady Rozhdestvensky, *conductor*

It was a quirk of fate that the Soviet Union should have produced, within the space of four years, two of the greatest cellists of the age, Mstislav Rostropovich and Daniil Borisovich Shafran. It was a particular misfortune for Shafran that Rostropovich should have been so visible a musician, culturally and politically, as Shafran was largely overlooked.

He was born on 13 January 1923 in St Petersburg, then Petrograd/Leningrad, where his father, Boris, was principal cellist in the Leningrad Philharmonic. Studies with his father were followed by lessons with Aleksander Shtrimer (who had also taught Shafran's father), first at the Special Music School, and then at the conservatoire two years later. Shafran made his concerto debut with the Philharmonic at the age of eleven, performing Tchaikovsky's 'Rococo' Variations conducted by Albert Coates and three years later, in 1937, the same year that he won the All-Union Competition, he recorded the work with Alexander Gauk. His competition prize was a 1630 Amati cello (reputedly), slightly on the small side, that he used for the rest of his life. After his death, it turned out that it was, in fact, probably eighteenth-century German or Bohemian.

His studies were interrupted by the War, during which he was evacuated to Novosibirsk with his parents, but he became soloist with the Moscow State Philharmonic in 1943 and recorded *Shostakovich's Cello Sonata* with the composer in 1946 (1960 stereo recording with Pecherskaya on PACL 95008), the same year he toured Romania and gave a recital with Enescu at the piano. He entered two major competitions, the Budapest in 1949 and the Prague the following year, on both occasions sharing the first prize with Rostropovich. Thereafter he began to tour Eastern Europe and gave his first Western concerts in Italy in 1959, America in 1960 at Carnegie Hall, returning in 1964 and 1977, when he performed the complete *Beethoven Cello/Piano Sonatas* with Anton Ginsburg. His first British appearance was in 1964 when he played in the Wigmore Hall and at the Royal Festival Hall where he performed *Prokofiev's Symphony-Concerto*.

His training under his father and Shtrimer had been rigorous and he would always practice in a jacket or tails for the final rehearsal of his concerts, the better to prepare himself for the physical ordeal to come. He practised at least up to five hours every day, sometimes more, starting at 8am and working without a break. On the day of the concert, he cut down to two hours' practice during the morning.

Constant practice sometimes took a toll on his fingertips and injury would occur. On such occasions Shafran simply used plasters on the tips and continued to play.

The smaller size of his cello undoubtedly encouraged Shafran's very personal use of shifts and fingering. He had a broad handsplay and as a result of unrelenting practice, his fingers were exceptionally and independently strong and this included the use of his thumb, on which he used to vibrate. The combination of a smaller cello, a wide span and independent digital strength enabled him frequently to stretch rather than shift. His student Alia Bekova noted his similarity to a violinist in the lightness of his playing and his fingerboard athleticism. What separated Shafran from every other cellist was his vibrato and specifically its exceptional range from a 'white' senza vibrato to an almost overpoweringly fast speed and everything in between. As his step-daughter Vera Guseva noted 'He finally stopped worrying about whether he was audible and just followed his musical instincts, including whispering with his cello'. Yet the extremity of its use proved immensely controversial as did his use of rubato. Felix Gottlieb, one of Shafran's accompanists, recalled in '*Daniil Shafran: Cello Solo*' that 'the only chance I had of meeting his unrestrained accelerando was simply to miss out a chord.'

He wasn't afraid to deviate from the score if he felt the music differently. A famous case was *Shostakovich's Cello Concerto No.2* in which he played fast and loose with tempi and altered the crescendo of the last note to a decrescendo, altering its significance by doing so. Even Shostakovich was unable to make him play what was printed ! Fidelity to the score was not Shafran's way – his musical ethos was deeply personal, and fully romanticised.

He recorded widely including the *Haydn D major Concerto* (also PACL 95008), Boccherini, Schumann, Dvořák and Prokofiev concertos. He also recorded both Kabalevsky concertos, the second of which was dedicated to him. His empathy and understanding of Kabalevsky's music is undeniable and the composer himself said of Shafran's playing that '*It's amazing what Dania is doing with my concerto. It's wonderful! Magnificent! I don't recognise my own music.*' His chamber recordings included much Bach – the *Suites and Sonatas* – Beethoven, Schubert (The 'Arpeggione' also PACL 95008), Brahms, Chopin, Franck, Prokofiev, Arapov and Rachmaninov. He has recorded a raft of smaller pieces – from Popper to Kreisler to Klengel – his colleague David

Oistrakh had advised him always to include some virtuoso pieces in his 'daily dozen' – and he also recorded such richly evocative works as **Sulkhan Tzintstsadze's 'Five Pieces on Folk Tunes'** with its ingenious use of Georgian modal harmonies. His transcriptions have earned him renown: they include *Shostakovich's Viola Sonata* and *Brahms' Four Serious Songs*.

His professional life was devoted to concerto and recital performance, and he never played in a piano trio, much less a quartet because in his youth in the 1930s and 40s playing chamber music was not thought necessary for a soloist. His keyboard collaborators included Sviatoslav Richter, Emil Gilels, Anton Ginsburg, Yakov Flier, Lydia Pecherskaya, and Felix Gottlieb but during tours he would be teamed with a luminary such as Carlo Zecchi as well as also local players, such as the German pianist, Walter Bohle. One of his most frequent accompanists was his wife, **Nina Musinyan** (1910-95), who had been a pupil of Konstantin Igumnov in Moscow and who had been instrumental in supporting Shafran from his prodigy years. He was conducted by the leading Soviet figures of his time – Mravinsky, Temirkanov, Rozhdestvensky, Gauk, Sanderling, Kondrashin, Arvīds Jansons, Konstantin Ivanov, as well as Neeme Järvi and by Kabalevsky, both in concert and on disc. He gave a memorable televised performance of the *Dvořák Concerto* with Carlo Maria Giulini in 1973.

He served on the jury of the cello section of the Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow from 1962 until his death in 1997 and from 1974-90 he was its chairman. Though he was never attached to any official institution Shafran taught widely, in Germany, Italy and Luxemburg and further afield, in Japan, and his unofficial influence has been significant: Steven Isserlis, for example, travelled to Moscow in 1987 to take lessons from him and organised the Wigmore Hall concerts in London in 1995 – two years after Shafran's official retirement - that proved to be his British swansong. Alia Bekova praised Shafran's use of the bow tip and mastery of staccato and spiccato. She also noted his preference for slightly loose hair on the bow. His bow speed was infinitely varied and he always encouraged the use of colour in the playing of his students, something Shtrimer – who encouraged artistic interpretation - had taught him, rather than merely motoric or robotic technical perfection. The arch-romantic Shafran died on 7 February 1997.

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Parnassus Records PACL95016

5055354409165

Recorded in the Soviet Union (now the Russian Federation) in 1946 ([2]-[3]), 1949 ([1]), 1954 ([9]), 1957 ([4]-[8]) and 1961 ([10]-[12])

Restored and remastered for Parnassus by **Paul Arden-Taylor**

Digital edition produced by **Gene Gaudette, Urlicht AudioVisual**

Cover image: Daniil Shafran, courtesy **Tully Potter Archive**

Design produced by **AliCat Design**

Producer: **Leslie Gerber**

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