

# THE RUSSIAN SOUL

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THE COMPLETE  
PRELUDES  
OF RACHMANINOV



*Fanny*  
**Azzuro**



ALBUM  
RECORDING  
FANNY AZZURO,  
PIANO

20  
20

THE RUSSIAN SOUL  
STATEMENT OF INTENT

PROGRAMME

The Russian Soul

*The complete works of Rachmaninov*

24 Preludes

Prelude in C-sharp minor (Op. 3 No. 2) – 1892

Ten preludes in Op. 23 – 1901–1903

Thirteen preludes in Op. 32 – 1910

Total time: 80 minutes

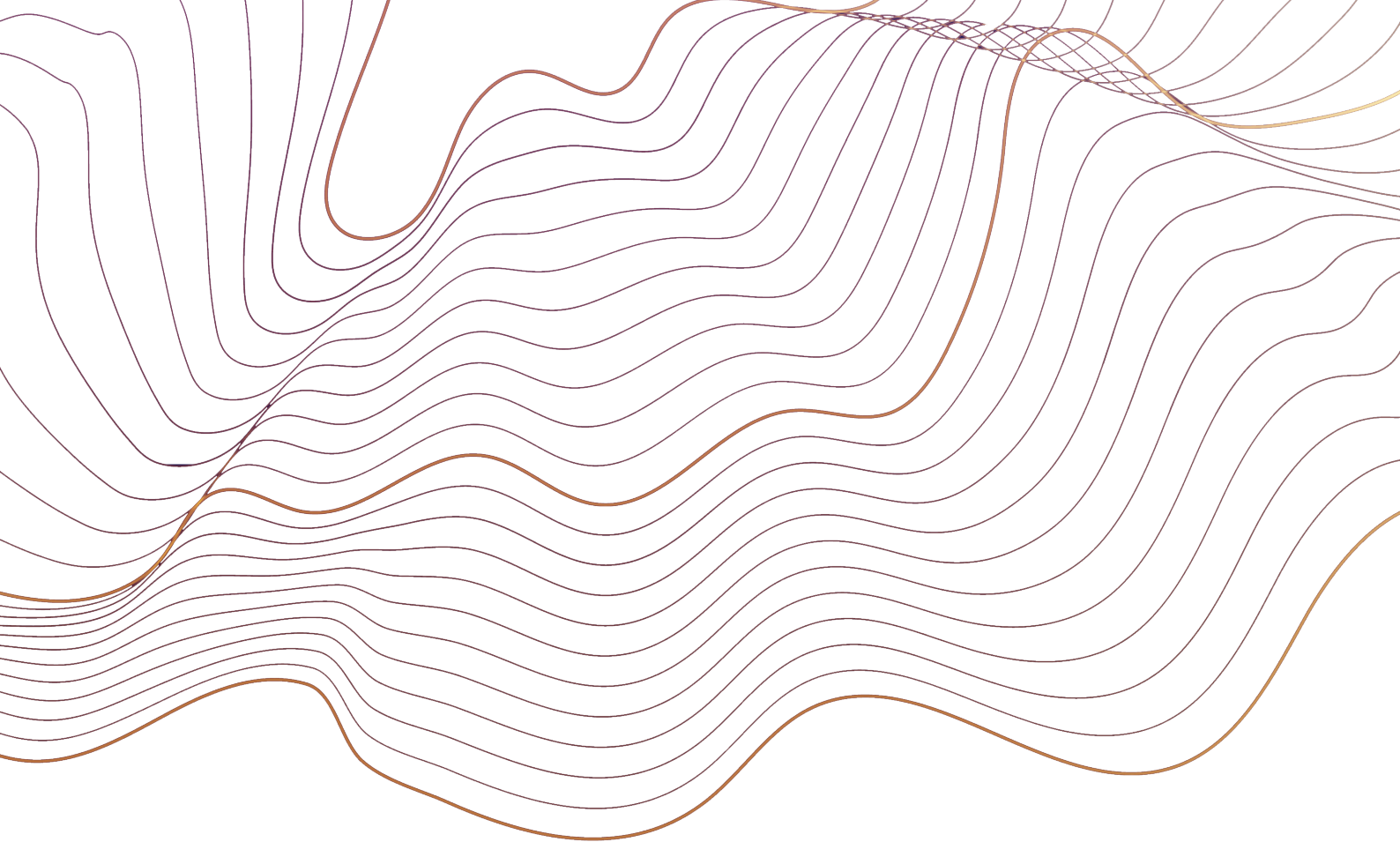
*‘The pure music to which the Prelude belongs may suggest or create in listeners a certain state of mind, but its fundamental role is to give them intellectual pleasure through the variety and beauty of its form.’*

(Victor Serov)

After two piano albums dedicated to the music of Russian, French and Spanish composers from the 20th century and after taking great pleasure in playing the short pieces of Variations on a Theme of Corelli, I am revisiting this repertoire from the early 20th century and setting out to conquer the lively Rachmaninov preludes. Short pieces, where you live in the moment very intensely, when the ‘prelude’ which was initially supposed to be played before a more substantial piece, becomes the centre of attention. And ‘preludes’ sells it short: they are altogether virtuoso studies (*Preludes in Op. 32 Nos. 4 in E minor, 13 in D-flat major*), sweet romances (*Op. 32 Nos. 5 in G major, 11 in B major, Op. 23 No. 6 in E-flat major*), nocturnes (*Op. 23 No. 10 in G-flat major*) as well as tales that are told in a magical, powerful, tragic way and whose romantic rendering stays intact. It is obvious that Rachmaninov drew his inspiration from Chopin’s genius, from his 24 Preludes (hence his *Variations on a Theme of Chopin, Op. 22*, which came just before the *Ten Preludes Op. 23*) and everything else. Just like Chopin, without any logic, Rachmaninov imagines how he can use every minor and major key: we go from a dramatic episode, a proper explosion of bells (*Op. 3 No. 2, Prelude in C-sharp minor*) to the infinite gentleness of some other preludes (*Op. 32 No. 5 in G major*). Shifting from a dream to harsh reality, let’s embark on a post-romantic Russian journey. The first prelude I ever had the pleasure to play is one of my favourite pieces from childhood, probably the reason why I wanted to keep on learning how to play: the very popular *Prelude Op. 23 No. 5 in G minor*. Written with a noble rhythm throughout, this fantastic cavalcade mellows in the middle part with breathtaking lyricism and onirism.

Why did I choose this?

I recently had to find a solution to complete my programme at La Folle Journée de Nantes, around the theme of ‘exile’. René Martin suggested I include the *Preludes Op. 32* which Rachmaninov had composed in 1910 in the USA during a tour. It was a big challenge, because I only had one month to learn how to play these majestic pieces—and I did it! One month of relentless work, without any break, and then the culmination of all the hard work: my concert at La Folle Journée de Nantes on 30 January 2019. I was so thrilled! Every day brought its load of excitement, as I discovered these preludes, from evoking an orchestra and a few horns (*Op. 32 No. 13 in D-flat major*), to the power of sound and breaking waves (*Op. 32 No. 4 in E minor*), the nostalgia of a long lost dream (*Op. 32 No. 2 in B-flat minor*) or a high-wire act (*Op. 32 No. 5 in G major*)... I simply fell in love with this programme from *Opus 32*. It therefore became obvious that I had to keep up the good work with *Opus 23*, especially after the feedback I got from several pianists I had worked with on this repertoire, among which my maestro, Boris Petrushansky, and the fantastic Jean-Marc Luisada, Jay Gottlieb, Hervé Sellin... Their enthusiasm carried me through to the realisation of this project and I will record this album next spring.



# FANNY AZZURO, PIANIST

## BIOGRAPHY

*“Fanny Azzuro’s expansive and welcoming piano”*  
Le Monde

Her motto is “to tell a story with honesty, humility and ability, while creating a strong human bond through a harmonious moment of sharing”. Fanny Azzuro is a pianist whose solo career is reaching new heights. At 33 years old, she has established herself on prestigious stages in the musical world, playing in a poetic and vibrant manner, always with deliberate intention. Her 2018-2019 season was filled with concerts in prestigious venues and festivals, such as Carnegie Hall in New York, La Roque d’Anthéron, La Folle Journée de Nantes, Nohant Chopin Festival, Lille Piano Festival, Salle Cortot in Paris, the opera houses in Toulon, Lille and Avignon, the Grand Theatre in Angers, and she performed in Zurich, Brussels, New York, Washington D.C. and Dallas.

In 2017, Fanny Azzuro recorded with Paraty Harmonia Mundi *1905 Impressions*, an album which was nominated at the International Classical Music Awards and received many accolades: Pianiste Maestro, 5 quavers from Pizzicato and 4 stars from Pianist Magazine. It was also selected by Concertclassic: “Fanny Azzuro’s recording is a little gem!” It is still regularly played on Radio Classique and France Musique.

In 2014, her album *Russian Impulse* had already been highly praised by Classica (“expansive and lyrical playing”), where she was compared to Lazar Berman and Nikolai Lugansky. BBC Music Magazine described her as a “brilliant young pianist”.

An all-round inquiring musician, she has a passion for chamber music and has shared magical moments with the Voce, Hermès and Van Kuijk quartets through playing Franck’s, Schumann’s and Fauré’s quintets. In the last year, she’s been playing original works and arrangements in a vibrant duo with the percussionist Adélaïde Ferrière. She has also been fully engaged for the past eight years with the SpiriTango Quartet, performing programmes and highly personal versions of tango nuevo and contemporary tango. Their third album was acclaimed by the press and in particular by Le Monde, which classed them “in the tradition of the great string quartets”.

She recently created *Movement*, a new project with the dancer Andréa Moufounda, staged by Parelle Gervasoni, with the aim of opening out classical music to a wider public. Furthermore, she frequently plays with the renowned jazz pianist Hervé Sellin in a jazz and classical music programme called *Passerelles*. One of her great sources of inspiration is the pianist Boris Petrushansky, a master of the Russian school of music. She still works with him at the Accademia Pianistica Internazionale in Imola (Italy).

After graduating from the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris (degree and master in piano and chamber music), she then studied with Tuija Hakkila at the Helsinki Sibelius Academy. This solid background enabled her to succeed in many international competitions, including the World Competition in Cincinnati, the Washington International Piano Competition, the Lalla Meryem in Rabbat (Morocco) and Piano Campus in Pontoise (France).

Officially a Yamaha Artist, she is also supported by many foundations and sponsors, among which the Mécénat Musical Société Générale, the Safran Foundation for Music, the Spedidam, the Adami, the Académie de Villecroze, the Nouveaux Virtuoses and the Meyer Foundation.

### How can I explain my attraction to the Russian piano school and its composers?

Pure chance—if such a thing exists. It is by chance that I first met Vladimir Viardo, over ten years ago, during a master-class in Aix-en-Provence. Who is he? A musician who lives and breathes music: ‘Driven by his belief that performance must transcend mere entertainment or display of skill, he seduces audiences to join him in a poetico-philosophical research of life through layers of intellect, imagination and cultural associations. His exuberant temperament and sincere passion expose spontaneous creativity grounded in a virtuosity that never fails to produce exhilarating exchange and profound complicity in concert.’ The same can be said about Boris Petrushansky, whom I consider to be my greatest piano master. He managed to draw out all the richness of my sound palette, all the intimacy I had with my instrument, transcending the ridiculous fears brought about by stress. On stage, his aim has always been to tell his most profound story with extreme sincerity and a deep concern for any given moment. This man is a poet. He was the last pupil of Heinrich Neuhaus and also a pupil of Lev Naumov (like Vladimir Viardo). He is a descendant of the greatest Russian piano school. So it is clear that my passion for this repertoire also came from these encounters and I cannot help but throw myself body and soul into studying these great majestic pieces: the complete *Preludes* of Rachmaninov.






I am now exploring this wide repertoire of preludes where the Russian soul dwells and which I hold close to my heart.

Fanny Azzuro



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# INFOS

FANNY AZZURO, PIANIST

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# THE RUSSIAN SOUL

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