

MARIA JOÃO PIRES

b. 1944

BACH

French Suite No. 2 in C minor

CHOPIN

Nocturne in C minor, Op. 48 No. 1

Nocturne in F sharp minor, Op. 48 No. 2

Nocturne in E, Op. 62 No. 2

MOZART

Piano Concerto No. 14 in E flat

Sonata in C, KV 545 "for beginners"

Sonata in E flat, KV 282

Sonata in B flat, KV 333

Sonata in A, KV 331 "alla turca"

SCHUBERT

Moment musical in A flat, D. 780/6

SCHUMANN

Arabeske

Wiener Philharmoniker

Claudio Abbado



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OF THE 20th CENTURY

2 CDS

MARIA JOÃO PIRES

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GREAT PIANISTS

OF THE 20th CENTURY

MARIA JOÃO PIRES

**BACH / CHOPIN / MOZART
SCHUBERT / SCHUMANN**



2 CDS



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PM 2

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Total playing-time: 2.30'11"

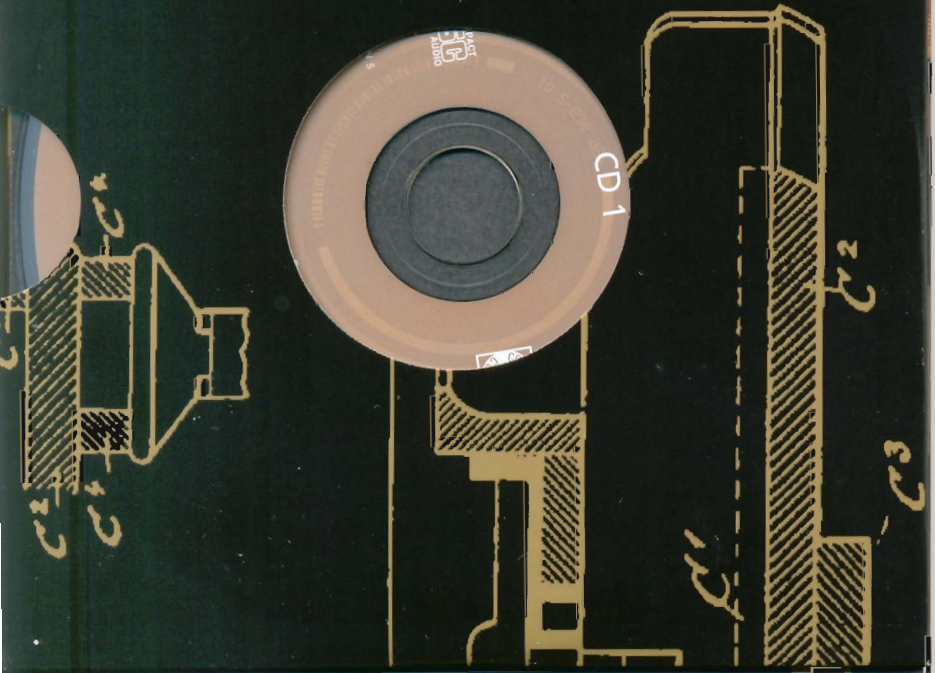


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*Von Herzen -
Möge es wieder
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Ludwig van Beethoven

It was in the 19th century that the piano rose to prominence as a concert instrument. Only in the 20th, with the invention of the gramophone, was it possible to record the instrument and its interpreters. Since then the wealth of recordings has become almost an embarrassment of riches. Selecting the greatest of these has been both a labour of love and, inevitably, a struggle of conscience. However, we believe that this edition, made in co-operation with many of the world's leading classical music companies, captures the best of recorded pianism. Philips Classics is privileged to offer the present edition both as a monument to the 20th century and as an inspiration for the next millennium.

Im 19. Jahrhundert begann der Aufstieg des Klaviers als Konzertinstrument. Doch erst mit der Erfindung des Grammophons im 20. Jahrhundert wurde es möglich, das Instrument und seine Interpreten für die Nachwelt festzuhalten. Die Anzahl der seitdem entstandenen Aufnahmen ist Legion. Daraus eine Auswahl zu treffen, war eine Herzensangelegenheit, aber auch ein Ringen um Objektivität. Wir glauben jedoch, daß diese Edition, die in Zusammenarbeit mit den führenden Klassiklabels entstanden ist, den bedeutendsten Pianisten der Aufnahmegeschichte Reverenz erweist. Philips Classics ist stolz auf dieses Monument des 20. Jahrhunderts, das auch als Inspiration für das kommende Jahrtausend dienen möge.

C'est au XIX^e siècle que le piano a accédé à une position prééminente au concert. C'est au XX^e siècle, avec l'invention du phonographe, qu'on a commencé à enregistrer le piano et ses interprètes. Sélectionner les plus grands des enregistrements accumulés a été à la fois affaire d'amour et de conscience. Nous croyons que cette édition, à laquelle les grandes compagnies de musique classique ont coopéré nombreuses, contient le meilleur du piano enregistré. Philips Classics a le privilège de présenter cette édition, monument au XX^e siècle et source d'inspiration pour le prochain millénaire.

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH
French Suite No. 2 in C minor, BWV 813

- 1 Allemande
- 2 Courante
- 3 Sarabande
- 4 Air
- 5 Menuet I - II
- 6 Gigue

3'23"
1'53"
3'58"
1'21"
1'40"
2'51"

ROBERT SCHUMANN

Arabeske

- 7 Leicht und Zart
- 8 Minore I
- 9 Minore II
- 10 Zum Schluss

0'56"
3'01"
1'41"
1'24"

FRANZ SCHUBERT

- 11 Moment musical in A flat, D. 780 No. 6

7'03"

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN

- 12 Nocturne in C minor, Op. 48 No. 1
- 13 Nocturne in F sharp minor, Op. 48 No. 2
- 14 Nocturne in E, Op. 62 No. 2

6'39"
7'10"
5'47"

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

- Piano Concerto No. 14 in E flat, KV 449

8'29"
6'47"
5'57"

- 15 1 Allegro vivace
- 16 2 Andantino
- 17 3 Allegro ma non troppo

Wiener Philharmoniker · Claudio Abbado

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Piano Sonata in C, KV 545 "For Beginners"

- 1 1 Allegro
- 2 2 Andante
- 3 3 Rondo. Allegro

Piano Sonata in E flat, KV 282

- 4 1 Adagio
- 5 2 Menuetto I - II
- 6 3 Allegro

Piano Sonata in B flat, KV 333

- 7 1 Allegro
- 8 2 Andante cantabile
- 9 3 Allegretto grazioso

4'11"

6'02"

1'36"

7'12"

3'59"

3'19"

9'45"

12'11"

6'32"

Piano Sonata in A, KV 331

Tema con variazioni

- 10 1
- 11 2 Menuetto
- 12 3 Alla Turca

14'11"

5'44"

3'41"

Recorded:
2/1989 (Schubert; Mozart: KV 545, KV 333)
Friedrich-Ebert-Halle, Hamburg, 5/1990 (Mozart: KV 331)
Fundacao Glouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon, 8/1990 (Mozart: KV 282)
Friedrich-Ebert-Halle, Hamburg, 10/1991 (Schumann)
Grosser Saal, Musikverein, Vienna, 3/1992 (Mozart: Concerto)
Hochschule für Musik, Munich, 1/1995 (Bach)
1/1996 (Chopin)

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Maria João Pires

Born in 1944 in Lisbon. Studied piano with Campos Coelho at the Conservatory of her native city, where she also studied music theory and music history. Next studied in Munich with Rosl Schmid and in Hanover with Karl Engel, who was an important influence on her development. International breakthrough in 1970 with first prize at the Brussels Beethoven Competition held on the occasion of the composer's bicentenary. Since then she has performed regularly throughout Europe, North America, Israel and Japan as well as at the leading international festivals (Schleswig-Holstein, Tanglewood and Ravinia). An exclusive Deutsche Grammophon artist since 1989, her recording of the complete Mozart Piano Sonatas won the Grand Prix du Disque in 1990. In addition to solo appearances, she devotes much of her activity to chamber music, the French violinist Augustin Dumay being her most important partner. Maria João Pires interprets a large, varied piano repertoire with exceptional inner consistency and poetry.

Geboren 1944 in Lissabon. Ausbildung zunächst bei Campos Coelho am dortigen Konservatorium, wo sie außer Klavier auch Composition, Musiktheorie und Musikgeschichte studierte, danach in München bei Rosl Schmid und in Hannover bei Karl Engel, der ihrer künstlerischen Entwicklung entscheidende Impulse gab. 1970 internationaler Durchbruch in Brüssel mit dem 1. Preis bei einem von internationalen Rundfunksendern veranstalteten Wettbewerb anlässlich Beethovens 200. Geburtstags. Seitdem regelmäßige Auftritte in Europa, den Vereinigten Staaten, Kanada, Israel und Japan sowie bei bedeutenden internationalen Festspielen (Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival, Tanglewood und Ravinia Festival). Nimmt seit 1989 exklusiv für Deutsche Grammophon auf. Ihre Einspielung von Mozarts sämtlichen Klaviersonaten wurde 1990 mit dem Grand Prix du Disque ausgezeichnet. Neben ihren solistischen Auftritten widmet sie sich der Kammermusik, wobei der französische Geiger Augustin Dumay ihr wichtigster Partner ist. Maria João Pires besticht in einem vielseitigen Repertoire durch die innerliche Konsequenz ihrer Interpretationen sowie durch klangliche Poesie.

Née à Lisbonne en 1944. Travaille d'abord avec le professeur Campos Coelho au Conservatoire de sa ville natale où, parallèlement au piano, elle étudie la théorie et l'histoire de la musique. Poursuit ses études à Munich auprès de Rosl Schmid, et à Hanovre avec Karl Engel, lequel donne un élan décisif à son évolution artistique. En 1970, s'impose à l'échelle internationale en remportant le premier prix au concours international organisé à Bruxelles par l'Union Européenne de Radiodiffusion pour le bicentenaire de la naissance de Beethoven. Depuis cette date, se produit régulièrement en Europe, aux Etats-Unis, au Canada, en Israël et au Japon, ainsi que dans les grands festivals internationaux (Schleswig-Holstein, Tanglewood et Ravinia). Depuis 1989, enregistre en exclusivité pour Deutsche Grammophon. Son enregistrement de l'intégrale des Sonates pour piano de Mozart lui a valu le Grand Prix du disque en 1990. A côté de ses récitals solistes, elle se consacre à la musique de chambre: le violoniste français Augustin Dumay est son principal partenaire dans ce domaine. Au sein d'un repertoire extrêmement diversifié, Maria Joao Pires séduit par la grande cohérence interne de ses interprétations et par une rare poésie sonore.

DISCERNMENT, PROGRESS, MATURITY, FLAMBOYANCE

Among the great and influential women keyboard artists of the 20th century, the Portuguese pianist Maria João Pires occupies a special position. For many years she has not only represented her native country as one of its few musical figures of world renown, she has also succeeded, during various phases of her career, in establishing a fascinating form of supranational artistry that has transcended borders and confronted even those music-lovers only mildly interested in the sociology of music with the issue of women in public life. In other words, Pires has never been an "easy" artist. She has always spoken her mind, always known or tested her limits and reflected on her art and the conditions associated with her activities. Delicate of physique, intrepid in her dealings, resolute in her decisions, she has looked for ways of converting her highly personal musical and practical insights into acoustical energy. Early in her career the crystal-clear pianism and dashing tempi of her recordings made listeners prick up their ears. With a firm and powerful touch, with fresh and sinewy phrasing, she gave the impression of a young artist managing very well indeed on a "clean" aesthetic regimen. For Erato she recorded all of Mozart's piano sonatas and concertos, as well as a selection of concertos by Bach and a series of works by Schubert, Schumann and Chopin (including both piano concertos and 14 waltzes, played in the same sequence as Lipatti!). Anyone who listened closely to Pires in those days – either on her recordings or in the concert hall – could not fail to sense that there were some other, quite different creative forces lying dormant inside this slight, nimble figure, just waiting to be unleashed by favourable circumstances.

And so it happened. At the end of the 1980s, when the pianist began a close association with Deutsche Grammophon, gave increasingly frequent concerts with Claudio Abbado, and seemed generally to have reorganised the planning of her life, suddenly everything about her playing – phrasing and ornaments, individual tones and whole musical paragraphs, with all the footnotes – became charged with new vitality, with new colours and meanings. It was as though, in the long Iberian shadow cast

by Alicia de Larrocha (and enthralled by the virtuosity of Martha Argerich) one had previously experienced no more than a polite suggestion of Maria João Pires. Now this respected strategist of conspicuous inconspicuousness had turned into an alchemist of finely shaded, subtly mixed, sensual piano sound, an interpreter whose flair for the moulding of music could sometimes be taken to the point of flamboyance. Her recording of the Chopin Nocturnes of January 1996 confirms this astonishing development, tone for tone, bar by bar. I asked myself at the time: What must be going through the mind of someone able in one moment of these 21 pieces to play with such extraordinary chasteness and in the next, through an almost imperceptible transformation of expression, to play with such eroticism? And how strong must be her ties to its dark and abrupt yet radiantly nocturnal vicissitudes of dramatised lyricism when a delicate Portuguese woman's *cantabile* can turn new pages in this pianistic book of aristocratic sentimentalism? So much ink has been spilled in Chopin's name over conflicting views of *rubato*, taste and dynamic shadings, yet these qualities remain hard to pin down. They are and will always be a fiction of musicologists and historians of interpretations unless a strong-willed artistic personality is prepared to set out on a risky path, without the aid of instructive signposts, and enter this labyrinth of beauty and disaster in search of the truth.

Maria João Pires and the Nocturnes: with intelligence and taking a long view, she spans broad cantilenas, delicately and tellingly fits accompanying chords into the melodic process, giving it a foundation, a sense of present and future. With the subtlest micro-shifts of soft and softer still, she infuses with meaning and deeper meaning the ornamental filigree inimitably splashed by Chopin between the notes. Her forte is rounded and firm, positively masculine in the dramatic intricacies of the C minor Nocturne. With an infallible barometer for atmospheric changes, so to speak, she senses darkenings and brightenings still on the horizon. Trills, so crucial to Chopin's nocturnal magic, appear in countless different artful forms and guises – resonant, refulgent, tremulous – yet always naturally embedded in the melodic line.

Maria João Pires is one of those pianists with a knack for sizing up her repertoire temperament. She doesn't weigh herself down with warhorses from the Romantic virtuoso literature of the 19th and 20th centuries; she sets her limits with Schumann's A minor Concerto and the two by Chopin. Her exploration of so-called early music

goes back as far as Scarlatti and Bach, whose Second French Suite she interprets without performance-practice "scruples" – in other words, with a historicising approach to phrasing and articulation that lends the music a sense of pride, eloquence and lyricism, imbuing it with light and shade and a timeless significance: Bach's instrumental music – if you will – as an indispensable preliminary exercise for the marvellous piano drama of Mozart's Sonatas and Concertos. With more flesh to her touch and with phrasing more broadly-arching than, say, her colleague Ingrid Haebler, Pires represents in her Mozart recordings of 1989, 1990 and 1992 (Piano Concerto in A, K. 414) an aesthetic of controlled thrust. Everything sparkles and shines, but not a single phrase seems merely clean and polished. It is as though she has attained a degree of security in Mozart that liberates her from listening to external opinions in order to follow an internal voice. She doesn't stage the fast outer movements of, for example, the great, concerto-like Sonata in B-flat in a stereotypically pianistic manner, nor does she unsettle the listener with violently contrived moments of devotional lingering. The work seems – after having been set in motion with a gentle nudge from the pianist – to be playing itself.



Similarly in her interpretations of Schubert, Pires's musical development has revealed a remarkable refinement and interiorisation of expression in general and of thematic characterisation in particular. In her recent recording of the Impromptus, she shows herself to be the sensitive custodian of a precious musical inheritance, almost self-sacrificingly searching in matters of lyrical detail. She eschews every off-hand excuse for pressing ahead and turns even the familiar *Moments musicaux* into nocturnes of sheer Hoffmannesque ambiguity, boldly evoking Schumann. Anything academic or amiable or suggesting an encore in these occasionally discursive works – No. 6 included here is evidence for this – seems to derive from an examination of its essence and spirituality. In that sense, Pires is anything but a pianistic professor of academic Schubertology. Her philosophy begins and ends in the self-controlled favour of her almost maternal concern for the well-being of a work's inherent character, and, ultimately, her knowledge and skills all go to serve nothing more or less than the natural simplicity of musical invention.

In this edition, Maria João Pires is the only figure of Portuguese origin. One explanation for this can surely be found in the political developments of this century, which inexorably forced her once world-dominating homeland at the extreme west of Europe into a delicate marginal position. Until the peaceful revolution of 1974, even cultural ties in the country were gradually weakened, in many respects actually broken. Fortunately, with Portugal's entry into the European Community, the exchange of information was very quickly restored to its earlier levels and concert life, too, opened up again to input from abroad, not just in the capital, but also in the provinces and the Azores. Yet another reason for her anomalous position undoubtedly dates back to the Portuguese musical scene in the 19th and 20th centuries, which allowed no fruitful exchange to develop between creative and re-creative artistic figures. Thus it was virtually predestined that the gifted girl from Lisbon would have to mature on her own as a pianist and align herself with prevailing central European standards. Pires gave her first recital at the age of five, and two years later made her début as soloist in a Mozart concerto. After seven years of study under Campos Coelho at the Lisbon Conservatory – including courses in composition, theory and music history – the promising young artist went in 1960 to the Munich Musikhochschule, where she studied until 1964 with Rosl Schmid. A year in Hanover working with Karl Engel followed. First prize at the Brussels Beethoven Competition, held in 1970 on the occasion of the composer's bicentenary, represented that critical step in an artist's life that is generally described as a "breakthrough." Those dates and facts would seem to guarantee a steady, continuous career, but Pires didn't have it easy and didn't make it easy for herself in the process of perfecting, organising and assessing her fabulous abilities. She comes and she conquers, but she also keeps one waiting if she finds that the conditions aren't right in the inspiring but exhausting pace of mutable concert life.

Translation: Richard Evidon



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fig. 5

fig. 6



