



Maryla Jonas (piano)

Volume 1: The 78 RPM Recordings

rec. 1946-1949

Mono

ST-LAURENT STUDIO YSL78-219 [47:35 + 53:34]

Volume 2: The LP Records

rec. 1947-1951

Complete tracklisting below

Mono

ST-LAURENT STUDIO YSL78-223 [56:01 +37:38]

Maryla Jonas recordings have generally been given short shrift by the historical reissue labels, with the exception of a single CD by Pearl, long since deleted, of a selection of her 78s in transfers by Roger Beardsley. Chopin Mazurkas and Schumann's *Kinderszenen* make up the lion's share of that compilation. Apart from this, there's a single track devoted to the pianist, featuring the Handel Passacaglia, on a historical Naxos CD entitled *Women at the Piano Volume 1* ([review](#)). It is laudable that the Canadian-based historical label, St. Laurent Studio has released the pianist's complete recorded legacy on four CDs. These are divided into two volumes of two discs each. Volume 1 is titled *The 78 RPM Recordings*, and Volume 2 is dedicated to *The LP Records*. The volume's titles refer to the recording's source material. Christopher Howell's [recent comprehensive article on Jonas](#) for MusicWeb International has rekindled my interest in the pianist. I have long admired the Chopin Mazurkas on a Columbia LP (RL 6624).

As the above article gives a detailed biographical account, I shall just sketch a few salient details. She was born in Warsaw in 1911. Piano lessons began early with Włodzimierz Oberfelt. In 1922 she entered Józef Turczyński's class at the Warsaw Conservatory, followed by later studies with Ignacy Jan Paderewski and Emil von Sauer. Life changed with the German invasion of Poland in 1939, when she lost several members of her family. After a period of incarceration by the Gestapo, she eventually made her way to Brazil, and with the encouragement of Arthur Rubinstein gradually resumed a concert career in America. The return was only short-lived, however, and after several years of poor health, she died in New York in 1959, aged only forty-eight.

The main bulk of the Jonas discography is devoted to solo piano works by Chopin, and more than half of this is assigned to the mazurkas; she recorded twenty-two in all, in four sessions between 1946 and 1949. The selection covers a broad emotional range and she explores and reveals the individual character of each of these

miniature jewels. Op. 17, no. 2 is imbued with world weariness and likewise Op 68, no. 4 in F minor is wistful. Op. 17, No 4 speaks of nostalgia and regret, whilst Op. 63, No. 3 in C sharp minor is delivered with elegant refinement. The Mazurka in B flat Op. Posth is subtly articulated, and the G major Op. Posth is more upbeat and genial.

Aside from the mazurkas, Jonas set down several other Chopin solo works. A group of nocturnes is included and I love the way she etches the ornate melodies, emphasizing their vocal qualities. These are some of Chopin's most intimate endeavours, and Jonas's approach is reflective and expressive. The Berceuse in D flat major has a charming simplicity and to each variation she brings delicate filigree. The Impromptu in A flat, Op. 29 is free-flowing and improvisatory. The Polonaise in B flat Op. 71, No. 2 is showy and virtuosic, and impressively despatched. The only disappointment in the Étude in E flat minor, Op.10, No. 6 which sounds routine and lacklustre.

Robert Schumann's Kinderszenen is outstanding and stands shoulder to shoulder with some of the finest versions by Lupu, Haskil, Cortot and Horowitz. Jonas effectively contrasts the more introspective pieces with the more exuberant ones. Each of these miniatures has its own tale to tell, and everything is approached with a child-like simplicity. Her pellucid tonal palette, instinctive phrasing and rapt sensitivity are wondrous. Ritter vom Steckenpferd and Glückes genug have an infectious geniality. In Am Kamin she evokes the fire flickering. Träumerei and Der Dichter spricht are both introspective and reflective.

The two Mendelssohn Songs without Words are especially notable for the poetic quality with which she invests them. Her *cantabile* playing and subtly of pedalling is highly reminiscent of Horowitz. She achieves a diaphanous bell-like sonority in the Nicholas (Villa Lobos) *Music Box*. The Schubert/Liszt Serenade is eloquently phrased, and is all the more effective for its telling introspection. When it comes to Schubert's beautiful Impromptu Op. 90, No. 3, she plays it in Haslinger's version transposed from G flat major to G major, with that tasteless change of harmony. She wasn't the only famous pianist to adopt this dreadful trend. She also makes a cut from bars 43-46 inclusive, but maybe that was to accommodate the time limitations of 78s. Each of the volumes has a version of the Handel G minor Passacaglia. Surprisingly the dates of the two recordings indicate that they were set down within a week of each other, on 23 and 29 September 1947. Despite the fact that the LP transfer is quieter and more bright than the that of the 78, when I played the two versions side by side, the performances sounded identical in every last detail. Are they the same recording? The jury remains out on this one.

These highly desirable and valuable recorded documents have been expertly transferred. Yves St Laurent has a non-interventionist policy, where there is no filtering and the natural surface noise is preserved. The transfers are similar to those of Opus Kura. The recordings emerge fresh, warm and vibrant. He has had access to well-preserved source material. There were just two tracks on Volume 1 which appeared sonically inferior: Chopin's Mazurka in E minor, Op. 41, No. 2 and Mazurka in C minor, Op. 30, No. 1. I would urge anyone with an interest in historical pianists to investigate this compelling legacy and, as no documentation is provided with these volumes, I would point the reader in the direction of Howell's excellent article.

Stephen Greenbank

Complete tracklist:

Volume 1

CD 1

Frédéric CHOPIN (1810-1849)

Nocturne in C Sharp minor, Op. Posth.

Mazurka in B flat major, Op. Posth.

Mazurka in F minor, Op. 68, No. 4

Nocturne in E minor, Op. 72, No. 1

Mazurka in G minor, Op. 67, No. 2

Mazurka in B minor, Op. 30, No. 2

Waltz in G-flat major, Op. 70, No. 1

Waltz in D-flat major, Op. 70, No. 3

Polonaise in B-flat major, op. 71, no. 2

rec. 19 April 1946

Mazurka in E minor, Op. 41. No. 2

Mazurka in A-flat major, Op. 41, No. 4

Mazurka in C minor, Op. 30, No. 1

Mazurka in A-flat major, Op. 24, No. 3

Mazurka in A minor, Op. Posth. 'Notre Temps'

Mazurka in C minor, Op. 56, No. 3

Mazurka in C-sharp minor, Op. 30, No. 4

Mazurka in F major, Op. 68, No. 3

Mazurka in G major, Op. Posth.

rec. 29 September 1947

CD 2

Mazurka in E minor, Op. 17, No. 2

Mazurka in G minor, Op. 24, No. 1

Mazurka in A-flat major, Op. 17, No. 3

Mazurka in G-sharp minor, Op. 33, No. 1

Mazurka in A minor, Op. 67, No. 4

rec. 19 September 1949

Mazurka in A minor, Op. 17, No. 4

Mazurka in A minor, Op. 59, No. 1

Mazurka in C-sharp minor, Op. 63, No. 3

Mazurka in C major, Op. 7, No. 5

rec. 20 September 1949

Robert SCHUMANN (1810-1856)

Kinderszenen, Op. 15

rec. 30 September 1947

Franz SCHUBERT (1797-1828)

Impromptu in G flat major, Op. 90, No. 3

Valses (Selection)

rec. 19 April 1946

Salomone ROSSI (1570-1630)

Andantino in C minor

rec. 30 September 1947

Georg Friederich HANDEL (1685-1759)

Passacaglia in G minor, suite No. 7

rec. 29 September 1947



Volume 2
CD1

Frédéric CHOPIN

Nocturne in E flat major, Op. 9, No. 2
Nocturne in B major, Op. 32, No. 1
Nocturne in G minor, Op. 14, No. 3
Nocturne in B flat minor, Op. 9, No. 1
Nocturne in F minor, Op. 55, No. 1
rec. 21 & 22 February 1950
Polonaise in C-sharp minor, op. 26, no. 1
Étude in E-flat minor, op. 10, no. 6
Waltz in B minor, op. 69, no. 2
Berceuse in D-flat major, op. 57
rec. 1 June 1951
Étude in F minor, op. 25, no. 2
Impromptu in A flat major, Op. 29
Waltz in C-sharp minor, op. 64, no. 2
rec. 16 June 1951

CD 2

Wilhelm Friedemann BACH (1710-1784)

Capriccio

Georg Friederich HAENDEL

Passacaglia in G minor, suite No. 7
rec. 23 September 1947

Jan Ladislav DUSSEK (1760-1812)

Consolation, Op. 62

Felix MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)

Two songs without words

Op.62, no. 1

Op.102, no. 4

Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART

Turkish march

NICHOLAS (actually VILLA-LOBOS)

Music Box in G major

Rec. May 9 1951

Alfredo CASELLA (1883-1947)

Bolero et gallop

Franz SCHUBERT/Franz LISZT (1811-1886)

Serenade

rec. 17 May 1951

Virgil THOMSON (1896-1989)

Music Box, lullaby

rec. 15 June, 1951

