PROGRAM NOTES

Sonata in A Major, K 24 – Scarlatti
Sonata in D Minor, K 9 – Scarlatti
Sonata in C Major, K 159 – Scarlatti
Domenico Scarlatti (1685 – 1757)

Giuseppe Domenico Scarlatti was the sixth of ten children of Alessandro Scarlatti, the founder of the Neapolitan school of 18th century opera. Domenico became one of the great geniuses of his time and the first real virtuoso of the keyboard - interestingly, he was born a few months after the other two great masters of his era, Handel and J.S. Bach. While the latter two are representative of the High Baroque, in Scarlatti we find the first significant examples of a new dramatic style of composition that would reach its full development in the works of such Classical giants as Haydn and Mozart.

Although he wrote a good amount of operas and other vocal works, following in his father's footsteps, Domenico is chiefly remembered in our day for the vast number of piquant and delightful harpsichord pieces that he wrote. Most of these are in the short form described then as "Sonata," which, however, bears no resemblance to the subsequent sonata form developed later by Haydn and Mozart and perfected by Beethoven. Of these he left over 600; unfortunately, no more than 30 of these are continually performed nowadays.

Scarlatti’s sonatas consist of only two short sections that are sometimes repeated. He used many difficult and daring devices such as rapidly repeated notes, skips, trills, and intricate hand-crossings. Technically speaking, not until Chopin was a milestone reached of comparable significance in the evolution of piano playing. These three lively and sparkling compositions are charming representations of Scarlatti’s style.

© 1994 Columbia Artists Management Inc.

Piano Sonata No. 3 in B Minor, Op. 58
Frédéric Chopin (1810-49)

The Sonata in B Minor is the third and last of Chopin’s piano sonatas. Composed in 1844, it is approximately contemporaneous with Chopin’s three mazurkas of Op. 56, the Berceuse in D flat, Op. 57, the two Nocturnes of Op. 55, and the Scherzo in E major, Op. 54. The Sonata is dedicated to Mme. la comtesse E. de Perthuis.

The B Minor Sonata, conforming more strictly than the earlier Sonata in B-flat Minor, Op. 35 to sonata form, is in other respects as well a more conventional work, although Chopin modifies the generally accepted pattern of the sonata form of his time in order to accommodate the long, lyrical themes which came so easily to him. This striking alteration of sonata form occurs immediately in the first movement. Chopin so thoroughly discusses and treats his strong, chordal first subject in the development section that he omits it totally in the recapitulation section, presenting instead a restatement of the lyrical second theme. Unconventional as this may be, ample amends are made by the masterly piano writing and ravishing melody.
The first movement, *Allegro maestoso*, opens with an exhilarating, almost symphonic theme which is announced at once, falling and then rising in quick succession. After stimulating progressions and development, the opening theme flows into the second, a wonderful *cantiéna* in D major - one of Chopin's most lyrical passages. Poetical comment and arabesque follow, leading to a development which is almost improvisational in quality, culminating in the return of the beautiful second theme and the final animated close in the key of B major.

The second movement, a scherzo marked *Molto vivace*, is in the unrelated key of E major. It presents music of an airy and graceful character. A delicate, yet vivacious figure winds in and out, moving constantly until the middle section, a trio, provides a moment of wistful reflection. Following the trio, the music of the first section is reprised.

The third movement, marked *Largo*, is in the key of B major and is cast in three-part song form. The theme of the two outer sections, displaying a decidedly Italian flavor, is a beautiful and long-drawn melody. The middle section presents music of a slow tempo and celestial character. The *Largo* has been likened to a nocturne, replete with the most subtle harmonies and rich instrumental timbres.

The finale is marked *Presto, non tanto* and cast in rondo form. It is considered one of the touchstones of piano virtuosity; from its beginning to its conclusion, it is a mad whirl of sound - a precursor to *The Ride of the Valkyries*. Ringing opening octaves introduce a triple figure *agitato*, which begins in the key of B minor, vibrant and rhythmical, and becomes increasingly high-spirited, with brilliant passage work in the treble, until it emerges triumphantly into the key of B major and comes to a thrilling and magnificent close. The finale is considered to be one of Chopin's most difficult works.

© 2000 Columbia Artists Management Inc.
- Ileen Zovluck

**Piano Sonata No. 2 in B-flat Minor, Op. 36**
**Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)**

Sergei Rachmaninoff, one of the greatest pianists in the history of music, was last in the line of great 19th century composer-pianists that began with Beethoven. At the Moscow Conservatory, where he won a gold medal in 1892, Rachmaninoff was noted for his brilliant technique and remarkable musical mind. He could memorize virtuoso pieces overnight, reproduce in entirety a work played months previously, or sight-read and transpose with effortless rapidity. In addition to his formidable abilities as a composer and virtuoso pianist, he also possessed a great facility with conducting.

Rachmaninoff himself conceded the difficulties which his two piano sonatas pose for the player. His music demands extreme technical facility along with great emotional intensity. The Sonata in B-flat Minor contains the rich harmonies, sweeping melodies and interweaving lines typical of many of his works for piano. Although Rachmaninoff had attached a Faustian program to his first piano sonata, he did not do so with the work which is heard in this performance. Although it is possible to hear the evocation of bells,
conjuring an image of a great Russian church tower in the Sonata's first movement, the composer supplies no program nor rationale.

Rachmaninoff composed the Sonata in B-flat Minor from January to August 1913, playing himself for its premiere in Moscow in December, 1913. In 1931, influenced possibly by the neo-Classicist Stravinsky, he drastically revised the work. The piece, constructed on a monumental scale, holds a place secure among the great Romantic piano sonatas. It is a work of great lyricism and impassioned expressiveness, brooding and savage, uniquely Russian. The pyrotechnic difficulty of the writing seems to demand more from the performer than 10 fingers can produce at a piano. The first movement of the Sonata, centered around the harmonic color of B-flat minor, reveals huge polyphonic bell-like figures suggesting perhaps some dark human destiny. The second movement rises from quiet contemplation to a feverish passion and then subsides to an E major closing of matchless beauty. The finale begins *attacca*, and becomes dominated by a kind of devilish waltz -- a *danse macabre*. The Sonata closes in a triumphant blaze of B-flat major.

Of his music, Rachmaninoff stated: "I try to make my music speak simply and directly that which is in my heart at the time I am composing. If there is love there, or bitterness, or sadness, or religion, these moods become part of my music, and it becomes either beautiful, bitter, or sad, or religious. For composing music is as much a part of my living as breathing and eating. I compose music because I must give utterance to my thoughts."

© 1998 Columbia Artists Management Inc.

**Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 in C-sharp Minor**

*Franz Liszt (1811-86)*

In the 1840s Liszt began to take an active interest in Hungarian popular music, and also wrote a book on the gypsies and their music in Hungary. What attracted Liszt were, of course, the romantic elements, the improvisatory and ornamental figurations of the gypsy style. He also admired the traditions and color of their two favorite instruments: the solo violin and the cymbalom. Nearly all of the 19 rhapsodies follow the same pattern structurally: they offer a striking contrast between two connected movements. The first, a *Lassan* is slow and languorous, and the second, a *Friskan*, is lively and passionate, based on the Hungarian national dance, the *Czardas*. These are combined with Liszt's own flair for the theatrical and his dynamic technique to produce music that is always dramatic, extraordinarily brilliant and effective.

© 1998 Columbia Artists Management Inc.