



AMICA International

Automatic Musical Instrument Collectors' Association

Honor Roll

Shura Cherkassky

He was born in Odessa to a dentist and a piano teacher. The family fled to the United States in the wake of the Russian Revolution. Cherkassky stirred up some notice as a child prodigy (apparently listed as two years younger than he was, to extend his "prodigy" like career, a fact that apparently remained unrevealed until 1995), but never signed a long-lasting contract with a major label to ride the PR machine to glory the way Horowitz and countless other contemporaries did. There is a smattering of disks that he made when he was in his pianistic prime, though unfortunately, I've never heard any of them. He did concertize and teach, and his career underwent something of a revival when he undertook a multidisc recording project with Nimbus Records. After that (and perhaps after the passing of other Romantic giants like Horowitz), Cherkassky's presence certainly rose, and there were a few discs of encores and at least one concerto recording for London before his unexpected death in late 1995.



Cherkassky was a pupil of Josef Hofmann, and he inherited his master's taste for an increasingly forgotten repertoire and approach to playing (though he also learned and programmed 20th century masterworks frequently, and played them well). He loved the bonbons that used to pepper pianists' programs, and approached works both big and small with a freedom and spontaneity that sounds anachronistic in this modern age of so-called textual fidelity. He would apparently practice his playing at half speed, to get the pieces under his fingers, but what he would do with a piece in concert was anyone's guess. At his best, he plays with a gusto, zest, and yes, logic that defies many other pianists, and often shines through the technical limitations that came with age.

Shura Cherkassky (born 1911) was a Russian-born American pianist who began making acoustic records as a child prodigy in 1924 and made his final, digital recordings just before his death in 1995. Cherkassky was a Romantic pianist who combined Romantic sensitivity of touch with the power of a modern player, and he travelled easily between these two styles. This blend of talents served Cherkassky well, particularly in works such as Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition. Shura Cherkassky appears on a number of labels, but may be best heard on UK Decca (London) and Nimbus. ~ David Lewis, All Music Guide



Bronze Sculpture Given To Shura Cherkassky *by Emmett M. Ford*

The AMICA, V 18, No. 3, April 1981

I want Shura Cherkassky to inherit this memento of Anton Rubinstein because he is Rubinstein's musical grandchild." With these words Mrs. Josef Hofmann presented the pianist with the bronze sculpture of the right hand of Anton Rubinstein (1962/). The sculpture had belonged to her late husband, Josef Hofmann. Cherkassky once studied with Hofmann, who, in turn was a Rubinstein pupil.

I wrote to Mr. Cherkassky inquiring if he still possessed the sculpture. Mr. Cherkassky replied that it was still in his possession.

The photo shows the bronze sculpture and Mr. Cherkassky holding programme notes in Rubinstein's handwriting.

(Photograph owned and copyrighted by Decca Record Company Limited. My appreciation and thanks for their permission to use the photo. E.M.F.)

Shura Cherkassky

by Emmett M. Ford

Shura Cherkassky, pianist, composer, Duo-Art piano roll artist and AMICA Honorary Member was born in Odessa, Russia, October 7, 1911. His father was a dentist. His first teacher was his mother, Lydia Cherkassky, who was a graduate of the Petrograd Conservatory. She was also a teacher of pianist, Raymond Lewenthal. Mr. Cherkassky's musical ability was shown at an early age and when five years old he had composed a five-act _ opera and when ten years of age had conducted a symphony orchestra.

After three years of privation and suffering and months of struggle, permission was received from the Russian Government to take the boy out of Russia. The Cherkassky family arrived in America December 23, 1922 and settled in Baltimore in 1923. Shura gave three piano recitals in Baltimore at the Lyric Theatre. Harold Randolph, Director of the Peabody Conservatory and Frederick R. Huber, Municipal Director of Music, were impressed by the boy's genius and took him under their guidance. Later he became a student of Josef Hofmann who was a famous teacher and later director of the Curtis Institute of Music. In later life, Shura recalled his training with the great pianist,

and the man's personality and organized work. Shura studied for some months with Leopold Stokowski in New York.

At the age of twelve he played the Chopin F Minor Concerto with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra,

The Youthful Shura Cherkassky

creating a sensation with his playing. A tour of the U.S. began in 1923 and he played in the White House when Herbert Hoover was President. In the 1929/30 season he was soloist with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, the Philadelphia Orchestra and with the London Symphony. He appeared with many European orchestras in the 1937/38 music season. Tours were made in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and the U.S. From 1935 to 1938 he toured the Orient, Russia and again in Europe. Returning to the U.S. in 1939, he later went to Paris to live. A short time was spent in Hollywood where he played some music of Chopin and Smetana for the film "Voice of the Wind," starring Francis Lederer (1944).



His home is now in London and he travels to give concerts all over the world; he has expressed his enjoyment of traveling.

Mr. Cherkassky has mentioned his dislike for piano contests and refuses to be on the jury.

His Duo-Art piano rolls were made when he was between the ages of twelve and thirteen. Phonograph records were made in the 1920's. When long playing records were made, he recorded master works for Vox, Decca, Victor and L'Oiseau-Lyre. The L'Oiseau-Lyre DSLO7, labeled "Kaleidoscope" are Leopold Godowsky's difficult arrangements. An excellent brochure is included with the recording.

Shura Cherkassky
by Abram Chasins

In 1927, when Shura was 16, I was both the pupil and assistant of Josef Hofmann, who as Dean of the Curtis Institute, also appointed me as Chairman of the Secondary Education Department. At that time, Shura was already famous as a genuine "wonder-child," when his parents were wise enough to send him to study with the unique Hofmann, who appreciated Shura's fabulous pianistic talents, his fire and virtuosity and beauty of tone. Shura is a worthy disciple.

Early in 1927, Hofmann asked me to teach Shura Composition and Analyses.

Apart from my admiration for Shura's remarkable pianism, I came to hold him in deep affection through our weekly sessions for over two years. He also began to play my "Three Chinese Pieces," which at that time were played by virtually every pianist on the platform, from Hofmann down and up again. And it is my pleasure to tell you that Shura played them with fantastic color and virtuosity.

I well remember once coming back to Philadelphia from a concert trip during which Shura had played a New York Carnegie Hall recital. The first thing Hofmann told me was that he had attended Shura's concert, that Shura had played as an encore "Rush Hour in Hong Kong," and then added, "You know, he plays it better than we do!" Shura has recorded the Three Chinese Pieces twice, once for Columbia and once-for RCA Victor. Now they are out of circulation, and I do wish he'd record them a third time.

The last time I saw Shura was in London some five years ago, when I went to his apartment and he played his current recital program for me. It was, as always, a thrilling experience. And now I am anticipating with deep pleasure our next reunion at the Ambassador in Pasadena, and then at the Cordell's reception. How appropriate that the Southern California Chapter of AMICA is hosting the gala occasion!