

# Idil Biret

## Schumann Liszt

### Fantasia Op. 17 Sonata B Minor

#### IBA CONCERT SERIES

With this LP IBA is beginning to release a new series of live concert recordings from the immense sound/video archive of Idil Biret from the 1950s to 2020. On the first LP Schumann's *Fantasia Op. 17* from the New York concert at Alice Tully Hall in 1972 and Liszt's *Sonata in B minor* from the Paris concert at Salle Gaveau in 1978 are included. Two performances of these works were significant milestones in Biret's concert career, opening up to her the stages of the Soviet Union and East Germany.



With Emil Gilels at the jury of the Queen Elisabeth Competition - Belgium 1978

#### Schumann *Fantasia Op. 17* • Biret in the Soviet Union (1960-1990)

In 1957 Emil Gilels met Idil Biret at the home of Nadia Boulanger together with the other jury members of the Marguerite Long-Jacques Thibaud piano competition. Idil was asked to play a piece for the guests. Later, she described this event in her book of memoirs: *"I had recently received my prize at the Paris Conservatoire and I began with the 2nd Ballade of Chopin which I had played there. This, of course, made no impression on the jury; they had heard it so many times. I felt that I had to do something quickly to get their attention. I asked if I could play another piece...and started to play the Fantasia Op. 17 of Schumann which I had prepared outside the Conservatoire, with Mlle Bonneville. At the end of the first movement Nadia Boulanger wanted me to stop. But, Emil Gilels gave me a sign to keep playing and I finished this marvelous piece. It was probably because of the Fantasia that Emil Gilels, when he again visited Paris the following year, asked me whether I would like to play in the Soviet Union. When I said that I would be delighted, he arranged a series of concerts there. That is how in 1960 began my many trips to the Soviet Union."* When describing the encounter with Idil to his friend Hayati Asilyazıcı in Moscow many years later, Gilels said the following: *"In the Soviet Union well known artists were assigned the duty of educating gifted youths. Artists like Idil appeared rarely of course. I can say that I knew the talented youths of our time from this age group. We all had the responsibility of taking at least five students and turning them into well known soloists. When I first heard Idil play, I noticed that she interpreted the piano works on a different and very aesthetic level. She surprised me. I noticed that Biret was able to connect with the audience in an altogether different manner. After this hearing, Idil's interpretation was firmly engraved in my mind. The following year, I was once again in Paris when I had concerts in France. I heard Idil Biret play again at the home of Nadia Boulanger. The contact she had made with the piano and her approach to the composers in that interval of a year truly astonished me. I recognized all the signs of the course an extraordinary musical development was taking. And without consulting Goskonsert (concert agency of the USSR), I proposed to Idil a tour in the Soviet Union. I had come to know in one year the extent of her repertoire. What we had here was much more advanced than a gifted pianist with an extensive repertoire. Naturally, afterwards I proposed to Goskonsert that Idil Biret should be invited to come to our country and go on a tour. So, Idil, despite her very young age (19) made a concert tour in the Soviet Union in 1960. It was very important for me and my country to become acquainted with this extraordinarily talented Turkish artist whose virtuosity was recognized so early on."*

Goskonsert had organized the tour in 1960 for eight concerts. After the success of Idil Biret's recital at the Tchaikovsky Hall of the Moscow Conservatory the tour was extended by Goskonsert to sixteen concerts. Following the Moscow concert the following article appeared in the newspaper *Sovietskaia*

*Kultura*, "No doubt remained as soon as the piano began to reverberate: On the stage was a first class musician and a maestro. A complete freedom went hand in hand with Idil Biret's interpretations. One has the feeling that she plays as easily as she breathes. With an extraordinary plasticity, she molds each musical phrase like wax with her fingers. But, the freedom which is in Miss Biret's interpretations is not accidental. Her attitude towards the works she is playing is the result of meditation. The art of Idil Biret gives joy and emotion." When pianist Victoria Postnikova met Idil Biret at the jury of the Scottish Competition in Glasgow (2007) she said, *"I will never forget your recital at the Tchaikovsky Hall in Moscow in 1960. The audience went just crazy."* "I always remember your concert in Odessa in 1960 when you played the Brahms D Minor Concerto. For me you are the greatest," said Serafima Mogilewskaja\* to Idil Biret when she met her in Brussels in the late 1990s. In the coming years Idil Biret made many tours in the USSR playing more than one hundred concerts gaining great fame there. The Consul General of Russia and his entourage attended Idil's 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations in Istanbul (2021) to give her the congratulatory letter from the Tchaikovsky Conservatory and the medal sent by the Gnessin Conservatory in Moscow. When they were asked why the Russians gave so much importance to Idil, the reply was, *"In Russia we know three great Turks - Atatürk, Nazim Hikmet and Idil Biret."*

\* Mogilewskaja was a student and later assistant of the legendary Russian piano teacher Heinrich Neuhaus. She was his student at the same time as Emil Gilels and Sviatoslav Richter who were her friends.



Idil Biret and Alexander Dimitreev after the concert in Leningrad - USSR 1984

After her performance of Rachmaninov's 3<sup>rd</sup> Piano Concerto with the Leningrad Philharmonic at the Istanbul Festival in 1983, conductor Alexander Dimitreev visited Idil Biret at her home and said the following: *"We were quite intrigued when we learnt that you wanted to perform Rachmaninov's 3<sup>rd</sup> concerto with our orchestra as women rarely play this work. I now want to thank you for your wonderful performance yesterday. There is no woman pianist in the Soviet Union who can play this work the masterly way you did. The number of men who can do so are limited in number to the fingers in one hand."*

#### Liszt *Sonata in B minor* • Biret in the German Democratic Republic (1979-1990)

Idil Biret gave her first concert in the German Democratic Republic at the East Berlin Festival in 1979 where she played works by Liszt, including the *Sonata in B minor*. Glowing articles then appeared in the newspapers. *Berliner Zeitung* wrote, *"These festive days get their best events from the visiting pianists. After the brilliant Liszt interpreter Lazar Berman, now another maestro of the piano, with a special affinity for Liszt made her debut in the German Democratic Republic: Idil Biret from Turkey. Liszt's exacting and always again sharply contrasting Sonata in B minor was mastered in all its nuances; the big upswings, the soft moments and the glitter of the passage play. The jubilant public found itself rewarded with an encore which in itself was nearly even more complex: a Tarantella by Liszt, performed with extreme purity and enormously dynamic staging."* Articles in other newspapers had the following titles: *Sachsishes Tageblatt* "A surprise with Turkish pianist Idil Biret", *Nationalzeitung* "With furious vigor, guest performance by Turkish pianist Idil Biret", *Neues Deutschland* "Fascinating concerts with virtuoso soloists", *Berliner Zeitung* "Idil Biret with an inspiring piano evening", *Berliner Zeitung am Abend* "A Tarantella as a virtuoso finale", *Neue Zeit* "Impulsiveness and sparkling colours". This concert opened the stages of the GDR to Biret for the next ten years until the fall of the Berlin wall. She made tours there playing with the best orchestras including the Dresdner Staatskapelle, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Berlin Radio Orchestra and gave many recitals one of which was at the newly restored Semper Oper shortly after its opening in 1985. Sadly, with the unification of Germany the forces that control the West German music environment moved into what was now Germany's eastern territory and with them their animosity toward Biret. Her planned ten concert tour in 1990 including concerts with all major orchestras was cancelled. So ended Biret's great career in the GDR.



At the concert with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra - GDR 1985

In June 1836, Schumann composed a lament for Clara which he titled 'Ruins'. But that autumn, he decided to incorporate that movement into a 'Grand Sonata' for Beethoven in three movements. Breitkopf & Härtel published the score in 1839. After it had been engraved, Schumann requested a change of title to 'Fantasie'; he told Clara Wieck that it was dedicated to Liszt, but also wrote, *"You can understand the fantasy only if you think back to the unhappy summer of 1836, when I renounced you; now I have no reason to compose such unhappy and melancholy music..."* She replied, *"Yesterday I received your wonderful fantasy-today I am still half ill with rapture..."* Liszt had written an early version of the sonata in B minor in 1849, between his two careers - as a young virtuoso and as a composer. It is not likely that he performed this first version. The final version was completed in Weimar in 1853 and published in 1854. He dedicated it to Schumann in return for Schumann's dedication of his *Fantasia* to him. The first performance of the work by Hans von Bülow took place in January 1857.



Idil Biret giving an interview at home to the German TV channel ZDF - Brussels 1992

#### COVER "Apollo and Daphne at Lake Nemi" J.M.W. TURNER 1840s

#### Schumann *Fantasia in C, Op. 17* (29:30)

- Quite fantastic and passionately delivered; In the tone of a legend.
- Moderate. Quite energetic. (in E<sup>b</sup> major)
- Taken slowly. Keep quiet throughout.

#### Liszt *Sonata in B minor* (28:55)

- Lento assai-Allegro energico-Andante sostenuto-Allegro energico-Andante sostenuto-Lento assai

#### THIS LP IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF EMIL GILELS

Recorded: Schumann *Fantasia Op. 17* in Alice Tully Hall, New York 17.2.1972; Liszt *Sonata in B minor* in Salle Gaveau, Paris 27.1.1978 • Photos: Cover painting by İbrahim Büyükyüksel; Emil Gilels and Idil Biret by Sefik B. Yüksel • Compilation and mastering: Ozan Sarier • Graphic design: Özcan Göksan • Graphic adaptation: Ali Ergün



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