

Idil Biret Rachmaninoff

**Istanbul Festival
2 July 1983**

**Piano Concerto No. 3
Leningrad Orchestra
Alexander Dmitriev**

**Ivanovka Museum
15 July 2017
3 Moments Musicaux**

Idil Biret's performances of the 3rd Concerto

The premiere of the 3rd Concerto with Sergei Rachmaninoff as the soloist took place on 28 November 1909, with the New York Symphony Orchestra conducted by Walter Damrosch. On 16 January, it was repeated in Carnegie Hall with Gustav Mahler conducting. The composer was also soloist in the first performance in Boston with the Boston Symphony Orchestra in October 1919, Pierre Monteux conducting. Perhaps by an act of providence, Idil Biret's first performance of this work in October 1963 in London was also conducted by Pierre Monteux then 88. She remembers that before the first rehearsal Monteux said to her, "I performed this concerto with Rachmaninoff himself. It is a virtuoso work. Play it as fast as you want and I will follow". So she did. The timing of the concerto at the London (and later Boston) performances of Biret is around 37 minutes. Whereas, the performance with the Leningrad Orchestra on this LP, twenty years later, lasts a leisurely 44 minutes.



Idil Biret and Pierre Monteux during rehearsal of the 3rd Concerto in London, 6 October 1963

A month later Idil Biret played the 3rd Concerto with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. On 22 November 1963, in the early afternoon of the fateful day, a 22 year old fearless Turkish girl stepped on the stage of the Symphony Hall of Boston to play a notoriously difficult concerto premiered there by the composer Rachmaninoff himself and performed soon after by the legendary interpreter of this work, Vladimir Horowitz. Some among the audience must have been present at both concerts. The article that appeared in the *Boston Globe* the next day said the following:

Tribute to Kennedy is Solace in Music "The Boston Symphony Orchestra played the funeral march from Beethoven's 'Eroica' Symphony, following Erich Leinsdorf's announcement to a stunned audience of President John F. Kennedy's death... So it was the task of the orchestra of Leinsdorf and of a young Turkish pianist making her U.S. debut to provide comfort through music...May her subsequent appearances fall on happier days."

The *Christian Science Monitor* wrote "There was a buoyant quality to Idil Biret's playing, a great warmth of tone was in no way dispelled by her technical skill. In Rachmaninoff's 3rd Concerto, she gave us power without a bang, emotion without a sentimental tear. There is no question that Miss Biret is one of the most extraordinary musicians and many of her listeners testified to her artistry by giving her a standing ovation."

The rest is history. The recording of Idil Biret's performance on this tragic day is now in the US Library of Congress's National Recording Registry among sound recordings deemed "culturally, historically or aesthetically significant" to the nation.



Idil Biret and Erich Leinsdorf after the performance of the 3rd Concerto in Boston, 22 November 1963

Another memorable performance of the 3rd Concerto by Idil Biret was at the Istanbul Festival in July 1983 with the Leningrad Orchestra conducted by Alexander Dmitriev. After her performance Maestro Dmitriev visited Idil Biret at her home. He kissed her hand and said the following: "We were quite intrigued when we learnt that you wanted to perform Rachmaninoff's 3rd Piano Concerto with our orchestra as women rarely play this work. I now want to thank you for your wonderful performance yesterday. In the entire Soviet Union there is no woman pianist today who can play this work the masterly way you did. The number of men who can do so can be counted with the fingers of one hand." The following article appeared in the daily *Milliyet* soon after the concert:

"Idil Biret played Rachmaninoff's 3rd piano concerto with the Leningrad Philharmonic conducted by Alexander Dmitriev. Her deep understanding of the work showed itself from the beginning with the entrance of the sorrowful first melody. In her performance there was no place for technical problems, the manner and place of every touch having long been determined, result of a mysterious accumulation. The pianist's interpretation also affected the orchestra and the conductor. This was one of the most outstanding musical events of the year."

Faruk Yener

The radio recording of this concert in the Idil Biret archive is on this LP.



Idil Biret and Alexander Dmitriev at concert in Leningrad

Ivanovka, the country estate of Rachmaninoff and the 3rd Concerto

Rachmaninoff wrote his Piano Concerto No. 3 at Ivanovka in the summer of 1909. The Third Concerto emerged from a happy period in Rachmaninoff's life. For several years, Rachmaninoff had been spending the summers at his estate in Ivanovka, deep in the steppes of Tambov province, more than 300 miles southeast of Moscow. In summer 1909, he was preparing there for



Rachmaninoff working on the score of the 3rd Concerto, Ivanovka 1910



A building of the Ivanovka estate, ca. 1910

his first tour of the United States scheduled for autumn. For the tour he composed a new concerto there, working quickly and easily, completing the entire piece in a matter of weeks. He practiced it on a silent keyboard during the trans-Atlantic crossing in preparation for the premiere which took place in late November in New York.

More than a century later, in July 2017, following a recital in Moscow, Idil Biret paid a memorable visit to Ivanovka. She gave a recital in the summer home of Rachmaninoff, now restored to its former glory after having been destroyed during the revolution. She played, among other works, Rachmaninoff's *Corelli Variations Op. 43* and four of the *6 Moments Musicaux Op. 16*, three of which are included on this LP. Idil Biret describes her voyage there as follows:

"The day after the Moscow concert, we set off for Tambov on the night train with my husband Şefik and our friend Amina Aygistova who had organised the trip to the Rachmaninoff Museum in Ivanovka. After a journey of about ten hours, we arrived in Tambov, a city about 500 km away in the southeastern part of Moscow. There, at the train station, we were met by the city's culture minister and the director of the museum, Alexander Ermakov. After a two-and-a-half-hour drive, we arrived in Ivanovka, about 150 km away, the estate where Rachmaninoff spent his summers between 1890 and 1917. During the civil war, the buildings were destroyed and the furniture were looted. Later, in the 1970s, with the initiative of Mr. Yermakov, the buildings were rebuilt according to the old plans. Household items belonging to the estate, found in houses in the surrounding villages, were purchased and placed in their original locations; items and books belonging to Rachmaninoff were obtained from Moscow and various countries and brought to the museum. These include the composer's silent keyboard, his bed and desk. The estate thus regained its former appearance to a certain extent. Now it is a museum, and concerts are held there every summer. I gave a recital on the afternoon of July 15th.

"The program included works by Bach, Chopin, and Rachmaninoff. Audience from the Tambov region and Moscow attended the concert held in the large hall of the museum house. On the last day of our stay, a pine sapling was planted in the garden by Mr. Yermakov,



Idil Biret with Alexander Yermakov and Amina Aygistova next to the table of Rachmaninoff, Ivanovka 2017



Idil Biret at the Ivanovka estate, 2017

right next to the house, in my name. After spending three unforgettable days in this beautiful estate, lush green and full of trees, which Rachmaninoff loved and where he composed the 3rd Piano Concerto which I often play, we set off again for Moscow on the night train."

THIS LP IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF ALEXANDER IVANOVICH YERMAKOV, THE FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF THE RACHMANINOFF MUSEUM IN IVANOVKA, A FRIEND OF IDIL BIRET.

Side A (29:47)

**Sergei Rachmaninoff
Piano Concerto No. 3, Op. 30**

Allegro ma non tanto	18:32
Intermezzo: Adagio	11:15

Side B (33:34)

Finale: Alle breve 14:55
(Istanbul 2 July 1983)

3 Moments Musicaux, Op. 16
Nos. 1, 2, 6 18:39
(Ivanovka 15 July 2017)

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