

# **Mp3 Nokuthula Ngwenyama, Jennifer Lim - Rubinstein Sonatas**



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Passionate, romantic, robust, succulent with moments of tenderness and playfulness 8 MP3 Songs in this album (60:41) ! Related styles: CLASSICAL: Romantic Era, CLASSICAL: Sonata Details: Nokuthula Ngwenyamas international performances as orchestral soloist, recitalist, and chamber musician garner great attention. Gramophone proclaims her playing as providing solidly shaped music of bold, mesmerising character, and the Washington Post described her as playing "with dazzling technique in the virtuoso fast movements and deep expressiveness in the slow movements. Ms. Ngwenyama came to international attention when she won the Primrose Competition and the Young Concert Artists International Auditions at 17, and in 1997 she received the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant. Born in California of Zimbabwean-Japanese parentage, Ms. Ngwenyama graduated from the Curtis Institute of Music. As a Fulbright scholar she attended the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris and received a Master of Theological Studies degree from Harvard University. Canadian pianist Jennifer Lim has been praised by The Financial Times, Germany for her "stupendous finger technique in break-neck passages, and, in the slow movement, deeply penetrating substance." Ms. Lim came into attention when she captured the Grand Prize at the Korea Times National Music Competition at age 8. In 1993 she was a top prize winner at the Canadian Music Competition in Montreal and the Johanna Hodges International Piano Competition in California. She studied at the renowned Curtis Institute of Music with Peter Serkin as his only student. Upon graduation in 1998 she was awarded the coveted Rachmaninoff Prize, presented by the Faculty to one graduating pianist. She completed her master's degree at The Juilliard School in New York in 2000 as a protégé of the legendary pianist Bella Davidovich. Ms. Lim has also studied privately with Anton Kuerti and Jane Coop. RUBINSTEIN SONATAS, OPS. 13

and 49 Anton Grigoryevich Rubinstein (1829 - 1894) was one of the most prodigious and controversial musical talents of the 19th century. His fame as a virtuoso pianist rivaled that of Liszt, and as a composer he was quite prolific, writing 17 operas, six symphonies, five piano concerti, concerti for violin and cello, and numerous chamber works. Many compositions performed during his lifetime fell into obscurity leading up to World War I, as did his great fame. A rise in nationalism did much to shunt Rubinstein's reputation and work, as his musical approach and personal philosophy did not fit that mold. He felt that German and Russian nationalism were dangerous and believed music should remain international. Nevertheless, a Germanic influence is apparent in much of his work, much to the consternation of 'The Five' (Balakirev, Borodin, Cui, Mussorgsky, and Rimsky-Korsakov) and other contemporary Russian composers. Rubinstein received early training from his mother and later studied with Alexander Villoing in Moscow. Villoing arranged an extended European tour between 1840 and 1843 to showcase his student, and he was touted as a young prodigy. He performed in Paris, where he met Liszt and Chopin, the Netherlands, where he fortuitously met members of the Russian imperial family, and was received by Queen Victoria in London. His family, including his talented brother Nikolai and sister Luba, moved from Moscow to Berlin at the advice of Liszt in order to further their musical education. There Rubinstein studied composition with Siegfried Dehn, Glinka's former instructor, and cultivated close friendships with Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer. His admiration for Mendelssohn comes through in much of his compositional style, and he was known to have performed many of his works. This influence is especially apparent in both scherzo movements of the Opus 13 and 49 sonatas performed here. Rubinstein's music has, over the last decade, entered into a renaissance with its appearances on the concert stage and in recordings. Performing artists and the general public are eager to appreciate his language, a combination of Mendelssohnian flavor with a dash of Russian coloristic folklore. His compositions, always well-crafted in the sense of form, convey an unreserved passion and ease under an overlying sense of freedom. Rubinstein himself stated, during an interview with musicologist Frederick Niecks, that he wrote on the spur of the moment, driven by an inner force; he could not... criticize, file and brood over his compositions. They were indeed improvisations and had the virtues and vices of improvisations." His composition came with so much ease that many manuscripts are devoid of revisions, starkly contrasting those of the great master Beethoven. Nevertheless, many of Rubinstein's contemporaries felt he bore a striking resemblance to him, and Liszt nicknamed him Van II. There were even rumors that Rubinstein was Beethoven's illegitimate son.

Compositionally speaking, the evident musical solution is not always the most creative. Are the criteria for artistic output framed by the balance of creative talent and laborious refinement? Or, can improvisatory inspiration alone serve the Muses just as well? Even though Rubinstein's music and talent are evidently stirring, these questions have added to his fame and controversy both today and in the past. Franz Liszt, in a letter to his friend Dr. Franz Brendel, referred to Rubinstein as: The pseudo-Musician of the Future. Still, I do not want to preach to him he may sow his wild oats and fish deeper in the Mendelssohn waters, and even swim away if he likes. But sooner or later I am certain he will give up the apparent and the formalistic for the organically Real, if he does not want to stand still. Liszt refers to a movement in Romantic music, spearheaded by Wagner, in which Musicians of the Future dedicate themselves to conveying a Real greater drama and expressiveness in their musical language and execution. This deliberate philosophy did not seem to fully engage Rubinstein. Nevertheless, he did not stand still compositionally or professionally. In addition to his illustrious performance career he secured Russian imperial support and took upon the responsibility of transforming musical life in his country. As founding director of the St. Petersburg Conservatory his first class included Tchaikovsky, Annette Essipova and other extremely talented musicians. Rubinstein considered this legacy one of his most important achievements. The Opus 13 sonata is a product of Rubinstein's first mature creative period. He was living in St. Petersburg, having returned from Germany due to the revolution of 1848. As a leading figure in local musical life he taught, performed, and composed. The Sonata No. 1 in G Major for Violin and Piano was written in his early 20s. His writing for the piano is lovingly crafted, showcasing incredible dexterity and technique. He also features flashy melodic writing for the violin, giving the line ample opportunity to shine. Although Rubinstein had experienced paternal loss and its resulting poverty abroad, a lightness and charm prevail throughout the work. Mendelssohn's influence is apparent, especially in the joyful, youthful and heroic Scherzo (third) movement. The Tema e Variazioni and Trio section of the Scherzo, however, betray touching Russian folkloristic styles in their themes and contoured development of the solo line, demonstrating Rubinstein's ability to successfully bridge German and Russian musical idioms. In contrast, the Sonata for Piano and Viola, Opus 49 is passionate and brooding. Published in 1855, it shows a more deeply charged Romantic influence. This was presumably written during his first major European concert tour in over a decade, which took place in 1854. During this tour Rubinstein's friendship with Liszt deepened, and their discussions of composition influenced him. This ranks as one of the major

Romantic sonatas for this combination of instruments. The piano writing is almost orchestral in scale, showcasing extreme contrasts of moods, emotions, and colors. It demands tremendous technical and musical control, as can be heard in the dramatic arpeggios of the first movement and the parallel thirds in the Trio section of the third movement. The viola voice is both powerful and lyrical in the role of a heroic protagonist. Rubinstein uses the timbre of the instrument especially well in the Andante movement to evoke a special air of tenderness. Rubinstein seemed an individual whose talents and flair enabled him to supremely succeed in a variety of endeavors. Intensely private, he walked a lonely path. He never completely fulfilled the Romantic stereotype, preferred a pan-European approach over the inspiration of nationalistic fervor, and constantly dealt with issues of otherness, including anti-semitism, throughout his life: Russians call me German, Germans call me Russian, Jews call me a Christian, Christians a Jew. Pianists call me a composer, composers call me a pianist. The classicists think me a futurist, and the futurists call me a reactionary. My conclusion is that I am neither fish nor fowl. 2008 Nokuthula Ngwenyama

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