The CHOPIN PROJECT Ólafur Arnalds & Alice Sara Ott

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Classical music has always been very much about performance and interpretation - about that moment, in concert, when the performer interprets the composer's music in his own way. Then recording technology came along, and in classical it was all about capturing the live performance in the most accurate way. But I believe that when music has been channelled through all the machinery and processes that are part of making a recording, it is no longer all about that moment. It can't be. The act of recording becomes a ghost performer in itself, reflecting on the result in a way that is often unaccounted for or ignored.

While The Beatles dragged pop music along by starting to use the recording technology as a part of the composition and performance, classical music was left to still somehow aim for the impossible. And the idea of what is considered an 'accurate and true' sound became an unbreakable norm in itself. This norm never made much sense to me. Why not use the technology we have as not only a tool, but a part of the actual interpretation? Why can't the microphones, the room - the sound - also be a performer? Why would all of these factors need to stay invisible behind the norm of a 'true' recording sound? And why would a 'good' classical piano sound naturally have to be the silvery, brilliant concert grand sound that we have on classical recordings today, while we know that the pianos of the 19th century sounded so very different?

All these are norms that I was interested to test. Alice was the perfect partner in this project. Her recording of Chopin's Waltzes has been a true inspiration for me. We spent a week exploring different microphones, pianos and venues all over Reykjavik, trying to find the perfect constellation for each of her interpretations. And then I tried to put them in a new context with my own recompositions,



based on themes from Chopin's pieces. I wanted to make a dynamic and modern album with the originals and recompositions melting together to create one arc, one coherent storyline.

Chopin's music has a very special meaning for me. When I was younger I was playing drums in various metal bands and all I wanted to listen to was punk and heavy metal music. But whenever I visited my grandmother, which I did frequently, she would always make me listen to Chopin. If it had been my parents forcing classical music down my throat at that time of my life I probably would have puked on their face. But – I guess out of respect for my grandmother – I always listened with her and slowly it started to grow on me.

My last moment with my grandmother was on her deathbed, she was just lying there, old and sick, but very happy and proud. And I sat with her and we listened to a Chopin sonata. Then I kissed her goodbye and left. She passed away a few hours later.

At that point I was already studying classical composition and experimenting, releasing and touring with all kinds of classically inspired music. But Chopin always kept this special place in my heart and I wanted to express that by making his music the center of this project. By looking at his music in a different way, through the prism of recording technique in its different facets and through my own compositions, I didn't intend to question the integrity of Chopin's music. I wanted to find my very personal interpretation, like so many other great musicians have done before me.

Ólafur Arnalds January 2015



All tracks produced by Ólafur Arnalds

Tracks 1, 4, 6, 7, 8 composed and arranged by *Ólafur Arnalds*, based on music of *Frédéric Chopin*

Tracks 1 and 7 based on Piano Sonata No. 3 in B Minor, op. 58: III. Largo
Track 4 based on Nocturne No. 20 in C Sharp Minor, op. posth.
Track 6 based on Nocturne No. 13 in C Minor, op. 48 No. 1.
Track 8 based on Nocturne No. 8 in D Flat Major, op. 27 No. 2.
Track 3 arranged by Nathan Milstein.

Piano: Alice Sara Ott Piano (Track 8): Ólafur Arnalds Solo Violin (Track 3): Mari Samuelsen

String Quintet: Viktor Orri Árnason, Björk Óskarsdóttir, Þórarinn Baldursson, Unnur Jónsdóttir and Hallgrímur Jónas Jensson Synthesizers: Ólafur Arnalds



Recorded at E7 Studios and Harpa Concert Hall, Iceland Recorded by Ólafur Arnalds, Finnur Hákonarson, Snorri Hallgrímsson and Bergur Þórisson

> Mixed by Ólafur Arnalds Mastered by Nils Frahm at Durton Studios

> Executive Producer for Mercury Classics: Dr. Alexander Buhr

Design & art direction: Jónas Valtýsson Photography: Héðinn Eiríksson

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Mari Samuelsen plays the *Ex-Willemotte Stradivari,* kindly loaned to her by *Florian Leonhard Fine Violins*

Alice Sara Ott appears courtesy of Deutsche Grammophon



Thank you

Sven Hasenjager Asterix Westphal Rubin Kodheli Daði Birgisson Georg á Kalda Bar Lee Crichlow Harpa Concert Hall Bergur Þórisson Snorri Hallgrímsson Mamma, Pabbi og Amma.

Ψ

One VERSES Two PIANO SONATA NO. 3: LARGO Three NOCTURNE IN C SHARP MINOR (ft. Mari Samuelsen) Four REMINISCENCE Five NOCTURNE IN G MINOR Six EYES SHUT / NOCTURNE IN C MINOR Seven WRITTEN IN STONE Eight LETTERS OF A TRAVELLER Nine PRÉLUDE IN D FLAT MAJOR ("Raindrop")



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