

LEONARD BERNSTEIN

SHOSTAKOVITCH: PIANO CONCERTO NO. 2

RAVEL: PIANO CONCERTO IN G MAJOR



PHOTO: KEN HEYMAN

To kick off the new year in 1958, the New York Philharmonic and its music director Leonard Bernstein debuted a new piano concerto by Dimitri Shostakovich. The work, the second of his piano concertos, had been written ten months before for Shostakovich's son, Maxim, who was 19 at the time. Bernstein, as pianist and conductor, not only performed the U.S. debut, but on January 6th he recorded the work for Columbia Records.

One of the most versatile musicians of the 20th century, Bernstein was a great interpreter of the music of that era. Greatly moved by Shostakovich's music he was one of the Soviet composer's greatest champions. The second piano concerto is often referred to as a fiery and youthful work, making it a perfect fit for the mercurial Bernstein. The performance captured here has the same consuming passion we know from his famous recording of Gershwin's "Rhapsody In Blue." It may well be the work's definitive recording.

Another work that will forever be associated with Bernstein as both pianist and conductor is Ravel's Concerto in G. This jazzy and uplifting piece is a perfect playmate for the Shostakovich concerto. No one brought more to this work than Bernstein, who had been playing it with the New York Philharmonic since 1944. Like Ravel, Bernstein was greatly inspired by jazz and it's clear (especially on this new LP!) that Bernstein understood the mood and syncopation of the piece like few before him.

Impex Records' new LP is a stunning time-capsule for classical record production during the golden era of early stereo: minimally miked, full of natural ambience and incredibly dynamic. The Shostakovich concerto was recorded in the enormous Colorama Ballroom of the Saint George Hotel, the location where Bernstein recorded "Rhapsody In Blue" and Tchaikovsky's "Romeo And Juliet." The Ravel was recorded on April 7th, 1958 in the magical acoustics of the 30th Street studio. We know the acoustics of this room from such famous recordings as *Kind Of Blue*, *Time Out*, *Highway 61 Revisited*, Barbara Streisand's debut album, not to mention countless other records by Bernstein, Bruno Walter, and Simon and Garfunkel.

--Robert "Mr. Record" Pincus

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Format: 180-gram LP
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