

Wednesday 18 & Thursday 19 September 2019

RATTLE: ROOTS & ORIGINS
RACHMANINOV SECOND SYMPHONY

Brahms Piano Concerto No 2
Interval
Rachmaninov Symphony No 2

Sir Simon Rattle conductor
Emanuel Ax piano

Concert ends approx 10pm

FREE PRE-CONCERT PERFORMANCE

6.30pm Barbican Foyers
Fanfares played by Signum Brass, a quintet
of Guildhall School musicians

WELCOME TO TONIGHT'S GROUPS

Farnham U3A Concert Club
Adele Friedland & Friends
Hertford U3A Concert Group
Gerrards Cross Community Association
Ian Fyfe & Friends
Maria Sturdy-Morton & Friends
Dartford Grammar School
University of North Carolina
Cazenove Capital
The John Lyon School

BRAHMS

&

RACHMANINOV

Johannes Brahms Piano Concerto No 2 in B-flat major Op 83 1878–81 / programme note by Stephen Johnson

- 1 **Allegro non troppo**
- 2 **Allegro appassionato**
- 3 **Andante**
- 4 **Allegretto grazioso**

Emanuel Ax piano



have written a tiny, tiny piano concerto with a tiny, tiny wisp of a scherzo', wrote Brahms to his close confidante, Elisabet von Herzogenberg, on 7 July 1881. Von Herzogenberg knew the composer well enough to take that kind of remark with several sacks of salt. So too did his friend, the surgeon Theodor Billroth, to whom Brahms posted the manuscript, with the accompanying message: 'I am sending you a few small piano pieces'. Billroth would only have had to glance at the score to realise that what Brahms had sent him was in fact unusually ambitious: a hybrid of concerto and symphony, laid out in four big movements instead of the conventional three – all hugely challenging for the soloist, but with the orchestra as equal protagonist in a sustained, developing musical drama.

The idea of creating a four-movement concerto, with its roots as firmly in the Beethovenian symphony as in his grander concertos, had haunted Brahms at

least since his early 20s. His First Piano Concerto (1854–58) actually began life as a symphony and Brahms only gradually gave up the idea of retaining the original slow Scherzo movement – its themes were later reprocessed in the movement 'All flesh is as grass' from the German Requiem. The Violin Concerto (1878) was also originally intended to have a Scherzo; that idea was soon dropped, but the material was clearly too good to be discarded, and before long it resurfaced in the Allegro appassionato of the Second Piano Concerto.

Interestingly, that stormy second movement is closer in style and spirit to Beethoven's colossal symphonic scherzos than anything in Brahms' four numbered symphonies. Brahms once complained of the difficulty of composing in Beethoven's shadow: 'You've no idea how hard it is with such a giant marching behind you!'. So it was crucial for Brahms to find a solution on his own terms – not by simply marching ahead of Beethoven, but by extending Beethoven's triumphs into new territory. One can perhaps sense something of his pride in that achievement in the dedication of the Second Piano Concerto: here at last, Brahms had found something worthy to offer 'to his beloved friend and teacher Eduard Marxsen'.

That said, there are passages in Brahms' Second Piano Concerto where the listener is more likely to be reminded of the spirit of chamber music, not least at the very beginning, where the soloist quietly replies to and echoes the theme presented by a solo horn. But then the piano begins a long forceful solo, building up tension before handing the baton over to the orchestra for an extended symphonic passage. From this grows a first movement that is not only rich in contrast and imagination but compellingly organic. Many composers would have been happy to go on from that to a meditative, lyrical slow movement. But Brahms intensifies the drama with his stirring scherzo second movement – the dark, impassioned minor-key outer sections framing a blazing major-key trio section.

Now follows the slow movement. It begins with a long, exquisite melody for solo cello, to which the soloist eventually adds their own reflective commentary. Stormier music follows, but the true heart of the movement comes in a slower pianissimo passage just before the return of the cello theme, in which the piano seems to float dreamily through languid, slow-moving clarinet and string figures. It is about as far removed from the turbulence of the scherzo

as could be imagined – a superb dramatic foil. It's hard to imagine conventional concerto triumphalism after a movement like this, so instead Brahms crowns his symphony-concerto with an unusually light-footed, playful finale: even in the gypsyish melancholy of the second theme (woodwind alternating with strings) there are glimpses of an ironic smile. At last the tempo quickens and the concerto ends with a display of relaxed, witty brilliance that is unique in Brahms. The ghost of the giant Beethoven has been faced, exorcised and finally forgotten.

Interval – 20 minutes

There are bars on all levels of the concert hall. Ice cream can be bought at the stands on Stalls and Circle level.

Johannes Brahms in Profile 1833–97 / profile by Andrew Stewart



Johannes Brahms was born in Hamburg, the son of an impecunious musician; his mother later opened a haberdashery business to help lift the family out of poverty. Showing early musical promise he became a pupil of the distinguished local pianist and composer Eduard Marxsen, who had been a personal acquaintance of Beethoven and Schubert. In his early career Brahms supplemented his parents' meagre income by playing in the bars and brothels of Hamburg's infamous red-light district before he met Hungarian violinist Eduard Reményi, who he accompanied in recital and who introduced him to the Hungarian 'gypsy-style' music which would form the inspiration for some of his most popular compositions.

In 1853 Brahms presented himself to Robert Schumann in Düsseldorf, winning unqualified approval from the older composer, who hailed him as 'fated to give expression to the times in the highest and most ideal manner'. The elder composer's admiration led to the first publication of Brahms' work. After Schumann's attempted suicide in February 1854, Brahms decided to base himself in Düsseldorf where he supported Schumann's wife, Clara, during her husband's illness and death. Brahms developed a deep affection for Clara, and

while the relationship did not develop as Brahms wished, their close friendship did survive. In 1862 Brahms moved to Vienna where he found fame as a conductor, pianist and composer and met Richard Wagner the following year. Brahms was appointed to the position of conductor at the Vienna Singakademie. To the surprise of audiences his programming focused on early German music by J S Bach, Heinrich Schütz and other composers, including Giovanni Gabrieli.

In 1864 Brahms quit his conducting post in order to devote more time to composing. He spent time in Lichtental where he worked on many of his most famous compositions, including the German Requiem. The Leipzig premiere in 1869 proved a triumph, with subsequent performances establishing Brahms as one of the emerging German nation's foremost composers. Following the long-delayed completion of his First Symphony in 1876, he composed in quick succession: the majestic Violin Concerto; the two piano Rhapsodies Op 79; the First Violin Sonata in G major; and the Second Symphony.

Brahms was now firmly established as a major figure in the world of music. His subsequent association with the much-admired court orchestra in Meiningen allowed

him freedom to experiment and develop new ideas, the relationship crowned by the premiere of his Fourth Symphony of 1884.

In his later years, Brahms considered that he might retire from composing and began to find companionship in escorting Alice Barbi, a 28-year-old mezzo-soprano (to whom he may have proposed marriage). Yet his fondness for a Meiningen clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld drew him to compose a series of profound works which explored matters of life and death in his *Four Serious Songs*.

In 1896 Brahms was diagnosed with liver cancer, the same disease that had killed his father Jakob 25 years earlier. He made his final public appearance to hear Hans Richter conduct his Fourth Symphony in March 1897 and died at his modest lodgings in Vienna, receiving a hero's funeral at the city's central cemetery three days later. □

Sergei Rachmaninov in Profile 1873–1943 / profile by Andrew Stewart

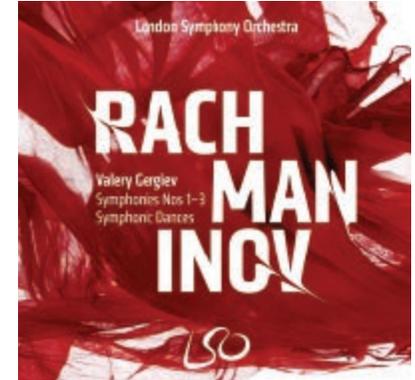


Melody is music', wrote Rachmaninov, 'the basis of music as a whole, since a perfect melody implies and calls into being its own harmonic design'. The Russian composer, pianist and conductor's passion for melody was central to his work, clearly heard in his *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, a brilliant and diverse set of variations on a tune by the great 19th-century violinist and composer Niccolò Paganini. Although the young Sergei's father squandered much of the family inheritance, he at first invested wisely in his son's musical education.

In 1882 the boy received a scholarship to study at the St Petersburg Conservatory, but further disasters at home hindered his progress and he moved to study at the Moscow Conservatory. Here he proved an outstanding piano pupil and began to study composition. Rachmaninov's early works reveal his debt to the music of Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky, although he rapidly forged a personal, richly lyrical musical language, clearly expressed in his Prelude in C-sharp minor for piano of 1892. His First Symphony of 1897 was savaged by the critics, which caused the composer's confidence to evaporate. In desperation he sought help from Dr Nikolai Dahl, whose hypnotherapy sessions restored Rachmaninov's self-belief

and gave him the will to complete his Second Piano Concerto, widely known through its later use as the sound-track for the classic film *Brief Encounter*. Thereafter, his creative imagination ran free to produce a string of unashamedly romantic works divorced from newer musical trends. He left Russia shortly before the October Revolution in 1917, touring as pianist and conductor and buying properties in Europe and the United States. □

▷ RACHMANINOV ON LSO LIVE



Rachmaninov
Symphonies Nos 1 to 3
Symphonic Dances

Valery Gergiev conductor

'The LSO brass are on fire in these performances, the strings rugged but precise, the woodwind rising to the demands of Rachmaninov's voluptuous melodies.'
The Guardian

Available at Isolive.co.uk, in the Barbican Shop, online on iTunes & Amazon or on Apple Music and Spotify

Sergei Rachmaninov Symphony No 2 in E minor Op 27 1907 / programme note by Andrew Huth

- 1 **Largo – Allegro moderato**
- 2 **Allegro molto**
- 3 **Adagio**
- 4 **Allegro Vivace**

Following the performances in January 1906 of his two one-act operas, *The Miserly Knight* and *Francesca da Rimini*, Rachmaninov next turned to composing an opera on Maeterlinck's *Monna Vanna*, but this ran into difficulties and remains a fragment. Then in February 1907 he wrote to a friend about a rumour in the Russian press: 'It's true, I have composed a symphony. It's only ready in rough. I finished it a month ago, and immediately put it aside. It was a severe worry to me, and I am not going to think about it any more. But I am mystified how the newspapers got onto it'. He was bound to be wary of announcing a new symphony, for the only performance of his First Symphony, in 1897, had been a disaster.

Rachmaninov conducted the first performance of the Second Symphony in St Petersburg on 26 January 1908, and in Moscow a week later. He went on to conduct it several times in both Europe and the US over the next six years, but never conducted it after leaving Russia in 1918, and unfortunately never had the chance to record it.

All sympathetic listeners agree that the Second Symphony contains the very best of Rachmaninov. Deliberately paced and rhythmically flexible, it is above all propelled by the wonderfully fertile melody of which he was such a master. The orchestral sound is full and rich, but unlike such contemporaries as Strauss and Mahler, Rachmaninov is relatively modest in his orchestral demands. He is also rather un-Russian in his approach to the orchestration.

Instead of the unmixed colour favoured by so many of his countrymen from Glinka to Shostakovich, Rachmaninov deals in varied shades and combinations, producing a full, sonorous orchestral blend, with horns and low woodwind (particularly in the melancholy cor anglais and bass clarinet) supporting the middle of the texture, and the tuba doubling the long-held bass notes that frequently underpin the music.

The slow introduction begins with an entire group of motto themes heard one after the other: the initial unison phrase on cellos and basses, ominous brass and wind chords, and the phrase passed from first to second violins. This introduction, as well as being a rich mine of thematic material, also announces the scale of what follows.

The E minor Allegro moderato emerges organically from the introduction. Its yearning first theme is carried forward with the same sequential techniques that characterise the introduction, but the quicker tempo gives the music a more positive, striving character. The second theme, beginning and ending in G major, is not designed to contrast strongly with the first, but rather to continue its melodic narrative into a different and lighter-sounding tonal area. The turbulent development, fragmenting motives from the introduction and the first subject, spills over into the reprise of the first subject, which then leads to the movement's most intense climax, with echoes of the music that described the infernal whirlwind in *Francesca da Rimini*. The return of the second theme marks the first appearance of E major, suggesting a major-key conclusion to the movement; but as the tempo quickens for the coda, the music darkens again and ends in a stormy E minor.

Although there is a great deal of activity in the Allegro moderato, its deliberate pacing and generally slow rate of harmonic change do not make it a truly fast movement. The quick A minor Scherzo therefore follows in second, rather than in third place. It is one of Rachmaninov's most vigorous movements, rhythmically incisive and clear in design. The

main horn theme is not only the source of the scampering contrapuntal ideas in the central section, but towards the end of the movement declares its own derivation from the sinister wind chords in the symphony's first bars. The music dies away in an ominous murmur.

The Adagio turns from A minor vigour to A major lyricism. Its opening phrase, rising on violins, comes again from the world of *Francesca da Rimini*, this time its ecstatic love duet. It is one of the three main melodic elements in the movement, the others being the rapt clarinet solo which follows immediately, and the third being the motto violin phrase from the symphony's introduction. The presentation, and then the subtle combination of these three elements, is vocal throughout, and sustained by a rich variety of accompaniment figures.

The breadth of scale is sustained in the finale, which is so balanced that reminiscences of the preceding movements are accommodated without losing momentum. It begins in a proud, boisterous style, and this is how the symphony will eventually end. In the course of the movement, however, there is room for many shades of feeling and also for one of the very biggest of Rachmaninov's 'big tunes', given at each of its two appearances to massed strings. □



Coming Up in 2019/20

HALF SIX FIX

Early-evening concerts, presented by the conductor

Every Half Six Fix concert promises insights from the conductor, a relaxed atmosphere, great music, and the full impact of the London Symphony Orchestra – all in around an hour.

The concerts start at 6.30pm, without an interval. Grab a drink, take your seat in the Barbican Hall, and sit back and enjoy a short programme of one or two major works, which the conductor will introduce from the stage.

To bring you closer to the action, we'll have screens to showcase the performers and programme notes available electronically on your Android or Apple device.

Tickets £12 to £37 + £10 Wildcards
plus booking fee per transaction of £3 online, £4 phone

iso.co.uk/halfsixfix

HALF SIX FIX IN 2019/20

Prokofiev Fifth Symphony
with **Michael Tilson Thomas**
13 November 2019

Beethoven & Berg
with **Sir Simon Rattle**
15 January 2020

Beethoven 'Choral' Symphony
with **Sir Simon Rattle**
12 February 2020

Bartók The Wooden Prince
with **François-Xavier Roth**
18 March 2020

Bartók Concerto for Orchestra
with **Sir Simon Rattle**
22 April 2020

Emanuel Ax piano



Born in Lvov, Poland, Emanuel Ax moved to Winnipeg, Canada, with his family when he was a young boy. His studies at the Juilliard School were supported by the sponsorship of the Epstein Scholarship Program of the Boys Clubs of America, and he subsequently won the Young Concert Artists Award. Additionally, he attended Columbia University, where he majored in French. Emanuel captured public attention in 1974 when he won the first Arthur Rubinstein International Piano Competition in Tel Aviv and in 1979 he won the coveted Avery Fisher Prize in New York.

This season Emanuel joins the London Symphony Orchestra and Sir Simon Rattle on an extensive tour of China and Hong Kong, as well as joining the Rotterdam Philharmonic at home in the Netherlands and on tour to the United States. He also returns to the Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra, Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia and Tonhalle Zurich, playing concertos by Brahms, Mozart and Chopin. During Summer 2020 Emanuel will join the Staatskapelle Dresden on tour in the Mediterranean with Myung-Whun Chung. He also performs extensively in North America, including in his hometown with the New York Philharmonic,

as well as in Cincinnati, Houston, Los Angeles, Philadelphia and San Francisco, among others.

Emanuel Ax is a committed exponent of contemporary composers: his repertoire already includes works written for him by John Adams, Christopher Rouse, Krzysztof Penderecki, Bright Sheng and Melinda Wagner, to which he has recently added HK Gruber's Piano Concerto and Samuel Adams' Impromptus.

A Sony Classical exclusive recording artist since 1987, recent releases include Brahms Trios with Yo-Yo Ma and Leonidas Kavakos, Strauss' *Enoch Arden* narrated by Sir Patrick Stewart, and discs of two-piano music by Brahms and Rachmaninov with Yefim Bronfman. In 2015 Deutsche Grammophon released a duo recording with Itzhak Perlman of Sonatas by Fauré and Strauss, which the two artists presented on tour during the 2015/16 season. Emanuel has received Grammy Awards for the second and third volumes of his cycle of Haydn's piano sonatas. He has also made a series of Grammy-winning recordings with Yo-Yo Ma of the Beethoven and Brahms sonatas for cello and piano. His other recordings include the concertos of Liszt and Schoenberg, three solo Brahms albums, an album of

tangos by Astor Piazzolla, and the premiere recording of John Adams' *Century Rolls* with the Cleveland Orchestra for Nonesuch. In the 2004/05 season Emanuel also contributed to an International Emmy Award-winning BBC documentary commemorating the Holocaust that aired on the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.

A frequent and committed partner for chamber music, he has worked regularly with such artists as Young Uck Kim, ChoLiang Lin, Yo-Yo Ma, Edgar Meyer, Peter Serkin, Jaime Laredo and the late Isaac Stern.

Emanuel lives in New York with his wife, the pianist Yoko Nozaki, and they have two children, Joseph and Sarah. He is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and holds honorary Doctorates of music from Yale and Columbia Universities. □

London Symphony Orchestra on stage 18 & 19 September

Leader

Carmine Lauri

First Violins

Clare Duckworth

Ginette Decuyper

Claire Parfitt

Laura Dixon

Maxine Kwok-Adams

William Melvin

Elizabeth Pigram

Laurent Quenelle

Harriet Rayfield

Sylvain Vasseur

Rhys Watkins

Julian Azkoul

Morane Cohen-

Lamberger

Grace Lee

Helen Paterson

Second Violins

David Alberman

Thomas Norris

Miya Väisänen

Matthew Gardner

Julian Gil Rodriguez

Belinda McFarlane

Iwona Muszynska

Paul Robson

Alix Lagasse

Csilla Pogany

Andrew Pollock

Siobhan Doyle

Greta Mutlu

Erzsebet Racz

Violas

Edward Vanderspar

Gillianne Haddow

Malcolm Johnston

German Clavijo

Stephen Doman

Lander Echevarria

Robert Turner

Michelle Bruil

Luca Casciato

May Dolan

Stephanie

Edmundson

Alistair Scahill

Cellos

Tim Hugh

Alastair Blayden

Jennifer Brown

Noel Bradshaw

Daniel Gardner

Hilary Jones

Laure Le Dantec

Amanda Truelove

Deborah Tolksdorf

Leo Melvin

Double Basses

Graham Mitchell

Colin Paris

Patrick Laurence

Matthew Gibson

Thomas Goodman

Joe Melvin

Jani Pensola

José Moreira

Flutes

Gareth Davies

Charlotte Ashton

Jack Welch

Piccolo

Sharon Williams

Oboes

Juliana Koch

Olivier Stankiewicz

Rosie Jenkins

Cor Anglais

Christine Pendrill

Clarinets

Chris Richards

John Bradbury

Chi-Yu Mo

Bass Clarinet

Renaud

Guy- Rousseau

Bassoons

Daniel Jemison

Todd Gibson-Cornish

Joost Bosdijk

Horns

Timothy Jones

Stephen Stirling

Angela Barnes

Alex Wide

Jonathan Maloney

Trumpets

David Elton

Jason Evans

Robin Totterdell

Niall Keatley

Trombones

Peter Moore

James Maynard

Bass Trombone

Paul Milner

Tuba

Ben Thomson

Timpani

Nigel Thomas

Mark Robinson

Percussion

Neil Percy

David Jackson

Sam Walton

Harp

Bryn Lewis

LSO String Experience Scheme

Since 1992, the LSO String Experience Scheme has enabled young string players from the London music conservatoires at the start of their professional careers to gain work experience by playing in rehearsals and concerts with the LSO. The musicians are treated as professional 'extra' players (additional to LSO members) and receive fees for their work in line with LSO section players. The Scheme is supported by: The Polonsky Foundation
Barbara Whatmore Charitable Trust
Derek Hill Foundation
The Thistle Trust
Angus Allnatt Charitable Foundation