



# SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

## *Symphony No. 1 in D minor, Op. 13*

**Sergei Vasilievich Rachmaninoff** (1873-1943) was a Russian composer, pianist, and conductor.<sup>[3]</sup> Rachmaninoff is widely considered one of the finest pianists of his day and, as a composer, one of the last great representatives of Romanticism in Russian classical music. The Rachmaninoff family was a part of an "old aristocracy", where all of the attitude but none of the money remained. The family, of Russian and distant Moldovan descent, had been in the service of the Russian tsars since the 16th century, and had strong musical and military leanings. Graduating from the Moscow Conservatory, he was briefly offered a position in the Bolshoi Theatre. The 1917 Russian Revolution forced Rachmaninoff to leave Russia and emigrate to the United States, he made a living primarily as a concert pianist. He died in California at the height of World War II, leaving his wife Natalia. Early influences of Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, and other Russian composers gave way to a personal style notable for its song-like melodicism, expressiveness and his use of rich orchestral colors. The piano is featured prominently in Rachmaninoff's compositional output, and through his own skills as a performer he explored the expressive possibilities of the instrument.

Rachmaninoff's **Symphony No. 1 in D minor, Op. 13**, was composed between January and October 1895 at his Ivanovka estate near Tambov, Russia. Despite its poor initial reception the symphony is now seen as a dynamic representation of the Russian symphonic tradition, with British composer Robert Simpson calling it "a powerful work in its own right, stemming from Borodin and Tchaikovsky, but convinced, individual, finely constructed, and achieving a genuinely tragic and heroic expression that stands far above the pathos of his later music." The First Symphony was actually Rachmaninoff's second attempt in the genre. During 1890–91, his final year at the Moscow Conservatory, he had been assigned by one of his composition teachers, Anton Arensky, to write a symphony as an exercise. This student work is written in traditional sonata form and modeled after the opening movement of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony. Rachmaninoff added that neither Arensky nor fellow-professor Sergei Taneyev was enthusiastic about the work, perhaps because of its lack of individuality. Requiring an unusually long time (for Rachmaninoff) to composer, some regard it as superior to the next two. It opens with a short introduction, which sets up the mood of the whole work as gloomy, fierce, and solemn. It also presents two themes: the first is derived from the *Dies Irae* plainchant (famously heard in Berlioz' *Symphonie Fantastique*); the second is in a distinct gypsy scale. These two themes would wind themselves around their entire work. Despite its cyclical structure (because of the two themes), the work is somewhat uneven; nevertheless, it is a powerful and dramatic work, depicting anguish against unrelenting fate.