



Sergei RACHMANINOFF

Concerto for piano and orchestra No. 1

Sergei Vasilievich Rachmaninoff (April 1, 1873–March 28, 1943) was a Russian virtuoso pianist, composer, and conductor of the late-Romantic period, some of whose works are among the most popular in the classical repertoire.

Born into a musical family, Rachmaninoff took up the piano at age four. He graduated from the Moscow Conservatory in 1892 and had composed several piano and orchestral pieces by this time. In 1897, following the critical reaction to his Symphony No. 1, Rachmaninoff entered a four-year depression and composed little until successful therapy allowed him to complete his enthusiastically received Piano Concerto No. 2 in 1901. After the Russian Revolution, Rachmaninoff and his family left Russia and resided in the United States, first in New York City. Demanding piano concert tour schedules caused his output as composer to slow tremendously; between 1918 and 1943, he completed just six compositions, including *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, Symphony No. 3, and *Symphonic Dances*. In 1942, Rachmaninoff moved to Beverly Hills, California. One month before his death from advanced melanoma, Rachmaninoff acquired American citizenship.

Early influences of Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Balakirev, Mussorgsky, 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.

Piano Concerto No. 1 in F# minor, Op. 1 was composed in 1891 when Rachmaninoff was at age 18. He dedicated the work to Alexander Siloti and later revised the work thoroughly in 1917. Despite this was stated as first piano concerto, this was actually Rachmaninoff's second attempt at a piano concerto. In 1889 he had begun but abandoned a concerto in C minor (the same key, incidentally, in which he would later write his Second Piano Concerto). He wrote Natalya Skalon on 26 March 1891, "I am now composing a piano concerto. Two movements are already written; the last movement is not written, but is composed; I shall probably finish the whole concerto by the summer, and then in the summer orchestrate it" He finished composing and scoring the piece on July 6 and was satisfied with what he had written. The first movement was premiered on 17 March 1892 at the Moscow Conservatoire, with the composer as soloist and Vasily Safonov conducting. This may have been the only time the composer played the concerto in its original form, although Siloti, to whom it is dedicated, programmed it to play himself on several occasions.

Composition students were usually advised to base their efforts on a specific model for their first exercises in new forms. In Rachmaninoff's case this was the Grieg Piano Concerto, which was a favorite work of his and one which he had been familiar from Siloti practicing it at the Rachmaninoff household during the spring and summer of 1890 for future concerts. Rachmaninoff adapted the entire musical structure of the outer movements to the Grieg concerto, literally building his music into it. With all his other concertos, Rachmaninoff would prove more enterprising.

