



SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

Concerto for piano and orchestra No. 2 in C minor, Op. 18

Sergei Vasilievich Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) was a Russian composer, pianist, and conductor.^[3] 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.

The *Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor, Op. 18*, is a concerto composed between the autumn of 1900 and April 1901. The second and third movements were first performed with the composer as soloist on 2 December 1900. The complete work was premiered, again with the composer as soloist, on 9 November 1901, with his cousin Alexander Siloti conducting. This piece is one of Rachmaninoff's most enduringly popular pieces, and established his fame as a concerto composer. The opening movement begins with a series of bell-like tollings on the piano that build tension, eventually climaxing in the introduction of the main theme. In this first section, the orchestra carries the Russian-character melody while the piano makes an accompaniment made of rapid oscillating arpeggios. After the statement of the long first theme, a quicker transition follows until the lyrical second theme is presented. The second movement opens with a series of slow chords in the strings which modulate from the C minor of the previous movement to the E major of this movement. The piano enters, playing a simple arpeggiated figure composed in 1891 as the opening of the Romance from Two Pieces For Six Hands. The main theme is initially introduced by the flute, before being developed by an extensive clarinet solo. The motif is passed between the piano and other soloists before the music accelerates to a short climax centred on the piano. The original theme is repeated, and the music appears to die away, finishing with just the soloist in E major. The last movement opens with a short orchestral introduction that modulates back to C minor, before a piano solo leads to the statement of the agitated first theme. Near the end, Rachmaninoff restates the second theme in loud, *fortissimo* orchestration. After this a fast, ecstatic and very triumphant coda draws the piece to a close, ending in C major.