



Sergei RACHMANINOFF

Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Op. 27

Sergei Vasilievich Rachmaninoff (1 April 1873 – 28 March 1943) was a Russian 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. He acquired U.S. citizenship a month before his death from advanced melanoma. 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.

Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Op. 27, written in 1906–07. The premiere was conducted by the composer himself in St. Petersburg on 8 February 1908. The score is dedicated to Sergei Taneyev, a Russian composer, teacher, theorist, author, and pupil of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. Alongside his Piano Concerto No. 2 and Piano Concerto No. 3, this symphony remains one of the best-known compositions. The first movement begins with a slow introduction, in which the 'motto' theme of the symphony is introduced and developed. This leads to an impassioned climax, after which a cor anglais solo leads the movement into the allegro in sonata form. The second movement really only *resembles* a scherzo insofar as it relates to the early- to mid-Romantic tradition of symphonic movements, and its use of a typical scherzo form (ABACABA). The third movement, in A minor, opens with a lively ostinato in the upper strings. The movement is in a broad three-part form, and is often remembered for its opening theme, which is played by the first violins and restated both as a melody and as an accompanying figure later on in the movement. The final movement is set in sonata form. The lively, fanfare-like first theme is played by the entire orchestra, leading into a march-like interlude played by woodwind. After the return of the first theme, the first subject is concluded, and transitions directly into a massive, broad melody played by strings.