



Sergei RACHMANINOFF

Symphony No. 3

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.

Rachmaninoff composed his *Third Symphony* after writing his Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini and Variations on a Theme of Corelli. He arrived at his newly built Villa Senar on Lake Lucerne in Switzerland in late April 1935 with the prospect of writing a symphony in mind. Satisfied with his new home and in good spirits, Rachmaninoff seemed definitely up to the task. On May 15 he informed his cousin Sofiya Satina that he had done "some work," and during the following weeks was seriously at work with the composition. However, a three-week cure at Baden-Baden in July, along with a two-week hiatus in August, put Rachmaninoff behind. Five days before leaving Senar at the end of his summer holiday, Rachmaninoff wrote to Satina with some dissatisfaction, "I have finished two-thirds in clean form but the last third of the work in rough. If you take into account that the first two-thirds took seventy days of intense work, for the last third – thirty-five days – there is not enough time. Travels begin and I must get down to playing the piano. So it looks as though my work will be put aside until next year."

Near the end of the 1935–36 concert season, recitals in Switzerland enabled Rachmaninoff to pay a brief visit to Senar. He evidently took the score of the symphony with him when he left, since he had it with him in Paris in February 1936 for Julius Conus to mark bowings in the string parts. Work on the last movement had to wait until the composer arrived at Senar on April 16 for the summer holiday. On June 30, the composer reported to Satina, "Yesterday morning I finished my work, of which you are the first to be informed. It is a symphony. Its first performance is promised to Stokowski—probably in November. With all my thoughts I thank God that I was able to do it!" Rachmaninoff arrived in America just in time for final rehearsals of the work's premiere.