# Alexander SCRIABIN
## *Symphony No. 2*

**Alexander Nikolayevich Scriabin** (6 January 1872 – 27 April 1915) was a Russian composer and pianist. His mother, Lyubov was a concert pianist, but died when Scriabin was only a year old. Shortly after, Scriabin's father, Nikolai, joined the military – as all of his relatives followed a military path – and was deployed to Turkey. Left in the custody of his grandmother, great aunt, and aunt, Scriabin was exposed to piano at an early age as his aunt was an amateur pianist herself. Scriabin began studying with disciplinarian Nikolai Zverev, and even began constructing his own pianos. Despite his keen intelligence, he was unsociable and not liked by many of his peers, often being teased for his small stature. Later, Scriabin studied at the Moscow Conservatory, where he became a notable pianist in spite of his small figure and hands, which could barely stretch a ninth interval. Even with such physical limitations, he would graduate with a Gold Medal in piano performance, but without a degree in composition, as Anton Arensky refused to sign his graduation certificate due to strong differences in personality and musical opinion. Within the next 6 years, Scriabin would gain recognition as a pianist and began teaching at the Moscow Conservatory, after which point he further developed his reputation as a composer. He would leave Russia briefly from 1903 until 1909 to live in Switzerland, Paris, and Brussels, but would return to work on increasingly grandiose projects. As someone that experienced synesthesia, Scriabin worked on a multi-media piece, *Mysterium*, which was to act upon senses other than hearing, such as smell and touch. Unfortunately, his frail nature led to an early death, as Scriabin died of sepsis from a sore on his upper lip in 1915. Upon hearing of his death, Sergei Rachmaninoff toured Russia performing Scriabin's music – marking the first time that Rachmaninoff publicly performed music other than his own.

*Symphony No. 2, Op. 29* (1901) was written by Scriabin shortly after his first symphony. The structure extends past the four-movement symphonic scheme (although the first and last two movements are played without break). Despite a poor reception at its premiere, there were those that greatly admired the work. Most exemplary, the New York Philharmonic conductor, Vassily Safonoff, waved the score at his orchestra and said, "Here is the new Bible, gentlemen..."

The first movement (*Andante*) is an apt introduction to the entire symphony. This movement opens with a somber clarinet theme, and the music continues to rise and fall through a sweeping *allegro giocoso* section before dropping back to the original *andante*. Scriabin uses his trademark extended dominant chord to bridge this movement to the next.

The second movement (*Allegro*) begins with perhaps the first rhythmically "obvious" theme of the symphony. While the first movement managed moments in major tonalities, this sonata allegro sustains them for large swaths. Nonetheless, Scriabin's prevalent harmonic exploration ensures the complexity of this movement's emotional palette, up until its final resolute chord.

The third movement (*Andante*) opens with a birdsong played on flute. While the movement opens in tranquility, it is not without drama, as building chromaticism launches the music into a tense *agitato*, an *appassionato*, and a scurrying *più vivo*.

The fourth movement (*Tempestoso*), a rondo abound with brass orchestration, first rumbles at the surface. Later on, the movement borrows the opening theme of the symphony and then recalls the *allegro giocoso* section of the first movement to catapult into the finale seamlessly.

The fifth movement (*Maestoso*) arrives with a brilliant march. Repurposing the opening theme in a homophonic, grand setting, movement proceeds with little interference, exhibiting relative tonal uniformity. The *allegro giocoso* section is used once again to move the piece to its final push, before unexpectedly pulling back for the coda. It eventually rises and concludes the symphony at its peak.