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CLASSICS



Sergei Rachmaninov
PIANO CONCERTO NO.3
Jean Sibelius
SYMPHONY NO.2



CHINEKE! ORCHESTRA

Gerard Aimontche *piano*
Roderick Cox *conductor*

Sergei Rachmaninov
Piano Concerto No. 3 in D Minor, Op. 30

Jean Sibelius
Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 43

CD1

Piano Concerto No. 3 in D Minor, Op. 30 Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943)

1. I. Allegro ma non tanto.....[16.06]
2. II. Intermezzo: Adagio.....[10.03]
3. III. Finale: Alla breve.....[14.30]

CD2

Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 43 Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)

1. I. Allegretto.....[9.15]
2. II. Andante.....[13.44]
3. III. Vivacissimo: Lento.....[12.26]
4. IV. Allegro moderato.....[8.34]

Total timings:[84.42]

CHINEKE! ORCHESTRA
GERARD AIMONTCHE *Piano*
RODERICK COX *Conductor*

Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943)
Piano Concerto No.3 in D Minor, Op. 30
Allegro ma non tanto
Intermezzo: Adagio
Finale: Alla breve

Gerard Aimontche *Piano*

An anxious and melancholic individual by nature, Sergei Rachmaninov rose above his personal issues at a young age to become one of the giants of the Western classical canon. Yet there was nothing inevitable about Rachmaninov's meteoric rise. In fact, it nearly did not happen at all.

From a young age, Rachmaninov had been marked out as a prodigy. At the tender age of 9 he was admitted to study at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. By the time he was 14 he had written his first full piece for orchestra. Aged twenty, he had finished a piano concerto and an opera, *Aleko*, which premiered, with enormous success, at the Bolshoi Theatre. Expectations were high for the young Rachmaninov, and there was great anticipation amongst concertgoers when it was announced that he was in the process of writing his very first symphony.

However when the work finally premiered in 1897, after 2 years of gestation, it was greeted neither with praise, nor even with apathy, but with abject revulsion. Prominent critic César Cui even described it as suitable only for 'the inhabitants of Hell'. While the modern consensus is that the work is sprawling and unfocused, the disaster of the premiere was undoubtedly exacerbated by the conductor, Alexander Glazunov. Glazunov, a fellow composer who was famed as much for his drinking habit as for his compositions, supposedly barely glanced at the score before he took to the stage, blind drunk, to conduct it.

The result was not pretty: Classical concertgoers in those days were not known for withholding their displeasure, and at some point during the performance Rachmaninov retreated backstage before fleeing the building altogether.

After a glittering start to his career, the failure of the Symphony No. 1 crushed Rachmaninov. He left the city, retreating to the seclusion of the countryside, and for 3 whole years composed

nothing. Although he still performed during this period, going so far as to undertake a concert tour in the UK, he found himself completely unable to produce any new works. As time went on, he lapsed into despondency, depression and alcoholism. Friends and family tried various remedies, including one disastrous visit to the celebrated novelist Leo Tolstoy at the recommendation of bassist Fyodor Chaliapin (after Chaliapin performed one of Rachmaninov's songs for Tolstoy, the great writer wasted no time in telling the composer how much he disliked it).

Eventually, Rachmaninov was brought to Dr. Nikolai Dahl, a highly regarded hypnotist and doctor of internal medicine, who embarked on a programme of positive reinforcement and hypnosis, willing Rachmaninov to begin work on a long-promised piano concerto, and encouraging him to have confidence in his abilities. Amazingly (perhaps most of all to Rachmaninov himself, who set no store by such treatment), it worked. Later, he would write: 'Incredible as it may sound, this cure really helped me'.

Whilst the resulting Piano Concerto No. 2 would put Rachmaninov's career back on track, his Piano Concerto No. 3 – composed a little over 8 years later – would firmly secure his compositional reputation. Renowned as one of the most technically daunting concertos in the repertory, the 'Rach 3' is a work that many pianists aspire to perform. Rachmaninov maintained that this concerto was "more comfortable" to play than the second, although this is perhaps of little comfort to any performer lacking the composer's phenomenal hand span and seemingly limitless stamina. It was even out of reach for the great Josef Hofmann, admired by Rachmaninov above all other pianists and to whom he dedicated the work. Hofmann had considerably smaller hands and, as a result, never performed the concerto which bears his name.

Rachmaninov denied any specific thematic influences within the piece. "It is borrowed neither from folk song nor from liturgical sources. It simply wrote itself," he stated about the primary melody, in which the pianist enters, subdued, underneath the orchestra. "If I had any plan in composing this theme, I was thinking only of sound. I wanted to 'sing' the melody on the piano, as a singer would sing it – and to find a suitable orchestral accompaniment, or rather one that would not muffle this singing." Although Rachmaninov may have sincerely believed the theme was his creation scholars have found strikingly similar music in Russian Orthodox monastic chants. The *Intermezzo* and *Finale* are played without pause, an abrupt

transition from the reflective melancholy of the second movement to the ferocious virtuosity of the *Finale*.

Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)

Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op.43

Allegretto

Andante

Vivacissimo; Lento

Allegro moderato

The success of Jean Sibelius's (1865-1957) tone poem *Finlandia* led many, both in his homeland of Finland and internationally, to associate all of his music as being representative of something (usually Finland itself). But while the nationalistic source material of *Finlandia* was never in doubt, when it came to his symphonies, Sibelius was an avowed absolutist. He never sought, nor desired anyone to see, anything except the pure music of these works.

Composed while Sibelius was travelling through Italy and central Europe, and coming hot on the heels of *Finlandia*, audiences and critics quickly attributed the character of the Symphony No. 2 to the sun-drenched landscapes of southern Europe. Others still detected hints of nationalism in the work, with conductor Georg Schnéevoigt, a close friend of Sibelius, later claiming that the opening movement depicted the carefree pastoral life of the Finnish people before the coming of the 'Great Enemy' (Russia).

Sibelius conducted the premiere of the Symphony himself in Helsinki on March 8, 1902. It proved to be a hit, and by popular demand the program was repeated three more times that month, each time to a capacity audience.

In an article that appeared the day after the premiere, Finnish conductor Robert Kajanus described gave his own vivid interpretation of the final 3 movements:

The Andante strikes one as the most broken-hearted protest against all the injustice that threatens at the present time to deprive the sun of its light and our flowers of their scent ... The scherzo gives a picture of frenetic preparation. Everyone piles his straw on the haystack, all fibres are strained

and every second seems to last an hour. One senses in the contrasting trio section with its oboe motive in G flat major what is at stake. The finale develops toward a triumphant conclusion intended to rouse in the listener a picture of lighter and confident prospects for the future.

For Sibelius, however, the Symphony No. 2, like all his other symphonies, was a medium through which to express the form and development of musical ideas and motifs. But while these works may not have been intended to reflect directly upon the real world, they each have a personality and character of its own. Like a person, each symphony was moulded by the context of its composition, influenced by, but not mirroring, the place and time of its creation, and the mood and circumstances of Sibelius' himself.

The Symphony No. 2 is characterised by its simple, folksong-like melodies – perhaps explaining Schnéevoigt's interpretation of the work as representing the pastoral Finnish people – and unorthodox approach to thematic material: Most symphonies introduce themes and motifs in full at the start of the work, then dissect and alter them throughout the course of the piece before finally returning to the basic themes at the end. Sibelius however uses the first movement of the Symphony No. 2 to first present the listener with fragments of thematic material which he then builds into full themes before pulling them apart again.

The opening Allegretto is followed by a restless slow movement, characterised by moments of calm disrupted by forceful outbursts. For Schnéevoigt, this movement represented the incursion of Russian forces into the Finnish nation.

The third movement, a scherzo, opens with concerted energy, (the 'great conflict' with Russia for Schnéevoigt), which gradually forms a link to the bold, uplifting finale ("The triumph of Finland"). The second subject of this concluding section is a sorrowful lament, which some believe to have been composed by Sibelius for his wife, in memory of the death of her sister.

Whilst the symphony may not have been composed to represent any specific theme or events, it is perhaps this very characteristic which has made it one of the composer's most popular works, allowing Schnéevoigt and other listeners to project their own ideas and stories onto the music, keeping the piece fresh for each new generation.

Programme notes by Fin Conway

First Violins

Tai Murray (leader)
Alex Gonzales
Aischa Guendisch
Braumah Kanneh-Mason
David Juritz
Didier Osindero
Miles Brett
Sarah Daramy-Williams
Hazel Correa
Alexandrine Caravassilis
Henry Salmon
Blaize Henry
Angela Antwi-Agyei
Emanuela Buta

Second Violins

Ilmar Gavilan
Galya Bisengalieva
Jannina Norpoth
Gavin Davies
Ronald Long
Assya Nurzhigitova
Oakki Lau
Tania Passendji
Charlotte Barbour-Condini
Yannick Hiwat
Radhika de Saram
Claire Hazelton

Violas

Richard Brice
Lena Fankhauser
Emma Sheppard
Ashleigh Gordon

Nicola Hicks
Dawn Michelle Johnson
Laurice Campell-Buckton
Audrey Monfils
Marie de Bry
Zami Jalil

Cellos

Desmond Neysmith
Marie Spaemann
Seth Parker-Woods
Abel Selaocoe
David Kadumukasa
Xenia Watson
Kwesi Edman
Zara Hudson-Kozdoj

Double Basses

Chi-chi Nwanoku OBE
Adam Wynter
Nathan Knight
Joseph Straker
Adam Storey
Ayesha D'Oyley

Flutes

Tia Roper
Matthew Lynch

Oboes

Titus Underwood
Uchenna Ngwe

Clarinets

Mariam Adam
Berginald Rash

Bassoons

Andrew Brady
Margaret Cookhorn

French Horns

Pierre Buizer
Derryck Nasib
Jonathan Hassan
Dwight Pile-Gray

Trumpets

Aaron Akugbo
Lawrence Omotey
Kevin Robinson

Trombones

Harry Brown
Vanessa Ritchie-Suarez

Bass Trombone

Richard Henry

Tuba

Andy Kershaw

Timpani

Paul Philbert

Percussion

Sacha Johnson
Dan Ellis



CHINEKE! ORCHESTRA

The Chineke! Foundation was established in 2015 to provide career opportunities to young Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) classical musicians in the UK and Europe. Chineke!'s motto is: 'Championing change and celebrating diversity in classical music'. The organisation aims to be a catalyst for change, realising existing diversity targets within the industry by increasing the representation of BME musicians in British and European orchestras.

The Foundation's flagship ensemble, the Chineke! Orchestra, is comprised of exceptional musicians from across the continent brought together multiple times per year. As Europe's first majority-BME orchestra, the Chineke! performs a mixture of standard orchestral repertoire along with the works of BME composers both past and present.

Chineke! is the brainchild of Chi-chi Nwanoku OBE, who says: 'My aim is to create a space where BME musicians can walk on stage and know that they belong, in every sense of the word. If even one BME child feels that their colour is getting in the way of their musical ambitions, then I hope to inspire them, give them a platform, and show them that music, of whatever kind, is for all people.'

The aims of the Chineke! Foundation and Orchestra are certainly ambitious. In the words of Sir Simon Rattle: 'Chineke! is not only an exciting idea but a profoundly necessary one. The kind of idea which is so obvious that you wonder why it is not already in place. The kind of idea which could deepen and enrich classical music in the UK for generations. What a thrilling prospect!'

GERARD AIMONTCHE

Gerard Aimontche is a prize-winner of international competitions such as Grieg International Piano Competition, the 8th Maria Yudina International Competition of Young Pianists in the category of Piano Duets and Chambers Ensembles, the 7th Nikolai Rubinstein International Competition for Young Musicians, the Chappell Medal Competition and Schumann Prize Award (London), the American Protégé Romantic Music Competition (New York) and the Guzik Foundation Award (San-Francisco). He is also a semi-finalist of Motreux Jazz Piano Competition (Switzerland), Hamamatsu Piano Competition and Cleveland Piano Competition.



He has performed in Russia and abroad in such well-known venues as the Carnegie Hall, Royal Festival Hall, Tchaikovsky Concert Hall, Great Hall of Moscow Conservatory, The Kremlin Armoury, Cleveland Museum of Natural History and many others.

In July 2017 Gerard made his London debut at the Royal Festival Hall with the Chineke! Orchestra and conductor Roderick Cox for this live recording of Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No. 3. He also appeared on BBC Radio 3's *In Tune*, where his performances were broadcasted live.

He has given a number of concerts with the State Symphony Orchestra of Moscow as well as playing with the Kaliningrad Chamber Orchestra under the prestigious baton of Aleksander Andreev. In 2014 he performed George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* with Kursk Philharmonic Orchestra and Rachmaninov's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* with Yaroslavl State Philharmonic Orchestra. In 2017 Gerard appeared with the National Symphony Orchestra of Cuba and maestro Marlon Daniel with a programme featuring *Burleske* by Richard Strauss.

Gerard has been invited to perform at such international music festivals as Mozarteum (Salzburg, Austria), Montreux Jazz Festival (Montreux, Switzerland), Larisa Gergieva (Vladikavkaz, Russia), The River of Talents (Saint-Petersburg, Russia), Night in the Museum (Tretyakovskaya Gallery, Moscow, Russia) and many others.

Gerard is a graduate of The Royal College of Music (Master of Performance, Artist Diploma, with Professor Norma Fisher), and the Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatory (postgraduate degree in performance, with Professor Sergey Dorensky). He holds a Music Diploma (Distinction) from Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatory (2014), where he studied with Professor Sergey Dorensky and his assistants, professors Andrey Pisarev, Nikolay Lugansky, and Pavel Nersessian. In 2009 he graduated from Gnessim Music School (Undergraduate Diploma).

In October 2015, Gerard Aimontche made his orchestral debut, performing Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No. 3 during the 'Color of Music' Festival in Charleston, South Carolina.

In July 2016 Gerard joined the Verbier Festival Academy, where he studied under the guidance of such brilliant musicians as Klaus Hellwig, Sergei Babayan and many more.

RODERICK COX

"Cox is a trailblazer ... a conductor who will be in the vanguard"
Minnesota Star Tribune

Winner of the 2018 Sir Georg Solti Conducting Award from the U.S Solti Foundation, Roderick Cox was the Minnesota Orchestra's Associate Conductor from September 2016 to July 2018 following a year in which he served as the ensemble's Assistant Conductor. Before arriving in Minnesota, he served for two years as Assistant Conductor of the Alabama Symphony Orchestra and Music Director of the Alabama Symphony Youth Orchestra.



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Roderick was awarded the Robert J. Harth Conducting Prize from the Aspen Music Festival in 2013, which led to national recognition and a return to the Festival as a Fellow. He has also held Fellowships with the Chicago Sinfonietta as part of their Project Inclusion programme and the Chautauqua Music Festival, where he was a David Effron Conducting Fellow. In 2018, Roderick was also one of only four conductors selected to participate in the prestigious Daniele Gatti Masterclass with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra.

As a guest conductor, Roderick has worked with the Cleveland, Seattle Symphony, BBC Symphony, Ulster, Louisiana Philharmonic, Indianapolis Symphony and Santa Fe Symphony Orchestras as well as the Orchestre Métropolitain (Festival de Lanaudière), Grant Park Festival Orchestra and at the Manhattan School of Music. Concerts with the Chineke! Orchestra included his debut in July 2017 in London (from which this live recording was taken) and further concerts in Birmingham and Ghent in September 2017.

Roderick will make his debut performance in a subscription concert with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra with Cameron Carpenter in November 2018 and make his Opera debut with Houston Grand Opera in January 2019 in performances of Bizet's *Pêcheurs de Perles*.

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Producer & Editor – Tim Oldham
Recording Engineer – Mike Hatch
Recording Assistants – Michael Gerrard, James Waterhouse*

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“These performances are impressive. Ensemble is notably precise in Sibelius’s Finlandia, where the stern brass section and the tension of the strings provides the bedrock for a dynamic and highly motivated account. Individual wind soloists shine out in the Dvořák, notably Titus Underwood’s finely shaped cor anglais solo in the Largo, while the orchestra’s perception of the music’s charm and vivacity demonstrates a keen sense of character”
BBC Music Magazine

*“... Kevin John Edusei conducts a fresh, lively account, full of sunshine ...
Titus Underwood’s cor anglais solo unfolds with natural tenderness and poise.
Edusei keeps the Scherzo bubbling along nicely before a speedy, exuberant finale ...
This is a bold statement of intent from an exciting ensemble.”*
Gramophone