



Great Pianists • Rachmaninov

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RACHMANINOV

Piano Concertos Nos. 1 and 4 Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini

Sergey Rachmaninov, Piano
The Philadelphia Orchestra
Eugene Ormandy • Leopold Stokowski



Historical Recordings 1939 • 1940 • 1941

Sergey Rachmaninov (1873-1943)

1 - 3 Piano Concerto No. 1 in F sharp minor, Op. 1 (24:41)

Recorded on matrices CS-045621-2, 045622-3, 045623-2, 045624-1, 045625-3 and 045626-3. First issued on Victor 18374/6 [M-865].

4 - 6 Piano Concerto No. 4 in G minor, Op. 40 (24:17)

Recorded on matrices CS-071277-2, 071278-2, 071279-1A, 071280-1A, 071281-1, 071282-1, 071283-1, 071284-1. First issued on Victor 11-8611/4 [M-972].

Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Op. 43

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|-----------|--|--------|
| 7 | Introduction: Allegro vivace and Variations I (Precedente) | (0:29) |
| 8 | Tema: L'istesso | (0:20) |
| 9 | Variation II: L'istesso tempo | (0:19) |
| 10 | Variation III: L'istesso tempo | (0:25) |
| 11 | Variation IV: Più vivo | (0:30) |
| 12 | Variation V: Tempo precedente | (0:28) |
| 13 | Variation VI: L'istesso tempo | (0:52) |
| 14 | Variation VII: Meno mosso, a tempo moderato | (0:59) |
| 15 | Variation VIII: Tempo I | (0:33) |
| 16 | Variation IX: L'istesso tempo | (0:31) |
| 17 | Variation X: Poco marcato | (0:50) |
| 18 | Variation XI: Moderato | (1:13) |
| 19 | Variation XII: Tempo di minuetto | (1:18) |
| 20 | Variation XIII: Allegro | (0:30) |
| 21 | Variation XIV: L'istesso tempo | (0:43) |
| 22 | Variation XV: Più vivo scherzando | (1:06) |
| 23 | Variation XVI: Allegretto | (1:20) |
| 24 | Variation XVII: [Allegretto] | (1:42) |
| 25 | Variation XVIII: Andante cantabile | (2:35) |
| 26 | Variation XIX: A tempo vivace | (0:36) |
| 27 | Variation XX: Un poco più vivo | (0:36) |
| 28 | Variation XXI: Un poco più vivo | (0:26) |

29	Variation XXII: Un poco più vivo (Alla breve)	(1:40)
30	Variation XXIII: L'istesso tempo	(0:47)
31	Variation XXIV: A tempo un poco meno mosso	(1:13)

Recorded on matrices CS-87066-1, 87067-1, 87068-1, 87069-1, 87070-1 and 87071-1. First issued on Victor 8553/5 [M-250].

Sergey Vasilyevich Rachmaninov was among those Russian composers who chose exile, rather than remain in Russia after the Revolution of 1917, the consequent civil turmoil and, as it turned out, the years of despotic oppression that followed. He was born at Semyonovo in 1873 into a family of strong military traditions on his mother's side and more remotely on his father's. A tendency to extravagance had depleted his father's fortunes and made it necessary to sell off much of their land and dissipating his wife's dowry. As a result of this, the childhood of Rachmaninov was largely spent at the one remaining family estate at Oneg, near Novgorod. The reduction in family circumstances had at least one happier result. When it became necessary to sell this estate and move to St Petersburg, the expense of educating the boy for the Imperial service proved too great. Rachmaninov could make use, instead, of his musical gifts, entering St Petersburg Conservatory at the age of nine with a scholarship. Showing no particular industry as a student and lacking the attention he needed at home, in 1885 Rachmaninov failed all his general subject examinations at the Conservatory and there were threats that his scholarship would be withdrawn. His mother, now separated from her husband and responsible for her son's welfare, arranged, on the advice of the well known pianist Alexander Ziloti, that he should move to Moscow to study with Zverev, a teacher known to impose the strictest discipline. In Zverev's house, however uncongenial the rigorous routine, he acquired much of his phenomenal ability as a pianist, while broadening his musical understanding by attending concerts in the city. At the age of fifteen he became a pupil of Zverev's former student Ziloti, a musician who had also studied with Tchaikovsky, Nikolay Rubinstein and, thereafter, with Liszt. Rachmaninov had lessons in harmony and counterpoint with Sergey Taneyev and Arensky, and his growing interest in composition led to a quarrel with Zverev and removal to the house of his relations, the Satins. In 1891 Rachmaninov completed his piano studies at the Conservatory and the composition of his first piano concerto. The following year he graduated from the composition class and composed the notorious Prelude in C sharp minor, a piece that was to haunt him by its excessive popularity. His early career brought initial success as a composer, halted by the failure of his first symphony at its first performance in 1897,

when it was conducted badly by Glazunov, apparently drunk at the time, and then reviewed in the cruellest terms by César Cui, who described it as a student attempt to depict in music the seven plagues of Egypt. Rachmaninov busied himself as a conductor, accepting an engagement in this capacity with Mamontov's Moscow Private Russian Opera Company. He was only able to return to composition after a course of treatment with Dr Nikolay Dahl, a believer in the efficacy of hypnotism. The immediate result was the second of his four piano concertos, a work that has proved to be one of the most immediately popular of all he wrote.

The years before the Russian revolution brought continued successful activity as a composer and as a conductor. In 1902 Rachmaninov married Natalya Satina and went on to pursue a career that was bringing him increasing international fame. There were journeys abroad and a busy professional life, from which summer holidays at the estate of Ivanovka, which he finally acquired from the Satins in 1910, provided respite. During the war, however depressing the circumstances, he continued his concert engagements, not being required for military service, as he had anticipated. All this was interrupted by the abdication of the Tsar in 1917 and the beginning of the Revolution.

Rachmaninov left Russia in 1917. From then until his death in Beverley Hills in 1943, he was obliged to rely largely on performance for a living. Now there was, in consequence, much less time for composition, as he undertook demanding concert-tours, during which he dazzled audiences in Europe and America with his remarkable powers as a pianist. His house at Ivanovka was destroyed in the Russian civil war and in 1931, the year of his *Variations on a Theme of Corelli*, his music was banned in Russia, to be permitted once again two years later. He spent much time in America, where there were lucrative concert-tours, but established a music publishing-house in Paris and built for himself a villa near Lucerne, where he completed his *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* in 1934 and his *Third Symphony* a year later. In 1939 he left Europe, to spend his final years in the United States. Rachmaninov completed the *Piano Concerto No. 1* in F sharp minor during the summer of 1891. He had brought forward his final piano examination at Moscow Conservatory a year, to avoid a change of teacher, with Ziloti's resignation from the Conservatory after the appointment of Safonov as director. Once he had successfully completed his examinations, he had travelled with Ziloti to Ivanovka, then a summer estate belonging to the Satins. He performed the first movement of the concerto at a student concert at the Conservatory the following spring, as he prepared for his final examination in composition, the writing of a one-act opera, for which he received the Great Gold Medal, a rare distinction. It was not until 1917 that Rachmaninov revised the

concerto, which he had dedicated to Ziloti, working on it in Moscow in the early winter. By December he had left Russia never to return. The chance of a concert engagement in Stockholm allowed him to leave the country, followed by his wife Natalya and his two daughters. Now his first three piano concertos, the second completed in 1901 and the third in 1909, became part of his stock-in-trade, with the concertos of Tchaikovsky and of Liszt. The Piano Concerto No. 1 was not, in fact, Rachmaninov's first attempt at the form. In 1889 he had sketched the plan of a Concerto in C minor, which was never completed. The Concerto in F sharp minor, in its earlier form, was performed by Rachmaninov on a number of occasions, but he grew increasingly dissatisfied with it and recast it completely during those uneasy weeks in late 1917, giving the orchestration greater clarity and in general tightening the construction. The first movement opens with a brass fanfare, followed by a rapid solo passage of descending octaves and the weighty chords that we might have expected. The orchestra introduces the first theme, taken up by the soloist. There is a second theme, marked *meno mosso*, and the opening of the movement has a part to play in what follows, notably in the extended cadenza. The slow movement, in D major, has been compared to a Chopin Nocturne. It is relatively short and almost at once allows the piano to have its own way in an expressive melody, leading to increasing complexity of figuration. The final *Allegro vivace*, opening in 9/8, contradicted in the second bar by the piano's quadruple-time 12/8, continues this pattern of contrasting metres. The excitement of the opening leads to a more tranquil mood in a central section marked *Andante ma non troppo*, in the key of E flat. The original key and mood are restored as the concerto moves forward to its final optimistic F sharp major.

Rachmaninov completed his Piano Concerto No. 4 in G minor between January and August 1926 and gave the first performance the following March in Philadelphia, with the orchestra conducted by Leopold Stokowski. He revised the concerto in 1941, giving the first performance of the revised version in October that year, again in Philadelphia, the performance now conducted by Eugene Ormandy. On neither occasion was the work particularly well received. The revision had responded to criticisms of the work's length, which was now much reduced, but the expectation aroused, with a knowledge of the earlier concertos and, by 1941, of the Paganini Rhapsody were not met. He dedicated the work to the émigré Russian composer Nikolay Medtner. The first movement opens with a brief orchestral introduction of six bars, after which the soloist enters with a heavy series of solid and dramatic chords, the substance of the first principal theme, derived from the *Étude-tableau* in C minor, Opus 33, No. 3 of 1914. The piano later introduces a more lyrical secondary theme, as the movement develops. The slow movement need not

suffer by the chance resemblance of the first three notes of the principal theme to the opening of the nursery-rhyme Three Blind Mice. The resemblance is superficial and irrelevant and should not detract from the expressive dialogue between soloist and orchestra. The final Allegro vivace follows without a break, abruptly introduced by the orchestra, and then, more delicately, by the piano, which goes on to more elaborate technical display, to a lyrical chordal episode and to reminiscences of the first movement that provide the concerto with an over-all thematic unity. It should be said that although the Fourth Concerto is the least popular and least often heard of Rachmaninov's concertos, it nevertheless has much to be said for it. It may still lack the tautness of construction that the composer strove to impart in his revision of the work, but in its lyricism and in its exploration of a still further extended harmonic language, it remains an attractive work of considerable interest.

Rachmaninov as Pianist

There is no doubt that Rachmaninov owed a great deal to his teacher, Nikolay Sergeyevich Zverev, who taught at the Moscow Conservatory from 1870 until his death in 1893 and provided the young Rachmaninov with the necessary degree of discipline in strict routine practice. Zverev was himself a pupil of Alexander Ivanovich Dubuque, who, in turn, had been a pupil of John Field. The routine of the day began, at Zverev's, with practice at six o'clock in the morning and continuing practice once Zverev had left for his Conservatory classes at nine. It was with Zverev that Rachmaninov acquired his own excellent technical foundation, continued under Zverev's former pupil Ziloti at the Conservatory from 1888. It is true that Rachmaninov rebelled against his teacher, finding that he needed peace to concentrate rather on composition, moving to lodge with his relations, the Satins. Because of Ziloti's resignation from the Conservatory, he took his final piano examinations a year early, in 1891, passing with honours. Thereafter he was able to concentrate on composition.

In Russia Rachmaninov enjoyed a varied career. He appeared as a pianist, but principally in his own works, and had a parallel and more important career as a conductor and composer. This came to an end with the Revolution and his departure abroad. In exile it became apparent to him that the only means he now had of supporting himself and his family was as a concert pianist. His repertoire had been relatively limited. He had a few concertos, including Tchaikovsky's *Piano Concerto No.1*, which he had played

in 1917 in aid of the revolutionary army, and some works of Chopin and Liszt, in addition to his own works. Moving almost immediately from Stockholm to Denmark, he set about improving his technique and consolidating his repertoire. In the following months in Scandinavia he appeared as soloist in his own *Piano Concerto No.2*, Tchaikovsky's *Piano Concerto No.1* and Liszt's *Piano Concerto No.1* and gave recitals of his own compositions. By the autumn of 1918 he found himself able to give a more balanced recital programme, with music ranging from Mozart and Schubert to Tchaikovsky.

It soon became clear to Rachmaninov that America was likely to provide the engagements and rewards he now needed. He gave the first of what were to be many American concerts in December 1918. He had acquired the support of Steinway's and a competent manager and soon found himself with a series of 36 engagements for his first season and some seventy for the next one. The process seemed to continue inexorably, with season after season, and periods of rest and preparation intervening in the summer months. In 1920 he came to an agreement with the Victor Talking Machine Company, later owned by RCA, and was able to record, over the years, much of his own repertoire. As time went on, he was later able to reduce the number of his American engagements, moving back to Europe, which remained essentially his home until 1939, when he found it prudent to return permanently to America once more. His American tours remained an essential part of his life until his death in 1943.

As a pianist Rachmaninov was an intelligent, thoughtful and careful performer, meticulous in his preparation. He had large hands, able to span a chord of a thirteenth with the left hand and with a remarkable stretch also in the right, spanning a tenth by taking the lower note with the first finger and the upper note by thumb-crossing. He was always aware of a sense of direction in what he played and of a point of culmination, of whatever kind, the whole executed with impeccable precision, a fine singing tone, where this was called for, rhythmic energy and a clarity of definition, even in passages of great complexity.

Leopold Stokowski

Of Polish and Irish parentage, the conductor Leopold Stokowski was born in London in 1882 and entered the Royal College of Music at the age of thirteen. He served as organist at St James's in Piccadilly, took a bachelor's degree in music at Oxford and in 1905 took a position as an organist in New York. He made his first appearance as a conductor in Paris in 1908. This led to an appointment as conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and in 1912 to the start of his long association with the Philadelphia Orchestra, where he did much to introduce new repertoire in performances of increasing technical brilliance. Between 1936 and 1938 he shared his position in Philadelphia with his successor, Eugene Ormandy, thereafter leaving to pursue an independent career with new or established orchestras. He continued his distinguished career into old age, giving his last concert in July 1977, a few weeks before his death.

Eugene Ormandy

Eugene Ormandy was born in 1899 in Budapest, where he studied the violin, latterly with Hubay. An abortive concert-tour to America undertaken in 1921 found him obliged to serve as a violinist in the orchestra of the Capitol Theatre, providing an accompaniment to silent films. It was here that he made his début as a conductor in 1924. In the following years he was engaged for broadcast concerts of popular classics and for summer concerts, some with the Philadelphia Orchestra. In 1931 he began a five-year association with the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra, increasing his reputation notably by his recordings. In 1936 he joined Stokowski in Philadelphia, succeeding him in 1938, to remain at the helm of that orchestra for the next 35 years, developing further the work of his predecessor. He died in 1985.

Sergey
RACHMANINOV

(1873 - 1943)

AAD

Playing Time:
71' 13"

Piano Concertos Nos. 1 and 4
Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini

Sergey Rachmaninov, Piano
The Philadelphia Orchestra
Eugene Ormandy • Leopold Stokowski*

Piano Concerto No. 1 in F sharp minor, Op. 1

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|----------|----------------|---------|
| 1 | Vivace | (11:58) |
| 2 | Andante | (5:20) |
| 3 | Allegro vivace | (7:15) |

Recorded on 4th December, 1939 and 24th February, 1940

Piano Concerto No. 4 in G minor, Op. 40

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|----------|----------------|--------|
| 4 | Allegro vivace | (9:37) |
| 5 | Largo | (6:00) |
| 6 | Allegro vivace | (8:37) |

Recorded on 20th December, 1941

7 - 31 Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Op. 43* (22'02")

Recorded on 24th December, 1934

Recorded at the Academy of Music, Philadelphia (Tracks **1** - **6**) and at RCA Victor Church Studio No. 2, Camden, New Jersey (Tracks **7** - **31**).
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Music Notes: Keith Anderson

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