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RACHMANINOV SYMPHONY NO.2

LIVE IN CONCERT
VLADIMIR ASHKENAZY

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RACHMANINOV

SYMPHONY NO.2

LIVE IN CONCERT

Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Op. 27

1	I. Largo – Allegro moderato	18.37
2	II. Allegro molto	10.16
3	III. Adagio	15.05
4	IV. Allegro vivace	14.41

Total timings: 58.42

PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA
VLADIMIR ASHKENAZY CONDUCTOR

SERGEI RACHMANINOV 1873-1943

Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Op. 27

Largo – Allegro moderato

Allegro molto

Adagio

Allegro vivace

It was not until the second half of the last century that Rachmaninov began to be taken seriously as a composer. Previously, all that was well known of his work were his piano concertos (the Second and Third in particular) and a handful of piano pieces – the best-known being the celebrated C sharp minor Prelude, which he wrote when he was still in his teens and went on to despise in later life. Nowadays his piano music is no longer regarded as fodder for virtuosos with strong fingers and weak intellects, and his symphonic music is treated with due respect.

But one area of his output is still little-known: his operas. Rachmaninov worked for several years as an opera conductor and gave the first performances of two of his own operas at the Bolshoi Theatre in the spring of 1906. Immediately after these performances, however,

he resigned from the staff of the Bolshoi and went off to Italy with his family, intending to escape the political unrest in Russia. But work proved difficult: Rachmaninov had hoped to begin another opera, based on Flaubert's novel *Salammbô*, but wranglings over the libretto forced him to abandon the idea. His young daughter, Irina, was unwell and in the autumn the family returned to Russia – but not for long. They set off almost immediately for Dresden, where they spent a few months of each subsequent year living in relative peace and seclusion. Rachmaninov was able to concentrate once again on composition. He began work on yet another opera, this time based on a play by Maeterlinck, *Monna Vanna*; and – in secret – on another symphony. Perhaps he kept the symphony under wraps because he was still sensitive about the dismal reception of his First Symphony. Whatever the reasons, not even his friends knew about it until they read about it in a newspaper.

One such friend, Mikhail Slonov, wrote asking about the report and Rachmaninov replied: 'I have composed a symphony. It's true! It's only ready in rough. I finished it a month ago and immediately put it aside. It was a severe worry to

me and I am not going to think about it any more. But I am mystified how the papers got hold of it!’ And he expanded further in another letter: ‘Recently heard from Slonov that he read in some paper that I had finished a symphony. As you may have heard something about this too, I want to say a few words on the subject. A month ago, or more, I really did finish a symphony, but to this must be added the phrase “in draft”. I have not announced it to the world because I want to complete it properly first. While I was planning to clean it up, it became terribly boring and repulsive to me. So I put it aside and went on with other things. So the world wouldn’t know anything about it yet, if it weren’t for Ziloti, who came here and dragged out of me everything I’ve done and everything I’m going to do. I told him I’m going to do a symphony. So that’s how I already have an invitation to conduct it next season!’

In fact, all this was true. Rachmaninov began work on the orchestration of the Second Symphony in the summer of 1907, immediately after the birth of his second daughter, and finished it shortly before the first performance, which he conducted himself in St Petersburg early in 1908. The Glinka Prize committee

awarded Rachmaninov the 100-rouble first prize for the symphony that same year; Scriabin came second with *Le poème de l’extase*.

The symphony opens with a long, brooding slow introduction. It is in an arch shape, rising from the darkness of a motto theme in the cellos and basses, reminiscent of Russian Orthodox chant, to a passionate climax and then subsiding again into the gloom. A recitative for the cor anglais ushers in the ‘Allegro’, a large-scale sonata movement built principally upon the violins’ first subject, which manages to soar and drive forward simultaneously. A solo clarinet introduces a new tune, taken up by the strings, consisting of falling sequences – one of Rachmaninov’s melodic trademarks. There is one more theme in the exposition, a radiant, lyrical tune for the cellos. The tempestuous development section rises to first one climax and then another, even louder and more dissonant. The recapitulation dwells more on the gentler material, music that seems the more passive after the storms of the development.

The scherzo opens with a swaggering theme for horns, with the violins articulating another of

Rachmaninov’s trademarks, a dactylic rhythm driving the music forwards. There is a contrasting lyrical second theme, a brief respite from the galloping opening subject, and then a central section, which – like the motto theme that opens the symphony – sounds like a Russian Orthodox procession.

The ‘Adagio’ is the lyrical heart of the symphony. Here Rachmaninov is at his romantic greatest, writing passionate and intense music, at once yearning and nostalgic. The clarinet melody – one of the greatest tunes of the 20th century – is accompanied by a remarkable texture, created by dividing the strings into no less than 16 independent parts. The movement is in sonata form, with a second subject group made up of a series of questions and answers for the woodwinds and a brief development section. But this wonderful music defies analysis, in that its beauty lies in the seemingly endless melody that Rachmaninov spins.

The ‘Adagio’ ends in a mood of quiet resignation, at once positive and melancholy. After that, the finale bursts in with an opening march-like theme, bristling with bravura energy. The triplets,

which are such a distinctive feature of the theme, drive the music forward in a headlong gallop. A cymbal crash and a brass fanfare introduce the effulgent second subject, which ends with a peaceful reminiscence of the ‘Adagio’. After a less serene but still good-humoured development, the recapitulation is introduced by a huge *crescendo*, beginning with a downward scale on the bassoon. The whole orchestra eventually joins in – even the glockenspiel – before the march theme makes its triumphant return. The recapitulation of the second subject is topped off by a final return of the motto-theme, and a whirlwind coda brings the symphony to a joyous conclusion.

© Wendy Thompson



Photo: Felix Broede

PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA

The Philharmonia Orchestra is a world-class symphony orchestra for the 21st century. Led by its Principal Conductor & Artistic Advisor Esa-Pekka Salonen, the Philharmonia has a pioneering approach to the role of the modern-day symphony orchestra, reaching new audiences and participants through audience development, digital technology and learning and participation programmes.

The Orchestra's home is Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall in the heart of London, where it presents a Season of over 50 performances each year. Orchestral programming is complemented by series including *Philharmonia at the Movies*, *Music of Today* and the Philharmonia Chamber Players.

The Orchestra is committed to presenting the same quality of live music in venues throughout

the UK as it does in London, especially at its residencies: in Bedford, Leicester, Canterbury, Basingstoke, at the Three Choirs Festival and Garsington Opera. At the heart of the UK residencies is a programme delivered by the Philharmonia Education team that empowers people in every community to engage and participate in orchestral music.

Internationally, the Philharmonia is active across Europe, Asia and the USA. With Esa-Pekka Salonen, the Orchestra has recently undertaken major tours to Taiwan and Japan (spring 2017), West-Coast USA (autumn 2016) and a residency at Festival d'Aix-en-Provence in summer 2016.

As one of the world's most recorded orchestras, the Philharmonia's international recognition and reputation in part derives from its extraordinary recording legacy, which in the last ten years has been burnished by digital and technological innovation. The Orchestra now records and releases music across multiple channels and media, from an iPad app to releases on partner label Signum Records.

More recently the Philharmonia and Salonen have forged a new path with Virtual Reality. *360 Experience*, produced with 3D audio and video, has been presented at Southbank Centre and at the Ravinia (Chicago) and Cheltenham Festivals, and is sold through the PlayStationVR store.

The Philharmonia was founded in 1945 by EMI producer Walter Legge. It has been self-governing since 1964 and is owned by its 80 members. During its first seven decades, the Orchestra collaborated with most of the great classical artists of the 20th century, such as Strauss and Karajan.

Finnish conductor and composer Esa-Pekka Salonen has been Principal Conductor & Artistic Advisor since 2008. Jakub Hrůša and Santtu-Matias Rouvali are Principal Guest Conductors and honorary conductor positions are held by Christoph von Dohnányi and Vladimir Ashkenazy. Composer Unsuk Chin is Artistic Director of the Orchestra's new-music series, *Music of Today*.

The Philharmonia's Principal International Partner is Wuliangye.

1ST VIOLIN

Zsolt-Tihamér Visontay
Victoria Sayles
Nathaniel Anderson-Frank
Imogen East
Eleanor Wilkinson
Adrián Varela
Karin Tilch
Soong Choo
Eugene Lee
Cindy Foster
Eunsley Park
Charlotte Reid
Paula Muldoon
Erzsebet Racz
Cassandra Hamilton

2ND VIOLIN

Annabelle Meare
Emily Davis
Fiona Cornall
Samantha Reagan
Gillian Costello
Gideon Robinson
Julian Milone
Susan Hedger
Jan Regulski
Teresa Pople
Helen Cochrane
Joanne Chen
Anna Brigham
Calina de la Mare

VIOLA

Yukiko Ogura
Gwendolyn Fisher
Shiry Rashkovsky
Michael Turner
Gijs Kramers
Cheremie Hamilton-Miller
Amanda Verner
Linda Kidwell
Lucia Ortiz Sauco
Graeme McKean
Pamela Ferriman
Stephanie Edmundson

CELLO

Timothy Walden
Karen Stephenson
Eric Villeminey
Deirdre Cooper
Anne Baker
Bianca Riesner
Lauren Steel
Judith Fleet
Julie-Anne Manning
Rosalie Curlett

BASS

Christian Geldsetzer
Adam Wynter
Michael Fuller
Gareth Sheppard
Andrew Vickers
Samuel Rice

Jan Zahourek
Salima Barday Gowani

FLUTE

Samuel Coles
June Scott
Keith Bragg

PICCOLO

Keith Bragg

OBOE

Gordon Hunt
Eugene Feild

COR ANGLAIS

Jill Crowther

CLARINET

Mark van de Wiel
Laurent Ben Slimane
Jennifer McLaren

BASS CLARINET

Laurent Ben Slimane

BASSOON

Ursula Leveaux
Todd Gibson-Cornish

HORN

Nigel Black
Kira Doherty

Geremia Iezzi
Jonathan Maloney
James Handy

TRUMPET

Jason Evans
Alistair Mackie
Mark Calder
Robert Farley

CORNET

Jason Evans
Mark Calder

TROMBONE

Byron Fulcher
Philip White

BASS TROMBONE

Daniel West

TUBA

Peter Smith

TIMPANI

Marney O'Sullivan

PERCUSSION

Oliver Patrick
Peter Fry
David Corkhill
Christopher Terian

VLADIMIR ASHKENAZY

One of the few artists to combine a successful career as a pianist and conductor, Russian-born Vladimir Ashkenazy inherited his musical gift from both sides of his family; his father David Ashkenazy was a professional light music pianist and his mother Evstolia (née Plotnova) was daughter of a chorus master in the Russian Orthodox church. Ashkenazy first came to prominence on the world stage in the 1955 Chopin Competition in Warsaw and as first prize-winner of the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels in 1956. Since then he has built an extraordinary career, not only as one of the most outstanding pianists of the 20th century, but as an artist whose creative life encompasses a vast range of activities and continues to offer inspiration to music-lovers across the world.

Conducting has formed the larger part of Ashkenazy's activities for the past 30 years. He continues his longstanding relationship with the Philharmonia Orchestra, who appointed him Conductor Laureate in 2000. In addition to his performances with the orchestra in London and around the UK each season, and on countless tours with them worldwide, he has also developed landmark projects such as *Prokofiev and Shostakovich Under Stalin* (a project which he also took to Cologne, New York, Vienna and Moscow) and *Rachmaninoff Revisited* (which was also presented in Paris). Together, Ashkenazy and the Philharmonia have undertaken a major tour of China, a European tour with soloists Evgeny Kissin and Vadim Repin and a ground-breaking tour of Latin America with soloists Nelson Freire and Esther Yoo.

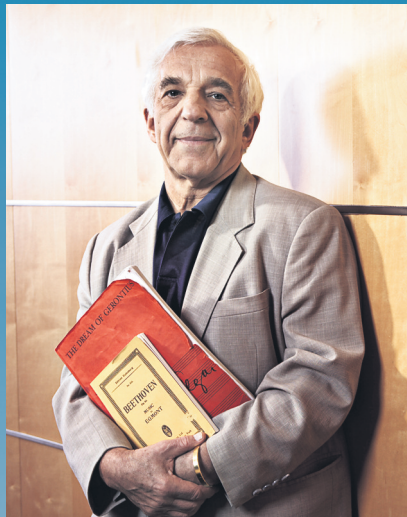


Photo: © Keith Saunders

Ashkenazy is also Conductor Laureate of both the Iceland and NHK Symphony orchestras and Principal Guest Conductor of the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana. He has recently stepped down from the Music Directorship of the EUYO, a post held with great satisfaction for 15 years. Previously he has held posts as Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor to the Sydney Symphony Orchestra (2009-13), and Chief Conductor of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra and Music Director of NHK Symphony Orchestra. He maintains strong links with other major orchestras including The Cleveland Orchestra (where he was formerly Principal Guest Conductor) and Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin (Chief Conductor and Music Director 1988-96). He regularly makes guest appearances with many other major orchestras around the world.

Ashkenazy maintains his devotion to the piano, these days mostly in the recording studio where he continues to build his extraordinarily comprehensive recording catalogue. This includes the Grammy award-winning album of Shostakovich's *Preludes and Fugues*, Rautavaara's Piano Concerto No.3 (a work which he commissioned), Bach's *Wohltemperierte Klavier*, Rachmaninov's

Transcriptions and Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations*, 'Ashkenazy: 50 Years on Decca' – a 50-CD box-set celebrating his long-standing relationship with the label, a milestone collection of Ashkenazy's vast catalogue of Rachmaninov's piano music, which also includes all of his recordings as a conductor of the composer's orchestral music. June 2016 saw the release of Shostakovich's Piano Trios Nos.1 and 2 and Viola Sonata on Decca.

Beyond his performing schedule, Vladimir Ashkenazy has also been involved in many television projects, inspired by his passionate drive to ensure that serious music retains a platform in the mainstream media and is available to as broad an audience as possible. He has collaborated extensively with legendary documentary-maker Christopher Nupen, and has been involved in programmes such as *Music After Mao* (filmed in Shanghai in 1979), and *Ashkenazy in Moscow*, which followed his first return to Russia since leaving the USSR in the 1960s. More recently he has developed educational programmes with NHK TV including the 1999 *Superteachers*, working with inner-city London school children, and in 2003-4 a documentary based around his *Prokofiev and Shostakovich Under Stalin* project.

Recorded live at Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall, on 5th November 2015

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