The University Musical Society
of The University of Michigan

Presents

The ANN ARBOR
May Festival

THE PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA
EUGENE ORMANDY, Music Director and Conductor
WILLIAM SMITH, Associate Conductor
EUGENE ORMANDY, Conducting
Soloist
GARY GRAFFMAN, Pianist

WEDNESDAY EVENING, APRIL 27, 1977, AT 8:30
HILL AUDITORIUM, ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

All-Rachmaninoff Program

"The Isle of the Dead," Op. 29

*Concerto No. 2 in C minor for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 18
  Moderato
  Adagio
  Allegro scherzando
  GARY GRAFFMAN

INTERMISSION

Symphonic Dances, Op. 45
  Non allegro
  Andante con moto (tempo di valse)
  Lento assai; allegro vivace

*Available on RCA Red Seal

First Concert  Eighty-fourth Annual May Festival  Complete Programs 4060
"The Isle of the Dead," Op. 29 . . . . . . . SERGEI RACHMANINOFF
(1873–1943)

In 1906, following two conspicuously successful seasons as conductor at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow, Rachmaninoff took his wife and infant daughter to Dresden, where he would have more time to devote to his creative work, free from commitments as a performer. He and his family remained in Dresden for three years, returning to Russia only for the summers, and it was during the early part of that period that he composed two of his most successful works for orchestra, the Second Symphony and the tone poem The Isle of the Dead.

Rachmaninoff chose Dresden not only for its own appeal, but also for its proximity to Leipzig, a city whose musical activity and museums interested him; in one of those museums hung Arnold Böcklin's painting Die Toteninsel ("The Isle of the Dead"). Böcklin (1827–1901) was a Swiss Romantic whose melancholy style and sumptuously dark coloration struck an especially sympathetic chord in Rachmaninoff—who was not, however, the only composer to respond to Böcklin's work with music. (Max Reger, for one, composed a "Böcklin Suite" of four shorter tone poems, one of them on this same painting.) This particular painting shows an island which is almost entirely cliff, rising awesomely from the water into a sunless sky; a portal has been carved through which the boat bearing a coffin may enter, and in the center, beyond the entrance, cypresses rise taller than the rocky sepulchre. The small boat making its way toward that grim portal bears a coffin across its bow, draped with wreaths; a solitary figure, shrouded in white, stands over it, and a single oarsman sits at stern.

Curiously, it appears that Rachmaninoff did not see this painting until after he had composed his tone poem of the same name, under the inspiration of a black-and-white sketch Böcklin made after completing the painting. The music was composed in April and May 1907 and first performed, under the composer's direction, on May 1, 1909, in Moscow. During the two-year interval Rachmaninoff did see the painting itself, and remarked: "If I had seen the original first, I might not have composed my Isle of the Dead. I like the picture best in black and white."

The music, in any event, seeks to evoke a mood more than to tell a story, though details of the visual image are reflected in it. The opening suggests the water quietly lapping against the shoreless cliffside. At length the horn breathes a lamentation; the undulating figure of the opening becomes more animated and the lamentation is taken up more poignantly by the oboe. The opening figure asserts itself still more energetically, and the lamentation takes the form of a brass chorale, its shape now recognized clearly as what was only hinted earlier: it was a variant of the Dies Irae, the ancient chant for the dead (which figures in several of Rachmaninoff's other works, from the earliest to the last).

The middle section corresponds to one of Rachmaninoff's great slow movements, reaching an emotional peak in the strings' soaring lyrical transformation of the lament theme. This rapturous effect is dispelled by a menacing orchestral irruption which leads to the concluding section, in which the insistent tread of the Dies Irae prevails in one form or another as other materials are reheard. Finally the melodic fragments dissolve, even the murmuring of the water is stilled, and darkness is complete: lamentation has ended, memory has vanished, and only stillness remains.

Rachmaninoff conducted performances of The Isle of the Dead with several American orchestras within a year of the premiere; the first recording of the work was made by The Philadelphia Orchestra under his direction in April 1929.

Concerto No. 2 in C minor for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 18 . . . RACHMANINOFF

Dr. Nikolai Dahl, to whom Rachmaninoff dedicated this Concerto, was godfather to the work in an unusually active sense. Rachmaninoff went into a period of depression that tied up his creative activity for nearly three years after the dismal failure of his First Symphony in 1897; toward the end of 1899 he consulted Dr. Dahl, whose specialty was treating such disorders through auto-suggestion and who was especially interested in Rachmaninoff since he himself was an accomplished amateur violinist and ardent chamber music player.

The treatment consisted of daily sessions from January through April of 1900, during which Dr. Dahl more or less hypnotized Rachmaninoff, repeating to him over and over again: "You will begin to write your concerto. . . . You will work with great facility. . . . Your concerto will be of excellent quality . . . ."

Before the year was out Rachmaninoff performed the second and third movements of his Second Concerto at a concert conducted by his cousin, Alexander Siloti, and on November 9, 1901, he played the work in full with the Moscow Philharmonic.

Complete self-confidence was elusive even then. Less than a week before the première Rachmaninoff was tormenting himself with doubt about the new concerto. To Nikita Morozov, who had
Again, an appropriate climax is given to a very active concert season with the traditional May Festival—and at the same time anticipation of another season is created with the current announcement of our 99th year of presentations. Continuity depends upon the faithful support of large and enthusiastic audiences. For such loyalty and support we are most grateful.

Special thanks are extended to the individuals and businesses listed herein who have made their annual contributions since January 1, 1976. Our next listing of Encore membership will be distributed at the opening concert of the Choral Union Series—the Beverly Sills recital on September 23—and at other series openings in Power Center and Rackham Auditorium.

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Oscar A. Eberbach—born August 9, 1881, died April 3, 1977—joined the Board of Directors of the University Musical Society in 1926, serving as treasurer for thirty years beginning in 1938. Mr. Eberbach lived his entire life in Ann Arbor, and attended, with his family, the first May Festival in 1894.

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undertaken an analysis of the work, he wrote that in playing through the first movement "it only now becomes clear to me that the transition from the first theme to the second is not any good, that as it stands now the first theme is not the first theme but an introduction, and that no fool will believe when I begin to play the second theme that that is the beginning of the Concerto. I feel the whole first movement is spoiled, and from this minute on it is repellent to me. I am simply in despair. And why did you start with this analysis of yours five days before the performance!!"

Despite these misgivings, the Concerto was a huge success. Less than a year after the première Siloti played the solo part in St. Petersburg with Arthur Nikisch conducting, and they then took the work on a very successful European tour. In 1904 the Concerto won for Rachmaninoff the first of his two Glinka Prizes (the second came four years later, for the Second Symphony), and by then it had already established itself with audiences everywhere. It remains to this day the most popular concerto composed in this century.

Like Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff knew how to create a good tune; themes from both of the outer movements of this Concerto were adapted for popular songs in the 1940s (when the genre still existed). The first-movement theme became *I Think of You*, while the big theme in the finale (not actually invented by Rachmaninoff, but given to him, he said, by the aforementioned Morozov) was fitted with the immortal verses of *Full Moon and Empty Arms*. Neither text, fortunately, is likely to intrude itself into the minds of today's listeners.

Between these outer movements, both filled to the brim with striking color and rhythmic effects as well as melodic abundance, is a slow movement that must be reckoned one of the most exalted products of Rachmaninoff's inspiration. The delicacy of the scoring, the tasteful balance of the various elements, and the unforced genuineness in this *Adagio sostenuto* (in E major) add up to expressiveness on the most intimate, and perhaps downright poetic, level.

As the exquisite *Adagio* is no mere interlude, the dramatic outer movements are no mere frame for it. The measure of Rachmaninoff's genius is in the even and sustained level of this remarkable work's appeal, from the first bar to the last.

**Symphonic Dances, Op. 45**

RACHMANINOFF

From the Third Piano Concerto onward (a work composed for his first American tour in 1909), all of Rachmaninoff's major works for orchestra were introduced in the United States, where he was also most active as a pianist and conductor in the forty-five years following his departure from Russia. Most of these works were in fact introduced by The Philadelphia Orchestra, for which the *Symphonic Dances* were composed in 1940. The first performance of this work was given by the Orchestra on January 4, 1941, under the direction of Eugene Ormandy, to whom the score is dedicated.

Rachmaninoff did not actually take up residence in America until 1935, and most of the work on his Third Symphony, which he began that year, was done at his summer home in Switzerland. The only work he composed fully in this country was his last, the *Symphonic Dances*, which followed the Third Symphony after a hiatus of four years in his creative activity and which may be the finest of all the music he wrote for orchestra without a solo part for piano. Rachmaninoff himself was a little surprised to have produced such a work at that time. "I don't know how it happened," he remarked; "it must have been my last spark." And so it was, for the composer died two years after the première of the *Symphonic Dances*, without attempting any further composition.

One area in which Rachmaninoff, almost alone among Russian composers, never worked was that of the ballet. He was delighted with Fokine's ballet to his *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, but said that he had no choreographic use in mind when he composed the *Symphonic Dances*. This does not rule out the idea of programmatic significance, however. Rachmaninoff originally thought of giving an individual title to each section of this triptych—"Midday," "Twilight" and "Midnight," symbolizing three stages of life— but decided to let the tempo markings suffice, and that decision seems quite in keeping with the essentially symphonic nature of the work.

In the first of the Dances (*Non allegro*) there are, as in the Fourth Concerto, syncopated sections which may or may not represent conscious allusions to jazz, but the notion is reinforced by the conspicuous presence of the alto saxophone. Rachmaninoff had never written for that instrument before, and before undertaking to fit it into his orchestral fabric he sought the advice of Robert Russell Bennett, the celebrated Broadway orchestrator. The movement, more striking for its rhythmic strength than for its themes, is in sonata form.

*Andante con moto* (*Tempo di value*) is the heading of the second movement, which comes from a world somewhere between the *Valse triste* of Sibelius and the gently nostalgic concert waltzes of Glazunov but displays a sense of fantasy entirely Rachmaninoff's own. The evocation of a gradually nocturnal mood is quite successful.

The final movement, after a brief introductory *Lento assai*, is a dramatic *Allegro vivace* whose dark events are more than intimated by the prominent citation of the *Dies Irae*, the traditional chant for the dead, which Berlioz, Liszt, Tchaikovsky, and Saint-Saëns used in various descriptive works and which Rachmaninoff himself had quoted or alluded to in his *Paganini* *Rhapsody* and First Symphony as well as *The Isle of the Dead*. 
International Presentations – 1977–78

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LAZAR BERMAN, Pianist ............. Thursday, November 3
ROTTERDAM PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA/de WAART ... Friday, November 11
NATIONAL ORCHEstra of BRAZIL/KARABTCHEWSKY ... Sunday, November 20
RUDOLF SERKIN, Pianist .............. Wednesday, January 18
LEONTYNE PRICE, Soprano .......... Wednesday, January 25
MOSCOW PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA/KITAIENKO ... Monday, February 27
BALTIMORE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA/COMMISSIONA ... Sunday, March 19
BAVARIAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA/KUBELIK .... Saturday, April 8

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MURRAY LOUIS DANCE COMPANY .... Monday & Tuesday, October 17 & 18
GEORGE SHEARING QUINTET ........ Wednesday, October 19
THE HOOVERS—A JAZZ HAPpening .... Saturday, October 22
THE PENNSYLVANIA BALLET .......... Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, November 14, 15, 16
BALLET FOLKLORICO MEXICANO .... Saturday, November 19
TCHAIKOVSKY's "NUTCRACKER" BALLET ... Thursday, Friday, Saturday, December 15, 16, 17
JOSE MOLINA BAILES ESPAÑOLES .... Wednesday, January 11
ROSSINI'S Barber of Seville—Canadian Opera Company .... Sunday, January 15
HUNGARIAN FOLK BALLET & GYPSY ORCHESTRA ... Tuesday, January 17
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Penca (The Art of Self-Defense) and
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May Festival 1978

THE PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA (four concerts) .... April 26–29

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