



It is also to be understood that Rachmaninov's "Americanisation" is not to be considered a complete capitulation to the new "style". He held fast to his Czarist roots and to the feudal systems and Russian folk music of his homeland. Of course, the Revolution of 1917 practically annihilated any loyalist feelings toward the rich and corrupt Russian court but Rachmaninov had permanently left the country at the beginnings of the revolution and brought with him his memories of a cultured musical past. With his assimilation into American society and the exposure to flappers and bathtub gin and the jazz of Gershwin and Jelly Roll Morton, Rachmaninov must have undergone a period of extreme culture shock which, if we perceive these, to Rachmaninov, foreign and somewhat crude influences in the 4th piano concerto, we find in this work a brilliant musical resolution. In short, in the sense of Rachmaninov's music, the piano concerto No. 4 is a melting pot, mixing the feelings of his past with the actualities of his present and resulting in a work for piano and orchestra that is a groundbreaking and significant musical statement from one of the finest composer/pianists of the 20th century.

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Sergei Rachmaninov

In considering the piano works of Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943) it is not to be forgotten that the expansive sonorities in his music have much to do with his physical size as well as his musical imagination. First and foremost, Rachmaninov was considered (and remains so to this day) to have been one of the finest pianist of his generation, falling into a category with such legends as Moriz Rosenthal and Josef Lhevinne. By all contemporary accounts, his playing was precise and clean despite the massive sonorities he had written into his music. The primary reason for this is that Rachmaninov possessed unusually large hands which enabled him to crisply render sonorities where pianists with smaller hands would become dependent on judicious use of the pedal or arpeggios to realise the chordal structure. Rachmaninov was fond of staccatos and precise, rhythmic drive. The generally accepted impression of Rachmaninov's music as works demanding massive tonal structures requiring an overbearing use of pedal have little to do with the reality of him as composer and as interpreter. Also, Rachmaninov's pianist model was the legendary Anton Rubinstein. It was Rubinstein's technique and his passion for clear textures and crisp interpretations which influenced Rachmaninov's pianism and which he transferred onto his compositions for the instrument.

Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor, Op. 18 (1901)

A striking example of this is the opening of the Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor, Op. 18. This work was composed between 1900 and 1901 and the second and third movements were first performed by the composer at the end of 1900. The completed work, with Rachmaninov as soloist, was premiered in 1901 under the baton of the great pianist and colleague, Alexander Siloti. The opening of this concerto presents, perhaps, the most graphic image of Rachmaninov's physical size being applied to his compositional technique. This movement opens with tolling bells, the piano announcing the tocsin while the orchestra presents a Russian melody of folkloric character. Following an agitated development section, the recapitulation reverses the roles of piano and orchestra found in the exposition and the piano becomes the dominant instrument, playing a processional-like theme that had been "hinted at" in the development section which results in a mirror image of the structure of the development.

It is, however, the finale of this concerto with its immortalised second theme that has turned this work in to the consummate pianistic evergreen. In 1945, the American crooner, Frank Sinatra, recorded a love ballad based upon the second theme of the *Allegro scherzando*. The ensuing pop song bore the title "Full Moon and Empty Arms". In addition, as if this were not enough, this concerto has become a reliable source for melodies which have found their way into the literature of popular songs. Among these are the 1941 song, "I Think of You", recorded by Frank Sinatra and based on the first movement and Eric Carmen's 1975 reworking entitled "All by Myself", taken from the concerto's 2nd movement, *Adagio sostenuto*. Other uses of melodies from this concerto are to be found in the films "Rhapsody" (1954), "The Seven Year Itch" (1955), "The World of Henry Orient" (1964), "Hereafter" (2010) and "The Fountainhead" (1943) based on the novel by Ayn Rand.

Piano Concerto No. 4 in G minor, Op. 40 (3rd revision, 1941)

The Piano Concerto No. 4 was composed in 1926 and revised many time before reaching its present form. At first, the work was a complete failure. An early revision, made in 1928, also failed to win approval for the composer who withdrew the work entirely. It was only in 1941 that Rachmaninov completed the third and final revision of this concerto and it is this third version that is most heard in concert today.

One of the problems with the fourth concerto was Rachmaninov's recognition of the changing political airs and the adoption of angular sonorities coming from composers such as Bartók and Stravinsky. Although a diehard romantic, it would have been impossible for Rachmaninov to have ignored these influences and this is demonstrated in the fourth concerto with its lighter orchestration and all-but neoclassic writing making use of short thematic motifs and strong rhythms and in sharp contrast to his earlier, "romantic" works.

It is also a factor in this concerto that Rachmaninov may have gained a degree of inspiration from the music of the American composer, George Gershwin. He is known to have been present at the premiere of Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" in 1924 and it is also known that Rachmaninov was a faithful fan of the jazz and big band leader, Paul Whiteman. He was also greatly taken by jazz elements and the tenor, John McCormack, has reported on hearing Rachmaninov, in his private moments, playing jazz at home and for his own amusement..