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# RACHMANINOV SYMPHONY NO.3 SYMPHONIC DANCES LIVE IN CONCERT VLADIMIR ASHKENAZY



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# RACHMANINOV

## SYMPHONY NO.3

### SYMPHONIC DANCES

#### Symphony No. 3 in A minor, Op. 44

1	I. Lento – Allegro moderato	15.57
2	II. Adagio ma non troppo – Allegro vivace – Tempo come prima	12.18
3	III. Allegro	13.32

#### *Symphonic Dances*, Op. 45

4	I. Non allegro	11.26
5	II. Andante con moto (Tempo di valse)	10.03
6	III. Lento assai – Allegro vivace – Lento assai. Come prima – Allegro vivace	14.12

Total timings: 77.34

PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA  
VLADIMIR ASHKENAZY CONDUCTOR

## SERGEI RACHMANINOV 1873-1943

### Symphony No.3 in A minor, Op.44

*Lento – Allegro moderato*

*Adagio ma non troppo – Allegro vivace –  
Tempo come prima*

*Allegro*

The Russian Revolution had a huge impact on Rachmaninov's career. At first, like the vast majority of his fellow-countrymen, he supported the fall of the Romanov dynasty by giving concerts in what he called 'my now-liberated country', but by the autumn of 1917, the situation in Russia had become intolerable. The country was paralysed by strikes; changes of government seemed to do nothing to alleviate the grim living conditions suffered by the population, and musical life had ground to a halt. Rachmaninov was desperately worried about his future, and began applying to get a visa to leave. An opportunity arose when he was invited to play in Stockholm. He seized the chance, and just before Christmas 1917 he, his wife Natalya and their two daughters left Russia, never to return.

For the first year of exile they lived in Stockholm and Copenhagen, before Rachmaninov finally decided that his future lay across the Atlantic. In November 1918 they sailed for the USA, where Rachmaninov – described by a fellow-virtuoso as 'the greatest pianist of his time' – was offered a series of lucrative concerts and a recording contract. From then onwards, he worked primarily as a concert pianist, fitting in composing whenever time allowed. Of his 45 published opus numbers, only six date from the period of his self-imposed exile during the remaining quarter-century of his life. The Fourth Piano Concerto of 1926 was his first significant piece for eight years. After another gap of five years came the *Corelli Variations* for piano, completed in June 1931. In 1934, a period of recuperation following a minor operation allowed him time to compose the *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* for piano and orchestra. Then, in the summer of 1935 during a gap between concert seasons, he began work on a Third Symphony, but only got two movements written before he had to start practising again for the next gruelling round of concert engagements. He returned to the symphony in June 1936 while staying at his newly completed villa near Lucerne, writing at the end of the score 'Finished. I thank God!'

The Symphony was premiered in Philadelphia by the Philadelphia Orchestra under Leopold Stokowski on 6 November 1936. Rachmaninov was disappointed by what he called its 'sour' reception. He commented rather bitterly at a press interview:

'When my First Symphony was first played, they said it was so-so. Then when my Second was played they said the First was good, but that the Second was so-so. Now that my Third has been played – just this fall – they say that my First and Second are good but that my – oh, well, you see how it is!'

In the light of the symphony's cool reception, Rachmaninov deferred a planned recording with the London Philharmonic Orchestra in September 1937, deciding instead to revise it. In fact, the original version was given its London premiere at the Queen's Hall two months later by the LPO under Sir Thomas Beecham. Rachmaninov then revised it in the summer of 1938, and eventually recorded it with the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1939.

The Third Symphony is no less lyrical or dramatic than Rachmaninov's previous works, but it has a pared-down quality (in common with Rachmaninov's

only other late orchestral work, the *Symphonic Dances* of 1940), both in terms of form and texture. It is also permeated with a mood of anguished yearning, in contrast to the radiant, full-blown optimism of the Second Symphony. Rachmaninov's later years were overshadowed by financial worry, overwork, increasing ill-health, and above all, by homesickness. In 1930 he said in an interview given in London:

'There is a burden heavier to me than any other; it is that I have no country. I had to leave the land where I was born, where I struggled and suffered all the sorrows of the young, and where I finally achieved success. The whole world is open to me and success awaits me everywhere. Only one place is closed to me, and that is my own country, Russia.'

Indeed, not only was Russia itself closed to Rachmaninov, but by the late 1930s his music was actually banned by the Soviet regime, so contemporary Russian audiences were not able to hear what has been called 'the last great utterance of the Russian Romantic symphonic tradition'. Sir Henry Wood, who conducted the Third Symphony in Rachmaninov's presence in 1938, recognised its significance, writing encouragingly:

'The work impresses me as being of the true Russian romantic school; one cannot get away from the beauty and melodic line of the themes and their logical development. As did Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov uses the instruments of the orchestra to their fullest effect. Those lovely little phrases for solo violin, echoed on the four solo woodwind instruments, have a magical effect in the slow movement. I am convinced that Rachmaninov's children will see their father's Third Symphony take its rightful place in the affection of that section of the public which loves melody. In fact, I go so far as to predict that it will prove as popular as Tchaikovsky's Fifth.'

Rachmaninov's Third Symphony has only three movements, the central, faster section of the slow movement acting as a *scherzo*. All three of Rachmaninov's symphonies begin with a motto-theme, which in the Third is heard very quietly at the outset of the brief slow introduction, and which recurs in various guises throughout the piece. The first movement constantly defeats the listener's expectations – lyrical melodies surge up, but are undermined by motifs of unease, and fragmentary, almost ghostly dance-like themes, so the long-breathed melodies we associate with

Rachmaninov's music never quite materialise. The movement builds up to a climax, and then subsides, ending quietly, and the second movement also begins quietly, with horn notes over a harp accompaniment. Henry Wood's 'magical' solo violin appears with a yearning melody which flowers into a full-blown violin theme, while the harp underpins the woodwind solos mentioned by Wood. But the pastoral idyll cannot remain unblemished: storm clouds appear on the horizon, the tempo quickens, and after a few false starts a dramatic *scherzo* erupts, almost grotesque in style, but with touches of delicate scoring. The tempo unwinds again and we return briefly to the mood of the opening, with the solo violin ushering in a quietly reflective ending.

The vigorous *finale* is episodic in style, contrasting dramatic, almost martial outbursts with lyrical, yearning themes of great beauty, an extended fugal section which starts on the violins, a passage for harp and woodwind underpinned by a menacing snare-drum rhythm, and a dance-like section in which a tambourine joins the accompaniment to a flute solo. The coda builds up in speed and intensity to round off the symphony on an optimistic note.

© Wendy Thompson

## SERGEI RACHMANINOV 1873-1943

### *Symphonic Dances, Op. 45*

*Non allegro*

*Andante con moto (Tempo di valse)*

*Lento assai – Allegro vivace – Lento assai.  
Come prima – Allegro vivace*

Rachmaninov left his native Russia in 1917, initially living in Copenhagen before receiving offers of work from America, where he settled in 1919. There followed an intensive schedule of touring, in both the States and across Europe. During the early 1930s, whilst visiting Switzerland, Rachmaninov decided to build himself a villa there, at Hertenstein on the banks of Lake Lucerne.

This varied existence suited Rachmaninov remarkably well. On the one hand, Russian remained his main language, and the family continued to welcome Russian visitors, employ Russian servants and observe Russian customs. A friend remarked that their lifestyle was 'very much like that of an old Russian estate'. On the

other, Rachmaninov relished novelty; the architecture of his villa was fashionably reminiscent of the Bauhaus style, and he enjoyed exploring Lucerne in a speedboat. Back in rural Russia, he had been the first in his region to own a car, and in the States he became partial to the latest ice-cream sodas.

The States beckoned once again when, in 1939, the threat of war compelled Rachmaninov and his family to leave Europe and return to the USA. Rachmaninov began work on the *Symphonic Dances* in late summer 1940, having originally conceived them as music for a new ballet by his friend, the choreographer Mikhael Fokin. The latter's death on 22 August brought the scheme to an abrupt end, but the music remains as the only complete work composed by Rachmaninov in America. Originally scored for two pianos, Rachmaninov's desire to finish the work's orchestration was heightened by the fact that the 1940-41 concert season was already under way. Rachmaninov wrote to the conductor Eugene Ormandy (1899-1985) in August:

'... Last week I finished a new symphonic piece, which I naturally want to give first to

you and your orchestra. It is called 'Fantastic Dances'. I shall now begin the orchestration. Unfortunately my concert tour begins on October 14th. I have a great deal of practice to do and I don't know whether I shall be able to finish the orchestration before November.

'I should be very glad if, upon your return, you would drop over to our place. I should like to play the piece for you. We are staying at the Honeyman Estate, Huntingdon, Long Island, and only forty miles from New York, so that you can easily reach us...'

Rachmaninov completed the *Symphonic Dances* between 22 September and 29 October 1940, dedicating the work to Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra, who agreed to give the work's premiere early in 1941. Rachmaninov met with Ormandy and the orchestra, explaining the dedication of his work to them with great warmth – and alluding to his admiration for the Russian opera singer, Feodor Chaliapin (1873-1938): 'When I was a young man, I idolised Chaliapin. He was my ideal, and when I thought of composition I thought of song and Chaliapin. Now he is gone. Today, when I think of composing, my thoughts turn to you...'

The work's premiere took place on 3 January 1941, and was met with a tepid critical response. Yet the critics may have been too swift to dismiss the *Symphonic Dances* as nostalgic reworkings of old ideas, when in fact there is much that is fresh and masterful in each movement. This was not a desperate last gasp, but a vigorous and assured final statement.

The glittering, witty first dance, representing Midday, is rich in musical allusion. Rachmaninov's use of the alto saxophone for a central solo recalls Prokofiev's prominent use of the instrument in *Romeo and Juliet* (1935). More overt is Rachmaninov's reference to his own First Symphony of 1895 – a wry, rather brave quotation given that the symphony's premiere was so terrible that it had triggered in the composer a nervous breakdown. The principal theme of the First Symphony was based on Russian liturgical music, and this represents one of several allusions to church music in the Dances.

The Dances are not a literal depiction of a day passing, but symbolise the passage of human life. Apt, then, that the First Symphony should be quoted early in the work. The second dance, a waltz, was

intended to conjure up *Twilight*, and, there is a languorous, jazz-like quality to the music, with its sinuous woodwind solos, that perfectly evokes this time of day. Yet there is a darker undercurrent to the movement, too; a chilly breeze reminding the revellers that night is on its way.

The third dance evokes *Midnight* – representing death. For this movement, Rachmaninov returned once more to the *Dies irae* from the Roman Catholic Requiem Mass: a haunting section of plainchant to which he had alluded in numerous works, including his *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* (1934). He also quotes *Blagosloveni yesi, Gospodi* ('Blessed be the Lord') from his 1915 choral work, *All-night Vigil*. The coda is marked, *Alleluia*, and the *Dies irae* must ultimately submit to this more hopeful material, in a key that was important to the composer: D minor. This life-affirming conclusion is all the more moving when one remembers that this was Rachmaninov's final work. Fittingly, he wrote at the end of the score: 'I thank thee, Lord.'

© Joanna Wyld



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  
Sarah Oates  
Imogen East  
Eleanor Wilkinson  
Adrián Varela  
Lulu Fuller  
Eugene Lee  
Victoria Irish  
Karin Tilch  
Soong Choo  
Minhee Lee<sup>1</sup>  
Molly Cockburn<sup>2</sup>  
Erzsebet Racz  
Laura Dixon<sup>1</sup>  
Julian Trafford<sup>2</sup>  
Charlotte Reid<sup>2</sup>  
Paula Muldoon  
Tereza Privratska<sup>1</sup>  
Caroline Frenkel<sup>2</sup>  
Minsi Yang<sup>1</sup>

#### 2ND VIOLIN

Emily Davis  
Tamás Sándor<sup>1</sup>  
Fiona Cornall  
Samantha Reagan  
Susan Hedger  
Gideon Robinson  
Helena Buckie<sup>1</sup>  
Jan Regulski<sup>2</sup>  
Julian Milone  
Sarah Thornett<sup>2</sup>  
Gillian Costello<sup>1</sup>  
Teresa Pople  
Paula Clifton-Everest<sup>1</sup>  
Helen Cochrane  
Nuno Carapina<sup>1</sup>  
Marina Gillam<sup>2</sup>  
Susan Bowran<sup>2</sup>  
Joanne Chen<sup>2</sup>  
Franziska Mattshent<sup>1</sup>

#### VIOLA

Yukiko Ogura  
Daniel Palmizio<sup>2</sup>  
Samuel Burstin  
Richard Waters  
Gwendolyn Fisher  
Bryony Gibson-Cornish<sup>2</sup>  
Michael Turner  
Cheremie Hamilton-Miller<sup>1</sup>  
Amanda Verner<sup>1</sup>  
Lucia Ortiz Saucó  
Linda Kidwell<sup>2</sup>  
Stan Popov<sup>1</sup>  
Rebecca Carrington  
Graeme McKean  
Louise Hawker<sup>1</sup>  
Pamela Ferriman<sup>2</sup>

#### CELLO

Timothy Walden  
Karen Stephenson  
Eric Villeminoy  
Richard Birchall  
Anne Baker  
Ella Rundle<sup>2</sup>  
Ashok Klouda<sup>1</sup>  
Deirdre Cooper  
Steffan Morris<sup>1</sup>  
Lauren Steel<sup>2</sup>  
Rowena Calvert<sup>1</sup>  
Morwenna Del Mar<sup>2</sup>  
Joe Zeitlin<sup>1</sup>  
Yvonne-Marie Parsons<sup>2</sup>

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Christian Geldsetzer<sup>2</sup>  
Gareth Sheppard  
Michael Fuller  
Adam Wynter<sup>1</sup>  
Simon Oliver  
Jeremy Watt  
Andrew Vickers  
Ivan Rubido Gonzalez<sup>2</sup>  
Lachlan Radford<sup>1</sup>

#### FLUTE

Samuel Coles  
June Scott  
Keith Bragg<sup>1</sup>

#### PICCOLO

Keith Bragg

#### OBOE

Gordon Hunt  
Timothy Rundle<sup>1</sup>  
Fraser MacAulay<sup>2</sup>

#### COR ANGLAIS

Jill Crowther

#### CLARINET

Frank Celata<sup>2</sup>  
Jordan Black<sup>1</sup>  
Jennifer McLaren<sup>2</sup>  
Victor de la Rosa Lorente<sup>1</sup>  
Laurent Ben Slimane<sup>1</sup>

#### BASS CLARINET

Laurent Ben Slimane

#### ALTO SAX

Simon Haram<sup>2</sup>

#### BASSOON

Robin O'Neill  
Luke Tucker<sup>2</sup>  
Dominic Tyler<sup>1</sup>

#### CONTRA BASSOON

Luke Whitehead

#### HORN

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Kira Doherty  
Geremia Iezzi<sup>1</sup>  
Jonathan Maloney  
Carsten Williams<sup>2</sup>  
Helena Jacklin<sup>1</sup>  
Daniel Curzon<sup>2</sup>

#### TRUMPET

Jason Evans  
Mark Calder  
Robert Farley

#### TROMBONE

Roger Cutts<sup>2</sup>  
Dudley Bright<sup>1</sup>  
Philip White

#### BASS TROMBONE

James Buckle<sup>2</sup>  
Daniel West<sup>1</sup>

#### TUBA

Peter Smith<sup>1</sup>  
Sasha Koushik-Jalali<sup>2</sup>

#### TIMPANI

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Edward Stephan<sup>1</sup>

#### PERCUSSION

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Louis-Pierre Janquin<sup>1</sup>  
Peter Fry  
Kevin Hathway<sup>2</sup>  
David Corkhill  
Cameron Sinclair  
Christopher Terian  
Jacqueline Kendle<sup>2</sup>

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Manon Morris<sup>1</sup>  
Louisa Duggan<sup>2</sup>  
Lucy Haslar<sup>1</sup>

#### PIANO

Helen Crayford<sup>2</sup>

#### CELESTE

Shelagh Sutherland<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> = Performer on Symphony No. 3 only

<sup>2</sup> = Performer on *Symphonic Dances* only



Photo: © Keith Saunders

## 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.

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.

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