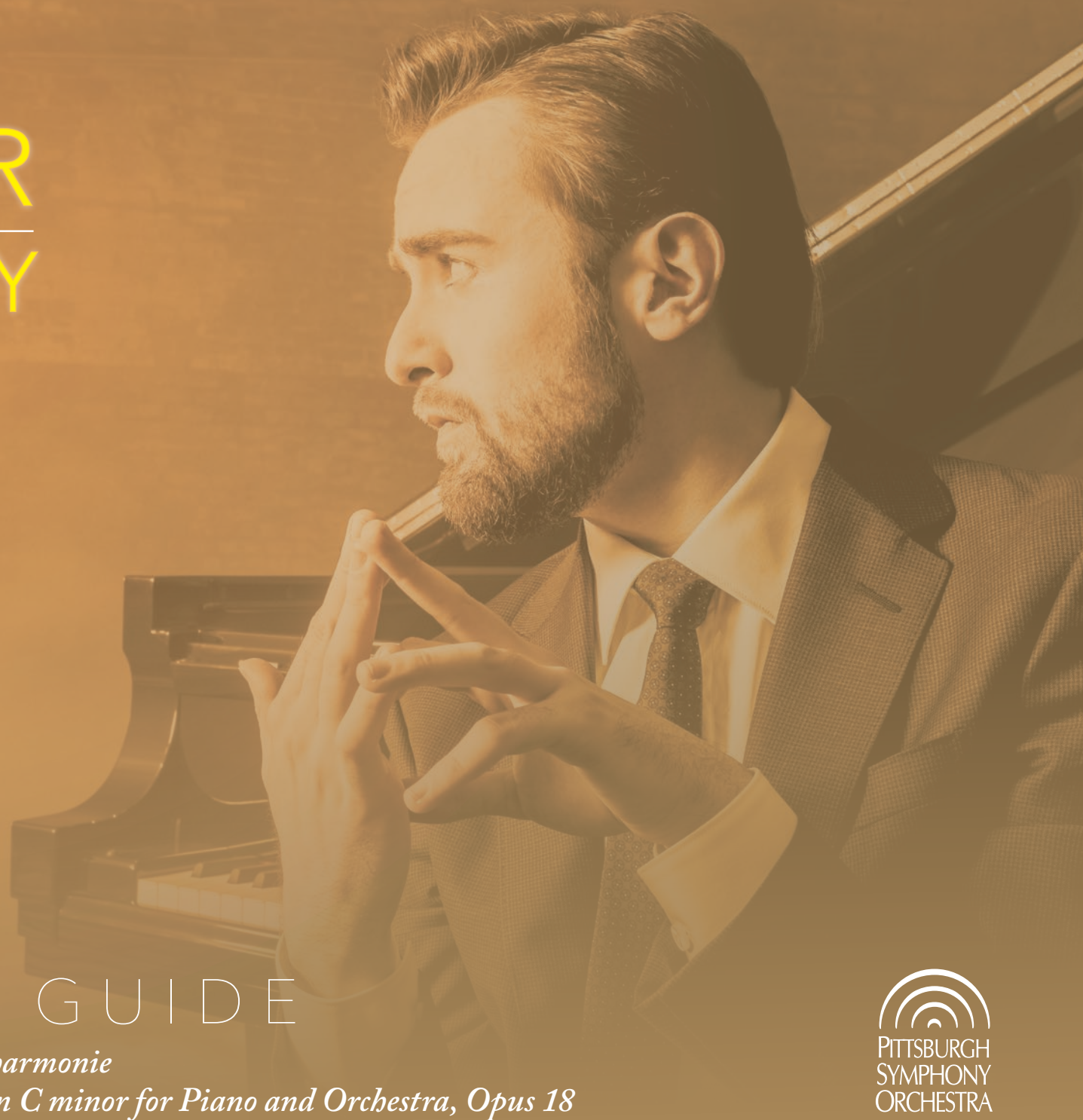




SUMMER
with the
SYMPHONY



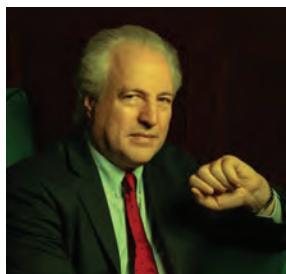
CONCERT GUIDE

Recorded live at the Berlin Philharmonie

Rachmaninoff: Concerto No. 2 in C minor for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 18



MANFRED HONECK'S NOTES ON RACHMANINOFF'S PIANO CONCERTO NO. 2



As part of our Summer with the Symphony programming, this is the second of our special two-week pairing of “Piano Masters.” I’m excited to share with you a most memorable performance of the Rachmaninoff Second Piano Concerto by the great Daniil Trifonov, from our May 2016 tour performance at the Berlin Philharmonie.

Like the Tchaikovsky Concerto that opened our “Piano Masters” mini-series, the Rachmaninoff Second Piano Concerto similarly does not need much introduction. It’s been described countless

times as amongst the greatest piano concertos ever written, widely popular and instantly recognizable. With its bell-like opening chords, utterly sublime second movement, and fleet finale, it’s easy to presume that this piece was surely the work of an assured and confident composer. What you may be surprised to uncover, however, is the less than ideal circumstances that accompanied the genesis of this great work. Let me share just a bit with you.

The year was 1897, and Rachmaninoff had just experienced the disastrous premiere of his First Symphony. All reports indicate that it was truly an appalling performance; so much so that Rachmaninoff walked out of the concert and resorted to hiding in a stairwell with his hands over his ears. He later described it as “the most agonizing hour of my life.” And in that moment, Rachmaninoff’s confidence, momentum and entire career seemed to suddenly deflate. Crushed by the overwhelmingly negative response, which was further compounded by problems in his personal life, Rachmaninoff fell into a deep despair. He also entered a severe writer’s block, unable to compose, which would afflict him over the next three years.

As Rachmaninoff grew more and more despondent, friends began to suggest various remedies. Twice, he visited Leo Tolstoy, hoping that contact with the great novelist might shake him out of his depression and somehow trigger a return of his creativity. Sadly, this failed. Concerned that Rachmaninoff was on the brink of a total nervous collapse, his family suggested that he visit Dr. Nicholas Dahl, a Moscow physician who was gaining notoriety as a specialist in curing through hypnosis. In January 1900, Rachmaninoff began to see Dahl, who was also a gifted amateur musician. The immediate tasks were to restore Rachmaninoff’s appetite, improve his sleep, revive his inner confidence, and get him composing again; specifically, a new piano concerto that had been promised to the London Philharmonic. Through a combination of psychotherapy and hypnosis, Dahl remarkably succeeded in enabling Rachmaninoff to rebuild himself. “Although it may seem incredible,” Rachmaninoff wrote many years later, “this cure helped me. New musical ideas began to stir within me—far more than I needed for my concerto.”

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Manfred Honeck leads the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra with soloist Daniil Trifonov, piano, at the Berlin Philharmonie, May 2016.

As luck would have it, the composition of the Second Piano Concerto would mark Rachmaninoff’s full recovery. Rachmaninoff, himself, was at the keyboard for the work’s premiere. He played magnificently, and it was a major triumph. With the Second Piano Concerto, Rachmaninoff’s career was saved, and his status as a world-class composer was reaffirmed. It is perhaps no wonder that Rachmaninoff would dedicate the Concerto to Dahl.

The Concerto became Rachmaninoff’s new calling card, and he would go on to perform the concerto around the world. Interestingly, with this work, it is clear that Rachmaninoff had not only overcome his writer’s block, but also found a new voice as a composer. Glorious melody after glorious melody abound; there is an effortless flow of ideas; and the dialogue between the solo piano and orchestra is masterful. Even today, Rachmaninoff’s Second Concerto is regarded as one of the crowning works and most treasured concertos in the entire piano repertoire.

We’re so pleased to showcase the remarkable talents of Daniil Trifonov as soloist in this performance of the Rachmaninoff Second Piano Concerto. His superb technique, poetic sensitivity and revelatory artistry make his interpretation of this beloved Concerto truly awe-inspiring.

Photo of Daniil Trifonov on cover and on pg. 5 by Dario Acosta. Photo of Manfred Honeck by George Lange.

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PROGRAM

SUMMER WITH THE SYMPHONY: PIANO MASTERS

JULY 17, 2020 AT 8:00 P.M.

RECORDED LIVE AT THE BERLIN PHILHARMONIE: MAY 22, 2016

Manfred Honeck, conductor
Daniil Trifonov, piano

Sergei Rachmaninoff Concerto No. 2 in C minor for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 18
I. Moderato
II. Adagio sostenuto
III. Allegro scherzando
 Mr. Trifonov



Daniil Trifonov performing the Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto No. 2 with the PSO in Berlin, May 2016.

ABOUT THE MUSIC



SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

When he was old and as mellow as he would ever get, Sergei Rachmaninoff wrote these words about his early years: “Although I had to fight for recognition, as most younger men must, although I have experienced all the troubles and sorrow which precede success, and although I know how important it is for an artist to be spared such troubles, I realize, when I look back on my early life, that it was enjoyable, in spite of all its vexations and bitterness.” The greatest “bitterness” of Rachmaninoff’s career was the total failure of his Symphony No. 1 at its premiere in 1897, a traumatic disappointment which thrust him into such a mental depression that he suffered a complete nervous collapse.

An aunt of Rachmaninoff, Varvara Satina, had recently been successfully treated for an emotional disturbance by Dr. Nicholas Dahl, a Moscow physician who was familiar with the latest psychiatric discoveries in France and Vienna, and it was arranged that Rachmaninoff should visit him. Years later, in his memoirs, the composer recalled the malady and the treatment: “[Following the performance of the First Symphony] something within me snapped. A paralyzing apathy possessed me. I did nothing at all and found no pleasure in anything. Half my days were spent on a couch sighing over my ruined life. My only occupation consisted in giving a few piano lessons to keep myself alive.” For more than a year, Rachmaninoff’s condition persisted. He began his daily visits to Dr. Dahl in January 1900. “My relatives had informed Dr. Dahl that he must by all means cure me of my apathetic condition and bring about such results that I would again be able to compose. Dahl had inquired what kind of composition was desired of me, and he was informed ‘a concerto for pianoforte.’ In consequence, I heard repeated, day after day, the same hypnotic formula, as I lay half somnolent in an armchair in Dr. Dahl’s consulting room: ‘You will start to compose a concerto — You will work with the greatest of ease — The composition will be of excellent quality.’ Always it was the same, without interruption.... Although it may seem impossible to believe,” Rachmaninoff continued, “this treatment really helped me. I started to compose again at the beginning of the summer.” In gratitude, he dedicated the new Concerto to Dr. Dahl.

The C minor Concerto begins with eight bell-tone chords from the solo piano that herald the surging main theme, announced by the strings. A climax is achieved before a sudden drop in intensity makes way for the arching second theme, initiated by the soloist. The development, concerned largely with the first theme, is propelled by a martial rhythm that continues with undiminished energy into the recapitulation. The second theme returns in the horn before the martial mood is re-established to close the movement. The *Adagio* is a long-limbed nocturne with a running commentary of sweeping figurations from the piano. The finale resumes the marching rhythmic motion of the first movement with its introduction and bold main theme. Standing in bold relief to this vigorous music is the lyrical second theme, one of the best-loved melodies in the entire orchestral literature, a grand inspiration in the ripest Romantic tradition. These two themes, the martial and the romantic, alternate for the remainder of the movement. The coda rises through a finely crafted line of mounting tension to bring this work to an electrifying close.

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

DANIIL TRIFONOV

Grammy Award winning Russian pianist Daniil Trifonov – winner of *Musical America's* 2019 Artist of the Year award – has made a spectacular ascent of the classical music world as a solo artist, champion of the concerto repertoire, chamber and vocal collaborator, and composer. Combining consummate technique with rare sensitivity and depth, his performances are a perpetual source of awe. “He has everything and more ... tenderness and also the demonic element. I never heard anything like that,” marveled pianist Martha Argerich. Trifonov recently added a first Grammy Award to his already considerable string of honors, winning Best Instrumental Solo Album of 2018 with *Transcendental*, a Liszt collection that marked his third title as an exclusive Deutsche Grammophon artist. As *The Times of London* notes, he is “without question the most astounding pianist of our age.”

This fall brings the release of *Destination Rachmaninov: Arrival*. Featuring the composer's First and Third Concertos, this is the third volume of the Deutsche Grammophon series Trifonov recorded with the Philadelphia Orchestra and Yannick Nézet-Séguin, following *Destination Rachmaninov: Departure*, named *BBC Music's* 2019 Concerto Recording of the Year, and *Rachmaninov: Variations*, a 2015 Grammy nominee. Later this fall, Trifonov inaugurates his multi-faceted, season-long tenure as 2019-20 Artist-in-Residence of the New York Philharmonic with accounts of Scriabin's Piano Concerto under Jaap van Zweden. The residency also sees him take part in the New York premiere of his own Piano Quintet, and rejoin the music director and orchestra for Mozart's 25th Piano Concerto, first in New York and then on a European tour that includes a stop at London's Barbican. The Scriabin concerto is the vehicle for the pianist's return to the New World Symphony under Michael Tilson Thomas, with whom he reunites for Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and for Rachmaninov's Fourth with the San Francisco Symphony, both at the orchestra's home and on tour in Europe. Other upcoming orchestral highlights include Alexander Mosolov's First Piano Concerto with the Nashville Symphony and Beethoven's First and Fifth Piano Concertos with the Philadelphia Orchestra and Nézet-Séguin, as heard on the pianist's DG Rachmaninov series. In recital this season, Trifonov tours a solo program of Bach transcriptions and *The Art of Fugue* to New York's Lincoln Center, Chicago's Orchestra Hall, Boston's Celebrity Series, and destinations in Europe, besides partnering his mentor and fellow pianist Sergei Babayan at Carnegie Hall, Cornell University, Eastman School of Music, and in Dortmund, Germany.

Trifonov launched the New York Philharmonic's 2018-19 season with back-to-back performances, playing Ravel's G-major Concerto at the opening-night gala and Beethoven's “Emperor” Concerto the following night. He revisited the Ravel on tour with the London Symphony and Sir Simon Rattle, and during a residency at Vienna's Musikverein, where he appeared with the Vienna Philharmonic and gave the Austrian premiere of his own Piano Concerto. The “Emperor” also took him to the London Symphony, National Symphony, Cincinnati Symphony, and Cleveland Orchestra, with which he toured Asia. Other orchestral



highlights included performances of Scriabin's concerto during a season-long residency with the Berlin Philharmonic, Prokofiev's Third with the Chicago Symphony, Rachmaninov's Third with the Boston Symphony, and Schumann's concerto with longtime collaborator Valery Gergiev and the Met Orchestra at Carnegie Hall. Trifonov gave solo recitals of Beethoven, Schumann, and Prokofiev on Carnegie's mainstage and in Berlin, where his Berlin Philharmonic residency featured multiple solo and chamber performances. These included accounts of his own Piano Quintet, of which he also gave the Cincinnati premiere with the Ariel Quartet, and a duo recital with German baritone Matthias Goerne, with whom he also appeared at New York's 92nd Street Y.

Other highlights of recent seasons include a seven-concert, season-long Carnegie Hall “Perspectives” series, crowned by a performance of Trifonov's own piano concerto with Gergiev and the Mariinsky Orchestra; curating similar series at the Vienna Konzerthaus and in San Francisco, where the pianist gave a season-closing performance with the San Francisco Symphony; playing Tchaikovsky's First under Riccardo Muti in the historic gala finale of the Chicago Symphony's 125th anniversary celebrations; headlining complete Rachmaninoff

concerto cycles at the New York Philharmonic's Rachmaninoff Festival, with London's Philharmonia Orchestra, and on tour with the Munich Philharmonic; undertaking Asian tours with the Czech Philharmonic and Rome's Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia and European tours with the London Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and La Scala Orchestra; and making debuts at London's BBC Proms and with the Chicago Symphony, Boston Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, Montreal Symphony, Rome's Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, London's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, the Berlin Staatskapelle, and the Berlin Philharmonic, where he headlined the orchestra's famous New Year's Eve concert under Sir Simon Rattle. Since making solo recital debuts at Carnegie Hall, London's Wigmore Hall, Vienna's Musikverein, Japan's Suntory Hall, and Paris's Salle Pleyel in 2012-13, Trifonov has given solo recitals at venues including the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C., Boston's Celebrity Series, London's Barbican and Royal Festival and Queen Elizabeth halls, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw (Master Piano Series), Berlin's Philharmonie, Munich's Herkulessaal, Bavaria's Schloss Elmau, Zurich's Tonhalle, the Lucerne Piano Festival, the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, the Théâtre des Champs Élysées and Auditorium du Louvre in Paris, Barcelona's Palau de la Musica, Tokyo's Opera City, the Seoul Arts Center, and Melbourne's Recital Centre.

The 2013-14 season saw the release of *Trifonov: The Carnegie Recital*, the pianist's first recording as an exclusive Deutsche Grammophon artist; captured live at his sold-out 2013 Carnegie Hall recital debut, the album scored a Grammy nomination. Besides the Grammy

Award-winning *Transcendental*, *Destination Rachmaninov: Departure*, and the Grammy-nominated *Rachmaninov Variations*, Deutsche Grammophon has also issued *Chopin Evocations*, which pairs the composer's works with those by the 20th-century composers he influenced. Trifonov's discography also features a Chopin album for Decca and a recording of Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto with Gergiev and the Mariinsky Orchestra on the ensemble's own label.

It was during the 2010-11 season that Trifonov won medals at three of the music world's most prestigious competitions, taking Third Prize in Warsaw's Chopin Competition, First Prize in Tel Aviv's Rubinstein Competition, and both First Prize and Grand Prix – an additional honor bestowed on the best overall competitor in any category – in Moscow's Tchaikovsky Competition. In 2013 he was awarded the prestigious Franco Abbiati Prize for Best Instrumental Soloist by Italy's foremost music critics, and in 2016 he was named *Gramophone's* Artist of the Year.

Born in Nizhny Novgorod in 1991, Trifonov began his musical training at the age of five, and went on to attend Moscow's Gnessin School of Music as a student of Tatiana Zelikman, before pursuing his piano studies with Sergei Babayan at the Cleveland Institute of Music. He has also studied composition, and continues to write for piano, chamber ensemble, and orchestra. When he premiered his own Piano Concerto in 2013, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* marveled: "Even having seen it, one cannot quite believe it. Such is the artistry of pianist-composer Daniil Trifonov."

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Rachmaninoff: Concerto No. 2 in C minor for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 18

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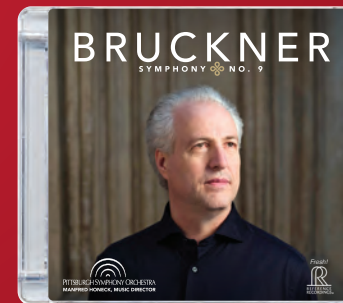
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