

# Season 2017-2018

**Thursday, April 12, at 7:30**

**Friday, April 13, at 2:00**

**Saturday, April 14, at 8:00**

**Sunday, April 15, at 2:00**

## The Philadelphia Orchestra

**Yannick Nézet-Séguin** Conductor

**Daniil Trifonov** Piano

**Rachmaninoff** Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor, Op. 18  
(April 12 and 13 only)

I. Moderato

II. Adagio sostenuto

III. Allegro scherzando

**Rachmaninoff** Piano Concerto No. 3 in D minor, Op. 30  
(April 14 and 15 only)

I. Allegro ma non tanto

II. Intermezzo: Adagio—

III. Finale: Alla breve

### Intermission

**Bartók** Concerto for Orchestra

I. Introduzione: Andante non troppo—Allegro  
vivace

II. Giuoco delle coppie: Allegretto scherzando

III. Elegia: Andante non troppo

IV. Intermezzo interrotto: Allegretto

V. Finale: Pesante—Presto

The April 12 and 13 program runs approximately 1 hour, 40 minutes.

The April 14 and 15 program runs approximately 1 hour, 50 minutes.

*Rachmaninoff's Piano Concertos Nos. 2 and 3 are being recorded live for future release by Deutsche Grammophon. We ask for your cooperation in making this project a success. Please make every effort to minimize noise during the concert.*

The April 12 concert is sponsored by the

**Louis N. Cassett Foundation.**

The April 12 concert is also sponsored by

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The April 14 concert is sponsored by

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Philadelphia Orchestra concerts are broadcast on WRTI 90.1 FM on Sunday afternoons at 1 PM, and are repeated on Monday evenings at 7 PM on WRTI HD 2. Visit [www.wrti.org](http://www.wrti.org) to listen live or for more details.

# The Philadelphia Orchestra

Jeffrey Griffin



The Philadelphia Orchestra is one of the preeminent orchestras in the world, renowned for its distinctive sound, desired for its keen ability to capture the hearts and imaginations of audiences, and admired for a legacy of imagination and innovation on and off the concert stage. The Orchestra is inspiring the future and transforming its rich tradition of achievement, sustaining the highest level of artistic quality, but also challenging—and exceeding—that level, by creating powerful musical experiences for audiences at home and around the world.

Music Director Yannick Nézet-Séguin's connection to the Orchestra's musicians has been praised by both concertgoers and critics since his inaugural season in 2012. Under his leadership the Orchestra returned to recording, with three celebrated CDs on the prestigious Deutsche Grammophon label, continuing its history of recording success. The Orchestra also reaches thousands of listeners on the radio with weekly broadcasts on WRTI-FM and SiriusXM.

Philadelphia is home and the Orchestra continues to discover new and inventive ways to nurture its relationship with its loyal patrons at its home in the Kimmel Center, and also with those who enjoy the Orchestra's area performances at the Mann Center, Penn's Landing, and other cultural, civic, and learning venues. The Orchestra maintains a strong commitment to collaborations with cultural and community organizations on a regional and national level, all of which create greater access and engagement with classical music as an art form.

The Philadelphia Orchestra serves as a catalyst for cultural activity across Philadelphia's many communities, building an offstage presence as strong as its onstage one. With Nézet-Séguin, a dedicated body of musicians, and one of the nation's richest arts ecosystems, the Orchestra has launched its **HEAR** initiative, a portfolio of integrated initiatives that promotes **H**ealth, champions music **E**ducation, eliminates barriers to **A**ccessing the orchestra, and maximizes

impact through **R**esearch. The Orchestra's award-winning Collaborative Learning programs engage over 50,000 students, families, and community members through programs such as Play!Ns, side-by-sides, PopUP concerts, free Neighborhood Concerts, School Concerts, and residency work in Philadelphia and abroad.

Through concerts, tours, residencies, presentations, and recordings, The Philadelphia Orchestra is a global ambassador for Philadelphia and for the US. Having been the first American orchestra to perform in China, in 1973 at the request of President Nixon, the ensemble today boasts new five-year partnerships with Beijing's National Centre for the Performing Arts and the Shanghai Media Group. In 2018 the Orchestra travels to Europe and Israel. The Orchestra annually performs at Carnegie Hall while also enjoying summer residencies in Saratoga Springs, NY, and Vail, CO. For more information on The Philadelphia Orchestra, please visit [www.philorch.org](http://www.philorch.org).

# Music Director

Chris Lee



Music Director **Yannick Nézet-Séguin** is now confirmed to lead The Philadelphia Orchestra through the 2025-26 season, an extraordinary and significant long-term commitment. Additionally, he becomes the third music director of the Metropolitan Opera beginning with the 2018-19 season; he is currently music director designate. Yannick, who holds the Walter and Leonore Annenberg Chair, is an inspired leader of The Philadelphia Orchestra. His intensely collaborative style, deeply rooted musical curiosity, and boundless enthusiasm, paired with a fresh approach to orchestral programming, have been heralded by critics and audiences alike. The *New York Times* has called him “phenomenal,” adding that under his baton, “the ensemble, famous for its glowing strings and homogenous richness, has never sounded better.”

Yannick has established himself as a musical leader of the highest caliber and one of the most thrilling talents of his generation. He is in his 10th and final season as music director of the Rotterdam Philharmonic, and he has been artistic director and principal conductor of Montreal’s Orchestre Métropolitain since 2000. In summer 2017 he became an honorary member of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe. He was also principal guest conductor of the London Philharmonic from 2008 to 2014. He has made wildly successful appearances with the world’s most revered ensembles and has conducted critically acclaimed performances at many of the leading opera houses.

Yannick and Deutsche Grammophon (DG) enjoy a long-term collaboration. Under his leadership The Philadelphia Orchestra returned to recording with three CDs on that label. He continues fruitful recording relationships with the Rotterdam Philharmonic on DG, EMI Classics, and BIS Records; the London Philharmonic for the LPO label; and the Orchestre Métropolitain for ATMA Classique. In Yannick’s inaugural season The Philadelphia Orchestra returned to the radio airwaves, with weekly Sunday afternoon broadcasts on WRTI-FM.

A native of Montreal, Yannick studied piano, conducting, composition, and chamber music at Montreal’s Conservatory of Music and continued his studies with renowned conductor Carlo Maria Giulini; he also studied choral conducting with Joseph Flummerfelt at Westminster Choir College. Among Yannick’s honors are a appointment as Companion of the Order of Canada; *Musical America’s* 2016 Artist of the Year; Canada’s National Arts Centre Award; the Prix Denise-Pelletier; and honorary doctorates from the University of Quebec in Montreal, the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, and Westminster Choir College of Rider University in Princeton, NJ.

To read Yannick’s full bio, please visit [philorch.org/conductor](http://philorch.org/conductor).

# Soloist



Dario Acosta/Deutsche Grammophon

Russian pianist **Daniil Trifonov**, *Gramophone's* 2016 Artist of the Year, has made a spectacular ascent in the world of classical music as a solo artist, a champion of the concerto repertoire, a collaborator in chamber music and song, and a composer. He first appeared with The Philadelphia Orchestra at Saratoga in 2013 and made his subscription debut in 2015, just weeks after Deutsche Grammophon (DG) released the Grammy-nominated recording *Rachmaninoff Variations* with him, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, and The Philadelphia Orchestra.

Focusing on Chopin in the 2017-18 season, Mr. Trifonov releases *Chopin: Evocation*, his fourth album as an exclusive DG artist, which includes works by Chopin and 20th-century composers who were greatly influenced by the Polish master. He gives more than 20 recitals on the same theme across the US, Europe, and Asia, including one at Carnegie Hall as part of a seven-concert, season-long Perspectives series that he curates. He also gives performances of his own Piano Concerto with longtime collaborator Valery Gergiev leading the Mariinsky Orchestra and Giancarlo Guerrero and the Detroit Symphony; curates a series of recitals and orchestral appearances at the Vienna Konzerthaus; and tours Asia and Europe. In addition to these current concerts, he performs Rachmaninoff with Mr. Gergiev and the Munich Philharmonic, Peter Oundjian and the Toronto Symphony, and Michael Tilson Thomas in season-closing performances with the San Francisco Symphony,

Mr. Trifonov's recordings with DG also include *Transcendental*, a double album of Liszt's complete concert etudes, and *Trifonov: The Carnegie Recital*, a recording of his Carnegie Hall recital debut, which won both an ECHO Klassik Award and a Grammy nomination. His discography also features a Chopin album for Decca and a recording of Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto with Mr. Gergiev and the Mariinsky Orchestra on the ensemble's own label. Born in Nizhny Novgorod in 1991, Mr. Trifonov attended Moscow's Gnessin School of Music before pursuing 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.

# Framing the Program

## Parallel Events

**1900**

**Music**

**Rachmaninoff** Elgar

Piano Concerto *Dream of*

No. 2 *Gerontius*

**Literature**

Chekov

*Uncle Vanya*

**Art**

Sargent

*The Sitwell*

*Family*

**History**

Boxer Rebellion

in China

The 23-year-old Sergei Rachmaninoff was utterly shattered in 1897 by the dismal reception of his First Symphony. He withdrew the work, stopped composing, and became seriously depressed. Four years later the enormous success that his Second Piano Concerto enjoyed from critics and audiences alike helped him to regain his confidence. His Third Piano Concerto, which he premiered in New York City, followed eight years later. Rachmaninoff performed both pieces many times with The Philadelphia Orchestra and recorded them here as well. At these concerts, the young Russian pianist Daniil Trifonov joins Yannick and the Philadelphians in performances that are being recorded live for Deutsche Grammophon, thus continuing the celebrated legacy of Rachmaninoff's music and the Orchestra.

**1909**

**Music**

**Rachmaninoff** Strauss

Piano Concerto *Elektra*

No. 3

**Literature**

Wells

*Tono-Bungay*

**Art**

Matisse

*The Dance*

**History**

Peary reaches

the North Pole

In 1940 Béla Bartók left his native Hungary and war-torn Europe to live for the remaining five years of his life in America. After an extended period of writer's block, he received a welcome commission that resulted in the dazzling Concerto for Orchestra, his most frequently performed composition. The five-movement work showcases the collective virtuosity of a full symphony orchestra, a perfect vehicle for The Philadelphians.

**1943**

**Music**

**Bartók** Copland

Concerto for *A Lincoln Portrait*

Orchestra

**Literature**

Sinclair

*Dragon's Teeth*

**Art**

Chagall

*The Juggler*

**History**

Penicillin

first used

successfully

The Philadelphia Orchestra is the only American orchestra with weekly broadcasts on Sirius XM's *Symphony Hall*, Channel 76, made possible through support from the Damon Runyon Cancer Research Foundation on behalf of David and Sandy Marshall. Broadcasts are heard on Mondays at 7 PM, Thursdays at 12 AM, and Saturdays at 4 PM.

# The Music



**Sergei Rachmaninoff**  
**Born in Semyonovo,**  
**Russia, April 1, 1873**  
**Died in Beverly Hills,**  
**California, March 28, 1943**

Sergei Rachmaninoff pursued multiple professional careers and juggled different personal identities, often out of joint with the realities of his time and place. He was a Russian who fled his country after the 1917 Revolution and who lived in America and Europe for the rest of his life. He was a great composer who, in order to support himself and his family, spent most of his time performing, both as a conductor and as one of the towering pianists of the 20th century. And he was a Romantic composer writing in the age of burgeoning Modernism, his music embraced by audiences but seemingly from a bygone world alien to the stylistic innovations of Debussy, Schoenberg, Ives, Stravinsky, and other contemporaries.

**Three Professions** Rachmaninoff worried at times that his triple professional profile might cancel one another out: "I have chased three hares," he remarked. "Can I be certain that I have captured one?" (This is based on an old Russian proverb that warned against the problem of chasing two hares, hence spreading oneself too thin.) He was an unusually accomplished performer in two domains at a time when there was an ever increasing separation between performer and composer. Rachmaninoff, in the great tradition of Mozart and Beethoven through Strauss and Mahler, was the principal performing advocate of his own music.

And yet even when he was out of sync with time and place, Rachmaninoff pressed on with a grueling performance schedule (sometimes 70 or more concerts in a year) and composed some of the most popular and enduring works of the first half of the 20th century. That during the latter half of his career he did most of this with The Philadelphia Orchestra makes the connections here all the more personal and poignant.

**The Last Romantic?** Rachmaninoff acknowledged his temporal and geographical homelessness. In an interview from the late 1930s he said:

I feel like a ghost in a world grown alien. I cannot cast out the old way of writing, and I cannot acquire the new. I have made intense effort to feel the musical manner of today, but it will not come to me. . . . I cannot cast out my musical gods in a moment and

bend the knee to new ones. Even with the disaster of living through what has befallen the Russia where I spent my happiest years, yet I always feel that my own music and my reactions to all music, remained spiritually the same, unendingly obedient in trying to create beauty.

It was exactly the personal, expressive, and spiritual that so often gives his music its instantly recognizable sound, drawn from Russian folksong, Orthodox liturgical chant, and a quest for beauty. Two years before his death he declared: "A composer's music should express the country of his birth, his love affairs, his religion, the books which have influenced him, the pictures he loves. It should be the product of the sum total of a composer's experience."

Rachmaninoff's unusual position as a late Romantic—perhaps even the last Romantic—was shrewdly assessed by Richard Taruskin in his monumental *Oxford History of Western Music*:

There were many, during the 1920s and 1930s, who regarded him as the greatest living composer, precisely because he was the only one who seemed capable of successfully maintaining the familiar and prestigious style of the nineteenth-century "classics" into the twentieth century. The fact that he was in fact capable of doing so, moreover, and that his style was as distinctive as any contemporary's, could be used to refute the modernist argument that traditional styles had been exhausted.

Taruskin puts his finger on the difference between a conservative composer like Rachmaninoff, who is genuinely popular with audiences, and challenging Modernist composers whose music is widely resisted, but whose stylistic innovations earn them prominent places in history books. Rachmaninoff demonstrated that it was still possible to develop an individual, instantly recognizable, and captivating compositional voice. Samuel Barber, another composer with deep ties to The Philadelphia Orchestra, did something similar, but such figures were rare in the 20th century.

**Rachmaninoff in Russia** Rachmaninoff was born to a well-to-do family that assiduously cultivated his prodigious musical gifts. His mother was his first piano teacher and at age nine he began studies at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, but floundered there. The family finances were declining, as was his parents' marriage,

and he transferred to the Moscow Conservatory, where he thrived. He met leading Russian musicians, studied with some of them, and won the whole-hearted support of his hero, Tchaikovsky.

Upon graduation in the spring of 1892 Rachmaninoff was awarded the Great Gold Medal, a rarely bestowed honor. His career as both pianist and composer was clearly on the rise with impressive works such as the Piano Concerto No. 1, the one-act opera *Aleko* (about which Tchaikovsky enthused), and pieces in a wide variety of other genres. One piano work written at age 18 received almost too much attention: the C-sharp minor Prelude, the extraordinary popularity of which meant he found himself having to perform it for the rest of his life.

He seemed on track for a brilliant and charmed career, the true successor to Tchaikovsky. Then things went terribly wrong with the premiere of his Symphony No. 1 in D minor, which proved to be one of the legendary fiascos in music history and a bitter shock to Rachmaninoff just days before his 24th birthday. Alexander Glazunov, an eminent composer and teacher but, according to various reports, a mediocre conductor, led the ill-fated performance in March 1897. The event plunged Rachmaninoff into deep despair: "When the indescribable torture of this performance had at last come to an end, I was a different man."

For some three years Rachmaninoff stopped composing, although he continued to perform as a pianist and began to establish a prominent new career as a conductor. He eventually found therapeutic relief and reemerged in 1901 with the Second Piano Concerto, an instant success. The following year, after surmounting religious obstacles, he married his cousin Natalia Satina, with whom he had two daughters.

His first important tour abroad was to London, where he conducted the orchestral fantasy *The Rock* and played various small piano pieces. (He declined to perform the First Piano Concerto, which would have been the natural vehicle but he considered it a student work until he revised it later.) His conducting career flourished as principal conductor at the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow and he earned some further income teaching. But political ferment in Russia after the Bloody Sunday massacre in January 1905 prompted him to spend more time abroad and concentrate on composition, writing operas in particular. Beginning in late 1906 he and his family spent most of the year in

Dresden, where he finished his Second Symphony, another compositional triumph. This was the piece he chose to conduct for his Philadelphia Orchestra debut in 1909 and it remains a signature work for the Philadelphians to this day. During this first American tour he premiered the Third Piano Concerto in New York and by the end of his three-month stay turned down the offer to become music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. (He would decline again in 1918.)

These years turned out to be Rachmaninoff's most prolific as a composer. He wrote the majority of his music during summers at a pastoral estate called Ivanovka, some 300 miles south of Moscow. But this idyllic world came to an abrupt end with the Russian Revolution in 1917. He and his family left in late December, never to return. The Bolsheviks burned most of Ivanovka to the ground (it has since been reconstructed as a museum). Rachmaninoff sought to recapture his happiest Russian memories in faraway places.

**Life after Russia** Challenged with finding ways to support his family, Rachmaninoff decided to concentrate on his keyboard career and began to make recordings as well, in 1920 signing a lucrative contract with the Victor Talking Machine Company (later RCA). His repertory, in comparison with other star pianists, was initially quite limited, and his technique needed honing in order to compete. These realities left him with far less time to compose and his productivity declined considerably. He wrote some small piano pieces and produced many dazzling arrangements that served him well as encores on his extended American and European tours and that fit easily on 78 rpm recordings, but in his last quarter century there were only six more pieces to which he assigned opus numbers. The Variations on a Theme of Corelli, Op. 42 (1931), was his final solo piano work. The five others are for, or with, orchestra, and all were premiered by The Philadelphia Orchestra. Three Russian Songs, Op. 41, scored for chorus and orchestra, and the Fourth Piano Concerto, Op. 40, premiered on the same concert in March 1927 with Leopold Stokowski conducting. The Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Op. 43, followed in 1934, premiered with Stokowski in Baltimore. His final two works were for orchestra alone: the Symphony No. 3, Op. 44, premiered in 1936 with Stokowski, and the magisterial Symphonic Dances, Op. 45, in 1941 with Eugene Ormandy.

In 1939, to mark the 30th anniversary of his first tour to America and his debut with the Orchestra, the Philadelphians and Ormandy presented a "Rachmaninoff

Cycle" here and in New York. Rachmaninoff played his first three concertos and the Paganini Rhapsody (with Ormandy on the podium), and conducted his Third Symphony (which he recorded at the time), and the earlier choral symphony *The Bells* (1913). In addition, Ormandy led the Second Symphony and *The Isle of the Dead*. After the first concert the *New York Times* reported that when Rachmaninoff came on stage the audience stood in his honor: "Their admiration for him and their enjoyment of his music were more evident there than words can make them here. The occasion was a memorable tribute to a great artist."

The next year Rachmaninoff made his final trip to Europe and then spent his last years in America, touring to the very end. Although his music was briefly banned in the Soviet Union during the early 1930s, after he wrote a damning letter to the *New York Times* attacking the regime, he was prized in his homeland as well. A communication on the occasion of his 70th birthday from the Union of Soviet Composers, signed by Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Khachaturian, Kabalevsky, Glière, and others, offered "cordial greetings to you, renowned master of Russian musical art, glorious continuer of the great traditions of Glinka and Tchaikovsky, creator of works that are dear and close to the hearts of the Russian people and all progressive humanity." Unfortunately, Rachmaninoff did not get the message. He died at his home in Beverly Hills just days before his birthday, the belated end of an era.

## Piano Concerto No. 2

The Second Concerto came at a crucial juncture in Rachmaninoff's career, following a nearly three-year period of compositional paralysis in the wake of the legendary failure of his First Symphony in 1897. Although he stopped composing entirely, he continued to perform as a pianist, to teach, and began to establish a new career as a conductor. In the hopes of getting him back on track as a composer, friends and family put him in touch with Dr. Nikolai Dahl, who was experimenting with hypnosis treatments pioneered in Paris around this time by Freud's teacher Jean-Martin Charcot. Dahl was a gifted amateur musician who took great interest in this case. According to various accounts (perhaps exaggerated), the two met almost daily, with the composer half asleep in the doctor's armchair hearing the mantra: "You will begin to write your concerto. ... You

*Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto was composed from 1900 to 1901.*

*Ossip Gabrilowitsch was pianist in the first Philadelphia Orchestra performance of the Second Concerto, on November 28, 1916, in Cleveland; Leopold Stokowski conducted. Rachmaninoff performed the piece here in 1921 and again on other occasions during the late 1930s and early '40s. The most recent subscription performance was in April 2017 with pianist Nikolai Lugansky and Stéphane Denève, part of the Orchestra's Rachmaninoff Festival.*

*In addition to Rachmaninoff's and Stokowski's 1929 recording of the Concerto, the Orchestra recorded the work in 1956 for CBS with Eugene Istomin and Eugene Ormandy, in 1971 for RCA with Arthur Rubinstein and Ormandy, and in 1989 for EMI with Andrei Gavrilov and Riccardo Muti. The second and third movements only were also recorded by Rachmaninoff and Stokowski for RCA in 1924.*

*Rachmaninoff scored the work for an orchestra of two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, cymbals, side drum), and strings, in addition to the solo piano.*

*Performance time is approximately 35 minutes.*

will work with great facility. ... The concerto will be of excellent quality."

The treatment worked—or at least complemented other factors that got the composer back on his creative track. A close friendship with the phenomenal Russian bass Fyodor Chaliapin was encouraging, especially when the two were approached after a performance by writer Anton Chekhov, who remarked: "Mr. Rachmaninoff, nobody knows you yet but you will be a great man one day." By the summer he was composing the Second Piano Concerto, his first substantial work since the Symphony fiasco; he dedicated the work to Dahl. The second and third of its three movements were completed by the fall and Rachmaninoff premiered them in Moscow that December with his cousin Alexander Siloti conducting. He finished the first movement in May 1901 and performed the entire Concerto in November. The work was greeted enthusiastically and opened the way to Rachmaninoff's most intensive period of compositional activity.

**A Closer Look** To begin the first movement (**Moderato**), the solo piano inexorably intones imposing chords in a gradual crescendo, repeatedly returning to a low F. This opening evokes the peeling of bells, a preoccupation of many Russian composers and one that had roots in Rachmaninoff's childhood experiences. The passage leads to the broad first theme played by the strings. The core of the Concerto is an extended slow middle movement (**Adagio sostenuto**). The pianistic fireworks come to the fore in the finale (**Allegro scherzando**), which intersperses more lyrical themes—indeed the beloved tunes from all three movements were later adapted into popular songs championed by Frank Sinatra and others.

## Piano Concerto No. 3

*Rachmaninoff composed his Piano Concerto No. 3 in 1909.*

*Since Alfred Cortot's appearance in the Orchestra's first performances of the Concerto, in January 1920 with Leopold Stokowski, a number of great pianists have performed it here, including Vladimir Horowitz, William Kapell, Emil Gilels, Van Cliburn, and André Watts. Rachmaninoff himself performed it with the Orchestra in February 1920 (with Stokowski) and in December 1939 (with Eugene Ormandy). The most recent subscription performance was in April 2017 with Nikolai Lugansky and Stéphane Denève, part of the Orchestra's Rachmaninoff Festival.*

*The Orchestra has recorded Rachmaninoff's Third Piano Concerto three times: in 1939 with the composer and Ormandy for RCA, in 1975 with Vladimir Ashkenazy and Ormandy for RCA, and in 1986 with Andrei Gavrilov and Riccardo Muti for EMI.*

*Rachmaninoff's score calls for solo piano, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, suspended cymbal), and strings.*

*The Third Concerto runs approximately 45 minutes in performance.*

Rachmaninoff continued to build on the compositional successes of his Second Piano Concerto and Second Symphony during what turned out to be the most productive period of his career. Now in his mid-30s, he was about to undertake his first tour to America in 1909. In preparation, he decided to write a new concerto, again amidst the calm of the family retreat in Ivanovka.

Rachmaninoff dedicated the Third Concerto to Josef Hofmann, the great Polish-born pianist who would later become the director of the Curtis Institute of Music. Soon after his friend's death, Hofmann commented: "Rachmaninoff was made of steel and gold; steel in his arms, gold in his heart." In the end, Hofmann never performed the piece, which Rachmaninoff premiered as soloist in November 1909 with Walter Damrosch leading the New York Symphony Orchestra. After a few weeks elsewhere on his three-month tour, Rachmaninoff played the piece again in New York, this time with Gustav Mahler conducting the New York Philharmonic. (The competing orchestras later merged.)

**A Closer Look** The unforgettable opening of the Third Piano Concerto (**Allegro ma non tanto**) is simplicity itself: a hauntingly beautiful melody played in octaves that has a chant-like quality. Rachmaninoff stated that it was "borrowed neither from folk song nor from ecclesiastical sources. It just 'got written' . . . I wanted to 'sing' a melody on the piano the way singers sing." Rachmaninoff composed two cadenzas, both of which he played. The short coda returns to the opening melody.

The following **Intermezzo: Adagio** begins with an orchestral section presenting the principal melodic ideas, melancholic in tone, until the piano enters building to a broadly Romantic theme. There is a very brief, fast, scherzo-like section that leads without pause into the thrilling and technically dazzling **Finale: Alla breve**. The movement recycles some of the musical ideas of the first one, making this one of the most unified of the composer's concertos.

—Christopher H. Gibbs

# The Music

## Concerto for Orchestra



**Béla Bartók**  
**Born in Nagyszentmiklós,**  
**Hungary (now Romania),**  
**March 25, 1881**  
**Died in New York,**  
**September 26, 1945**

Leading European composers during the Second World War faced difficult challenges concerning how to create, survive, and behave. Some were forced to flee for their lives, often ending up in America. Others collaborated—reluctantly or opportunistically or enthusiastically—with the Fascist regimes in Germany, Italy, and Spain. A few pursued “inner immigration,” remaining in Europe, trying to keep off the radar screen, and all the while composing works with no immediate prospects for performance.

Béla Bartók pursued an honorable path among unattractive options. A fervent anti-Fascist whose views caused him increasing problems with governmental authorities, exile from his native Hungary was self-imposed. He and his wife moved to America in October 1940, soon after the death of his mother freed him from filial obligations. Life abroad also had challenges. Sporadic income from lectures and performances supplemented a stipend from Columbia University, which gave him an honorary doctorate in November. The university hired him not as a composer but rather to pursue ethnomusicological research in folk music, a field in which he was an extraordinary scholarly pioneer and that also had an enormous impact on the original music he composed. Bartók’s health was failing (the eventual diagnosis was leukemia) and he composed very little for some three years.

**A Welcome Commission** At the urging of two prominent fellow Hungarians, the violinist Joseph Szigeti and the conductor Fritz Reiner, in May 1943 Bartók received a commission for an orchestral work from Serge Koussevitzky, the enterprising conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Although Bartók was reluctant to start a new project, the \$1000 fee must have proved tempting, made all the more attractive when he received a grant from the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP) that allowed him to work in peace at a sanatorium in Saranac Lake in upstate New York.

In August Bartók began composing the Concerto for Orchestra and completed it in under two months, although he drew upon some musical material written years

earlier. As he reported to Szigeti, “At the end of August I experienced an improvement in the state of my health. Presently I feel quite healthy: I have no fever, my strength has returned, and I am able to take long walks in the wooded hills around here. In March I weighed 87 pounds, now 105. I’m gaining weight. I’m getting fat. I’m getting limber. You won’t recognize me anymore. Perhaps the fact that I was able to complete the work that Koussevitzky commissioned is attributable to this improvement (or vice versa). I worked on it for the whole of September, more or less night and day.”

The premiere took place over a year later when Koussevitzky led the work to great acclaim on December 1, 1944. Bartók had been frustrated by the American reception of his recent compositions, which were generally viewed as too challengingly Modernist. The Concerto for Orchestra was more approachable and immediately brought Bartók welcome attention and new commissions. His writer’s block now broken, he wrote the Sonata for Solo Violin, the Third Piano Concerto, and most of the Viola Concerto before his death in September 1945 at age 64.

**A Closer Look** Although the core concerto repertory of the past two centuries features just one instrumentalist in relation to an orchestra, the earlier Baroque *concerto grosso* often employed multiple soloists. Bartók was hardly the first 20th-century composer to revive this idea, but his dazzling tour-de-force deservedly proved the most famous and influential. He well knew the level of playing that an ensemble like the Boston Symphony was capable of and exploited it to the fullest.

As with many works throughout his career, Bartók does not so much quote folk materials, but rather calls upon the style, gestures, and instrumentation of a wide variety of music from central Europe, including Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia. The five movements unfold in Bartók’s favored arc shape (ABCBA) with the outer movements in sonata form, scherzos in second and fourth place, all framing an elegiac center. Bartók explained in a program note: “The general mood of the work represents, apart from the jesting second movement, a gradual transition from the sternness of the first movement and the lugubrious death-song of the third, to the life-assertion of the last one.”

The first movement (**Introduzione: Andante non troppo—Allegro vivace**) begins with a slow, soft, and mysterious introduction dominated by the lower strings

*The Concerto for Orchestra was composed in 1943.*

*George Szell conducted the first Philadelphia Orchestra performances of the Concerto in January 1948, in Philadelphia and at Carnegie Hall. The work was a favorite of Eugene Ormandy (who conducted it numerous times, including on his last concert, in January 1984 at Carnegie Hall), but was also led by such conductors as Lorin Maazel, Thomas Schippers, Seiji Ozawa, Antal Dorati, James DePreist, Marin Alsop, David Zinman, Christoph Eschenbach, and Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos. The most recent subscription performances of the piece were in February 2012, with Charles Dutoit on the podium.*

*The Philadelphia Orchestra has recorded the work four times: in 1954 and 1963 for CBS, and in 1979 for RCA, with Ormandy, and in 2005 for Ondine, with Eschenbach.*

*Bartók scored the piece for three flutes (III doubling piccolo), three oboes, English horn, three clarinets (III doubling bass clarinet), three bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, two trombones, bass trombone, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, cymbals, side drum, tam-tam, triangle), two harps, and strings.*

*The Concerto for Orchestra runs approximately 35 minutes in performance.*

that eventually builds to a fast and vigorous first theme and a more plaintive second theme featuring the oboe. Bartók's manuscript shows the original title of the second movement was "Presentation of the couples," which he changed to "Game of the couples" (**Giuoco delle coppie: Allegretto scherzando**). He explained that this scherzo "consists of a chain of independent short sections, [played] by wind instruments consecutively introduced in five pairs (bassoons, oboes, clarinets, flutes, and muted trumpets)." The sections have nothing in common and after a brief brass chorale in the middle, they are recapitulated with a fuller orchestration.

The mournful centerpiece (**Elegia: Andante non troppo**) is also "chain-like," this time with three themes. In the second scherzo (**Intermezzo interrotto: Allegretto**) Bartók parodies the so-called invasion section from Shostakovich's enormously popular Seventh Symphony ("Leningrad"). He initially admitted this movement was programmatic—apparently representing the Nazis intruding on cheerful Hungarian life—but withdrew any overt information except for the suggestive title: "interrupted intermezzo."

The piece concludes with another sonata-form movement, this time in perpetual motion. "The exposition in the finale (**Pesante—Presto**) is somewhat extended," Bartók explained, "and its development consists of a fugue built on the last theme of the exposition." After Koussevitzky gave the first six performances of the Concerto for Orchestra in Boston and New York, Bartók made some fairly minor revisions to the score, mainly with respect to tempos and instrumentation. More significant was a new ending to the work, which the conductor George Szell had originally found rather abrupt. The score therefore includes a more triumphant alternative, which is what is usually performed, including at this performance.

—Christopher H. Gibbs

# Musical Terms

## GENERAL TERMS

**Cadenza:** A passage or section in a style of brilliant improvisation, usually inserted near the end of a movement or composition

**Chorale:** A hymn tune of the German Protestant Church, or one similar in style. Chorale settings are vocal, instrumental, or both.

**Chord:** The simultaneous sounding of three or more tones

**Coda:** A concluding section or passage added in order to confirm the impression of finality

**Concerto grosso:** A type of concerto in which a large group (known as the *ripieno* or the *concerto grosso*) alternates with a smaller group (the *concertino*). The term is often loosely applied to any concertos of the Baroque period except solo ones.

**Elegia:** Elegy

**Fugue:** A piece of music in which a short melody is stated by one voice and then imitated by the other voices in succession, reappearing throughout the entire piece in all the voices at different places

**Gioco delle coppie:**

Game of the couples

**Intermezzo:** A short movement connecting the main divisions of a symphony

**Interrotto:** Interrupted

**Modernism:** A

consequence of the fundamental conviction among successive generations of composers since 1900 that the means of musical expression in the 20th century must be adequate to the unique and radical character of the age

**Octave:** The interval between any two notes that are seven diatonic (non-chromatic) scale degrees apart

**Op.:** Abbreviation for opus, a term used to indicate the chronological position of a composition within a composer's output

**Perpetual motion:**

A musical device in which rapid figuration is persistently maintained

**Recapitulation:** See sonata form

**Scherzo:** Literally "a joke." Usually the third movement of symphonies and quartets that was introduced by Beethoven to replace the minuet. The scherzo is followed by a gentler section called a trio, after which the scherzo is repeated. Its characteristics are a rapid tempo in triple time, vigorous rhythm, and humorous contrasts. Also an instrumental piece of a light, piquant, humorous character.

**Sonata:** An instrumental composition in three or four extended movements contrasted in theme, tempo,

and mood, usually for a solo instrument

**Sonata form:** The form in which the first movements (and sometimes others) of symphonies are usually cast. The sections are exposition, development, and recapitulation, the last sometimes followed by a coda. The exposition is the introduction of the musical ideas, which are then "developed." In the recapitulation, the exposition is repeated with modifications.

## THE SPEED OF MUSIC (Tempo)

**Adagio:** Leisurely, slow

**Alla breve:** (1) 2/2 meter [cut time]. (2) Twice as fast as before.

**Allegretto:** A tempo between walking speed and fast

**Allegro:** Bright, fast

**Andante:** Walking speed

**Moderato:** A moderate tempo, neither fast nor slow

**Presto:** Very fast

**Scherzando:** Playfully

**Sostenuto:** Sustained

**Vivace:** Lively

## TEMPO MODIFIERS

**Ma non tanto:** But not too much so

**Non troppo:** Not too much

## DYNAMIC MARKS

**Crescendo:** Increasing volume

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