Concert Program for for April 27, 2012

Hans Graf, conductor
Stephen Hough, piano

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV (1844-1908)
***Skazka,* op. 29** (1879-80)

RACHMANINOFF (1873-1943)
Piano Concerto No. 1 in F-sharp minor, op. 1
(1890-91, rev. 1917)
Vivace
Andante
Allegro vivace

Stephen Hough, piano

Intermission

SHOSTAKOVICH (1906-1975)
Symphony No. 1 in F minor, op. 10 (1924-1925)
Allegretto; Allegro non troppo
Allegro
Lento–
Lento; Allegro molto

Hans Graf is the Monsanto Guest Artist.
Stephen Hough is the Carolyn and Jay Henges Guest Artist.
The concert of Friday, April 27, is underwritten in part by a generous gift from Karen and Bert Condie.
Pre-Concert Conversations are presented by Washington University Physicians.
These concerts are part of the Wells Fargo Advisors Series.
Large print program notes are available through the generosity of Mosby Building Arts and are located at the Customer Service table in the foyer.

Concert Program for April 28 and 29, 2012

Hans Graf, conductor
Stephen Hough, piano

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV (1844-1908)

***Skazka,* op. 29** (1879-80)

SHOSTAKOVICH (1906-1975)

Symphony No. 1 in F minor, op. 10 (1924-1925)
Allegretto; Allegro non troppo
Allegro
Lento–
Lento; Allegro molto

Intermission

RACHMANINOFF (1873-1943)

Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor, op. 18 (1900-01)
Moderato
Adagio sostenuto
Allegro scherzando

Stephen Hough, piano

Hans Graf is the Monsanto Guest Artist.
Stephen Hough is the Carolyn and Jay Henges Guest Artist.
The concert of Saturday, April 28, is underwritten in part by a generous gift from Mr. and Mrs. Mark E. Hood.
The concert of Sunday, April 29, is underwritten in part by a generous gift from the Margaret Blanke Grigg Foundation.
Pre-Concert Conversations are presented by Washington University Physicians.
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CHRISTIAN STEINER

Hans Graf Monsanto Guest Artist

Hans Graf was chosen to be the Music Director of the Houston Symphony in 2000 and began his tenure with the orchestra in September 2001. Prior to his appointment in Houston, he was the music director of the Calgary Philharmonic for eight seasons and held the same post with the Orchestre National Bordeaux Aquitaine for six years. He also led the Salzburg Mozarteum Orchestra from 1984 to 1994.

Graf is a frequent guest with all of the major North American orchestras. Graf made his Carnegie Hall debut with the Houston Symphony in January 2006 and returned to Carnegie leading the Orchestra of St. Luke's in March 2007. He and the Houston Symphony were re-invited to appear at Carnegie Hall in January 2010, at which time they presented the New York premiere of *The Planets–An HD Odyssey*, featuring exclusive high definition images from NASA's exploration of the solar system accompanied by Holst's famous work, *The Planets*. Graf and the Houston Symphony return to Carnegie Hall once again in May 2012 to participate in Carnegie's *Spring for Music* festival.

Internationally, Graf conducts in the foremost concert halls of Europe, Japan, and Asia. In October 2010, Graf led the Houston Symphony on a tour of the U.K., which included performances in Birmingham, Edinburgh, Leeds, Manchester, and two performances at the Barbican in London.

Born in 1949, near Linz, Graf studied violin and piano as a child. He earned diplomas in piano and conducting from the Musikhochschule in Graz and continued his conducting studies with Franco Ferrara in Siena, Sergiu Celibidache in Bologna, and Arvid Jansons in Weimar and Leningrad. Graf served as the Music Director of the Iraqi National Symphony Orchestra in Baghdad during the 1975-76 season and the following year began coaching at the Vienna State Opera. His international career was launched in 1979 when he was awarded first prize at the Karl Böhm Competition.

Graf has been awarded the Chevalier de l'ordre de la Légion d'Honneur by the French government for championing French music around the world as well as the Grand Decoration of Honour in Gold for Services to the Republic of Austria.

Hans Graf most recently conducted the St. Louis Symphony in October 2008.

Grant Hiroshima

Stephen Hough Carolyn and Jay Henges Guest Artist

Stephen Hough is widely regarded as one of the most important and distinctive pianists of his generation. In recognition of his achievements, he was awarded a prestigious MacArthur Fellowship in 2001. He received the 2008 Northwestern University School of Music's Jean Gimbel Lane Prize in Piano Performance and was recently named winner of the 2010 Royal Philharmonic Society Instrumentalist Award.

Hough has appeared with most of the major American and European orchestras and plays recitals regularly in the important halls and concert series around the world. Hough is also a regular guest at festivals such as Salzburg, Ravinia, Tanglewood, Edinburgh, Aldeburgh, and the BBC Proms, where he has made over 15 concerto appearances. In the summer 2009 he played all of the works for piano and orchestra of Tchaikovsky over four Prom concerts, three of which were broadcast live on BBC television.

Highlights of Hough's 2011-12 season include return engagements with the Minnesota Orchestra and the Pittsburgh, National, and Seattle symphonies; the world premiere of the orchestrated version of his Mass with the Indianapolis Symphony; recitals in San Francisco, Chicago, Miami, Paris, Stockholm, and Santa Fe; an extensive tour of recitals and concerto appearances throughout Australia; and orchestral appearances with the London Philharmonic, Finnish Radio, Netherlands Philharmonic, and Leipzig Radio Orchestra, and a residency with the Singapore Symphony.

Hough is also an avid writer and composer. He has written for the *Guardian* and *Times*, and was invited by the Telegraph Media Group in 2008 to start what has become one of the most popular cultural blogs. He has also written extensively about theology for the print media and his book, *The Bible as Prayer*, was published in the U.S. and Canada by Paulist Press in 2007.

Hough's recent compositions include a cello concerto, *The Loneliest Wilderness*; two choral works—*Mass of Innocence and Experience* and *Missa Mirabilis*—which were performed at London's Westminster Abbey and Westminster Cathedral respectively; a trio, "Was mit den Tränen geschieht," commissioned by members of the Berlin Philharmonic; and a sonata for piano, "Broken Branches," which will be premiered at Wigmore Hall.

A resident of London, Hough is a visiting professor at the Royal Academy of Music in London and holds the International Chair of Piano Studies at his alma mater, the Royal Northern College in Manchester. For further information please visit www.stephenhough.com.

Stephen Hough most recently performed with the St. Louis Symphony in April 2011.

Russian Traditions

BY LAURIE SHULMAN

Ideas at Play

Russian music has a remarkably rich history. The literature of Russian Orthodox chant and the folk music of this vast land extend back for centuries, as sacred and secular music do in virtually every culture. But the synthesis of those elements into a specifically Russian classical style was a product of the mid-19th century. Specifically, it originated with the pioneering music of Mikhail Glinka, and flowered brilliantly in the works of the so-called *Kuchka* or "Mighty Handful," also known as the "Mighty Five."

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, whose music opens these concerts, was arguably the most influential of those five (the others were Mily Balakirev, César Cui, Alexander Borodin, and Modest Mussorgsky), at least for the generation immediately following. Rimsky's impact derives from several factors, notably his important treatises on orchestration and his position on the faculty of the St. Petersburg Conservatory beginning in 1871. His students included Liadov, Glazunov, Miaskovsky, Stravinsky, Prokofiev, and Respighi. Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff also revered Rimsky, especially early in their careers.

The Russian tradition and the figurative passing of the baton are central to this weekend's Rachmaninoff Festival concerts, which feature two of Rachmaninoff's piano concertos plus a little-known tone poem by Rimsky-Korsakov and a seminal masterpiece by Dmitry Shostakovich. Three of the compositions we hear are strikingly early—including two teenage works.

Both programs open with *Skazka*, op. 29, a single movement for orchestra that anticipates the brilliant orchestration and exotic orientalism of Rimsky-Korsakov's later scores. The title is a Russian term that means "legend" or "fairy tale." Rimsky wanted to evoke the spirit and enchanted atmosphere of several tales, rather than the specific narrative of a particular legend.

Not yet 20 when he wrote his First Symphony, Shostakovich was struggling as a silent movie house pianist, trying to balance a heavy work load with his studies at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. The symphony served as a graduation piece but, more importantly, announced that the Soviet Union had a major new compositional voice. Sardonic and grotesque elements color this impressive symphony. They are a foretaste of the powerful social and political commentary that would suffuse many of Shostakovich's later compositions.

In the two piano concertos by Rachmaninoff, we have a synthesis of youthful ardor and a more sophisticated, polished orchestral technique. The Concerto No. 1 in F-sharp minor, op. 1 was—like the Shostakovich symphony—a teenage work, dating from Rachmaninoff's years at the Moscow Conservatory. He then set it aside as a juvenile effort. Twenty-five years later, he dusted off the manuscript and revised it, applying all

the expertise he had gained as a composer, particularly in the realm of orchestration. The result is a mature perspective on an early work.

Although Rachmaninoff spent the last eight years of his life in the United States and lived through nearly half the 20th century, he remained profoundly Russian in spirit and conservative in his harmonic language. The post-romanticism of the late 19th century suffuses his music. Nowhere is that more apparent than in the sweeping melodies and lush textures of the Concerto No. 2 in C minor, op. 18. This breakthrough work catapulted Rachmaninoff to international success as a composer and pianist. Passion and sumptuous harmonies enrich the score, which has enchanted audiences for more than a century.

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov *Skazka*, op. 29

Born: March 18, 1844, in Tikhvin, near Novgorod, Russia **Died**: June 21, 1908, in Liubensk, near St. Petersburg, Russia **First performance**: January 22, 1881 in St. Petersburg on a Russian Musical Society program; the composer conducted **STL Symphony premiere:** This week **Scoring:** Two flutes and piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani and other percussion, harp, and strings **Performance time:** Approximately 13 minutes

Rimsky-Korsakov

In Context 1879-80 *Josef Stalin born; Thomas Edison demonstrates incandescent light in Menlo Park, New Jersey; Tchaikovksy's opera* Eugene Onegin *premieres in Moscow*

If you had asked Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov what sort of composer he was, he would have identified himself as an opera composer. He wrote four operas in the 1870s and 1880s. From the mid-1890s until his death in 1908, he focused almost exclusively on opera, completing another 11 stage works and sketching several more. One of the late operas, in fact, is called *Skazka, or The Tale of Tsar Saltan*. It is the source of the ever-popular "Flight of the Bumblebee," but it has nothing whatsoever to do with the symphonic poem that opens this weekend's program—apart from a connection to the poet and playwright Alexander Pushkin.

Skazka is one of Rimsky-Korsakov's hidden jewels. It is contemporary with the early opera *Snegurochka (The Snow Maiden)*. Both works reflect Rimsky's keen interest in Russian legend, particularly in their literary descendants as retold by Pushkin and Alexander Ostrovsky. Rimsky was fascinated by the fantastical elements of these folk tales, which brought forth his inner lyric muse.

His starting point was the introduction to Pushkin's *Ruslan and Lyudmila,* the same epic fairy tale that Mikhail Glinka had adapted for his eponymous opera (1837-42). A quotation from Pushkin's prologue, alluding to various Russian folk tales, appears as an epigraph in the

score to *Skazka*. He sets the scene by the shores of a bay, describing a restless, magical tomcat tied to an oak tree with a golden chain. While circling the tree, the cat relates traditional Russian stories about Baba-Yaga, knights in armor, brave princes, the evil Kashchei, witches, wolves, and imprisoned princesses.

In his memoir *My Musical Life*, Rimsky insisted that *Skazka* related no particular tale, stating that he had taken Pushkin as a starting point.

> By quoting Pushkin's prologue I show that my fairy-tale is Russian and magical, as if it were one of the miraculous tom-cat's fairy-tales that I had overheard and retained in my memory. Yet I had not at all set out to depict in it all that Pushkin had jotted down in the prologue.... Let everyone seek in my fairy-tale only the episodes that may appear before his imagination.

The Music Bold and aggressive brass is one aspect of Rimsky's colorful orchestration. For example, he calls for flutter-tonguing in the trumpets, still an unusual technique in the late 19th century. His music uses no folk songs *per se*, but it has a very Russian feel to it. Moods swing dramatically from the somber to the ecstatic. After complementary opening gestures from basses and violins, low strings and bassoon introduce a sinuous, chromatic fugue subject.

The clarinet theme that follows, with its wonderful harp highlights, looks forward to Rimsky's mature works. Suspense builds as woodwinds chirp and echoes of the slow fugue recur. Rimsky adds to the color with an indecisive, flirtatious idea from divided strings, then with brasses entering the fray. Moods shift rapidly, now sinister, now radiant, in this musical patchwork.

Rimsky acknowledged that the score adhered to some aspects of symphonic forms, while encouraging the listener to perceive the atmosphere, and possibly various tableaux, from Russian tales. *Skazka* is thus not a literal narrative, but rather a free fantasy. The episodic score allows us to focus on the details of these orchestral touches.

Serge Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto No. 1 in F-sharp minor, op. 1

Born: April 1, 1873 in Oneg, Novgorod District, Russia **Died:** March 28, 1943, in Beverly Hills **First performance:** March 17, 1892 at the Moscow Conservatory (first movement only), Rachmininoff was the soloist, Vasily Safonov conducted; the revised version was first performed on January 18, 1919, in New York, Rachmaninoff was the pianist, Modest Altschuler conducted the Russian Symphony Orchestra **STL Symphony premiere:** December 29, 1911, Arthur Shattuck was soloist, with Max Zach conducting **Most recent STL Symphony performance:** February 18, 2007, Stephen Hough was soloist, with David Robertson conducting **Scoring:** Solo piano with pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, and bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani and other percussion, and strings **Performance time:** Approximately 27 minutes

Rachmaninoff

In Context 1890-91 *Van Gogh dies in southern France; Tchaikovsky composes opera* Queen of Spades; *Borodin's opera* Prince Igor *produced posthumously in St. Petersburg*

Serge Rachmaninoff led a three-pronged career: as pianist, conductor, and composer. By the time he embarked on his first concert tour to the United States in 1918, his personal repertoire included three of his own piano concertos, as well as those of Liszt and Tchaikovsky. Unfortunately the demands of travel and performance cut severely into the time he had available for writing new pieces. On several occasions, he reworked an early composition in order to meet the need for a new performing vehicle. The First Piano Concerto is a prime example.

The 17-year-old Rachmaninoff began work on this piece in 1890 while enrolled at the Moscow Conservatory. He completed the first version the following year, and appeared as soloist performing the first movement with the Conservatory Orchestra in spring 1892, with Vasily Safonov conducting. Like most of Rachmaninoff's early pieces, this first version of the concerto bore the stamp of Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov. He had not yet found the individual voice that makes his music so easily identifiable to our ears.

By the late 1890s, Rachmaninoff had dismissed his F-sharp minor Concerto as a student work. He considered revising it in 1908, but other projects diverted him. Nine years later, in autumn 1917, he returned to this first concerto. Although the Bolsheviks wrought political cataclysm practically at his doorstep, Rachmaninoff remained virtually oblivious, as he overhauled the score. In the early 1930s, he recalled to Oskar von Riesemann: "I sat at the writing table or the piano all day without troubling about the rattle of machine-guns and rifle shots."

Rachmaninoff's concentration and absorption in his work must have been remarkable. By 1917, the original concerto was more than a quarter-century old. His style had evolved and his command of orchestral writing had grown. Where the early version had been diffuse and unpolished, the revised concerto is economical, feisty, and exuberant. One defining facet of the 1892 concerto survived virtually intact: its splendid melodies. We can clearly hear Rachmaninoff as master of the grand theme in this concerto. Those themes were there from the start.

The Music The piano part in the revised version is more fluid, and consistent with what we have come to recognize as Rachmaninoff's characteristic style. The interaction of piano and orchestra is highly sophisticated. The traditional structure represents considerable tightening over the 1892 version. This metamorphosis took place in near record time. The alterations were complete in November 1917. By Christmas, Rachmaninoff had left Russia permanently.

The newly-introduced concerto had a difficult time finding acceptance with critics and audiences, primarily because of the huge success that continued to greet the composer's Second (1901) and Third (1909) Concertos. He told his friend Alfred Swan:

> I have rewritten my First Concerto; it is really good now. All the youthful freshness is there, and yet it plays itself so much more easily. And nobody pays any attention. When I tell them in America that I will play the First Concerto, they do not protest, but I can see by their faces that they would prefer the Second or Third.

Although this piece will never surpass its successors in popularity, it has much to offer. Rachmaninoff had a lifelong predilection for minor mode that is part of his musical signature, casting a shadow of melancholy on many works. This First Concerto breaks from that pattern. It is less mournful than some of the later compositions, displaying a more extrovert personality that asserts itself at the opening with the brass fanfare.

For those who delight in the fireworks of a keyboard virtuoso, this concerto will not disappoint. Its first movement is ablaze with Lisztian acrobatics that will tax even the most athletic pianist. Rachmaninoff's lengthy cadenza gives the soloist superb additional opportunities to display both technique and musicianship. The slow movement, a nocturne, is rich with the lyricism we treasure in Rachmaninoff, and the finale is brisk and exciting, with metric and key changes that keep our ears alert while pleasing them.

Dmitry Shostakovich Symphony No. 1 in F minor, op.10

Born: September 25, 1906, in St. Petersburg **Died:** August 9, 1975, in Moscow **First performance**: May 12, 1926 in Leningrad; Nikolai Malko led the Leningrad Philharmonic **STL Symphony premiere:** March 3, 1939, Carlos Chávez conducting **Most recent STL Symphony performance:** January 27, 2007, Vassily Sinaisky conducting **Scoring:** Three flutes and two piccolos, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets and alto trumpet, three trombones, tuba, timpani and other percussion, piano, and strings **Performance time:** Approximately 28 minutes

Shostakovich

In Context 1924-25 *Lenin's body interred in a marble tomb in Red Square; Soviet army occupies Mongolia; George Gershwin performs the Carnegie Hall premiere of* Rhapsody in Blue *with Paul Whiteman's orchestra*

With 15 symphonies to his credit, Dmitry Shostakovich must be considered the premiere symphonist of the mid-20th century, and one of the greatest of modern times. His First Symphony, a teenage work, clearly heralded an enormous gift for handling the large ensemble. Composed in 1924 and 1925 when the composer was completing his studies at Leningrad Conservatory, it is neither immature nor lightweight. Op. 10 is the first composition among Shostakovich's early published works worthy of serious consideration among his orchestral masterpieces.

The New Grove describes a "split focus" in Shostakovich's youthful compositions, a concern for tradition vs. a challenge of tradition. One writer has suggested that, in these early works, Shostakovich reflected the free-wheeling and controversial Leningrad atmosphere of the mid-1920s. He also had academia on his mind. The First Symphony is the work of a serious youth preparing a suitable piece to submit for graduation.

We know something of the progress of Shostakovich's First Symphony through his letters. Shostakovich was a prolific, if careful, letter writer. (In Soviet Russia, after all, one never knew whom else besides the intended recipient might read a missive.) Fortunately, a good deal of his correspondence survives from the 1920s.

In 1924, he decided to relocate from St. Petersburg to Moscow. The main reason he cited was a better climate, but the capital had other attractions. One was Tatyana Glivenko, who lived there; she was his first sweetheart and, some say, the great love of his life. Another was the composer and music theorist Boleslav Yavorsky, then chair of the music section of Narkompros—the state scientific council—and a teacher at Moscow's First Musical Technical School. Yavorsky became an important mentor and confidant to the young composer.

Before he could leave, however, he needed to complete his studies at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. In a letter dated November 7, 1924, Shostakovich reported to Tatyana Glivenko, "Now I'm writing a Symphony (Conservatory task for this year), which is quite bad, but I have to write it so that I can have done with the Conservatory this year." Graduation was essential if he were to pursue advanced study and a career in Moscow.

By early December, two movements were complete. Distractions intervened, not the least of those being the death of the composer's father. Prompted by his family's straitened circumstances, Shostakovich secured employment playing piano in silent movie houses. The work took time and energy, which meant that symphony composition came in fits and starts.

In January 1925 he blocked out the slow movement. He wrote to Glivenko that he now thought of the work as a "symphony-grotesque," providing a clue as to its overall character. His letters to friends speak of exhaustion and writer's block after the slow movement was done. Finally, in late April he had a burst of energy, writing to Yavorsky that "in a single breath" he had completed the symphony. (The finale took him a week.)

His professors heard the piece in a two-piano version the following month. Shostakovich continued to tweak the score for the balance of the year, putting on the final touches in December. Nikolai Malko led the Leningrad Philharmonic in the premiere on May 12, 1926, and the young composer's career was launched.

The Music Already at this early stage, Shostakovich demonstrated the brilliant gift for orchestration that distinguishes his work. His use of piano in the second and fourth movements lends an incisive edge that throws the other orchestral colors into relief without overwhelming them; the keyboard is fully integrated into the orchestral fabric. Indeed,

the slow introduction that opens the symphony emphasizes woodwinds and brass, allotting important solo material to muted trumpet and bassoon. Their material generates most of what follows. Musical democracy is clearly established in the opening measures. The strings do not dominate, and Shostakovich focuses on the varied colors of the other instrumental sections.

The sardonic second movement reflects the influence of Prokofiev, which is rare elsewhere in Shostakovich. A fine oboe solo introduces the Lento in B-flat minor. The finale is quintessential Shostakovich: sarcastic, decisive, energetic. He strikes a wonderful balance between propulsive motion and soaring romantic melody. Hearing this remarkable debut symphony, we can readily concur with Alexander Glazunov (one of the grand old men at the Conservatory during Shostakovich's student years) that Shostakovich, in this work, exhibited a "distinct and striking creative talent."

Serge Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor, op. 18

Born: April 1, 1873 in Oneg, Novgorod District, Russia **Died:** March 28, 1943, in Beverly Hills **First performance:** November 9, 1901, in Moscow, Rachmaninoff was the pianist, with Alexander Siloti conducting **STL Symphony premiere:** March 12, 1915, Ossip Gabrilowitsch was soloist, with Max Zach conducting **Most recent STL Symphony performance:** May 9, 2010, Horacio Gutiérrez was soloist, with Robert Spano conducting **Scoring:** Solo piano with two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani and other percussion, and strings **Performance time:** Approximately 33 minutes

Peter Joslin - ArenaPAL

Rachmaninoff

In Context 1900-01 *Russia completes occupation of Manchuria; Chekhov's* Three Sisters *premieres at Moscow Art Theater; Mahler's Symphony No. 4 premieres in Munich*

By the skin of its teeth, the Second Concerto is a 20th-century work. Rachmaninoff composed the second and third movements in 1900, adding the first movement in 1901. For practical purposes, however, this is a late Romantic concerto in the tradition of the 19th-century virtuoso. What distinguishes it from dozens of less stellar late Romantic concertos is the glorious piano writing and Rachmaninoff's increased skill in handling orchestral resources. He also strikes a fine balance between Russian gloom and rhapsodic ecstasy. Several popular songs of the 1930s and 1940s were based on this concerto's themes.

This concerto was a breakthrough work for Rachmaninoff on two levels. The first was a break from the past. The Second Concerto marked his emergence from a deep depression that had gripped him for three years, following the disastrous premiere of his Symphony No. 1. The second level looked to the future: this work boosted Rachmaninoff's

international reputation as a master of the concerto. It affirmed his genius to a broad public.

As to that depression: Early in 1900, Rachmaninoff traveled to Yalta in the southern Crimea. He had been sent there by his family, who were concerned by his prolonged disinterest in composition following the failure of his First Symphony in 1897. A mild climate made Yalta a preferred destination for well-heeled artists eager to escape the bitter Russian winter. The resort was frequented by Russia's cultural elite and boasted a particularly strong coterie of theatrical types. Residents included the director Konstantin Stanislavsky, the playwright Anton Chekhov, the Romantic realist author Maxim Gorky, and the composer Vasily Kalinnikov. Rachmaninoff's traveling companion was the Russian operatic bass Feodor Chaliapin.

The Yalta trip included treatment from Dr. Nikolai Dahl, a specialist in behavioral hypnosis. He was also an enthusiastic amateur cellist with a broad knowledge of music. Dahl had treated Rachmaninoff's aunt with great success. Rachmaninoff liked him, enjoyed his discussions with Dr. Dahl, and responded well to their sessions. In his memoirs, the composer recalled: "Day after day I heard the same hypnotic formula while I lay half asleep in Dahl's armchair: 'You will begin to write your concerto. You will work with great ease. The music will be excellent.' Incredible as it may sound, this cure really helped me." (He later acknowledged to friends that a promise he had made to London's Philharmonic Society for a new concerto also spurred him to recovery.)

When Chaliapin was invited to sing in Arrigo Boito's opera *Mefistofele* at Milan's Teatro alla Scala, he invited Rachmaninoff to accompany him to Italy. Chaliapin had rented a house for June and July on the Ligurian coast north of Genoa. After six months away from home, Rachmaninoff had begun to pine for his family; he also missed Russian culture keenly. Nevertheless, he had broken through the depression. At the villa in Varazze, near San Remo, he resumed composing and began the Second Concerto.

When he returned to Russia in August 1900, the second and third movements were complete. He performed them in December at a charity concert, adding the first movement in spring 1901. He played the new concerto in its entirety in November 1901; his friend Alexander Siloti conducted. The performance was a triumph, and the Second Concerto has been a mainstay of the literature ever since. When it was published, Rachmaninoff included a dedication to Dr. Nikolai Dahl.

The Music The opening of Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto is one of the marvels of the literature. With no orchestral preparation, the pianist plays a series of quiet chords in F minor, alternating with a low F in the most sepulchral region of the keyboard. Seven times we hear the chord, each time with a slightly different harmony and another response from that low F. Each time the exchange takes place, the volume increases slightly. The eighth time, now quite loudly, the pianist thunders another big chord, then three portentous notes leading to a decisive landing on C.

It is the first time Rachmaninoff has tipped his hand that his concerto is in C minor, the advertised key. His opening ploy has been a red herring, teasing us, building suspense, putting us on the edge of our seats, waiting for a door to slam, a shoe to drop, or a rocket to blast off.

Takeoff, as it happens, is immediate. The piano is off and running in a swirling of arpeggios. The orchestra, hitherto silent, plunges in with the passionate first theme, and the tapestry of Rachmaninoff's music comes into focus. His remarkable opening is one of the most dramatic and original in the concerted literature. That simple, eight-bar piano introduction throws down a gauntlet, declaring the soloist's hegemony over the orchestra, yet paradoxically indicating his co-dependence. Rachmaninoff requires the orchestra to anchor the home tonality and the principal theme, thereby providing the framework for the pianist's activity.

The relationship between piano and orchestra in this concerto is unusual. Throughout the work, Rachmaninoff entrusts most of the melodies to the large ensemble, whereas the piano takes a decorative, textural role. Keyboard provides lush embroidery for the dense fabric of the music. No transparent muslin or sturdy denim here. Rachmaninoff's luxuriant materials are velvet, satin brocade, silk *moiré*, and ermine trimming.

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