

PROGRAMME

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

FESTIVE OVERTURE

Shostakovich is best-known as a symphonist (fifteen symphonies), but his repertoire was wide-ranging, consisting of string quartets (another fifteen), operas, ballets, songs, and at least thirty-six film scores. Of the three great Russian composers of the Stalin era (Prokofiev and Stravinsky being the other two), Shostakovich was the only one who worked entirely in the Soviet era. Although he was an extreme patriot, and had a great empathy with the common man, he both hated and feared Stalin. He was twice publicly humiliated, and his music banned. He considered Stalin to be totally unprincipled, and whose actions were completely self-serving and capricious.

Not long after being denounced in *Pravda*, almost certainly at the order of Stalin, Shostakovich was ordered to prepare for a trip to New York to represent the Soviet Union at the Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace. He refused to go. He made all sorts of excuses to the officials who tried to persuade him. He got air-sick, he was working on an opera. Whatever. Stalin called him to sort things out. Why did he not want to go?

He said that he couldn't go. His comrades' music wasn't played, and neither was his own. They would ask him about that in America. What could he say?

Stalin pretended to be surprised. "What do you mean, it isn't played? Why aren't they playing it?" Shostakovich recalled him saying. There was a decree by the censors, he replied. Stalin said that he had given no such orders, and blamed it on someone else, and, all of a sudden, it was okay to play Shostakovich's music in the USSR. From an "enemy of the people," Shostakovich had suddenly become valuable to Stalin as a cultural ambassador to the West.

The *Festive Overture* was written in 1954, and has been said to be Shostakovich's celebration of Stalin's recent death. Beginning with a grand fanfare in the brass, repeated, it moves through what one critic described as a "skittish presto" in the woodwinds, then has a lyrical theme in the strings, and ends with a reiteration of the opening fanfare, and a drum-roll. It certainly sounds like a celebration!

GEORGE GERSHWIN

PIANO CONCERTO IN F

The success of *Rhapsody in Blue* in February 1924 propelled Gershwin overnight from a talented Broadway composer to someone taken seriously in the world of concert music. When conductor Walter Damrosch and the New York Symphony Society asked Gershwin to

compose a piano concerto the following year, the young composer accepted eagerly—the commission, signed in April 1925, would pay him \$500 for the new concerto. Gershwin had at first planned to call the piece *New York Concerto*, but his desire for respectability won out, and he settled on Piano Concerto in F. Though the concerto employs Charleston rhythms and a blues trumpet, Gershwin wanted it taken as a piece of serious music, one intended to represent “the young, enthusiastic spirit of American life.”

Certainly the Concerto in F takes the form of the classical concerto: a sonata-form first movement, a lyric second movement and a rondo-finale. The *Allegro* opens with a great flourish of timpani followed by the characteristic Charleston rhythm. Solo bassoon introduces the first theme, gradually taken up by the full orchestra, and the piano makes its entrance with the wonderful second subject, sliding up from the depths on a long glissando into the lazily-syncopated tune. Gershwin was willing to bend classical form for his own purposes, and he described this first movement: “It’s in sonata-form— but.” It concludes with a *grandioso* restatement by full orchestra of the piano’s opening tune and an exciting coda based on the Charleston theme. Gershwin said that the slow movement “has a poetic nocturnal atmosphere which has come to be referred to as the American blues...” He contrasts the trumpet’s bluesy opening with the piano’s snappy entrance on a variant of the same tune and then alternates these ideas across the span of the movement. Gershwin described the *Allegro agitato* finale as “an orgy of rhythm,” and the opening plunges the pianist and orchestra into a perpetual motion- like frenzy. At the end, Gershwin brings back the *grandioso* string tune from the first movement, and the Concerto in F rushes to an ecstatic finale.

SERGEI RACHMANINOV

SYMPHONIC DANCES

World War I, of course, was a trial for Rachmaninov and his countrymen, but his most severe personal adversity came when the 1917 Revolution smashed the aristocratic society of Russia — the only world he had ever known. He was forced to flee his beloved country, leaving behind family and financial security. He pined for his homeland the rest of his life, and did his best to keep the old language, food, customs and holidays alive in his own household.

By 1940, when he composed the Symphonic Dances, he was filled with worry over his daughter Tatiana, who was trapped in France by the German invasion (he never saw her again), and had been weakened by a minor operation in May. Still, he felt the need to compose for the first time since the Third Symphony of 1936. The three Symphonic Dances were written quickly at his summer retreat on Long Island Sound, an idyllic setting for creative work, where he had a studio by the water in which to work in seclusion, lovely

gardens for walking, and easy access to a ride in his new cabin cruiser, one of his favourite amusements. Still, it was the man and not the setting that was expressed in this music. "I try to make music speak directly and simply that which is in my heart at the time I am composing," he once told an interviewer. "If there is love there, or bitterness, or sadness, or religion, these moods become part of my music, and it becomes either beautiful or bitter or sad or religious."

It is nostalgic sadness that permeates the works of Rachmaninov's later years. Like a grim marker, the ancient chant Dies Irae ("Day of Wrath") from the Roman Catholic Requiem Mass for the Dead courses through the Paganini Rhapsody (1934), the Second (1908) and Third (1936) Symphonies and the Symphonic Dances (1940). The Symphonic Dances were his last important creation, coming less than three years before his death from cancer at age 70. There is nothing morbid about them, however. They breathe a spirit of dark determination against a world of trial, a hard-fought musical affirmation of the underlying resiliency of life. Received with little enthusiasm when they were new, Dances have come to be regarded as among the finest of Rachmaninov's works.

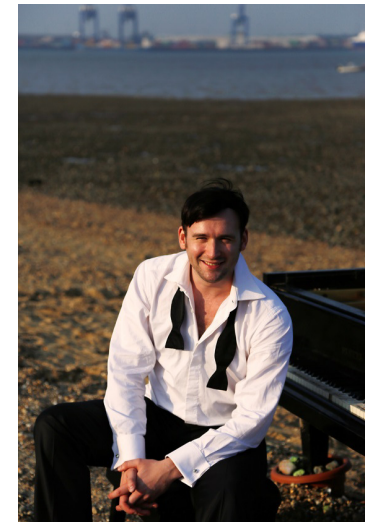
The first of the Symphonic Dances, in a large three-part form (A–B–A), is spun from a tiny three-note descending motive heard at the beginning that serves as the germ for much of the opening section's thematic material. The middle portion is given over to a folk-like melody initiated by the alto saxophone. The return of the opening section, with its distinctive falling motive, rounds out the first movement. The waltz of the second movement is more rugged and deeply expressive than the Viennese variety, and possesses the quality of inconsolable pathos that gives so much of Rachmaninov's music its sharply defined personality.

The finale begins with a sighing introduction for the winds, which leads into a section in quicker tempo whose vital rhythms may have been influenced by the syncopations of American jazz. Soon after this faster section begins, the chimes play a pattern reminiscent of the opening phrase of the Dies Irae. The sighing measures recur and are considerably extended, acquiring new thematic material but remaining unaltered in mood. When the fast, jazz-inspired music returns, its thematic relationship with the Dies Irae is strengthened. The movement accumulates an almost visceral rhythmic energy as it progresses, virtually exploding into the last pages, a coda based on an ancient Russian orthodox chant (which he had earlier used in his 'All-Night Vigil Service' of 1915) whose entry Rachmaninov noted by inscribing "Alliluya" in the score. Was a specific message intended here?

As the Alliluya succeeds the Dies Irae, did the composer mean to show that the Church conquers death? optimism, sadness? Rachmaninov was silent on the matter, except to say, "A composer always has his own ideas of his works, but I do not believe he ever should reveal them. Each listener should find his own meaning in the music."

SOLOIST JOHN PAUL EKINS

In great demand as a recitalist, concerto soloist and chamber musician, John Paul Ekins has given performances throughout the UK, and overseas in Azerbaijan, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Kuwait, Norway, Poland, Romania, Spain and Switzerland, and he has been broadcast on the BBC, on Romanian national television and radio, and on Polish television. In 2009 he graduated from the Royal College of Music with First Class Honours, and in the same year he was awarded the James Anthony Horne Scholarship by the Guildhall School of Music and Drama to study with Charles Owen, where he graduated with Master of Performance (Distinction) in 2011. He was the recipient of a Music Education Award from the Musicians Benevolent Fund, and receives generous support from Making Music, The Concordia Foundation, The Razumovsky Trust and The Keyboard Charitable Trust.



He has performed at a number of prestigious venues in the UK and abroad, including Bucharest's Athenaeum, Zurich's Tonhalle, Prague's Martinu Hall, Bergen's Troidhaugen, Krakow's Florianka Hall, London's Wigmore Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room, St. Martin-in-the-Fields, Fairfield Hall and Steinway Hall, Birmingham's Symphony Hall, Oxford's Holywell Music Room, Bath's Pump Room, Bristol's Colston Hall and Belfast's Ulster Hall. As a concerto soloist he has performed works by Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann, Grieg, Rachmaninoff, Shostakovich and Gershwin with orchestras throughout the UK. His concerto highlight thus far was performing Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue at the Royal Albert Hall with Southbank Sinfonia.

John Paul was particularly honoured to be presented to Her Majesty The Queen and His Royal Highness The Prince Philip at a Reception for Young Performers at Buckingham Palace, and international competition successes have brought him as many as 19 awards and prizes.

During the interval and after the concert, copies of John Paul's recent DVD recording will be on sale for £10.

You can find out more information on John Paul at www.jpekingspianist.com or follow him on Twitter @jpekingspianist.

CONDUCTOR PHILIP ASLANGUL

Philip graduated from the Guildhall School of Music in 1990, where he studied cello, piano and conducting with Stefan Popov, Carola Grindea and Alan Hazeldine respectively.

He has pursued a varied career; as a cellist, he has given recitals around the country with the Burlington Duo and The Q Piano Trio, including a live radio broadcast in 1991.

He has worked as a freelance cellist appearing as principal with orchestras including the National Pops Orchestra, The Camerata of London and The City Chamber Ensemble, and is currently the sub-principal of the English Philharmonia.

As a pianist, Philip is in demand as a repetiteur and accompanist; he has worked with the award-winning ladies choir 'Impromptu' for the past 12 years including a performance on BBC2 in 2000 and BBC Wales in 2009; in 2006 he accompanied the Emerald Chorus on Radio 3.

Philip is actively involved in youth music and conducted Kingston Schools Orchestra and Kingston Young Strings between 1998 and 2004. He is currently conductor of Sutton Youth Music Service's Young Musician's String Group, and is coach and stand-in conductor for the Borough's orchestras. He is an examiner and Music Medal Moderator with the ABRSM and also works for the OU as a mentor.

LEADER ANNMARIE MCDADE

Annmarie studied violin with Trevor Williams and Jonathan Carney and piano with Raymond Fischer at the Royal College of Music.

Annmarie had many years leading touring shows and in West End shows such as Annie get Your Gun, Aspects of Love, The Sound of Music, Oklahoma, The Producers and Company.

She spent nearly eight years in the West End production of Les Miserables (frequently leading) until 2004 and worked with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, English Northern Philharmonia, British Symphony Orchestra, Opera Della Luna, London Arts Orchestra (principal 2nd), Camerata of London (principal 2nd & guest leader), Pro Arte Orchestra (leader), London Philharmonic Youth Orchestra (principal 2nd & founder member) and many others.

Solo performances include Mozart A major and G major and Bruch G minor concertos, Beethoven's F major Romance, Bach's and Malcolm Arnold's Double Violin Concertos and Vivaldi's Four Seasons.

Annmarie teaches in schools and privately - all ages , all abilities! She was Orchestral coach for Berkshire Young Musicians' Trust, Beauchamp House International Music and drama courses and ENCORE.



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Our next concert...

Mendelssohn Ruy Blas Overture

Haydn Horn Concerto in D

Tchaikovsky Symphony No 5

SATURDAY 26TH NOVEMBER 2016 : 7.30 PM

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Elaine Boyd
Julie Trentham

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Fiona Glasscock
Anne Arber
Henrik Jensen
Marietta Almeida

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Joe Belton

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PIANO

Simon Ferris



Sutton Symphony Orchestra

Conductor: Philip Aslangul

Leader: Annmarie McDade

Shostakovich Festive Overture

Gershwin Piano Concerto in F

Soloist: John Paul Ekins

Rachmaninov Symphonic Dances

All Saints Church
Carshalton

Saturday 2nd July 2016
7.30pm

In the presence of the Mayor and Mayoress
Councillor Richard Clifton and Mrs Gloria Clifton

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