Rachmanninov The Symphonies



22, 26 & 29 June Adelaide Town Hall



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Rachmaninov The Symphonies

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Finzi *Eclogue*

Gershwin Rhapsody in Blue

Rachmaninov Symphony No.1



June

Sat 22, 7.30pm Adelaide Town Hall



Prokofiev Piano Concerto No.3

Rachmaninov Symphony No.2



Copland *Appalachian Spring:* Suite

Barber Violin Concerto

Rachmaninov Symphony No.3

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June

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June

Sat 29, 7.30pm Adelaide Town Hall

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Welcome



Colin Cornish AM Chief Executive Officer

I would like to welcome you to this annual exploration of the works of great composers and thank you for your passion for this Adelaide Symphony Orchestra concert series.

Presented across three concerts, Rachmaninov: The Symphonies is a fantastic opportunity to welcome back some of the ASO's most cherished guests. Violinist Emily Sun is our Artist in Association, and is fast becoming a regular with our orchestra as she graces our stage with her virtuosic performances. As pianist Konstantin Shamray returns to Adelaide, he fills Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No.3 with his dynamic energy.

We also look forward to our continued collaboration with Andrew Litton, who last year made his Adelaide Symphony Orchestra debut with our Rachmaninov piano concerto series. Andrew once again takes to the podium to conduct all three Rachmaninov symphonies, and several history-making works in their orbit.

As we experience this moving series, we also celebrate the enduring legacy of Gershwin's iconic *Rhapsody in Blue* on its 100th anniversary. Andrew is an expert in Gershwin's music and will perform the solo piano part – a role the composer himself enjoyed at its New York City premiere. We are grateful to Joan Lyons and Diana McLaurin for their generous and loyal support of Andrew Litton's appearance with the ASO this year.

We also wish to thank Normus Homes for its support of the Rachmaninov series again. Thanks to the enthusiasm of our South Australian community, we have again seen all three concerts sell out well in advance.

I would like to acknowledge the recent appointment of our new Chief Conductor, Mark Wigglesworth. It has been some years since this role was filled, and we are all thrilled that Mark is taking it on from 2025. I am sure that we will hear and feel a special energy when he returns to conduct the ASO in September this year.

I hope you enjoy the 2024 Rachmaninov series, and join us again in celebrating the universal love and excitement of his music.

Artists



Andrew Litton Conductor

Supported by Diana McLaurin & Joan Lyons, Patrons of Andrew Litton

Andrew Litton is Music Director of the New York City Ballet, former Principal Guest Conductor of the Singapore Symphony Orchestra, Conductor Laureate of Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, and Music Director Laureate of Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra. Under Litton's leadership the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra gained international recognition through extensive recording and touring and Litton was knighted with the Royal Norwegian Order of Merit. Litton was Principal Conductor of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra from 1988– 1994 and Music Director of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra from 1994–2006.

Recent and forthcoming highlights include his debut with the Royal Ballet at Covent Garden, and performances with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra, Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Dallas Symphony Orchestra, Seattle Symphony, Orquesta Sinfonica de Galicia, Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra, and cycles of Rachmaninov piano concertos and symphonies with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra.

Litton has led major opera companies including the Metropolitan Opera, Royal Opera, Opera Australia and Deutsche Oper Berlin and was key to founding the Bergen National Opera.

An accomplished pianist, Litton performs as a soloist, conducting from the keyboard. He is also an acknowledged expert on and performer of Gershwin's music and serves as Advisor to the University of Michigan Gershwin Archives.



Konstantin Shamray Piano

Described as an exhilarating performer with faultless technique and fearless command of the piano, Australian-based pianist Konstantin Shamray enjoys performing on an international level with the world's leading orchestras and concert presenters. In 2008, Shamray burst onto the concert scene when he won First Prize at the Sydney International Piano Competition. He is the only competitor in the 40 years of the competition to win both First and People's Choice Prizes, in addition to six other prizes.

Shamray has since performed extensively throughout the world. Here in Australia, 2024 season highlights include engagements with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra (with Umberto Clerici), West Australian Symphony Orchestra (with Dmitry Matvienko), Dunedin Symphony Orchestra (with Umberto Clerici), and Adelaide Symphony Orchestra (with Andrew Litton).

Chamber music is vital to Shamray's career and he enjoys regular appearances with leading artists at UKARIA Cultural Centre including Richard Tognetti, Li-Wei Qin, Jeroen Berwaerts, and Kristian Winther. Shamray looks forward to duo recitals with violinist Satu Vänskä at the Melbourne Recital Centre and UKARIA Cultural Centre, plus solo recitals at Sydney's Utzon Room, UKARIA, and the Queensland Conservatorium.

Shamray was recently appointed Senior Lecturer in Piano at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music at the University of Melbourne.



Emily Sun Violin

ASO Artist in Association: Supported by Sally Gordon

Emily Sun has won the Royal Overseas League Competition, ABC Young Performers Award, and given performances throughout Europe, the United Kingdom, and Australasia. Concerto debuts this season include with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, and Johannesburg Philharmonic Orchestra. Now in her second year as Adelaide Symphony Orchestra's Artist-in-Association, Sun performs with conductors Andrew Litton and Shiyeon Sung, following the 2023 world premiere of Elena Kats-Chernin's violin concerto Fantasie im Wintergarten with conductor Benjamin Northey. Sun also appears as soloist with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, and in the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra's Kaddish: A Holocaust Memorial Concert.

As guest soloist, Sun has been welcomed by the London Mozart Players, European Union Chamber Orchestra, Qingdao Symphony Orchestra, and alongside Maxim Vengerov at Buckingham Palace. She has recently appeared with the Sydney, Melbourne, and West Australian symphony orchestras, Australian Festival of Chamber Music, Music Viva Australia, and in the Classic 100 in Concert on ABC iview.

Sun's album *Nocturnes* (ABC Classics) with pianist Andrea Lam was nominated for a 2021 ARIA Award. She has also recorded with Ensemble Émigré (Rubicon Classics). Sun is a Violin Professor at the Royal College of Music, and performs on a 1753 G.B. Guadagnini 'The Adelaide' violin, generously loaned by the UKARIA Cultural Trust.



Rachmaninov The Symphonies

III. Larghetto

IV. Allegro con fuoco

Andrew Litton Director/Piano

Duration 1 hr 45 mins (incl. interval)

Sat 22 June Adelaide Town Hall

Finzi <i>Eclogue</i> , Op.10	[11′]
Gershwin (orch. Grofé)	[16']
Rhapsody in Blue	
(1942 full orchestra version)	
Interval	
Rachmaninov	[42']
Symphony No.1 In D Minor Op.13	
I. Grave - Allegro ma non troppo	
II. Allegro animato	

Listen Later ABC Classic is recording this concert for later broadcast. You can hear it again on Saturday 22 June at 8pm.

Classical Conversation Join us in the Adelaide Town Hall auditorium one hour before each concert for our free *Classical Conversations* as broadcaster Russell Torrance and ASO Concertmaster Kate Suthers discuss the music in tonight's program.

Concert 1

Finzi (1901–1956) *Eclogue*

Gershwin (1898–1937) Rhapsody in Blue

Rachmaninov (1873–1943) Symphony No.1

Many composers were displaced during World War I. Sergei Rachmaninov fled Russia in 1917 before rebuilding his life in New York. On the other side of the world, Gerald Finzi – born in London to a German and Italian-Jewish family - spent much of his childhood in Switzerland. Finzi had lost his father and several siblings, so his mother hoped that moving to Switzerland would give them a fresh start. However, with the onset of war, his family decided to return to England, abandoning their plans for a new life. Nevertheless, Finzi slowly grew through his grief and forged a successful career in music. He immersed himself in the pastoral traditions of English composers, and filled his extensive personal library with the literature of Thomas Hardy and other poets.

In 1922, Finzi found peace in the bucolic village of Painswick, though he would later spend a few years in London, working with composers such as Vaughan Williams. It was during the Roaring Twenties that Finzi started writing a piano concerto – but he never finished it. Instead, he worked these musical ideas into his *Grand Fantasia* and *Toccata* (1928/1953) and *Eclogue*. Although he started composing *Eclogue* in the 1920s, he revisited the work in the 1940s – another tough period for Finzi. During World War II, he worked for the Ministry of War Transport, hosted refugees in his home, and founded a string ensemble that performed at local army camps.

The music begins with a slow and simple (andante semplice) piano melody, including

gentle call and response between left and right hands. The theme travels to the strings, which embrace it in the same spirit. *Eclogue* would feel serene if not for the occasional waves of emotion that surge through the crescendos. At the centre of the work is a boomingly loud (*fortississimo*) revelation. Its deceptively dismal conclusion is broken when the piano offers a pleasant resolution.

As Finzi drafted his *Eclogue* in the villages of England, another composer was writing music in a city that never sleeps. This was the Jazz Age in America – and the young George Gershwin was taking classical inspiration and merging it with the hottest styles in New York City.

American bandleader Paul Whiteman was such a fan of Gershwin, he told the *New York Tribune* that the composer was writing a new jazz concerto for his upcoming concert An Experiment in Modern Music. This was news to Gershwin – he had no idea about the commission! After reading the newspaper clipping, he took on the challenge. Just a few weeks later, he had written *Rhapsody in Blue*.

Perhaps the tight deadline helped guide the unusual structure of *Rhapsody in Blue* – a freewheeling work for solo piano and jazz band that resembles a concerto. Gershwin – who played the solo from memory at its 1924 New York premiere – wrote in a letter that his rhapsody was a "musical kaleidoscope of America – of our vast melting pot, of our unduplicated national pep, of our metropolitan madness". Its colour and energy



George Gershwin, New York World-Telegram and the Sun Newspaper Photograph Collection, 1938

emanates from the trill of a clarinet, which in one bar ascends 17 notes before launching into its jazzy melody. Several themes are developed through *Rhapsody in Blue*: brushed snare and saxophone chime in for the Train Theme; the heavily accented Stride Theme follows. The boom-cha beat of percussion signals the Shuffle Theme, while the Love Theme features swoon-worthy strings over chromatic accompaniment.

Rhapsody in Blue was fully orchestrated in 1926, and indeed it was Gershwin's "melting pot". The songwriter born in Brooklyn to Russian-Jewish immigrants, who started out as a song plugger in Tin Pan Alley and rehearsal pianist on Broadway, went on to compose this masterpiece of jazz and classical origins, which musicologists continue to compare to the great piano works of Rachmaninov.

It is generally agreed that Rachmaninov attended the premiere of *Rhapsody in Blue* (along with Leopold Stokowski, who conducted the Philadelphia Orchestra through Rachmaninov's own music). In America, Rachmaninov would take a similar approach to Gershwin, fusing jazz and classical elements in his compositions. His fourth piano concerto – written around the same time as *Rhapsody in Blue* – is one such example. But at this point in our program, we take another trip far from Gershwin's city and Finzi's country, and far from the Jazz Age.

Rachmaninov was born into a Russian military family, and would have followed suit had his father not abandoned him. This helped open the door to his pursuit of music, and he enrolled at the Moscow Conservatory. His burgeoning career as a composer-pianist flourished throughout the 1890s, until it hit a major roadblock with his Symphony No.1 in D minor.

Rachmaninov carried the weight of dark biblical references in his first symphony: strings recall the melodic motion of the Dies Irae chant for the dead. He also inscribed in his score the Romans 12:19 quote, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay". Brass and winds sustain haunting chords at the start of the bleak (grave) opening movement. Russian composer-critic César Cui wrote that it all left an "evil impression". But a symphony rarely fails because it is unsettling - and this work did fail. It was not the fault of its composer, but conductor Alexander Glazunov. Glazunov appeared drunk on the podium at its 1897 premiere - a carelessness that so deeply traumatised Rachmaninov, he turned to hypnosis to overcome what he called "the indescribable torture of this performance".

Also unfortunate for Rachmaninov was the loss of his score after the Russian Revolution. He never saw it again during his lifetime in America. But in a twist of fate, in the 1940s, the instrumental parts were found by accident in the St. Petersburg Conservatory. It didn't take long for the world to embrace it – this time, with deeper respect to Rachmaninov's legacy. In its second life, it premiered in Russia, 1945; and in America, 1948 with conductor Eugene Ormandy leading the composer's favourite group, the Philadelphia Orchestra.

Stephanie Eslake



2

Andrew Litton Conductor

Konstantin Shamray Piano

Duration 2 hrs (incl. interval)

Wed 26 June Adelaide Town Hall

Prokofiev Concerto for Piano No.3 In C Op.26

I. Andante – Allegro II. Andantino III. Allegro ma non troppo

Interval

Rachmaninov Symphony No.2 In E Minor Op.27

Listen Later ABC Classic is recording this concert for later broadcast. You can hear it again on Tuesday 9 July at 1pm.

Classical Conversation Join us in the Adelaide Town Hall auditorium one hour before each concert for our free *Classical Conversations* as broadcaster Russell Torrance and pianist Konstantin Shamray discuss the music in tonight's program.

[60']

[27']

Concert 2

Prokofiev (1891–1953) Piano Concerto No.3

Rachmaninov (1873–1943) Symphony No.2

Sergei Prokofiev and Sergei Rachmaninov are today known for their riveting compositions that live on through concert series like these – performed by virtuosic pianists such as Konstantin Shamray, and led by renowned conductors like Andrew Litton. But back in their own time, these two composers were *themselves* in demand as solo pianists and conductors. For this reason, they tailored many of their works to their own hands.

To exhibit their soloistic skills, Prokofiev and Rachmaninov often premiered original works that were elaborate or notoriously difficult. Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No.3 is one such piece, and he premiered it himself in 1921. It involves the pianist crossing hands to reach the opposite end of the piano, which Prokofiev would have achieved with his own "very long, awkwardly dangling arms, terminating in a bruiser's powerful hands" as described by his composer friend Vladimir Dukelsky. (Rachmaninov too was known for his impressive hands, which could span 12 piano keys – an extraordinary physical ability reflected in his writing.) Prokofiev had previously performed the solo in his own Piano Concerto No.1, winning the 1914 Anton Rubinstein Prize. The score for his Piano Concerto No.2 was burnt in the Russian Revolution, though he later rewrote it. And the composition of his Piano Concerto No.3 was also tainted by periods of war, as were many of the works in this Rachmaninov concert series.

Prokofiev was born in 1891, Ukraine – then ruled by the Russian Empire. Prokofiev's mother

Maria was an amateur pianist who worked hard to pursue her passion. As she raised the young Prokofiev, she divided her time between motherhood and piano practice, travelling to Moscow and St. Petersburg for her own music lessons. She was a role model for Prokofiev, filling his home with music, helping him with his earliest compositions, and taking him to the opera. She supported his enrolment in St. Petersburg Conservatory when he was just 13 years old. He was admitted under the guidance of Alexander Glazunov, a composer-conductor we will revisit in this program.

Maria continued to support her son's music education as the political situation became increasingly unstable. Because she was a widow, he was not called to take part in the war, and instead he studied organ and continued to compose. He started drafting his initial ideas for the Piano Concerto No.3 in C major as early as 1911, though the composition process faced years of disruption. Prokofiev left the Russian Revolution to travel to America (the same year Rachmaninov arrived – 1918), and finally completed the piece in the summer of 1921 from a house on the French coast. That year, he would sit at the piano to present its premiere with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. The concerto was also the first recording he ever made when in 1932 he played alongside the London Symphony Orchestra at Abbey Road Studios.

In his own program notes, Prokofiev described his three-movement concerto as expressing



Rachmaninov ca. 1936

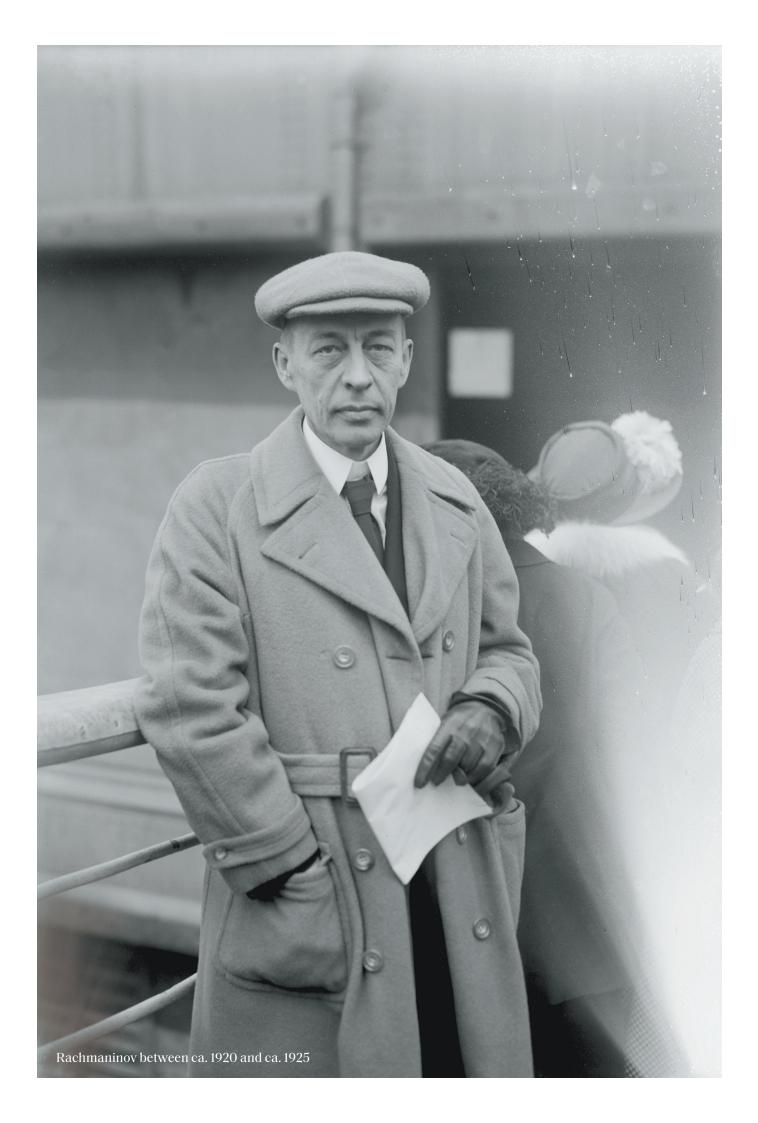
"caustic humour". A solo clarinet opens the first movement before the second clarinet joins, then flute and violins take over with their wistful interpretation of the theme. The piano's enthusiastic entry signals an abrupt change of mood, but it won't be the last, and soon it plays an eccentric melody surrounded by the clacking texture of the castanets. In the second movement, the piano develops the theme in a "quasi-sentimental fashion" before performing in a "quiet and meditative fashion", in the words of Prokofiev. And in his finale, the composer notes a "good deal of argument with frequent differences of opinions as regards the key" after the piano's "blustery entry".

Like Prokofiev, Rachmaninov was that rare breed of talent who made his career as a composerperformer-conductor. So he could appreciate how awfully the inebriated Alexander Glazunov (Prokofiev's early champion) had conducted the 1897 premiere of his Symphony No.1. Rachmaninov wrote in a letter, "I am amazed – how can a man with the high talent of Glazunov conduct so badly?" He bemoaned Glazunov's lack of technique, musicianship, and emotion – the combined impact of which cannot be overstated: it traumatised Rachmaninov. Only after extensive therapy did he regain his mental health, and unleash his next attempt at the symphony more than a decade later.

Rachmaninov composed his Symphony No.2 in E minor in Dresden, having moved from Moscow in 1906, the year after the First Russian Revolution. He returned to Russia to conduct its 1908 premiere in St. Petersburg – a brave decision considering his distressing history with this musical form, and an act for which he was greatly rewarded. The symphony was an immediate success and won him a Glinka Prize. But Rachmaninov didn't leave it at that. Perhaps his insecurities resurfaced, perhaps he embraced constructive criticism – intentions aside, he revisited the composition after its premiere and on the advice of his contemporaries, allowed a great deal of his writing to be removed. Close to half an hour of his music was cut. But in its original form, this stimulating four-movement symphony is packed with 60 minutes of whirlwind drama and romance.

It became something of a tradition for Rachmaninov to include the haunting Dies Irae chant in his works. He featured this medieval Mass for the Dead theme in his First Symphony (Concert 1), and the final movement of his Third – not to mention in his Isle of the Dead (1909), The Bells (1913), and Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini (1934) among others. In his Symphony No.2, an impression of the Dies Irae appears in the lively French horn introduction to the second Scherzo movement. It's a starkly different feel to the first movement in which the symphony's motto is introduced in the strings at a languorous Largo pace. The motto resurfaces at the end of the second movement through a proud statement from the brass, then again in the lovelorn Adagio. The final movement is a culmination of the themes Rachmaninov had expressed throughout the work, and his minor-key symphony concludes with a rapturous major chord.

Stephanie Eslake



.≺ Sat 29 June Adelaide Town Hall Copland [23'] Appalachian Spring: Suite Barber [25'] Concerto for Violin, Op.14 I. Allegro II. Andante III. Presto in moto perpetuo Interval Rachmaninov [39'] Symphony No.3 In A Minor, Op.44 I. Lento; Allegro moderato II. Adagio ma non troppo III. Allegro

Rachmaninov

The Symphonies

Andrew Litton

Conductor

Emily Sun Violin ____

Duration

2 hrs (incl. interval)

Listen Later ABC Classic is recording this concert for later broadcast. You can hear it again on Sunday 4 August at 1pm.

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Concert 3

Copland (1900–1990) *Appalachian Spring*: Suite

Barber (1910–1981) Violin Concerto

Rachmaninov (1873–1943) Symphony No.3

By the time Rachmaninov completed his Symphony No.3 in 1936, he was well on the way to becoming an American citizen. After the Russian Revolution, he left his homeland by open sled, and eventually boarded a ship that would send him to the United States in 1918. He ended up in the centre of it all – New York – where around the same time another composer had started to forge a career in music. Aaron Copland's parents were Russian-Jewish immigrants who arrived in Brooklyn in the late 19th Century. It was in this thriving cultural district of New York that Copland learnt how to write the music that would help shape the national sound of America.

While a portion of the 3200km-long Appalachian Mountains extends to his home state of New York, Copland was not inspired by this natural phenomenon when he composed *Appalachian Spring*. His music is simply named after a line in a Hart Crane poem that appealed to dancerchoreographer Martha Graham. *Appalachian Spring* was a ballet in its original form, and Graham's style of dance was on Copland's mind when he crafted the piece; its working title was *Ballet for Martha*.

The ballet was funded by renowned arts patron Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, who had also supported the construction of the Coolidge Auditorium in the Library of Congress. The venue hosted the 1944 premiere of Copland's work, and he had composed it for a chamber ensemble of just 13 instruments befitting the intimate size of the space. On stage, Graham and her dance group spun, curtsied, and square danced through an American tale of life on the farm in 19th-Century Pennsylvania. Copland captured the hopeful spirit of the era through his variations on the theme *Tis a Gift to be Simple – a* light but profoundly moving Shaker hymn.

Appalachian Spring was a Pulitzer Prize-winning success. Copland orchestrated the work into a suite that premiered in Carnegie Hall, 1945 with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra.

If we continue our tales of old Pennsylvania, we might reflect on the state as the birthplace of another beloved American composer. Copland's contemporary Samuel Barber was born in Pennsylvania, 1910. His family had a lodge at Pocono Lake, by the Appalachian region, and there he wrote his 1939 Violin Concerto. (He initially started working on the piece in Switzerland, until the war made it unsafe for him to stay – an experience echoed in the childhood of Gerald Finzi, Concert 1).

Like Copland's *Appalachian Spring*, Barber's Violin Concerto was commissioned by a wealthy American patron of the arts, Samuel Fels. Fels was looking for a new concerto for the virtuoso Iso Briselli, who had studied with Barber at the Curtis Institute of Music.

In his own notes on the Violin Concerto, Barber describes a "lyrical" introduction for the soloist, and a finale that "exploits the more brilliant and virtuoso characteristics" of the instrument. Unfortunately, Briselli's teacher Albert Meiff didn't



Lake Lucerne, Photochrom print, between ca. 1880 and ca. 1890

agree with this charming assessment. His dislike of the work caused such a commotion, Briselli never had the chance to premiere it despite Fels having paid hundreds of dollars towards its creation. Meiff insisted on rewriting the concerto himself; Barber did not indulge him. Instead, the piece finally premiered in 1941 under the bow of violinist Albert Spalding (of the famous Spalding sports goods family). Eugene Ormandy conducted this concert with the Philadelphia Orchestra. Later, Ormandy would lead the same orchestra through a recording of Rachmaninov's Symphony No.3.

Rachmaninov loved the Philadelphia Orchestra. He was generous in his praise and considered it the best he'd ever listened to; perhaps the best in the world. He had conducted the Philadelphia Orchestra through his Symphony No.2 in 1909 – this was on his tour of America before he officially left Russia. The orchestra premiered many of his compositions in the United States, including his Symphony No.3 in A minor under the baton of Leopold Stokowski in 1936.

As Barber had worked on the draft of his Violin Concerto in Switzerland, Rachmaninov wrote much of his Third Symphony in Villa Senar by the country's picturesque Lake Lucerne. Rachmaninov spent many summers at this family estate, also composing there his 1934 *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* (another work premiered by Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra). Rachmaninov opens his symphony with a slow (*lento*) statement of the motto, which is first heard in the solo clarinet, cello, and horn performing in unison. This motto adopts various forms throughout the course of the work, and spans mellow brass with harp accompaniment to pizzicato strings. The surrounding themes that flow through the movements range from dreamy and nostalgic as in the first and second, to driven and militaristic in the second, to light and optimistic as begins the third.

When composing his Symphony No.3, Rachmaninov took a number of risks. In the final movement, he included the same source material that had featured in the opening of his failed First Symphony – the medieval *Dies Irae* chant. He also composed the work in a more modern style – too modern for some, but not modern enough for others, depending on the perspective of the critic. And indeed there were critics – the music was so poorly received that Rachmaninov confessed it felt "condemned" in all the places it was performed.

No longer the impressionable 23-year-old who needed to undergo hypnosis to recover from his poorly received work (as in the case of his First Symphony), Rachmaninov did feel his Third was misunderstood. He had previously lamented that music was tending towards the calculated and academic, less driven by the romance and drama that he so candidly composed into his own works. While it may not have found its moment in 1936, Rachmaninov did predict that this symphony would one day be "rediscovered…and become a sensational success". Little did he know his First Symphony would achieve the same remarkable fate.

Stephanie Eslake

Adelaide Symphony Orchestra

Mark Wigglesworth Chief Conductor Designate

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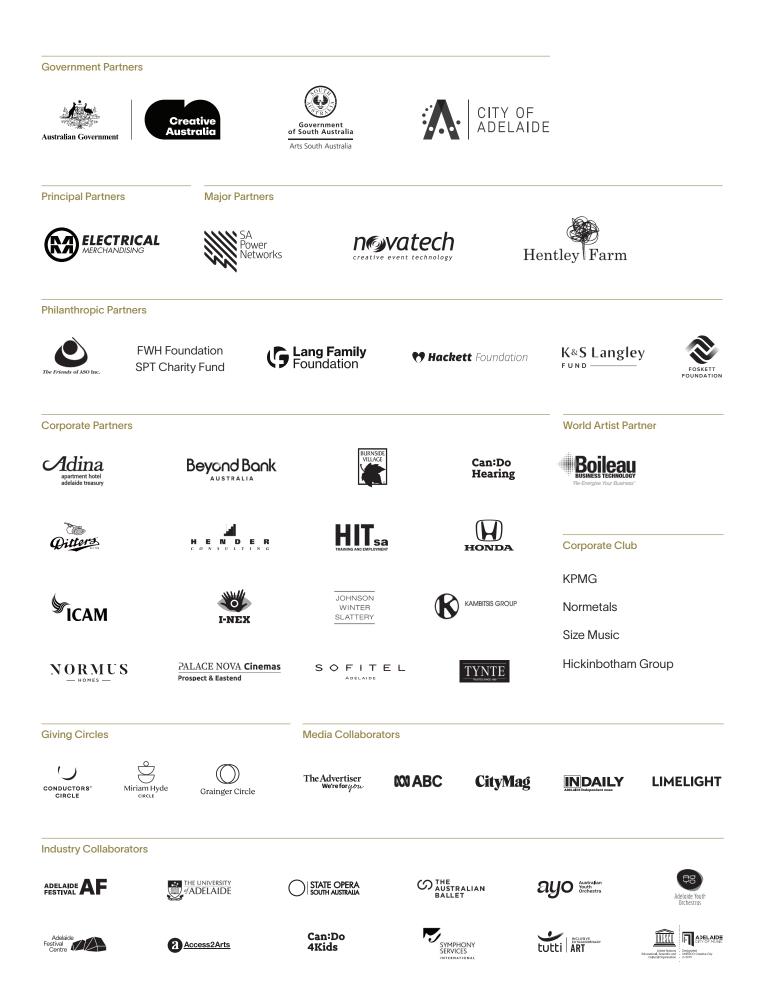
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