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BRUSSELS PHILHARMONIC

RACHMANINOV 2

STÉPHANE DENÈVE, DIR.
BRUSSELS PHILHARMONIC

16.10.2021

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WELCOME

“The most agonizing hour of my life”. That is how Rachmaninov described the première of his First Symphony – it was not a success. It took him more than three years to recover from the disaster and emerge from his depression and writer’s block.

After an initial success with his Second Piano Concerto in 1901, he made his definitive comeback and revenge as a composer with this Second Symphony. And deservedly so: the youthful overconfidence gives way here to a deliberate, refined approach, at times restrained, at others mysterious and dramatic. An unabashedly romantic masterpiece, with enormous power and exuberance. A symphony that you must hear live at least once in your life.

PROGRAMME

Brussels Philharmonic

Stéphane Denève, music director & conductor

Stacy Garrop

Penelope Waits (2013)

Sergei Rachmaninov

Symphony No. 2 in E-minor, op. 27

I. Largo - Allegro moderato

II. Allegro molto

III. Adagio

IV. Allegro vivace

DISCOVER MORE

19:30 MEET THE ARTIST (FOYER 2)

Stéphane Denève & Sander De Keere

No one better than the conductor to tell you all about the music of the evening. Why did he choose this work, how did he prepare, what makes it so special? Get a unique insight into the symphonic world during this pre-concert talk.

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Real time programme notes - during this concert you can keep your phone near: while the orchestra is playing, the free Wolfgang app tells you what is happening - at the very moment - in the music.

PROGRAMME NOTES

Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943) combined, for most of his life, a career as a composer with that of a pianist, thus carrying forward the tradition of the composer virtuoso. He commuted between the two big cities of Moscow and Saint Petersburg, and his estate, Ivanovka, in the Russian countryside, where he wrote most of his works. He was considered by many people as

one of the last major Romantic composer and the most important successor to Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893). The work which most audiences are most familiar with is his *Second Piano Concerto*, but his *Second Symphony*, with its passionate melodies and rich orchestration, is one of the favourite works in the symphonic repertoire.

A promising future

Rachmaninov had the good fortune of being born in a prosperous and musical family: his paternal grandfather composed songs and salon music after his career as an officer, and his mother gave him his first piano lessons. Because of his father's lavish lifestyle, very little of the extensive family property remained. His parents' marriage did not last long, and so the young Rachmaninov and his brothers, sisters and mother moved into a small apartment in Saint Petersburg. As a teen, he entered the

conservatory there, but he lacked the motivation to study. On the advice of a cousin, the pianist and conductor Alexander Siloti, he was sent to Moscow. There he studied with the renowned but strict piano professor, Nikolai Zverev. Zverev's iron discipline worked wonders for Rachmaninov. Moreover, Zverev introduced him to the professional musical world in Moscow. Not much later, Rachmaninov was also admitted to the harmony class of Anton Arensky. It soon became clear that he was extraordinarily talented: in 1888, he graduated with the highest distinction in music theory, and in 1892 he passed his exam in piano and competition a year earlier than expected – a performance rewarded with a gold medal.

Right after graduation, Rachmaninov was considered a fully fledged composer, who also enjoyed the support of Tchaikovsky. He could already boast several impressive works. In addition to some songs and piano pieces, his

graduation piece was the one-act opera *Aleko*, which was so successful that it was immediately performed in the Bolshoi Theatre. And lest one forget, his First Piano Concerto, to which Rachmaninov officially gave the title 'Opus 1'.

From pit to pinnacle

Writing one's first symphony is a symbolic moment for every composer. For Rachmaninov, this took place with even more pressure, after the death of Tchaikovsky in 1893. After all, the public saw him as the composer's great successor. He worked on his *First Symphony* for many years, but the première in 1897 was a disaster: the tipsy conductor, Glazunov, apparently made for a lamentable performance, and the press labelled the symphony "an evocation of the seven plagues of Egypt". Rachmaninov was paralysed by the result. He sank into depression and for three years did not write a single note: "a paralysing apathy overcame me. I did nothing at

all and found no pleasure in anything. I spent half of each day on a bench. I had given up and was in great despair."

Rachmaninov sought help, and found it from the neurologist Nikolai Dahl, who used hypnosis to overcome his writer's block. In 1901, he tried his hand at a *Second Piano Concerto*, and encouraged by its success, he began in October 1906 to work on his *Second Symphony*.

Rachmaninov managed to move with his family to the quiet cultural city of Dresden just in time to flee the coming revolution. His *Second Symphony* is a thoroughly Romantic work, both in form and in character. On 8 February 1908, he conducted the world première of his symphony himself. It was an enormous success: audience and critics alike praised the lyrical melodies and their emotional power. To this day, this monumental symphony is one of Rachmaninov's most frequently performed works.

A mythological symphony

The American composer Stacy Garrop is known for compositions which exude narrative force. The symphonic work *Penelope Waits* is part of her *Mythology Symphony*. It all started with a commission from the Detroit Symphony for the orchestral work *Becoming Medusa*. A mere two years later, partly at the request of the Albany Symphony, the idea matured of expanding it into a symphony based on the female figure in mythology. And so, four more movements followed: *Lovely Sirens*, *The Fates of Men*, *Penelope Waits* and *Pandora Undone*.

The composer herself describes *Penelope Waits*, the second movement of the *Mythology Symphony*, as follows: "This quiet movement presents Queen Penelope, the faithful wife of Odysseus, as she patiently waits twenty years for her husband's return after his participation in the Trojan War. Penelope herself is represented by

the oboe. She is accompanied by a chamber orchestra (rather than the whole ensemble) while she keeps the vultures at bay who wish to marry her in order to inherit her wealth.”

Commentary by Aurélie Walschaert

STÉPHANE DENÈVE CONDUCTOR & MUSIC DIRECTOR BRUSSELS PHILHARMONIC

Stéphane Denève is Music Director of the Brussels Philharmonic. With the orchestra he is at the same time launching CffOR (Centre for Future Orchestral Repertoire): an extensive online database dedicated to 21st-century compositions for orchestra with chances at attaining ‘repertoire status’. Stéphane Denève is so passionate about this new adventure and enthusiastic about the

orchestra's potential that he and his family have settled in Brussels.

Meanwhile, Stéphane Denève is Music Director of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, Principal Guest Conductor of The Philadelphia Orchestra, and Director of the Centre for Future Orchestral Repertoire (CffOR). He has previously served as Chief Conductor of Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra (SWR) and Music Director of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra.

Recognised internationally for the exceptional quality of his performances and programming, he regularly appears at major concert venues with the world's greatest orchestras and soloists. He has a special affinity for the music of his native France, and is a passionate advocate for music of the 21st century.

Recent engagements in Europe and Asia have included appearances with the Royal

Concertgebouw Orchestra, Orchestra Sinfonica dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Vienna Symphony, DSO Berlin, NHK Symphony, Munich Philharmonic, Orchestre National de France, Czech Philharmonic, and Rotterdam Philharmonic.

In North America he made his Carnegie Hall debut in 2012 with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, with whom he has appeared several times both in Boston and at Tanglewood, and he regularly conducts The Cleveland Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony and Toronto Symphony. He is also a popular guest at many of the US summer music festivals, including Bravo! Vail, Saratoga Performing Arts Center, Hollywood Bowl, Blossom Music Festival, and Festival Napa Valley. Summer 2018 saw his debuts at the Grand Teton Music Festival and Music Academy of the West, and in 2019 he led a major US tour with the Brussels Philharmonic. In

December 2020 he conducted the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra and pianist Igor Levit at the 2020 Nobel Prize Concert in Stockholm.

He enjoys close relationships with many of the world's leading solo artists, including Jean-Yves Thibaudet, Yo-Yo Ma, Nikolaj Znaider, James Ehnes, Leif Ove Andsnes, Leonidas Kavakos, Nicholas Angelich, Lang Lang, Frank Peter Zimmermann, Gil Shaham, Emanuel Ax, Renaud and Gautier Capuçon, Lars Vogt, Nikolai Lugansky, Paul Lewis, Joshua Bell, Hilary Hahn, and Augustin Hadelich.

In the field of opera, Stéphane Denève has led productions at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, Glyndebourne Festival, La Scala, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Saito Kinen Festival, Gran Teatro de Liceu, Dutch National Opera, La Monnaie, Deutsche Oper Am Rhein, and at the Opéra National de Paris.

As a recording artist, he has won critical acclaim for his recordings of the works of Poulenc, Debussy, Ravel, Roussel, Franck and Connesson. He is a triple winner of the Diapason d'Or of the Year, has been shortlisted for Gramophone's Artist of the Year Award, and has been awarded an International Classical Music Awards twice. His most recent releases include a live recording of Honegger's *Jeanne d'arc au bûcher* with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and two discs of the works of Guillaume Connesson with the Brussels Philharmonic (the first of which was awarded the Diapason d'Or de l'année, Caecilia Award, and *Classica Magazine's* CHOC of the Year).

A graduate and prize-winner of the Paris Conservatoire, Stéphane Denève worked closely in his early career with Sir Georg Solti, Georges Prêtre and Seiji Ozawa. A gifted communicator and educator, he is committed to inspiring the

next generation of musicians and listeners, and has worked regularly with young people in programmes such as those of the Tanglewood Music Center, New World Symphony, the Colburn School, and the Music Academy of the West.

www.stephanedeneve.com

BRUSSELS PHILHARMONIC

The Brussels Philharmonic was founded in 1935 by the Belgian public broadcaster (National Broadcasting Institute (NIR/INR)). Since its creation, it has worked with top international conductors and soloists. The orchestra was and is known to be a pioneer in performing contemporary music – a reputation that brought world-renowned composers such as Bartók,

Stravinsky and Messiaen to Brussels. To this day, the Brussels Philharmonic is continuing this tradition, including a 21st-century work in almost every concert programme.

The orchestra's historic home port is the Flagey building in Brussels, the heart of Europe, where it rehearses and performs in Studio 4 – in acoustic terms one of the top concert halls in the world – and which serves as its home base for concerts in Belgium and the rest of the world.

The French top conductor Stéphane Denève is the music director of the Brussels Philharmonic. His passion for 21st-century music and personal mission to create dialogue between the repertoire of the past and the future is fully in keeping with the orchestra's DNA.

At the international level, the Brussels Philharmonic has made a name for itself, with regular appearances in the major -venues and

festivals, such as Carnegie Hall in New York, the Philharmonie de Paris, Wiener Musikverein, Grosses Festspielhaus Salzburg, Usher Hall in Edinburgh and Cadogan Hall in London. The international representation by IMG Touring brings further tours and concerts on new stages both in Europe and beyond (e.g. Japan in 2017, North America in 2019).

Another speciality for which the Brussels Philharmonic has gained an international reputation is the recording of soundtracks for series, games and films, including the Oscar-winning score for 'The Artist' (music by Ludovic Bource). In Belgium, the orchestra is a regular partner of the Film Fest Gent and of MotorMusic, and participates each year in concerts with iconic films (both blockbusters with award-winning scores and black-and-white classics with a new soundtrack).

Meanwhile, the orchestra has proven to be a pioneer in other respects as well. Besides its ground-breaking initiatives under way, including the Tax Shelter, the establishment of a foundation for the purchase of string instruments, and more recently the partnership with Brussels Airlines, the orchestra embraces innovation in every area and all levels of its activities. The gentlemen of the orchestra are dressed by Café Costume in the custom designed Symphonic Sporting Jacket, with technical innovations in the field of fabric and cut, and 2021 saw the release of the orchestra's own smartphone app.

The various recordings of Brussels Philharmonic (Deutsche Grammophon, Palazzetto Bru Zane, Klara/Warner Classics, Film Fest Gent, Naxos, Brussels Philharmonic Recordings) have been warmly received by the international press and awarded an ECHO Klassik, Choc de Classica de l'année and Diapason d'Or de l'année, amongst others.

The Brussels Philharmonic is an institution of the Flemish Community.

www.brusselsphilharmonic.be

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MUSICIANS

BRUSSELS PHILHARMONIC

(1) principal / (2) soloist

concertmaster

Otto Derolez

violin I

Bart Lemmens (1), Sylvie Bagara, Olivia Bergeot, Eva Bobrowska, Annelies Broeckhoven, Cristina Constantinescu, Veerle Houbraken, Justine Rigutto, Elizaveta Rybentseva, Anton Skakun, Alissa Vaitzner, Bram Van Eenoo, Gillis Veldeman

violin II

Mari Hagiwara (1), Samuel Nemptanu (1), Vania Batchvarova, Véronique Burstin, Aline Janeczek, Sayoko Mundy, Naoko Ogura, Eline Pauwels, Julien Poli, Eva Pusker, Dirk Uten

viola

Mihai Cocea (1), Griet François (2), Philippe Allard, Marina Barskaya, Phung Ha, Hélène Koerver, Agnieszka Kosakowska, Barbara Peynsaert, Stephan Uelpenich, Patricia Van Reusel

cello

Karel Steylaerts (1), Diego Coutinho, Barbara Gerarts, Julius Himmler, Sophie Jomard, Bénédicte Legrand, Emmanuel Tondus, Elke Wynants

double bass

Jan Buyschaert (1), Elias Bartholomeus, Thomas Fiorini, Daniele Giampaolo, Simon Luce, Jens Similox-Tohon

flute

Lieve Schuermans (1), Jill Jeschek (2), Eva Vennekens (2)

oboe

Joost Gils (1), Maarten Wijnen, Lode Cartryse (2)

clarinet

Maura Marinucci (1), Danny Corstjens (2), Midori Mori (2)

bassoon

Karsten Przybyl (1), Jonas Coomans (2)

horn

Hans van der Zanden (1), Mieke Ailliet (2), Diechje Minne, Claudia Rigoni

trumpet

Simon Van Hoecke (1), Rik Ghesquière, Luc Sirjacques

trombone

David Rey (1), Tim Van Medegael (2), Daniel Foeteler

tuba

Dieter Verschuren (2)

timpani

Gert François (1)

percussion

Titus Franken (2), Jelle Proost, Stijn Schoofs

harp

Eline Grosloot (2)

friends of flagey

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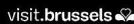
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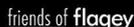
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