

LSO St Luke's

CHAMBER MUSIC



Recorded for future broadcast on BBC Radio 3

RACHMANINOFF & FRIENDS: SIMON CRAWFORD-PHILLIPS & PHILIP MOORE

Friday 14 January 2022 1pm
Jerwood Hall, LSO St Luke's

Serge Rachmaninoff *Symphonic Dances Op 45*
Igor Stravinsky arr Victor Babin
Three Dances from 'Petrushka'

Simon Crawford-Phillips piano
Philip Moore piano

Symphonic Dances Op 45

Serge Rachmaninoff

- 1 **Non allegro**
- 2 **Andante con moto (Tempo di valse)**
- 3 **Lento assai - Allegro vivace**

S*ymphonic Dances* was Serge Rachmaninoff's swansong. It was composed in the US, where Rachmaninoff and his family eventually settled after their flight from revolutionary Russia. For two decades he earned a comfortable living primarily as a concert pianist, until his health began to decline from the onset of cancer. In the summer of 1940 he took a break from touring to write *Symphonic Dances*, completing the orchestral score by the end of October.

The piece – a symphony in all but name – was dedicated to Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra, who gave the premiere in Philadelphia on 3 January 1941. At much the same time, Rachmaninoff made a version of the piece for two pianos, which he and Vladimir Horowitz first performed at a private party in Beverley Hills in August 1942. He died at his California home seven months later.

Rachmaninoff held the view that a composer's music 'should express the country of his birth, his love affairs, his religion, the books that have influenced him, the pictures he loves' – the sum total of life experience. His last major work reflects his lifelong obsession with ecclesiastical chant.

The first movement quotes the principal theme of his own First Symphony, itself derived from the characteristic motifs of Russian church music. The second movement is a rather sinister, uneasy waltz. The finale, after a slow introduction, unleashes a torrent of relentless aggression reminiscent of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. This *savage danse macabre* is underpinned by the spectral tones of the *Dies Irae* – a leitmotif which haunts so many of the composer's major works. It also quotes the chant 'Blessed be the Lord' from the *All-Night Vigil*, a choral piece by Rachmaninoff from 1915, associated with the Resurrection. At the end of the score Rachmaninoff wrote simply, 'I thank Thee, Lord'.



Three Dances from 'Petrouchka'

Igor Stravinsky

- 1 Russian Dance
- 2 In Petrouchka's Cell
- 3 The Shrovetide Fair

From the late 1930s Rachmaninoff became the friend and mentor of two fellow Russian exiles – the husband-and-wife piano duo partnership of Victor Babin (1908–72) and Vitya Vronsky (1909–92). They had met in Berlin as pupils of Artur Schnabel, married, and emigrated to the US, where they were introduced to American audiences largely through their recordings of music by Rachmaninoff. Babin, who became director of the Cleveland Institute of Music, was also a composer and arranger. In the early 1950s he made this arrangement for two pianos of sections of Stravinsky's ballet *Petrouchka*, based on Stravinsky's own virtuoso solo piano version.

Petrouchka, Stravinsky's second score for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, was originally conceived as a concert piece for piano and orchestra. Stravinsky said that the piano represented in his mind 'a cheeky puppet, suddenly endowed with life, exasperating the patience of the orchestra with diabolical cascades of arpeggios', and the piano plays a significant role in the orchestral score, the vibrant colours of which are masterfully translated in Babin's piano duo version.

The story of *Petrouchka* concerns a puppet who is brought to life during a Russian Carnival fair, only to be murdered by his rival in love. The ballet is constructed in four tableaux, of which the piano versions make use of three.

The opening 'Russian Dance', in which the piano originally featured prominently, is taken from the end of the first tableau, after the Showman has animated his three puppets: Petrouchka, the Ballerina and the Moor. They engage in a lively dance, based on two Russian folk tunes, over hammered ostinato rhythms. The dissonant second movement, 'In Petrouchka's Cell', features the tragic puppet trapped in his tiny room, crying out in despair against the fate that has rendered him ugly and misshapen. In the third movement, 'The Shrovetide Fair', the carnival atmosphere reaches its height with a series of short, colourful dances for various typically Russian characters – wet-nurses, a dancing bear, court coachmen, and a group of masked strolling players. But the ballet's dramatic climax and enigmatic conclusion, when Petrouchka is stabbed by the Moor but re-appears as a mocking ghost, is replaced by a more conventional ending suitable for concert performances.

Simon Crawford-Phillips & Philip Moore

piano duo

Simon Crawford-Phillips and Philip Moore have a long-standing musical partnership, having met as students of Hamish Milne at the Royal Academy of Music in 1994. During their time with him they won first prize at the 1997 International Schubert Competition in the Czech Republic, second prize at the 1998 Tokyo International Piano Duo Competition, and the 1999 Royal Over-Seas League Rio Tinto Ensemble Prize. The duo were subsequently selected for representation by Young Classical Artists Trust and their contribution to the profession was recognised through a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship in 2004.

Together they have performed and broadcast internationally, and at all the major UK festivals and venues; they made their BBC Proms debut in 2001. They have given world premieres of Detlev Glanert's Two Piano Concerto (with BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra/Martyn Brabbins) and, at the 2009 BBC Proms, Anna Meredith's Two Piano Concerto (with Britten Sinfonia/Ludovic Morlot). On the same day they gave a BBC Promenade performance of Bartók's Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion with Colin Currie and Sam Walton, LSO Percussion. In 2012 they made their debut with the Hallé under Edward Gardner. In 2014 they premiered Steve Reich's *Quartet* for two pianos and two vibraphones at the Southbank, Carnegie Hall (listed as one of The Ten Best Classical Performances of 2014 by *New York Magazine*), Kölner Philharmonie, Cité de la musique Paris, and many other major venues.

Simon Crawford-Phillips and Philip Moore are Steinway Artists and Associates of the Royal Academy of Music.

Coming Up

RACHMANINOFF & FRIENDS: OLENA TOKAR & IGOR GRYSHYN

Friday 11 February 2022 1pm
Jerwood Hall, LSO St Luke's

A selection of songs by **Rimsky-Korsakov**, **Alma Schindler-Mahler** and **Rachmaninoff**.

Olena Tokar soprano
Igor Gryshyn piano

BORIS GILTBURG

Friday 11 February 2022 6pm
Jerwood Hall, LSO St Luke's

Sergei Prokofiev Piano Sonata No 2 in D minor
Serge Rachmaninoff Piano Sonata No 1 in D minor

Boris Giltburg piano

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