

Sergueï Rachmaninoff, Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor Op. 18
arranged by Iain Farrington

I. Moderato

II. Adagio sostenuto

III. Allegro scherzando

Sergueï Rachmaninoff's First Symphony was introduced in Saint Petersburg at a concert conducted by Alexander Glazunov, in 1897. Glazunov was a good composer but a terrible conductor, and this premiere did not go well. It was certainly not the only time in the history of music that the critics or the public were unable to distinguish between a failed performance and a bad composition. Always subject to depression, Rachmaninoff quickly found himself unable to face the sight of blank manuscript paper and this lasted for two years. The longer his composer's voice was silent, the worse he felt; the worse he felt, the more impossible the idea of composing became. In his Memoirs, the composer explained, "A paralyzing apathy possessed me. I did nothing at all and found no pleasure in anything. Half my days were spent on a couch. I had given up in great despair."

Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto possesses the dedication, "À Monsieur N. Dahl." Dr. Nicolai Dahl was an internist who had been studying hypnosis. Rachmaninoff began daily visits to him in January 1900. The first aim was to improve the composer's sleep and appetite as well as to quit excessive drinking. However, the main goal was to enable him to compose a piano concerto. Dr. Dahl's treatment, a mixture of hypnotic suggestions "You will begin your concerto...you will work with great facility...the concerto will be excellent..." and cultured conversations, worked well. By April, Rachmaninoff felt well enough to travel to Crimea and to Italy. When he returned home, he brought with him sketches for the new piano concerto. Two movements, the second and third, were finished that fall and premiered in December 1900. After the concert, Rachmaninoff composed the first movement. He premiered his complete Second Piano Concerto in C minor on November 9, 1901, with the Moscow Philharmonic conducted by Alexander Siloti with great public recognition. This piano concerto was a personal and a musical triumph for the composer.

A quality especially apparent in the Second Piano Concerto is a sense of effortlessness in its unfolding. It begins with a series of piano chords in crescendo, all based on F, each reinforced by the tolling of the lowest F on the keyboard, and, through the gathering harmonic tension and dynamic force, carry us into the home chord of C minor. Once there, the strings with clarinet initiate a plain but intensely expressive melody, which the piano accompanies with sonorous broken chords. The piano's role as an accompanist is also worth noting. Nowhere is the pianist so often an ensemble partner and so rarely a soloist aggressively in the foreground as in this first movement of the Second Concerto.

Rachmaninoff constructs a bridge passage into the second movement. Again the pianist is at first the accompanist, briefly to the flute, then at greater length to the clarinet. Throughout the movement the relationship between piano and orchestra is imagined and worked out with great delicacy. A quicker interlude functions as a short scherzo. This interlude spills into a splash of cadenza, and for just five notes a pair of flute and clarinet (two flutes in the original version) eases the music back into softly swaying arpeggios.

Rachmaninoff begins the finale with distant march music, then works his way around to the piano's assertive entrance. The march music is now determined and vigorous. When one remembers the biographical background of this concerto, it is pleasing to see that the last tempo mark is "risoluto."

Derivative Works

The Second Piano Concerto was used in popular culture on many occasions. The second movement theme appears in Eric Carmen's 1975 ballad "All by Myself." Carmen first composed the song's interlude, then took the bridge from Rachmaninoff and the chorus from his own "Let's Pretend." The second theme of the third movement provides the basis for Frank Sinatra's 1945 "Full Moon and Empty Arms."

The version presented during my conducting recital is arranged for chamber orchestra by pianist and organist Iain Farrington. His publishing house Aria Editions has more than eighty arrangements of large orchestral works for chamber orchestra. As a well-known pianist soloist, he notably played at the opening ceremony of the London Olympics in 2012 broadcast to a worldwide audience of nearly one billion spectators with Rowan Atkinson, the London Symphony Orchestra and Sir Simon Rattle.

"Melody is music and the foundation of all music. I do not appreciate composers who abandon melody and harmony for an orgy of noises and dissonances," Rachmaninoff asserted. In the midst of the Ukrainian invasion by Putin, I hope to conduct this piece to cover the horrible noise and dissonances of the war and to honor the words of Leonard Bernstein: "This is our reply to violence, to make music more intensely more beautifully, more devotedly than before."

Igor Stravinsky, Pulcinella Suite

- I. Sinfonia
- II. Serenata
- III. a) Scherzino – b) Allegretto – c) Andantino
- IV. Tarantella
- V. Toccata
- VI. Gavotta (con due variazioni)
- VII. Vivo
- VIII. a) Minuetto – b) Finale

The suite you will hear tonight is a reduction of Stravinsky's one-act ballet, Pulcinella. Stravinsky arranged this instrumental-only suite in 1922, two years after writing the original work (which had included three solo singers; thus the term "ballet" is slightly misleading).

The character of Pulcinella is taken from Italian *commedia dell'arte*, a theatrical genre of the 17th and 18th centuries. In these productions, stock characters and semi-scripted interactions formed the parameters for actors' improvisations, in much the same way that composers of this period used cadential formulae and other schemata as vehicles for their own creativity. Sergei Diaghilev, director of Les Ballets Russes in Paris, certainly had this connection in mind when he asked Stravinsky to compose a ballet based on a *commedia dell'arte* libretto using music from the 18th century. Diaghilev had amassed a collection of virtually unknown 18th-century scores, which he presented to Stravinsky as material from which to work. Initially Stravinsky was reluctant to accept the commission, but upon getting to know the music, he became enthusiastic about the project and would later write that Pulcinella had been "My discovery of the past, the epiphany through which the whole of my late work became possible." This "late work" is now referred to as Stravinsky's neo-classical period (a term Stravinsky himself disliked).

At the time Stravinsky was working on the ballet, he (and Diaghilev) believed that all the 18th-century music he was using was by Giambattista Pergolesi. However, academic research has since discovered that over half the music had been erroneously attributed to Pergolesi, and that the collection in fact included works by his contemporaries Domenico Gallo, Carlo Monza and Willem Graaf van Wassenaer. The table below shows the pieces on which each movement of the Pulcinella Suite is based. Although Stravinsky would later claim that his ballet was based on "fragments" or "sketches," these are all complete works, and many of them are part of larger oeuvres or collections.

<u>Movement</u>	<u>Original work</u>	<u>Composer</u>
Sinfonia	Trio sonata no. 1 in G Major Moderato	D. Gallo
Serenata	<i>Il flaminio</i> Act 1 “Mentre l'erbetta pasce l'agnella”	G. Pergolesi
Scherzino	Trio sonata no. 2 in B-flat Major Presto 1st mvt	D. Gallo
Piu vivo	<i>Il flaminio</i> Act 3 “Benedetto, maledetto”	G. Pergolesi
Allegro	Trio sonata no. 2 in B-flat Major Presto 3rd mvt	D. Gallo
Andantino	Trio sonata no.8 in E-flat Major Allegro ma non tanto	D. Gallo
Tarantella	Concerto armonico no. 2 Allegro moderato e staccato	W. G. van Wassenaer
Toccata	Harpsichord suite no. 1	C. Monza
Gavotta con due variazioni	Harpsichord suite no. 3 Gavotta con variazioni (1, 4)	C. Monza
Vivo	Sinfonia for cello and basso Presto	G. Pergolesi
Minuetto	<i>Lo frate 'nnamorato</i> Act 1 “Pupillette, fiammette d'amore”	G. Pergolesi
Finale	Trio sonata no. 12 in E Major Presto	D. Gallo

Upon comparing these works with Stravinsky's final product, it is striking how little Stravinsky departs from his source material. Almost all of the melodic themes are intact, and the bass lines that accompany them have not been altered. However, the orchestration, accent patterns and semi-dissonant harmonies are unmistakably Stravinskian. The result is a work that retains the spirit and affect of the original music and presents it through the lens of Stravinsky's own musical idiom.