



Suite No. 2 for Two Pianos, Op. 17 Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)

Composed in 1900-1901.

*Premiered on November 24, 1901 in Moscow,
by the composer and Alexander Siloti.*

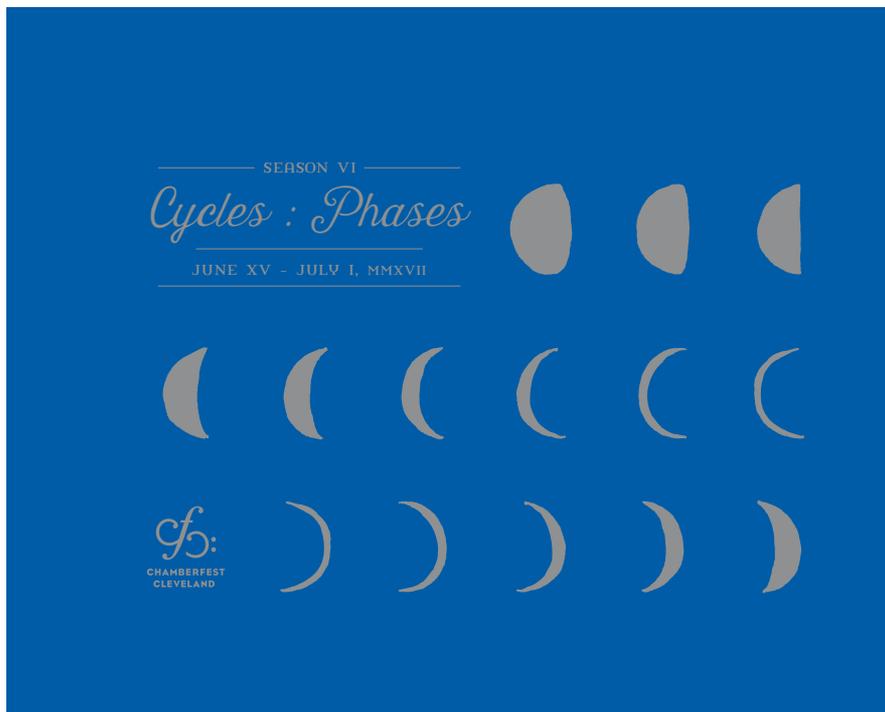
Late in 1900, soon after he had finished his Piano Concerto No. 2, Rachmaninoff composed a Cello Sonata for his long-time friend Anatoli Brandukov as well as the splendid Suite No. 2 for Two Pianos. His premiere of the Second Concerto in Moscow on November 9, 1901, conducted by his cousin Alexander Siloti, was received rapturously, as was the first performance of the Suite No. 2 by those same principals at a concert of the Moscow Philharmonic Society two weeks later. The successful premiere of the Cello Sonata with Brandukov on December 2nd capped an amazing month of accomplishment for Rachmaninoff, during which the 28-year-old composer-performer proved himself to be one of the most eminent talents on the international music scene.

The Suite No. 2 opens with a virile march whose rich harmonies, robust sonorities and convivial sharing of motives make this one of the most gratifying pieces in the two-piano repertory for performers and listeners

alike. Though the second movement is titled *Waltz*, this gossamer music is really a quicksilver scherzo in the tradition of Mendelssohn. The broad theme of the movement's contrasting central trio is reminiscent of the *Dies Irae* ("Day of Wrath"), the ancient chant from the Roman Catholic Requiem Mass for the Dead that obsessed Rachmaninoff throughout his life and appeared in various permutations in such other works as his *Paganini Rhapsody*, Second and Third Symphonies and *Symphonic Dances*. The Romance has a lyricism and passion that are almost operatic in character and intensity. Rachmaninoff said that the *Tarantella* that provides the Suite's dazzling finale was based on a folk song he heard during his visit to Italy in the summer of 1900, but the melody has never been identified.

In 1942, with his health deteriorating and his ability to carry on his wildly successful American tours in question, Rachmaninoff settled in the halcyon environs of Beverly Hills. "Vladimir Horowitz lived not far away," Sergei Bertensson recorded in his biography of the composer. "Sergei was fond of Horowitz and his entire family, and I heard him repeatedly express his admiration of the famous pianist. Horowitz frequently visited Rachmaninoff, and they played duets for their own pleasure. I was once invited to attend one of these exclusive concerts, and, except for the members of both families, I was the sole auditor. The program included a Mozart sonata, Mozart's D major Piano Concerto and Rachmaninoff's Second Suite for Two Pianos. It is impossible to express my impression of this event. 'Power' and 'joy' are the two words that come first to mind—expressive power, and joy experienced by the two players, each fully aware of the other's greatness. After the last note no one spoketime seemed to have stopped." Plans were discussed to record the Suite, but Rachmaninoff died the following March, and the musical world was denied the ineffable pleasure of having a permanent souvenir of the collaboration of two of the greatest artists ever to touch a keyboard.

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Trio No. 3 for Piano, Violin and Cello in G minor, Op. 110 Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Composed in 1851.

In September 1850, the Schumanns left Dresden to take up residence in Düsseldorf, where Robert assumed the post of municipal music director. He was welcomed to the city with a serenade, a concert of his works, a supper and a ball. Though he had been cautioned a few years before by his friend Felix Mendelssohn that the local musicians were a shoddy bunch, he was eager to take on the variety of duties that awaited him in the Rhenish city, including conducting the orchestra's subscription concerts, leading performances of church music, giving private music lessons, organizing a chamber music society, and composing as time allowed. Despite Schumann's promising entry into the musical life of Düsseldorf, it was not long before things turned sour. His fragile mental health, his ineptitude as a conductor, and his frequent irritability created a rift with the musicians, and the orchestra's governing body presented him with the suggestion that, perhaps, his time would be better devoted entirely to composition. Schumann, increasingly unstable though at

first determined to stay, complained to his wife, Clara, that he was being cruelly treated. Proceedings were begun by the orchestra committee to relieve him of his position, but his resignation in 1853 ended the matter. By early the next year, Schumann's reason had completely given way. On February 27th, he tried to drown himself in the Rhine and a week later he was committed to the asylum in Eindhoven, where he lingered with fleeting moments of sanity for nearly two-and-a-half years. His faithful Clara was there with him when he died on July 29, 1856, at the age of 46.

Though Schumann's tenure in Düsseldorf proved difficult and ended sadly, he enjoyed there one of his greatest outbursts of creativity — nearly one-third of his compositions were written in the city. The G minor Piano Trio, his third and last venture in the genre, was composed in a single week (October 2-9) in 1851, after he and Clara had returned from a tour that took them to Bonn, Heidelberg, Baden-Baden, Switzerland (Clara reported that the Alpine views drew cries of rapture from her husband), Brussels and Antwerp, where Robert adjudicated a choir contest. The Trio was premiered at a "Schumann Week" in Leipzig in March 1852.

The sonata-form opening movement ("Animated, but not too fast") is devoted almost completely to the widely arched theme presented by the violin at the outset. The motive is worked into a variety of guises — some lyrical, some augmented in note values, some modified in intervallic content — but all growing with admirable logic from the single thematic seed. The movement is a fine testament to the manner in which Schumann developed over the course of his career from a composer of aphoristic sketches for piano to a skilled builder of large musical structures. The second movement ("Moderately slow") is a lovely wordless duet for strings that becomes more agitated in its central episode. The third movement ("Fast") is a haunted scherzo (in duple meter) whose ghostly strains are balanced by two trios of brighter character. The ebullient finale ("Vigorous, with humor") is a large, three-part form (A-B-A) whose middle regions are given to marching music of somber demeanor.

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Quartet No. 2 for Piano, Violin, Viola and Cello

in G minor, Op. 45

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

Composed 1885-1886.

Premiered on January 22, 1887 in Paris.

It was in 1883 while Fauré was revising the score of the C minor Piano Quartet, composed in 1876 for the fledgling Société Nationale de Musique, that he seems to have become interested in providing it with a sequel. No documentary evidence exists concerning the gestation of the Piano Quartet No. 2 in G minor, though the work was apparently Fauré's principal creative occupation during 1885 and 1886. The first definitive date that can be attached to the Quartet is that of its premiere — January 22, 1887 at the Société Nationale by violinist Guillaume Rémy, violist Louis van Waefelghem, and cellist Jules Delsart, with the composer himself as pianist. The score of the G minor Quartet was published later that year with a dedication to the eminent German pianist and conductor Hans von Bülow, who had said some nice things about Fauré's music in a recent open letter to the Parisian conductor, violinist and impresario Édouard Colonne.

The Piano Quartet No. 2 opens with a sweeping unison string theme of almost symphonic breadth whose initial gesture — a heroic octave leap — is followed by a series of short, tightly compressed motivic cells. The piano's repetition of the main theme leads to the introduction of the quiet, lyrical second subject by the viola. A brief reference to the main theme serves as the transition to the exposition's third melody, a smoothly arching strain presented by cello and viola in octaves. The development section concerns itself first with permutations of the main theme and then with the arching theme before a sonorous unison return of the principal subject marks the beginning of the recapitulation. The viola again gets to sing its lyrical subsidiary theme, but the arching melody is omitted in favor of the anxious coda based on the main theme that brings the movement to a dying close.

The *Scherzo*, according to Jean-Michel Nectoux in his study of Fauré, “casts a spell in its headlong career through a night illuminated by mysterious flashes: we are reminded of Schubert's *Erl King*, Berlioz's *Faust*, and Franck's *Accursed Huntsman*.” The movement, possessed of a kind of demonic force rare in Fauré's writing, is formed around the alternation of two contrasting themes: the first is an agitated, rhythmically unsettled piano melody of scale steps given against a background of plucked strings; the other is a smooth string motive derived from the opening movement's second theme.

Fauré gave the following explanation of the twilight mood and meditative serenity of the *Adagio*: “In the slow movement of my Second Quartet, I recalled a peal of bells we used to hear of an evening drifting over to Montgauzy [near Foix, in southwest France, where he lived as a boy] from a village called Cadirac whenever the wind blew from the west.”

The finale, thematically rich and somewhat prolix, resumes the impassioned energy of the opening movement. A main theme of aggressive triplet rhythms is announced by the strings above a restless piano accompaniment. Other complementary thematic ideas follow: a lyrical but syncopated strain in the piano; a piano subject in hammered chords (the formal second theme); and a smooth, expressive melody in long notes in the viola and cello. The development section is based largely on the opening triplet motive. The exposition's four themes are heard again in the recapitulation before a brilliant coda in the sun-bright key of G major brings the Quartet to its victorious conclusion.