



2023-24 Hal & Jeanette Segerstrom
Family Foundation Classical Series

KERN PLAYS RACH 3

Thursday, Feb. 1, 2024 @ 8 p.m.

Friday, Feb. 2, 2024 @ 8 p.m.

Saturday, Feb 3, 2024 @ 8 p.m.

SUNDAY MATINEE*

Sunday, Feb 4, 2024 @ 3 p.m.

Sunday's matinee will only feature
the Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto

Carl St.Clair, conductor

Olga Kern, piano

Pacific Symphony

PROGRAM

RACHMANINOFF Piano Concerto No. 3 in D minor,
Op. 30*
Allegro ma non tanto
Intermezzo
Finale
Olga Kern

-INTERMISSION-

BRAHMS Symphony No.1 in C minor, Op. 68
Un poco sostenuto; Allegro
Andante sostenuto
Un poco allegretto e grazioso
Adagio; Più andante; Allegro non
troppo, ma con brio

Sunday, Feb 4, 2024 @ 3 p.m.

RACHMANINOFF Piano Concerto No. 3 in D minor,
Op. 30*
Allegro ma non tanto
Intermezzo
Finale
Olga Kern

The Saturday concert is generously sponsored by
The Board of Counselors

The 2023-24 season piano soloists are generously
sponsored by **The Michelle F. Rohé Fund**



**This concert is being recorded for broadcast on
July 7, 2024 on Classical California KUSC.**

Performance at the Segerstrom Center for the Arts
Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall & Lobby



PROGRAM NOTES

Sergei Vasilyevich Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto No. 3 in D minor, Op. 30

Born: Apr. 1, 1873 in Starorussky Uyezd, Russian Empire

Died: Mar. 28, 1943 in Beverly Hills, CA

Composed: Summer 1909 in Dresden, Germany

Premiered: Nov. 28, 1909 at New York City, with the composer as soloist and Walter Damrosch conducting the New York Symphony Society

Most recent Pacific Symphony

performance: Feb. 19, 2022 with Carl St.Clair conducting and Alessio Bax as soloist.

Instrumentation: two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, one tuba, timpani, percussion, strings, and solo piano

Approximate duration: 39 minutes



Sergei Rachmaninoff, the last of the great Russian Romantic composers, was also one of history's great pianists—perhaps the greatest of all, according to some current re-evaluations. As a conservatory student in Moscow and St. Petersburg, he focused intensively on both piano technique and composition, and he was recognized as a great pianist throughout his career. Just before his death, he was touring the U.S. as a piano soloist. Despite his latter-day moodiness and a bit of harmonic adventurousism, you can hear that his style was rooted in the 1800s and in Russian tradition.

Listening to Rachmaninoff's long, brooding lines, their sweetness tinged with melancholy, it is surprising to learn that he died at his home in sunny Beverly Hills as recently as 1943. Another Russian expatriate composer, Igor Stravinsky, had come to the United States in 1939, became a naturalized U.S. citizen, and encouraged Rachmaninoff to move to Los Angeles. Once here, his hallmarks remained dazzling virtuosity and lush melody: Big intervals and big sound were natural parts of his musical vocabulary, and seemed to come naturally to his huge hands and long limbs. In fact, it is now believed that he had Marfan's Syndrome, a congenital condition associated with these skeletal proportions. But if Marfan's contributed to his heroic sound, there was a more delicate aspect to the Rachmaninoff style: fleet passagework, rhythmic pliancy, and long, singing lines. His third piano concerto is known to many pianists as Rach 3, or—thanks to Sylvester Stallone—as Rocky III.

The difficulties lie in Rachmaninoff's unique combination of power, poetry, and speed. Those huge, complex chords, thundering octaves, cascading phrases, and purling legatos might be nearly impossible to play, but should sound effortless as they hold you in their thrall. It's only afterwards, when you are released from their spell, that you might wonder how in the world the pianist played them with only two hands. Not surprisingly, this concerto is associated with some of the greatest pianists of the early 20th Century. Its dedicatee was the revered Josef Hoffmann, and though he never played it, it helped launch the career of an astounding newcomer named Vladimir Horowitz, who chose it for his graduation recital at the Kiev Conservatory

and was soloist in the premiere recording.

The composer felt that his third concerto was more "comfortable" to perform than his second, but now, more than a century later, the third is considered more awesomely virtuosic. It was a spectacular showcase for Rachmaninoff's particular gifts, and touring with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, he was both soloist and conductor in Chicago and Philadelphia; in New York he played the concerto with the New York Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Walter Damrosch, and with the New York Philharmonic under the direction of Gustav Mahler.

Written in the three-movement form typical of Romantic concertos, the Piano Concerto No. 3 is replete with dazzle and lush melody. It begins with an allegro movement in D minor in which the opening statement, a simple melody, is juxtaposed against a slower theme. These frame a characteristic Rachmaninoff development section, with brilliant passagework and thundering climaxes that create intense drama before the original theme reappears in relative tranquility.

The concerto's second movement, marked *intermezzo*, reveals what many listeners value most in Rachmaninoff: a melody of intense, swooning romanticism that goes wherever its organic, spontaneous development seems to lead it. Introspective in character, it builds gradually from quiet nostalgia to dramatic fortissimos that showcase the soloist's power. This development is mediated by the reintroduction of the main melody from the first movement. Solo flourishes from the piano lead directly from its close. In a work that is both a sprint and a marathon, this movement provides the few moments of respite for the soloist.

Grace and speed are in order for the final movement, which builds toward a powerful climax by weaving together contrasting materials: accented march rhythms alternating with flowing, lyrical phrases. The movement reprises melodic materials from the concerto's opening, concluding with a coda of thrilling power.

Johannes Brahms Symphony No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 68

Born: May 7, 1833 in Hamburg, Germany

Died: Apr. 3, 1897 in Vienna, Austro-Hungarian Empire

Composed: Between 1855 and 1876

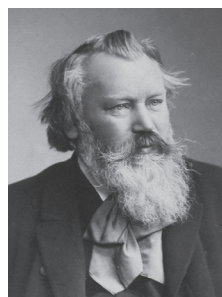
Premiered: Nov. 4, 1876 in Karlsruhe, Grand Duchy of Baden, with Felix Otto Dessoif conducting

Most recent Pacific Symphony

performance: Oct. 24, 2015, with Carl St.Clair conducting

Instrumentation: two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, three bassoons including contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, and strings

Approximate duration: 45 minutes



Every symphonist since Beethoven has labored in Beethoven's shadow, but this shadow fell with particular darkness upon

PROGRAM NOTES

Johannes Brahms. In Germany and throughout Europe, musical insiders saw in Brahms a composer of superb craft and a certain gravitas that were perfectly suited to the symphonic form. Here, at last, was someone who could keep the symphony alive and growing after Beethoven's towering, form-busting Ninth. But Brahms, for his part, was uneasy about these expectations. He did not produce his first symphony until age 43. Despite years of revising and polishing, he suffered deep anxiety before the premiere. After its great success one might have expected him to relax and wear the mantle of symphonist more comfortably; instead, he worried about his second, facing what writers today call the "sophomore curse" as they wonder how to follow a successful first novel.

Nothing in 21st century America resembles the public anticipation of Brahms's first symphony in Germany and Austria, but our fierce, multi-generational sports rivalries—say, Red Sox versus Yankees or Celtics versus Lakers—can provide some context for the pressure Brahms faced in composing it. Years before its premiere, critics and music fans were already referring to it as "Beethoven's Tenth." The future of classical composition was the subject of debate in cafes and salons, with the firebrand Richard Wagner representing either the savior or destroyer of cherished musical traditions extending back to Bach, and Brahms representing either a holdout against progress or a viable way forward. Though Wagner was born 20 years before Brahms, Wagner was the rebel and Brahms the traditionalist, and a three-word question—"Brahms oder Wagner?"—could provoke fistfights. In 1877, after at least 14 years of composing and recomposing, Brahms gave traditionalists what they wanted: a symphony worthy of Beethoven's legacy, combining traditional craft and gravitas with a more modern sound. Its premiere in Baden under the baton of his friend Felix Dessooff was greeted with acclaim and relief.

What next? Despite his nerves, Brahms was not about to spend another 43 years fretting about a symphony. In 1877, during the summer after the premiere of this one, he threw himself into the composition of his Symphony No. 2. By the end of the summer, it was essentially complete. Though it was not greeted with the same enthusiasm as his first, today we recognize it not only as the first's equal in stature, but also as its necessary complement: a symphony that does not look back to Beethoven in tribute, but instead looks ahead to a progressive future for the form.

Some scholars have looked at Brahms' first and second as one of two symphonic pairs, the other being Beethoven's fifth and sixth. When we compare all four, the earlier symphony in each pair is an impassioned statement exploring human fate in a metaphysical way; each later symphony has a lyrical, pastoral feeling. Each earlier symphony had a long, agonized gestation; each later symphony was composed with relative speed, in a burst of creative energy. (For both Beethoven and Brahms, composition was more usually a process of great deliberation.) In fact, Brahms' second is sometimes referred to as his pastoral symphony. But as musicologist Sarah Gerk points out, the pattern of propulsive inspiration for a symphony following prolonged labor on another is common among symphonists—as is the pattern of following a profound, fateful symphony with one that is more relaxed.

Among Brahms' four symphonies, only his first begins with

a formal introduction, a *poco sostenuto* opening that gives way to complex, syncopated rhythms that are uniquely Brahmsian. Throughout, the symphony's sound combines grandeur and grace. In its rhythmic patterns, many listeners hear the presence of Beethoven—particularly his fifth symphony's "fate" theme. In this symphony, as in Brahms' concertos, surface polish often conceals complex construction; in this case we hear expressions of complex, boiling energy alternating with inward contemplation. But when the serene and deeply moving chorale melody of the final movement enfolds us, we find that Brahms—like Beethoven—has given us a profoundly felt symphony that leads us into a place of light and comfort.

Michael Clive is a cultural reporter living in the Litchfield Hills of Connecticut. He is program annotator for Pacific Symphony and has written numerous articles for magazines and newspapers in the U.S. and U.K. and hundreds of program notes for orchestras and opera companies. Operahound.com

ABOUT THE ARTIST

With a vivid onstage presence, dazzling technique, and keen musicianship pianist Olga Kern is now recognized as one of her generation's great artists. With her vivid stage presence, passionately confident musicianship, and extraordinary technique, the striking pianist continues to captivate fans and critics alike. Kern was born into a family of musicians with direct links to Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff and began studying piano at the age of five. She jump started her U.S. career with her historic Gold Medal at the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition in Fort Worth, Texas as the first woman to do so in more than 30 years.



Steinway Artist and First Prize winner of the Rachmaninoff International Piano Competition at 17, Kern is a laureate of many international competitions. In 2016, she served as Jury Chairman of both the Seventh Cliburn International Amateur Piano Competition and the first Olga Kern International Piano Competition, where she also holds the title of Artistic Director. Kern frequently gives masterclasses and since September 2017, has served on the piano faculty of the prestigious Manhattan School of Music. Also in 2017, she received the Ellis Island Medal of Honor (New York City). In 2019, she was appointed the Connie & Marc Jacobson Director of Chamber Music at the Virginia Arts Festival.

Kern is featured in award-winning documentaries about the 2001 Cliburn Competition: *The Cliburn: Playing on the Edge, They Came to Play*, and *Olga's Journey*.