

Sunday Matinee

RACHMANINOFF'S SYMPHONY NO. 2

Sunday, June 14, 2026 @ 3 p.m.

Valentina Peleggi, conductor
Pacific Symphony

RACHMANINOFF

Symphony No. 2 in E Minor, Op. 27
Largo - Allegro moderato
Allegro molto
Adagio
Allegro vivace



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

ABOUT THE CONDUCTOR

Valentina Peleggi, guest conductor



In 2025-26, Valentina Peleggi returns to Pacific Symphony and makes her Australasian debut with the Tasmanian Symphony and New Zealand Symphony, championing works by Puccini, Verdi, and Rossini. Peleggi's past guest appearances in North America have included the Chicago, Dallas, Baltimore,

New World, Kansas City, Indianapolis, Colorado, and Vancouver symphonies and at the Grant Park Music Festival. In Europe, she has previously conducted the London Philharmonic, Royal Philharmonic, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Ulster Orchestra, Brussels Philharmonic, Liege Philharmonic, Antwerp Symphony, Nuremberg Symphoniker, Gulbenkian Orchestra, Norrköping Symphony, Orchestra della Toscana, Pomeriggi Musicali di Milano and Arena di Verona orchestras; she has also conducted at the Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires.

Opera (especially bel canto) is vital part of Peleggi's activity. In May 2025 she debuted at Opera de Rouen and in Paris at the Theatre des Champs-Élysées with Rossini's *Semiramide*, and in 2026, she will return to Opera North to lead the production of *The Marriage of Figaro* at the Opera North. She has previously conducted *Le Comte Ory* with the Philharmonia Orchestra at Garsington Opera and *Rigoletto* at the Teatro Verdi in Trieste, and made her Opéra de Lyon debut with Piazzola's *Maria de Buenos Aires*. Whilst a Mackerras Fellow at English National Opera in 2018 and 2019 she conducted a wide range of repertoire including *Carmen* and *La Bohème*.

2021 saw the release of her first CD, featuring acappella works by Villa Lobos in a new critical edition for Naxos guest edited by Peleggi and performed by the São Paulo Symphony Chorus, where she returned in 2023 to conduct an acappella concert. While acting Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor of the Chorus, she was concurrently Resident Conductor of the São Paulo Symphony Orchestra and Music Director (responsible for Italian repertoire) of the Teatro São Pedro in São Paulo.

The first Italian woman to enter the conducting programme at the Royal Academy of Music of London, she graduated with Distinction and was awarded the DipRAM for an outstanding final concert, as well as numerous other prizes, and was recently honoured with the title of Associate. She furthered her studies with David Zinman and Daniele Gatti at the Zurich Tonhalle and at the Royal Concertgebouw masterclasses. She won the 2014 Conducting Prize at the Festival International de Inverno Campos do Jordão, was awarded a Bruno Walter Foundation Scholarship at the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music in California, and received the Taki Concordia Conducting Fellowship 2015-2017 under Marin Alsop.

Peleggi holds a Master in Conducting with Honours from the Conservatorio Santa Cecilia in Rome, and in 2013 she received the Accademia Chigiana's highest award, going on to assist Bruno Campanella and Gianluigi Gelmetti at Teatro Regio di Torino, Opera Bastille Paris, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Teatro Regio di Parma and Teatro San Carlo. She also assisted on a live worldwide broadcast and DVD production of Rossini's *Cenerentola* with the Orchestra Nazionale della RAI. From 2005

to 2015 she was the Principal Conductor and Music Director of the University Choir in Florence and remains their Honorary Conductor, receiving a special award from the Government in 2011 in recognition of her work there. Peleggi is passionate about the arts and holds a Master in Comparative Literature.

Sergei Rachmaninoff

Born: Apr. 1, 1873 in Semyonovo, Russia

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

Symphony No. 2 in E Minor, Op. 27



Composed: 1906-07

Premiered: Jan. 26, 1908 at the Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg, Russia, with the house orchestra conducted by the composer.

Most recent Pacific Symphony

performance: Oct. 21, 2017, in the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall with Rune Bergmann conducting.

Instrumentation: Three flutes including piccolo, three oboes including English horn, three clarinets including bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, one tuba, timpani, percussion, and strings.

Approximate duration: 60 minutes.

Rachmaninoff was painfully vulnerable to his own doubts and those of the critics. A harsh judgment in print or less-than-enthusiastic audience reaction was enough to plunge him into a despairing creative paralysis so crippling that we must now count ourselves fortunate to have the relative handful of compositions that survived his depression.

The Symphony No. 2 may be the unlikeliest of these survivors. The young Rachmaninoff's potential as a conductor and pianist was not in question, but he was committed to composition above all, and a symphony was a critically important milestone for his career. He first approached the form when he was 22, fashioning an ambitious work in the tradition of forebears he admired, including Tchaikovsky and Borodin. It was ardent, poetic, and a disaster, thanks to a dismal premiere performance that destroyed the core of his identity—belief in his calling as a composer. Initial sketches for another symphony and an opera based on *Dante* were shelved. Every attempt at new work brought blank aridity, and it seemed Rachmaninoff might never compose again—least of all a symphony.

Rachmaninoff's creative stasis lasted about three years, ending with what we might now call an intervention: A group of concerned individuals confronted him in 1900, persuading him to consult the physician Nikolai Dahl, who specialized in treating alcoholic patients via hypnotherapy. Dahl treated Rachmaninoff for three years with repetitive hypnotic affirmations. "You will work with great facility," Dahl insisted, and it's hard to deny that he effected a cure: Rachmaninoff not only resumed composing, but produced his Piano Concerto No. 2, his most popular work. He dedicated it to Dr. Dahl.

The Symphony No. 2 may represent an even greater triumph. Not only does it stand with the second concerto as one of Rachmaninoff's most successful works, but it demonstrates the composer's courage in confronting the form that originally traumatized him. By the time he composed it, in 1906 and 1907, his success in his native Russia was such that he sought privacy with his family in the music-friendly city of Dresden. He returned to the scene of his initial disaster for the second symphony's premiere, this time conducting it himself to critical and public acclaim.

The symphony begins with a substantial first movement that introduces fragments of melody that first stand on their own, then combine into longer and more layered statements. The second movement's initial expansiveness is shouldered out by the energy and intensity of a sparkling scherzo. A reprise of the scherzo theme also brings us the familiar sound of the *Dies irae*, an eerie plainchant motif that fascinated Rachmaninoff and many other composers. The movement ends with a resounding fortissimo coda in E minor.

No one composed more satisfyingly lingering adagios than Rachmaninoff, who in this symphony's third movement seems to offer enough materials for three or four adagios. It begins with silken violins that give way to a long clarinet statement, eventually merging into a contrapuntal discourse. The symphony treats us to a joyful final movement that seems to belie Rachmaninoff's prevailing melancholy mood. An energetic invitation sweeps through the orchestra, subsiding into a protracted development section that introduces vigorous dance rhythms into the mix. The finale rewards us with one of Rachmaninoff's most convincingly triumphant extended melodies.

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