



2021-22 Hal & Jeanette Segerstrom Family
Foundation Classical Series

ZHANG PLAYS RACH 2

Preview talk with Dr. Jacob Sustaita @ 7 p.m.

Thursday, November 11, 2021 @ 8 p.m.

Friday, November 12, 2021 @ 8 p.m.

Saturday, November 13, 2021 @ 8 p.m.

Markus Stenz, conductor
Haochen Zhang, piano
Pacific Symphony

Zhang Plays Rach 2
has been generously sponsored by
Diana Martin and Mark Tomaino (Thursday).

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A rebroadcast of **Rach 2** will be on **KUSC** on
Sunday, January 9, 2022 at 7 p.m.

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

PROGRAM

Rachmaninoff

Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, Op. 18

Moderto

Adagio sostenuto

Allegro scherzando

Haochen Zhang, piano

— Intermission —

Debussy

Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun

Stravinsky

Suite from *The Firebird* (1945)

Introduction

Prelude, Dance of the

Firebird, & Variations

Pantomime I

Pas de deux

Pantomime II

Scherzo (Dance of the

Princesses)

Pantomime III

Rondo

Infernal Dance

Lullaby (Berceuse)

Final Hymn

PROGRAM NOTES

Sergei Rachmaninoff:

Concerto No. 2 in C minor for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 18



Rachmaninoff was essentially a figure of the 20th century, the last of the Russian romantics. But his sound was rooted in the 1800s and in the Russian nationalist composers dating back to Glinka and Tchaikovsky. Trained as a pianist as well as a composer in Moscow and St. Petersburg, Rachmaninoff focused on the

piano in composition as well as performance; of his three concertos, the Concerto No. 2 is both the most popular and the most critically admired. This is the composition that made his reputation, and that pianists and fans often call “Rocky 2.” It certainly takes a heavyweight talent to go the distance with it.

The concerto’s success was hard-won. Composed between the autumn of 1900 and spring of 1901, Concerto No. 2 followed by three years the dismal reception of Rachmaninoff’s first symphony, which proved a setback to

his musical ambitions (despite the admiration it has earned in our own day). Always subject to clinical depression, the well-born Rachmaninoff benefited from both assiduous medical care and rededication to piano composition in working to free himself from a creative stasis. In fact, the concerto was dedicated to his physician, Nikolai Dahl. One can hear the brooding depressive as well as the ardent romantic throughout the concerto. In the first movement, marked *moderato* and written in C minor, an opening of intense foreboding builds through a series of powerful chiming chords in the piano. As the tension builds to a breaking point, the piano's simulated chiming rolls into a sweeping main theme that is taken up in the violins but quickly engulfs the entire orchestra.

From this moment on—indeed, from the very opening bars, with the piano's lone voice—the concerto announces itself as a hugely scaled musical statement that balances sweeping, melancholy phrases with romantic melodies. Throughout the concerto, we hear both the chilly breath of Russia outdoors and a moody interior landscape. When a rolling theme emerges, its march tempo gives it the quality of an inexorable machine, with only the solo piano to challenge it. Slow chords in the strings open the second movement, an *adagio* that moves from C minor into E major. While the piano delineates a theme through fleet, poetic arpeggios, the overall mood remains melancholy, with a short exchange between orchestra and piano developing the movement's motifs.

Yet the tinge of sadness does not overwhelm—perhaps because of the sense of romance and melodic richness that pervades the whole concerto. Its songful quality, which gave rise to two Frank Sinatra tunes based on just the first movement (*I Think of You* and *Ever and Forever*), takes full flight in the lush, gorgeous third movement, marked *allegro scherzando*. This movement is built around a melody that is like the distilled essence of romance, and that forms the basis of the popular song from the 1940s, *Full Moon and Empty Arms*. It has been quoted in dozens of movies to convey the exquisite pleasure of love anticipated... and the exquisite pain of love unfulfilled. It can also be said to have saved Rachmaninoff's life: when he composed this melody and discussed it with colleagues, it secured his more optimistic outlook on his composing prospects. This is the theme that turned *Brief Encounter* into a three-handkerchief weepy, and that prompted Marilyn Monroe to exclaim, "Every time I hear it, I go to pieces!" in *The Seven Year Itch*. The concerto ends in a flourish of virtuosity and optimism. 🌸

Claude Debussy:

Prelude to The Afternoon of a Faun



Debussy was influenced in his musical explorations by writers of his day—particularly the revolutionary poet Stéphane Mallarmé and the Belgian symbolist playwright Maurice Maeterlinck—as well as by the chromaticism of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. Mallarmé's extraordinarily moody, dense poems hover in the

netherworld between conscious thought and the unconscious mind. Rich in allusions and symbols that reveal the hidden world of human eroticism, they were crafted at a time when Freud's study of the unconscious was changing the way we view erotic impulse.

Mallarmé was about 20 years older than Debussy, who composed a musical setting for one of Mallarmé's poems when he was just 22. As quoted by the poet Paul Valéry, Mallarmé seems to have had his strong reservations about the very idea of composing such a work. After all, the words of a poem are their own music... why graft a redundant set of musical notes onto them? Nonetheless, just three years later the young composer joined Mallarmé's salon, an influential and now legendary group of poets and artists who met on Tuesday evenings to exchange ideas and argue companionably.

In 1892, when Debussy was about 30, he began working on a composition inspired by another Mallarmé poem, *Afternoon of a Faun*. But in this case, the work is not a direct setting of the words, but an autonomous "prelude" suggested by the poem's dense, drowsy eroticism. Mallarmé called the poem an "eclogue," a brief, nature-oriented lyric recalling the poems of Virgil; its narrator-subject, the faun, is the half-man-half-goat exemplified by the god Pan, always haunting the forest and un-self-consciously randy. And this time, according to Debussy's biographer Maurice Dumesnil, Mallarmé greatly admired the result when he heard it in concert, impressed with Debussy's success in capturing the poem's elusive and all-important qualities of mood. Two years later, Debussy embarked upon his monumental *Pelléas et Mélisande*, an opera based upon Maeterlinck's sad, densely Freudian fable set in a magical forest.

How much of the music's erotic subtext was heard by Debussy's contemporary listeners? One clue: The Prelude did not gain notoriety until 20 years after Debussy composed it, when Vaslav Nijinsky choreographed and danced it for the Ballets Russes with explicit depictions of the faun's sexual daydreaming. Sophisticated Parisian viewers were shocked; their howls of protest foreshadowed what would happen the following year, at the premiere of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*.

The Prelude to the *Afternoon of a Faun* opens with one of the most iconic passages in classical music, a solo flute passage that ranks with the first four notes of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony or the pulsing snare drum in Ravel's *Bolero* as instantly recognizable and utterly universal. Often cued by just a nod or a brief hand gesture from the conductor, the phrase curls from a single flute like a wisp of smoke, falling in half-steps to delineate the mysterious tritone interval and then rising again. This is how Debussy introduces us to the languorous, amorous faun, ever in dreamy pursuit and always with the Pipes of Pan hanging from his neck. The conductor and scholar Pierre Boulez, one of the 20th century's most authoritative champions of the new, cited this exquisitely dramatic entrance as a turning point in composition; in his 1958 "Entries for a Musical Encyclopaedia" he notes that "the flute of the faun brought new breath to the art of music." 🌸

Igor Stravinsky:

Suite from *The Firebird*



Stravinsky's sense of his own greatness was as much a matter of *noblesse oblige* as of ego. But in 1908, just before he began work on *The Firebird*, there was little external evidence of his potential to become one of the giants of Western music. He was 26 and still greatly influenced by his teacher and mentor, Nikolai

Rimsky-Korsakov, whose iridescent harmonies and traditional virtuosity were still strongly evident in Stravinsky's compositions, almost all of which remained unpublished.

Without a major commission, Stravinsky was receptive to a suggestion from Rimsky for an opera based on an enchanting tale from Hans Christian Andersen, *Le Rossignol*. But after a year's work, an improbable series of coincidences brought Stravinsky the commission for *The Firebird*, his breakthrough ballet for Serge Diaghilev's prestigious Ballets Russes, and he set *Le Rossignol* aside. Suddenly, Stravinsky was in a hothouse of international talent; the Ballets Russes' dancers included Vaslav Nijinsky and Bronislava Nijinska, its settings and costumes were designed by such artists as Pablo Picasso and Leon Bakst, and its productions embodied all the artistic richness and ferment of Paris in the Art Deco era preceding World War I. With characteristic boldness, Diaghilev had given Stravinsky this assignment based on a single hearing of a rather slender score; its success made the composer's reputation overnight. It was the beginning of a transformative musical journey that continued with *Petrushka* and the epoch-making *The Rite of Spring*. In less than five years, this astounding collaboration caused sophisticated Parisians to riot at the sound of a new and revolutionary kind of music far beyond anything Rimsky-Korsakov imagined.

"Shimmering" is a word often used to describe the ethereal beauty of Stravinsky's score for *The Firebird*. But when balletomanes first encountered it in 1909, both the look and the sound of this work had the power to shock. Where 19th-century ballets were dominated by elegance and picturesque delicacy on stage and in the pit, *The Firebird* substituted a story rooted in folk traditions that seemed primitive by comparison, even including human sacrifice. The music booms with emphatic percussion and is not afraid of dissonance. Yet it also shines with melodies that are almost magical, capturing the sense of human awe in the midst of nature's eternal vastness. In his next two ballets, Stravinsky would go even further in combining sophisticated musical craft with folk elements that seemed shockingly primitive to his contemporary listeners.

"For me, the most striking effect in *The Firebird* was the natural-harmonic string glissando near the beginning, which the bass chord touches off like a Catherine wheel," Stravinsky wrote. "I was delighted to have discovered this, and I remember my excitement in demonstrating it to Rimsky's violinist and cellist sons." Though he was still in his twenties, it was not the first time he had used the orchestra to evoke fireworks. His *Feu d'artifice* (*Fireworks*) was composed a year before *The Firebird*. It was this sparkling orchestral fantasy that had so impressed Diaghilev, leading to their fateful collaboration. 🌩

Sergei Rachmaninoff

Born: April 1, 1873, Nieg, Russia

Died: March 28, 1943, Los Angeles, Calif.

Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, Op. 18

Composed: 1900-1

World premiere: November 9, 1901, in Moscow, with the composer as soloist and his teacher and first cousin Alexander Siloti conducting

Most recent Pacific Symphony performance: June 2, 2018

with Ben Gernon conducting and Boris Giltburg at the piano

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons,

4 French horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani,

percussion, strings, and solo piano

Estimated duration: 33 minutes

Claude Debussy

Born: Aug. 22, 1862, Paris, France

Died: March 25, 1918, Paris, France

Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun

Composed: 1892-1894, with further minor revisions over the span of two decades.

Premiere: December 22, 1894. Gustave Doret conducted at a concert in Paris of the Société Nationale de Musique.

Most recent Pacific Symphony performance: March 8, 2014 with Thierry Fischer conducting.

Instrumentation: 3 flutes, 3 oboes including English horn, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 French horns, percussion, 2 harps, and strings

Estimated duration: 10 minutes

Igor Stravinsky

Born: June 5, 1882, Oranienbaum, Finland

Died: April 6, 1971, New York, New York

Suite from *The Firebird*

Composed: 1909-10

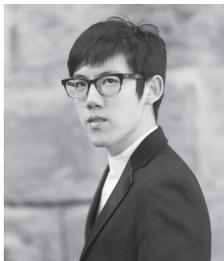
World premiere: The original ballet premiered June 25, 1910, by Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes at the Opéra in Paris. In 1911, 1919 and 1945, Stravinsky extracted three somewhat different orchestral suites, respectively, from the score of the whole ballet. The last of these was based on the 1919 version, in which Stravinsky had reduced the size of the orchestra.

Most recent Pacific Symphony performance: Pacific Symphony last performed *The Firebird* Suite in its 1919 version on November 19, 2016 with Rune Bergmann conducting. Tonight is Pacific Symphony's first performance of the 1945 version, which is a re-orchestration of the 1919 suite with the insertion of five additional sections from the ballet.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes including piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 French horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, piano, and strings

Estimated duration: 31 minutes

ABOUT THE ARTIST



Since his gold medal win at the 13th Van Cliburn International Piano Competition in 2009, Haochen Zhang has captivated audiences in the United States, Europe and Asia with a unique combination of deep musical sensitivity, fearless imagination and spectacular

virtuosity. In 2017, he received the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant, which recognizes talented musicians with the potential for a major career in music.

Zhang has already appeared with many of the world's leading festivals and orchestras including the BBC Proms with Long Yu and the China Philharmonic; the Munich Philharmonic with the late Lorin Maazel in a sold-out tour in Munich and China; the Easter Festival in Moscow by special invitation of Maestro Valery Gergiev; the Sydney Symphony and David Robertson in a China tour; and the NDR Hamburg and Thomas Hengelbrock in a tour of Tokyo, Beijing and Shanghai.

Zhang has performed with The Philadelphia Orchestra, Munich Philharmonic, London Symphony, London Philharmonic, WDR Symphony Orchestra, Frankfurt Radio, San Francisco Symphony, LA Philharmonic, Pacific Symphony, Kansas City Symphony, Seattle Symphony, Israel Philharmonic, Sydney Symphony, Japan Philharmonic, Singapore Symphony, Mariinsky Orchestra, Warsaw Philharmonic, Taiwan Philharmonic and Hong Kong Philharmonic orchestras, among others. In recital, he has performed at Spivey Hall, La Jolla Music Society, Celebrity Series of Boston, CU Artist Series, Cliburn Concerts, Krannert Center, Wolf Trap Discovery Series, Lied Center of Kansas and UVM Lane Series, among others.

Zhang's performances at the Cliburn Competition were released to critical acclaim by Harmonia Mundi in 2009. He is featured in Peter Rosen's award-winning documentary chronicling the 2009 Cliburn Competition, *A Surprise in Texas*.

Zhang is a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, where he studied under Gary Graffman. He has also been studying periodically with Andreas Haefliger in Vienna. He was previously trained at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and the Shenzhen Arts School, where he was admitted in 2001 at the age of 11 to study with Professor Dan Zhaoyi. 🌿

ABOUT THE CONDUCTOR



Markus Stenz has held a number of high-profile positions with international orchestras and opera houses including Principal Conductor of the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra (2012-2019), Principal Guest of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra (2015-2019) and Conductor-in-

Residence of the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra (2016-Dec 2020). He was general music director of the City of Cologne and Gürzenich-Kapellmeister for 11 years (2003-2014), principal guest conductor of the Hallé Orchestra (2010-2014), artistic director and chief conductor of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (1998-2004), principal conductor of London Sinfonietta (1994-1998) and artistic director of the Montepulciano Festival (1989-1995).

Stenz made his opera debut in 1988 at La Fenice with Henze's revised version of *Elegy for Young Lovers*. Since then, he has appeared at many of the world's major opera houses including Teatro alla Scala Milan, La Monnaie, English National Opera, San Francisco Opera and Chicago Lyric Opera. His notable performances in Cologne have included Wagner's *Ring*, *Lohengrin*, *Tannhäuser*, Janacek's *Jenufa*, Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and Eötvös' *Love and Other Demons*.

Stenz has conducted many world premieres including Henze's *Das Verratene Meer* for Deutsche Oper Berlin, *Venus und Adonis* for Bavarian State Opera, and *L'Upupa und der Triumph der Sohnesliebe* at the Salzburg Festival, Wolfgang Rihm's *Die Eroberung von Mexico* and Detlev Glanert's *Caligula* for Frankfurt Opera and *Solaris* at the Bregenz Festival. In the 2018-2019 season, he conducted the long-awaited world première of Kurtág's *Fin de Partie* at La Scala, Milan and Dutch National Opera.

Guest conducting engagements include the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Berlin Philharmonic, Munich Philharmonic, NHK, London Philharmonic, Vienna Symphony, and in the United States the Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, Dallas, Houston, Pittsburgh, San Diego and St. Louis Symphony Orchestras, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and Minnesota Orchestra.

In this season's engagements Stenz conducts Britten's *Midsummer Night's Dream* at Deutsche Oper Berlin and the French premiere of Kurtág's opera *Fin de Partie* at Opéra National de Paris. Other guest conducting engagements include performances with performances with Pacific Symphony and the Colorado and Jacksonville Symphony Orchestras as well as Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Orchestre National de Lyon and Orchestra della Toscana. 🌿