



**CHAMPAIGN-URBANA
SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**

Stephen Alltop, Music Director & Conductor

PROFESSIONAL ORCHESTRA IN RESIDENCE AT KRANNERT CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

SEASON

66

THE THRILL OF THE ORCHESTRA

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2025

KRANNERT CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

Stephen Alltop, Music Director & Conductor

Timothy Ehlen, piano

NOV 22



Concerto Fest

CHAMPAIGN URBANA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Saturday, November 22, 2025 | 4:00 pm

Faith United Methodist Church

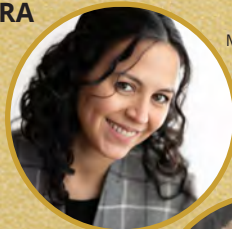
1719 S. Prospect Ave., Champaign

Maria Arrua, violin

John Dee, oboe

Stephen Alltop, conductor, harpsichord, and organ

Frances Ho, assistant conductor



MARIA ARRUA



JOHN DEE

Join CUSO for an afternoon of amazing baroque music. You'll delight in hearing famous choruses recast for two instrumental "choirs" in Handel's *Concerto a due cori in B-flat*. Concertmaster Maria Arrua and Music Director Stephen Alltop will team up in a fabulous and rarely-heard concerto for Violin and Harpsichord by Haydn. Principal oboist John Dee will shine in Albinoni's D Minor oboe concerto. The amazing pipe organ at Faith United Methodist Church will be featured in its full glory as Stephen Alltop performs Vincent Lübeck's *Präludium in E Major*. We'll conclude with magical music by Rameau that will leave you enchanted.

HANDEL: *Concerto a due cori No. 1 in B-Flat Major, HWV 332*

HAYDN: *Concerto for Violin, Harpsichord and String Orchestra in F Major, Hob. XVIII:6*

ALBINONI: *Oboe Concerto in D Minor, Op. 9 No. 2*

LÜBECK: *Präludium in E Major*

RAMEAU: Suite from *Les Boréades*



**CHAMPAIGN-URBANA
SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**

Stephen Alltop, Music Director & Conductor

For tickets call CUSO at 217-351-9139,
or visit cusymphony.org. Tickets on sale
through eventbrite.com on Nov. 1.

TICKETS: General Admission \$32 adult, \$10 youth/student of any age

WELCOME

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Dear Friends,

Welcome to the 2025-26 season opening concert of the Champaign-Urbana Symphony Orchestra. We begin our year with lively and colorful music! On a program featuring University of Illinois faculty member Timothy Ehlen performing the brilliant *Piano Concerto in G* of Maurice Ravel, we are reminded that all three composers heard this evening were leading pianists of their respective generations.

Among concert starters, I've always found Brahms' *Academic Festival Overture* to be one of the best. While Brahms' exquisite craft is always on display, this university-inspired piece also brims with a sense of youthful fun.

Rachmaninoff's *Symphonic Dances* is not only his final work, but also his sole composition written completely in the United States. And yet, there are elements in the *Symphonic Dances* that show the motherland of Russia was never far from his heart and thoughts. This sweeping masterpiece capitalizes on the full colors and thrilling power of the symphony orchestra.

Thank you so much for being here to help us start what should be a wonderful and fulfilling year of great music. Enjoy!

Musically yours,

Stephen Alltop
Music-Director and Conductor



CHAMPAIGN-URBANA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Stephen Alltop, Music Director & Conductor

CUSO is the professional orchestra in residence at the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts and is a member of the League of American Orchestras, the Illinois Council of Orchestras, the American Society of Composers, Authors & Publishers (ASCAP), and Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI). CUSO is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency.

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CELEBRATING 66 SEASONS OF LOCAL MUSIC



PROFESSIONAL ORCHESTRA IN RESIDENCE AT KRANNERT CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

1959

The “Champaign-Urbana Civic Symphony Orchestra” was founded in 1959 by music lovers in our community who had the dream of establishing a local, professional symphony orchestra. Funded by local businesses and more than 300 subscribers, the orchestra performed the opening concert in Smith Hall on October 20, 1960 under the leadership of Bernard Goodman. The concert was hailed “a magnificent success” by *The News-Gazette* and the new orchestra flourished with the help of the Symphony Guild that was formed in 1962.

CUSO began performing at the newly-built Krannert Center for the Performing Arts in 1969 and was designated the professional orchestra in residence at Krannert Center in 1988. Over the years, CUSO has performed more than 350 concerts and showcased the talents of thousands of local, professional musicians, bringing the magic of music to audiences of all ages. In partnership with the Guild, CUSO youth music programs have introduced thousands of grade school children to the vibrancy of live orchestral music, with Youth Concerts at Krannert Center and free concerts in the schools.

For the past 66 years, CUSO has thrived with community support. The orchestra is an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and receives no funding from Krannert Center or the University of Illinois. Like orchestras throughout the country, more than 60% of our budget is funded by the generous support of sponsors and donors.

Your gift to the Champaign-Urbana Symphony Orchestra makes these performances of great music by talented local musicians possible. To make a donation, call the CUSO office at 217-351-9139 or visit our website at cussympphony.org. Thank you for your support!





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Iris Swanson
(Verdi's "Requiem")

Ruth Wyman
(Happy Birthday, America!)

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The Thrill of the Orchestra)

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The Maestro Circle recognizes donations of \$1,000 or more more for the current season. CUSO gratefully acknowledges these donors for their early support of the programs and performances of the 2025-2026 season, with gifts made to CUSO and the Guild from April 4, 2025 through September 23, 2025.

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The Champaign-Urbana Symphony Orchestra warmly thanks these community members for their gifts made to CUSO and the Guild from April 4, 2025 through September 23, 2025 to support the 2025-2026 season.

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It is with sincere gratitude that we recognize donations made to CUSO and the Guild in the past 12 months for memorials and gifts made in honor of an individual for a birthday, anniversary, or special occasion.

In Memory of Richard "Dick" Cogdal

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In Memory of Dan Wheatman

Susan and Gerald Crawford



THE ORCHESTRA

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Stephen Alltop, Conductor
[Margaret C. Goodman Memorial Chair]
Frances Ho, Assistant Conductor

FIRST VIOLIN

Maria Arrua, Concertmaster
[Homer Schmitt Memorial Chair]
Qimao Li,
Acting Associate Concertmaster
Luke Brann
Wei-Ting Chen
Maria Emmons
Maiya Favis
Sierra Freund
Frantz Kjoniksen
Armine Mortimer
Rachel Sompong

SECOND VIOLIN

Bethany McClatchey, Principal
[Raymond E. Williams Memorial Chair]
Armgard Haken, Associate Principal
Alivia Gaskins
Jacy Jacobus
Maciej Latawiec
Alice Lee
Johnny Lusardi
Eun Namkung
Juliana Scofield
Anna Wallace

VIOLA

Erin Rafferty, Principal
[Wyndham J. Roberts Memorial Chair]
Isaac Henry, Associate Principal
[Ernest and Lois Gullerud Endowed Chair]
Elaine Fine
Matthew Nowlan
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Rebecca Saul
Jacqueline Scavetta

CELLO

Barbara Hedlund, Principal
[CUSO Guild Memorial Chair]
Zora Yo, Acting Associate Principal
[Carl and Nadja Altstetter Endowed Chair]
Andrew Gagliu
Robert Hauser
Kristen Johns
Kirsten Landowne

BASS

Andrew French, Principal
Margaret Briskin
Todd Gallagher
Mingzi Han
Kristina Lee

FLUTE

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[Thomas and Barbara Page Memorial Chair]
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Ellen Elrick

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[Margaret R. and Michael Grossman Endowed Chair]
Peggy Grossman

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Audrey Conklin

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The Champaign-Urbana Symphony Orchestra
acknowledges support from the Illinois Arts Council.

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CUSO FOUNDERS SOCIETY

Named in honor of the founders of the Champaign-Urbana Symphony Orchestra, the CUSO Founders Society recognizes donors who have contributed \$10,000 or more beginning in 2009, the 50th anniversary of the orchestra. As we celebrate our 66th season of local music, CUSO is grateful to these community members whose generous support over the years has led the way in sustaining and securing the legacy of the orchestra.

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HONORING THE MEMORY OF WALTER MCMAHON



WALTER MCMAHON 1928—2025

The Champaign-Urbana Symphony Orchestra Board of Directors dedicates tonight's performance of "The Thrill of the Orchestra" in honor of our good friend, Walt McMahon. Walt's leadership as a CUSO board member made significant contributions to the orchestra's success. He passed away peacefully at the age of 96 on February 25, 2025, surrounded by family and friends.

Walter Wolcott McMahon was born July 28th, 1928, in Clinton, Iowa, where he grew up the only child of two schoolteachers, who instilled in him the value of education and the moral obligation to help others and strive to make the world a better place. While an undergraduate at the University of Iowa, he met his beloved wife Carolyn. They were married in 1951 and enjoyed 64 happy years of marriage before she passed away in 2015.

Shortly after starting his Master's degree at the University of Iowa, Walt was called to serve in the Korean war. As a Lieutenant in the Infantry, he was badly wounded and spent seven months recovering in a Japanese hospital. He was discharged with a Purple Heart in 1952. After Korea, he returned to graduate studies in Economics at the University of Iowa and the London School of Economics. Upon earning his PhD, he was hired in 1957 as an Assistant Professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Aside from sabbaticals spent living abroad, he spent his entire professional career at the U of I.

Walt's work focused on human capital, including health economics, economic development, and the economics of education. He passionately believed that education is foundational to improving the lives of individuals and society, particularly in developing countries. Over his long and distinguished career, which continued up to a year before his death, he published (or co-published) twelve books and over 80 book chapters and journal articles.

Walt was an extraordinary man who lived life to the fullest and made many significant contributions to the fields of economics, education, and social justice. Walt and his wife Carolyn generously supported the Champaign-Urbana Symphony Orchestra as donors, patrons, Guild members, and board members. CUSO is especially grateful to Walt for his intelligent and optimistic leadership on the Symphony board. Tonight's concert celebrates Walt's love of music and the CU Symphony, with gratitude for all he brought to our community and our world.



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The Champaign-Urbana Symphony Orchestra is deeply grateful to our sponsors for their generous support of "The Thrill of the Orchestra."



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THE THRILL OF THE ORCHESTRA

THE CHAMPAIGN-URBANA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Stephen Alltop, Music Director & Conductor

Concert No. 319, October 4, 2025 | 7:30 p.m.

Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, Foellinger Great Hall

Stephen Alltop, conductor

Timothy Ehlen, piano

Academic Festival Overture, Op. 80

Johannes Brahms

(1833–1897)

Piano Concerto in G Major

Maurice Ravel

(1875–1937)

I. *Allegramente*

II. *Adagio assai*

III. *Presto*

Timothy Ehlen, piano

INTERMISSION

Symphonic Dances, Op. 45

Sergei Rachmaninoff

(1873–1943)

I. *Non allegro - Lento - Tempo I*

II. *Andante con moto (Tempo di valse)*

III. *Lento assai - Allegro vivace*



MUSIC DIRECTOR AND CONDUCTOR



STEPHEN ALLTOP

Stephen Alltop is celebrating his thirteenth season as Music Director and Conductor of the Champaign-Urbana Symphony Orchestra. In 2022, he received the Conductor of the Year Award from the Illinois Council of Orchestras for his work with CUSO. He also serves as Music Director of the Apollo Chorus of Chicago and the Elmhurst Symphony Orchestra. Dr. Alltop has been a member of Northwestern University's conducting and keyboard faculties since 1994. His recent projects at Northwestern have included conducting the world premiere recording of Stacy Garrop's oratorio *Terra Nostra* for Cedille Records, and leading Handel's *Alcina* and Monteverdi's *The Coronation of Poppea*.

Stephen Alltop has appeared with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra as both a harpsichord and organ soloist, and performs frequently with Chicago's Music of The Baroque. He has appeared with Boston's Handel and Haydn Society and the Chicago Bach Project, Chicago Sinfonietta, Grant Park Symphony Orchestra, Joffrey Ballet, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Minnesota Orchestra, Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, Omaha Symphony, and the Peninsula Music Festival and Ravinia Festival. Dr. Alltop served as coordinator and performer for WFMT's Chicago Bach Organ Project in the fall of 2014, a live performance series of all of Bach's organ works, and the WFMT Bach Keyboard Festival in the fall of 2015. His recordings are on the Albany, American Gramophone, Cedille, and Clarion labels.

Dr. Alltop has performed with many leading musicians and actors of our time, including Hilary Hahn, Orli Shaham, Tony Randall, Martin Sheen, and Brian Dennehy. He has prepared ensembles for the Ravinia Festival, Chicago Opera Theater, The Oprah Winfrey Show, Star Wars in Concert, Lollapalooza, and Josh Groban on Tour.

Dr. Alltop has guest conducted numerous orchestras and choruses across the United States, Europe, and South Korea. In June of 2022, he stepped

(continued on page 21)

GUEST ARTIST

TIMOTHY EHLEN

Timothy Ehlen, International Steinway Artist and Professor of Piano at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, has performed extensively in the United States, Europe and Asia. After his New York debut in Lincoln Center at Alice Tully Hall in 1988, the New York Times raved that his “playing was filled with elegant personality... recalled bygone artists like Robert Casadesus and, especially Walter Gieseking in their mastery of both 18th century and impressionist music... immaculate technique.” Recitals in France, Germany, and Korea have elicited a similarly enthusiastic response: “Sensitive and tender creativity [in Ravel]” [Fürther Nachrichten] and “behind the fire hid a heartfelt emotion, held together by tender affection [in Beethoven]” [L’Alsace].



Recital venues include the Cleveland Orchestra’s Schubert Bi-Centennial Series in Cleveland, festival Recontres Internationales de Piano en Alsace, International Franz Liszt Festival in France; periodic recitals on the series “Sundays Live” (broadcast live on KMZT in Los Angeles from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art) and the Wilshire Ebell Theater in Los Angeles, Old First Concerts in San Francisco, Bösendorfer Hall in Vienna, Kum Ho Art Hall in Seoul, Korea, Freeport Arts Center Community Concerts Series in Illinois; numerous universities, including Indiana University in Bloomington, Eastman School of Music in Rochester, NY, Northwestern University in Evanston, IL, Seoul National University in Korea, Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore, New England Conservatory of Music, and Michigan University in Ann Arbor. He has been heard frequently on National Public Radio, in addition to numerous independent broadcasts of major market performances in this country and abroad.

Mr. Ehlen has recorded the complete Beethoven Piano Sonatas for the Azica label. Other CD releases on the Azica label include the Schumann Fantasie op. 17 and other works (2006), The Ehlen-Tai Piano Duo, Virtuosoic Dance (2016), and the Brahms late character pieces, ops. 116, 117, 118 and 119 (2018). Additional recordings have appeared on the Crystal, Omnibus, and Felia Mundi labels.





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Oh, AND it supports the local classical music scene! With each pour, we donate \$1 to the Champaign-Urbana Symphony Orchestra. AND AND, if you bring in this program from “The Thrill of the Orchestra” concert, we’ll send you home with the special, limited-release glassware you see in the photos.

Bryan Miller supplied the honey from his Big Grove Apiaries in Champaign. The “Champaign” of meads for the “Champaign” of symphonies. What’s better than that??”

—CUSO English hornist and brewer, Evan Tammen and Artesia owner,
Linda Tammen



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STEPHEN ALLTOP *(continued from page 16)*

in on three-hours notice to lead the Grant Park Symphony Orchestra in a program of Beethoven, Schubert and Tchaikovsky broadcast live on WFMT Radio. He returned to the Grant Park Symphony Orchestra in August of 2023. He has worked closely with leading composers of the day, including residency projects with John Corigliano, Eleanor Daley, Stacy Garrop, Stephen Paulus and Eric Whitacre, and has conducted world premieres of works by John Luther Adams, Joseph Schwantner, Frank Ferko, Fabrizio Festa, Stacy Garrop, Stephen Paulus, and many others. In 2007, he made his Carnegie Hall debut conducting the music of Eric Whitacre.

He has conducted opera and orchestral concerts with a number of Italian orchestras, including I Soloisti di Perugia, Fondazione Arturo Toscanini (Bologna), Teatro Reggione Orchestra (Parma), Festival Mozart (Roveto), Orchestra Sinfonica (Bari), Teatro Piccinni (Bari), and the Festival Duni (Matera). In June of 2025, he led an all-American concert with Choeur Arsis in Fribourg, Switzerland.

Dr. Alltop lectures frequently for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Northwestern University Alumnae Continuing Education Series, Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, and other organizations. Since 2014, he has given presentations on leadership for various programs in the Kellogg School of Management.

Stephen is an avid squash player and baseball fan. His latest fitness goal is to do fifty 5k races (17 still to go).

PROGRAM NOTES



JOHANNES BRAHMS

Born May 7, 1833 in Hamburg, Germany.

Died April 3, 1897 in Vienna, Austria.

Academic Festival Overture, Op. 80

In 1880, Johannes Brahms was awarded an honorary doctorate in music from the University of Breslau (now the University of Wrocław, Poland). School officials asked Brahms to compose something for the ceremony that would match the solemnity of

the occasion. Instead, Brahms turned out a lighthearted piece he called a “rollicking potpourri of student songs.”

Brahms’ *Academic Festival Overture* quotes four beer hall songs that would have been immediately recognizable to German college students at the time. The first song, “Wir hatten gebauet ein stattliches Haus” (“We have built a stately house”), introduced by the trumpets, had more political connotations than your average drinking song, however. It had been used as a theme song for a student organization that advocated for the unification of independent German principalities. The authorities had banned the song for decades. Though the ban had been lifted in most places by the official founding of the German Empire in 1871, it was still in place in Vienna at the time of the *Academic Festival Overture*’s composition. As a result, the police delayed the Viennese premiere of the work for two weeks for fear that it would incite civil unrest.

The second beer hall song Brahms quotes is “Der Landesherr” (“Father of our Country”), which can first be heard in the strings. The bassoons then introduce “Was kommt dort von der Höh?” (“What comes from afar?”), a song that was associated with freshman initiations. These three songs alternate before the full orchestra comes together in a rousing rendition of “Gaudeamus igitur” (“Let us rejoice, therefore”), a popular commencement song in Europe whose text dates back to a 13th-century Latin manuscript. Though the song was often used in official ceremonies, the lighthearted nature of the text, which exhorts the bacchanalia of university life, made it a popular drinking song among students.

While today’s audiences probably will not recognize the tongue-in-cheek musical references, it is still easy to hear that Brahms’ *Academic Festival Overture* leans more toward the “festival” part of its name than the “academic.” It is also fun to imagine the students’ stifled laughter when the piece was first performed and the school officials’ probably less-than-enthusiased reaction.

—Katie Buzzard

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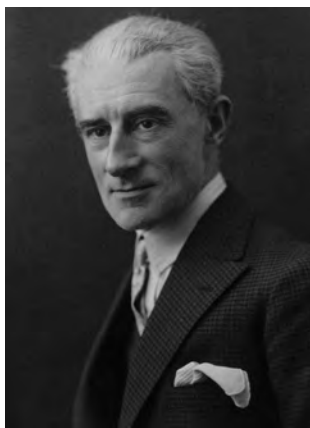


MAURICE RAVEL

Born March 7, 1875 in Ciboure, France.
Died December 28, 1937 in Paris, France.

Piano Concerto in G Major

Maurice Ravel's Piano Concerto in G begins with the crack of a whip, startling the piccolo into action. The scene seems set for a race—or is it a circus? Before a minute has passed, each of the concerto's chief characteristics has made a fleeting appearance: joyous brilliance, melancholy lyricism, lively virtuosity, classical economy, evanescent orchestral color, a hint of American jazz, and a trace of Ravel's native Basque country.



Ravel said his goal was to write a “genuine concerto”—a brilliant work, highlighting the virtuosity of the soloist. He was, in part, reacting to the kind of symphonic concerto “conceived not for but against the piano” (here he mentions Johannes Brahms). Instead he took as his musical guides Mozart and Saint-Saëns, whose piano concertos he especially admired.

Mozart is present not only in the collaborative relationship between the soloist and orchestra, but in the classically proportioned orchestra and the way Ravel places the woodwinds in high relief. Saint-Saëns emerges in neoclassical forms and in the way the musical materials seem calculated to delight.

Also in the spirit of Mozart and Saint-Saëns, Ravel had intended the concerto for his own use. But unlike those composers, Ravel was no keyboard virtuoso, and it was Marguerite Long who gave the premiere. Ravel may not have been much of a pianist, but he was a virtuoso of the orchestra, and in this concerto the orchestra is featured as much as the piano. After the piccolo and trumpet introduce the frolicsome opening theme, the English horn escorts us into Spain, accompanied by languid strumming from the piano. The clarinet introduces the first of a series of jazz-inspired gestures that suggest George Gershwin. Listen for the distinctive qualities of high bassoon and muted trumpet; listen for the harp, which is given the first cadenza, ahead of the soloist!

The slow second movement begins with piano alone, playing one of Ravel's most expressive and finely crafted melodies. Ravel claimed it nearly killed him, but there's no evidence of the painstaking effort that went into sculpting this perfectly poised music. Ravel creates a feeling of

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RAVEL PIANO CONCERTO IN G MAJOR *(continued from page 23)*

impulse by superimposing a stately sarabande rhythm in the right hand above a slow waltz in the left. Once the orchestra enters, the mournful tones of the English horn lead a wistful and tender dialogue.

The third movement—a whirlwind presto barely four minutes long—is launched with a drum roll and a fanfare. We're back in the world of races and circuses—the world of Igor Stravinsky's *Petrushka* and Erik Satie's *Parade*. The music plays out a game, said Long, in which two themes are pursued between soloist and orchestra. The Presto is more overtly jazzy than the first movement, with piercing clarinet flourishes and sliding trombones. Through all this the piano darts and weaves until the dazzling movement is brought to a sudden and abrupt end, exactly as it began.

Program notes by Yvonne Frindle for the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, sponsored by Washington University Physicians.

PROGRAM NOTES

**“Music is a calm moonlit night,
the rustle of leaves in summer.
Music is the far off peal of bells at dusk!
Music comes straight from the heart
and talks only to the heart: it is Love!”**

— SERGEI RACHMANINOFF



SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

Born April 1, 1873 in Staraya Russa, Russia.
Died March 28, 1943, in Beverly Hills,
California

Symphonic Dances, Op. 45

Like J. S. Bach, who upon his death was looked upon as a more or less old fuddy-duddy (now we know better, of course), Rachmaninoff has borne his share of criticism for having composed in a hopelessly old-fashioned style, long after its relevance. His compositions are the last major representatives of vivid Russian Romanticism—long after that style was presumed dead and buried. Yet, like Bach, his musical genius, his talent, and his strong belief in the validity of his art all led him to create a legacy that took “old-fashioned-style” to a natural and valid high point of achievement. While a child of the nineteenth century, he died almost at the midpoint of the twentieth, secure in his success, and secure in the world’s enduring appreciation of his “dated” style. Although Rachmaninoff left Russia after the Revolution, never to return, and lived in a variety of places—at his death in 1943, he was living in Beverly Hills—he lived as a Russian all of his life. That is, he and his wife maintained a home with Russian servants, spoke Russian there, and lived with Russian customs.

His Symphonic Dances was his last composition, completed in 1940, and was composed while summering in Centerport, NY, a hamlet on the famed “Gold Coast” of Long Island. He spent time there to be near his brother, who was working at a well-known cancer research center nearby. Symphonic Dances was given its première by the Philadelphia

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Orchestra early in 1941. While true to his orientation to the late romantic idiom outlined above, his last work, nevertheless, shows evidence of an evolving sensitivity to progressive twentieth-century musical styles. While the three movements evince a clear and coherent musical style, they contain a wealth of references to a variety of musical and extra-musical elements. Moreover, while much of the traditional Rachmaninoff “sound” is prevalent, we hear new textures and harmonies not characteristic of the arch-romantic. Quotations from works that he had composed many decades before are interspersed with melodic elements from Russian ecclesiastical chant, modern, jagged rhythms, and even a solo for saxophone, of all things.

The first movement begins deceptively and coyly with a few quiet woodwind motifs over light tripping strings—and then hammer strokes from the full band sets the real mood. Memorable melodies one will not hear yet, for here, as in most of the movement, short little aphoristic motifs are the building blocks. From time to time the composer skillfully augments the percussion section with the piano. After establishing a steady rhythmic dance tempo, the middle section is introduced by a variety of delicate woodwind solos, working over an important, short motif. This prefaces the impressive, long lyrical solo for the alto saxophone, often in dialogue with its friends in the woodwind section—the first characteristic Rachmaninoff tune of the movement. The string section then picks up the soulful saxophone tune and spins it out in the composer’s familiar style. A soft, ominous transition in the low instruments takes us back to the opening tempo, motifs, and mood. Before this return finishes the movement, there’s an odd moment where an apparently new “big lyrical Rachmaninoff tune” seemingly appears out of nowhere. This beautiful tune is actually a brief quotation from his disastrous first symphony from 1895. The condemnation of it was so severe (“... from the conservatory of Hell.”) that Rachmaninoff suffered a psychological breakdown. So, forty-five years later, in old age, he is apparently thumbing his nose at long dead critics. The movement goes from this to end quietly.

The middle movement is a dark, introspective waltz in the tradition of Sibelius’ famed *Valse triste*. Rarely loud, always gently swaying, it’s a dark affair with frequent ruminative suspensions of the tempo. The spectral mood is established by muted brass, soft cascades of woodwind scales against the sotto voce strings, and even a “Devil’s fiddle” evocation. Rachmaninoff originally entitled this movement “Dusk,” and the crepuscular atmosphere of the music perfectly captures the moment.

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The last movement is much more than just the third dance; it's a full-blown symphonic movement in the form of a dynamic scherzo. After a brief, slow introduction with mysterious chords in the winds, the driving scherzo bursts forth, with a dash of "ecclesiastical" chimes foretelling something of the nature of the coming contest. Fundamentally, the movement is built around a contrast between death and immortal life, but it's not always a dark affair. The musical material of death is the familiar *Dies iræ* from the Requiem Mass, and Rachmaninoff uses the chant from the discovery of the empty tomb on Easter from his beloved Vespers as the affirmation of life. Of course, the movement builds on all this, but these are the basic materials from which the composer weaves a stunning, expansive movement. The tempos, the moods, modes—major and minor, and orchestration: all is a kaleidoscope of symphonic proportions. The slow middle contrasting section usual to scherzos begins with dark presentiments, but soon grows into an affirmative, soaring affair so familiar in Rachmaninoff's music. A little fanfare in the oboes heralds the return of the driving scherzo as the motifs of death and life continue their struggle. A smashing conclusion carried by the composer's mastery of huge sonic canvases of orchestral color and driving rhythms is inevitable. When one considers the life's work of Rachmaninoff, a more fitting last composition cannot be imagined.

—Wm. E. Runyan

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WILLIAMS: "Star of Bethlehem" and "Somewhere in My Memory"

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