

Classics by Rachmaninoff: Paganini Rhapsody and Symphonic Dances

Wednesday, January 20, 2027 · 20:15 · Concertgebouw
Maxim Emelyanychev, conductor · Alexander Melnikov, piano

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	LANGER b. 1974 <i>Suite from 'Figaro Gets a Divorce'</i>	18'
2	RACHMANINOFF 1873–1943 <i>Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Op. 43</i>	23'
3	RACHMANINOFF 1873–1943 <i>Symphonic Dances, Op. 45</i>	36'
TOTAL MUSIC		77'

Elena Langer

18 minutes

b. 1974

Suite from 'Figaro Gets a Divorce'

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The six movements are short and sharply contrasted, and their titles tell the story.

The **Opening** is the most abstract of them, a picture of a world that has lost its footing. The **Love Song** belongs to the young couple Angelika and Serafin; its lyricism is repeatedly interrupted, a sign of the dangers around them. **The Escape** is frantic music for refugees on the run.

The Major carries the marking 'jazzy, sleazy', and is the place to listen for the accordion, along with solos for violin and piano that paint a thoroughly untrustworthy character. **Susanna and Cherubino**, which Langer subtitles 'less of a love song', comes from the scene in the Cherub's nightclub.

The finale, **A Mad Day**, takes its name from the subtitle of Beaumarchais's *Marriage of Figaro*. It runs on a syncopated repeating figure taken from the nightclub act, and sums up the opera in a few minutes of driving rhythm.

Sergei Rachmaninoff

1873–1943

23 minutes

Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Op. 43

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The piece begins with a joke of construction. After a few bars of introduction the orchestra plays the first variation, a bare skeleton of the harmony, before anyone has heard the theme. Only then do the violins state Paganini's tune, with the piano picking out single notes.

The early variations are quick, dry and witty, all in strict time. With **Variation 7** the tempo broadens and the piano solemnly intones the *Dies irae* in chords, while bassoon and cellos mutter fragments of Paganini beneath it. A little later the chant returns as a grotesque march, like slow funeral bells.

Variation 11, a reflective cadenza for the piano over a mysterious accompaniment, opens the middle section. From here the music leaves A minor and travels through several keys, by way of a minuet (Variation 12) and darker, more searching pages, until the piano alone begins **Variation 18**. Listen to the melody rise instead of fall, then to the strings taking it over in full voice.

The last six variations return to A minor and build one long crescendo of speed and difficulty. In the final variation the brass blare out the *Dies irae* at full strength. The ending is a surprise: after all the thunder, the piano signs off quietly with a last scrap of Paganini's theme.

Sergei Rachmaninoff

1873–1943

36 minutes

Symphonic Dances, Op. 45

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Non allegro. After a few quiet bars that hint at the rhythm to come, the orchestra launches a stamping, march-like dance built on a three-note figure. The middle section could not be more different. The woodwinds are left alone, and over a gently

rocking accompaniment an alto saxophone sings a long, homesick melody. The march returns, and in the coda, as the key turns from C minor to C major, listen for the broad, consoling string melody: the theme of the First Symphony, laid to rest.

II. Andante con moto (Tempo di valse). A waltz, but an uneasy one. Its chromatic melody, which the violins play in parallel thirds, is melancholy where a Viennese waltz would be care-free, and the sweetness has a sour edge, as if a ballroom were being remembered long after the dancers had gone.

III. Lento assai, Allegro vivace. The finale is a battle of chants, driven by sharp syncopations. Fragments of the Dies irae flicker through the fast music. A slow central section mourns, and then the dance returns with the Orthodox melody gaining strength. In the last pages it takes over completely, and the work ends in a blaze of rhythm with the full percussion.



CONCERT PROGRAMS

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Version 1, 7 October 2026