

Riccardo Chailly conducts early Rachmaninoff, with Alexander Malofeev

Thursday, May 13, 2027 · 20:15 · Concertgebouw
Riccardo Chailly, conductor · Alexander Malofeev, piano

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	RACHMANINOFF 1873–1943 <i>Scherzo in D minor</i>	5'
2	RACHMANINOFF 1873–1943 <i>Piano Concerto No. 1 in F-sharp minor, Op. 1</i>	27'
3	RACHMANINOFF 1873–1943 <i>The Rock, Op. 7</i>	16'
4	RACHMANINOFF 1873–1943 <i>Cinq Études-tableaux (orchestration Respighi)</i>	
TOTAL MUSIC		48'

Sergei Rachmaninoff

5 minutes

1873–1943
Scherzo in D minor

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The Scherzo lasts between four and five minutes and uses a small orchestra: woodwind in pairs, a single horn and trumpet, timpani and strings. Listen for the steady, pulsing rhythm that drives it, for the clear, uncluttered scoring, and for the fluttering flute writing that comes straight from Mendelssohn. There is very little here of the broad melody and dark colouring that people think of as Rachmaninoff. What it shows is a fourteen-year-old who already knew how an orchestra works, and that is the point of beginning the concert with it.

Sergei Rachmaninoff

1873–1943

27 minutes

Piano Concerto No. 1 in F-sharp minor, Op. 1

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Vivace. A brass fanfare, then the piano crashes in with a cascade of double octaves and chords, a gesture taken from the openings of the Grieg and Schumann concertos. The flourish returns later in the movement and helps to hold it together. The main theme that follows is short by Rachmaninoff's later standards, but it already rises and falls in the long arch that became his signature.

II. Andante. A nocturne, and a brief one, only 74 bars long. The piano muses over quiet support from the orchestra, and the harmony is coloured here and there by the chromatic touches he added in the revision.

III. Allegro vivace. The finale begins loudly, with the bar lengths shifting back and forth, one of the few places where this conservative composer plays with metre; this opening dates from 1917. A long central episode in E-flat major, far from the home key, gives the soloist room to sing before the quick music returns and drives to the end.

Sergei Rachmaninoff

1873–1943

16 minutes

The Rock, Op. 7

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The opening sets out the characters. A weary phrase low in the cellos and double basses stands for the man, or the rock. A flute answers with a graceful, lively figure, the cloud or the young woman. A third idea, passed between solo woodwinds, has been read as the strivings and disappointments of his life.

From these the piece grows as a single span of between fifteen and eighteen minutes. The orchestra is a large one, with harp and a good deal of percussion, and Rachmaninoff uses it for atmosphere: listen for the anger of the storm, and for bell sounds that seem to come through the driving snow. The music works up to an impassioned climax and then falls away into a despairing coda, with the rock left alone.

Sergei Rachmaninoff

1873–1943

Cinq Études-tableaux (orchestration Respighi)

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

There are five movements, each a separate scene. They are described here in the order in which the set is usually given.

The Sea and the Seagulls (Op. 39 No. 2) is a picture of gulls hovering over a heaving sea, and the bleakest of the five.

The Fair (Op. 33) is the one piece from the earlier set, bright, loud and festive, a market scene in full swing.

Funeral March (Op. 39 No. 7) is the most elaborate picture. It opens with the march itself; then comes music that suggests a choir singing, over a fine, persistent accompaniment that stands for rain. At the climax church bells ring out, and then the march returns.

Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf (Op. 39 No. 6) sets growling figures low in the orchestra, the wolf, against the hurrying steps of the girl.

March (Op. 39 No. 9) closes the set in D major, with a colouring that one programme note calls exotic and Eastern.

Throughout, it is worth noticing how much Respighi adds in drama and atmosphere while the music remains recognisably Rachmaninoff's, which is what reviewers of the orchestral version have tended to admire in it.



CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/rco-2027-05-13-chailly>

Version 1, 8 October 2026