

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

1873–1943

Scherzo in D minor

5 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

This is where Sergei Rachmaninoff's orchestral music begins. The Scherzo in D minor is his earliest surviving piece for orchestra, written while he was a pupil at the Moscow Conservatory. The manuscript is dated February 1888, when he was fourteen, though another hand later altered the year to 1887. He dedicated it to his cousin, the pianist Alexander Siloti, to whom he would also dedicate his First Piano Concerto.

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

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

27 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

The First Piano Concerto is Rachmaninoff's Opus 1, the first piece he thought worth a number. He wrote it in 1890 and 1891, still a student at the Moscow Conservatory. In March 1891 he told a friend that two movements were written and the third composed in his head; he finished the score on 6 July, a few months after his eighteenth birthday. It was his second attempt at a concerto, after one in C minor that he had begun and abandoned in 1889, and he dedicated it to his cousin and teacher Alexander Siloti.

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

The Rock, Op. 7

16 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Rachmaninoff wrote ‘The Rock’ in the summer of 1893, when he was twenty. He called it a fantasy for orchestra; its Russian title, ‘Utyos’, is also translated as ‘The Crag’. Jurgenson published the score in Moscow in 1894, and he dedicated it to Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, whose brilliant way with the orchestra it plainly admires.

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)

ABOUT THE WORK

The last piece in this programme of early Rachmaninoff is not early at all, and its orchestral dress is not by Rachmaninoff. He wrote two sets of piano pieces under the title ‘Études-tableaux’, study-pictures: Op. 33 at his country estate, Ivan-

ovka, in 1911, and Op. 39 in 1916 and 1917, among the last music he composed before leaving Russia. Each is a study in some aspect of piano technique and, at the same time, the picture of something. What the pictures were he kept to himself. 'I do not believe in the artist that discloses too much of his images', he said, and he preferred to let listeners paint for themselves what the music most suggested.

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.

Tonight's artists

Alexander Malofeev *piano*

Alexander Malofeev makes his debut with the Concertgebouw Orchestra in these three concerts, on 13, 14 and 15 May 2027, each at 20:15 in the Main Hall of the Concertgebouw. The concerto suits the occasion: it is the work of a pianist of seventeen and eighteen, and the orchestra's note points to the heroic part it gives the soloist. Riccardo Chailly conducts. He was the orchestra's chief conductor from 1988 to 2004 and has been its conductor emeritus since, and he has chosen a programme that keeps almost entirely to what Rachmaninoff wrote before he was twenty-one, closing with five later piano pieces as Respighi orchestrated them.

Alexander Malofeev was born in Moscow in 2001 and began playing the piano at five. He studied at the Gnssin music school and at the Moscow Conservatory, and came to international attention in 2014 when, at the age of thirteen, he won first prize at the International Tchaikovsky Competition for Young Musicians. He has since appeared as a soloist with orchestras including the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia and the Lucerne Festival Orchestra, working with conductors such as Riccardo Chailly and Yannick Nézet-Séguin, and is especially admired in Rachmaninoff, Prokofiev and Tchaikovsky. An outspoken critic of Russia's invasion of

Ukraine, he left Russia in 2022 and has lived in Berlin since. He records exclusively for Sony Classical, which released his first solo album, *Forgotten Melodies*, in February 2026.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

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

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