

**Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Opus 27**  
**Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943)**

**Largo - Allegro moderato**

**Allegro molto**

**Adagio**

**Allegro vivace**

Rachmaninov's unmistakable musical style, the rich romantic sweep, the raw emotion, the deep tone, the masterful endless melody is what Max Harrison rightly describes as the 'fusion of logic and emotion'. However, this intensely personal style came with a personal price on the composer's own logic and emotion. Dissatisfied with his compositions in the early years and suffering from a bad bout with malaria, Rachmaninov's personal resolve was irreparably damaged causing a depressive state that would haunt him all his life. His acceptance in the main stream was anything but stable. He was forced to teach and play as an accompanist, neither task to which he was suited. Despite a reprise position at the Moscow opera house, improved finances and a renewed will to write, following a successful engagement in London, the depression remained. After his stint at the Bolshoi he moved to Dresden with his family, and it is to this comparatively relaxed period which also produced his Piano Sonata No. 1 and symphonic poem "*The Isle of the Dead*", that this Symphony No. 2 belongs.

It received its first performance on 26 January 1908 at the Maryinsky Theater, St. Petersburg, with the orchestra of the Moscow Philharmonic society conducted by the composer. Dedicated to Sergei Tanief, one of his former teachers, it was published later that same year and, interestingly, won the Michail Glinka prize of 1000 roubles.

The symphony had two primary purposes, which one can assume were well met. The first was to erase the memory of the painful failure in St. Petersburg 1897 of his first symphony. The second, a little more daunting, was to top the compositional achievements of the second piano concerto, which though providing him with much of his fame, he considered as one sided in its representation of his musical personality. Rachmaninov's popularity underwent significant changes for differing reasons, which must have contributed to his embattled sense of worth. In his native Russia, the music that was accepted early in his career was labeled 'bourgeois' in the wake of the 1917 revolution and then received back in highly esteemed favor by 1939. The particular style of emotional depth and rich tone described above was also, often brushed aside in his later years, belying its originality and compositional strength. In the 1920's Paul Rosenfeld wrote that this symphony was "like a mournful banquet on jam and honey", while Virgil Thompson dismissed it 25 years later as "mud and sugar". Part of this may be attributed to the fact that for a long time there were

significant cuts made, with the authorization of the composer, in not only this work but both piano concerti nos 2 and 3, which leave the pieces cheated on structure and cheapened on message. The cuts have now almost all been consigned to history as the brilliance of Rachmaninov's compositional logic is celebrated.

If one were to demand a capsule of Rachmaninov's musical style, this symphony would aptly fit the bill. Here you find it all - the rich sound, the endlessly inventive melody, the emotion, the energized allegro movements, the pathos of the adagios, the often used "Dies Irae" motto, the often used references to the choral traditions of the Russian Orthodox churches and perhaps the most satisfyingly original resolution of thematic processes. Written at age 34 it marks, exactly, the halfway point of his compositional output. His last work was *Three Symphonic Dances* written aged 68. He died in Beverly Hills, 28 March 1943, aged sixty-nine as a result of cancer, and is buried in the Kensico cemetery near New York.