

April 23, 2022

RUSSIAN *Wonders*



Russian Wonders

Saturday, April 23, 2022 • 7:30PM

Peoria Civic Center Theater

Peoria Symphony Orchestra
George Stelluto • Conductor
James Giles • Piano

Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 1 in B-flat Minor, Op. 23

Allegro non troppo — Allegro con spirito
Andante semplice — Prestissimo
Allegro con fuoco

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky
(1840-1893)

James Giles • Piano

INTERMISSION

Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Op. 27

Largo — Allegro moderato
Allegro molto
Adagio
Allegro vivace

Sergei Rachmaninoff
(1873-1943)

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This program is partially supported by a grant
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James Giles • Piano

James Giles regularly delights audiences in important musical centers around the world. Known for his probing and charismatic performances, Giles's interests range from Beethoven to Bernstein, and from Romantic staples of the repertoire to new music written specifically for him. The 2019-2020 season featured a tour of Denmark and recitals in Toronto, Paris, Naples, Budapest, and Manchester, England. Recent U.S. dates included recitals in Atlanta, Dallas, Tampa, Des Moines, Bloomington, IN, and Chicago.

In an eclectic repertoire encompassing the solo and chamber music literatures, Giles is equally at home in the standard repertoire as in the music of our time. He has commissioned and premiered works by William Bolcom, Stephen Hough, Lowell Liebermann, Ned Rorem, Augusta Read Thomas, and Earl Wild. Most of these new works are featured on Giles's Albany Records release entitled "American Virtuoso." His recording of solo works by Schumann and Prokofiev is available on England's Master Musicians label. He recorded John Harbison's Horn Trio with the Chicago Chamber Musicians and recently released a recording with the St. Petersburg Chamber Philharmonic.

His Paris recital at the Salle Cortot was hailed as "a true revelation, due equally to the pianist's artistry as to his choice of program." After a recital at the Sibelius Academy, the critic for Helsinki's main newspaper wrote that "Giles is a technically polished, elegant pianist." And a London critic called his Wigmore Hall recital "one of the most sheerly inspired piano recitals I can remember hearing for some time" and added that "with a riveting intelligence given to everything he played, it was the kind of recital you never really forget."

He has performed with New York's Jupiter Symphony (Alkan and Czerny); the London Soloists Chamber Orchestra in Queen Elizabeth Hall (Mozart and Beethoven); the Kharkiv Philharmonic in Ukraine (Prokofiev and Rachmaninoff); and with the Opera Orchestra of New York in Alice Tully Hall (Chopin). After his Tully Hall solo recital debut, critic Harris Goldsmith wrote: "Giles has a truly distinctive interpretive persona. This was beautiful pianism – direct and unmannered." Other tours have included concerts in the Shanghai International Piano Festival; St. Petersburg's White Nights New Music Festival, Warsaw's Chopin Academy of Music; Chicago's Dame Myra Hess Series, Salt Lake City's Assembly Hall Concert Series, and in Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, the Musikhalle in Hamburg, and the Purcell

Peoria Symphony Orchestra

April 23, 2022

George Stelluto • Conductor

Conductor Podium Endowment

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Violin 2

Guest Principal
The Frederick Family Endowment
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Rosemary Ardner
Molly Wilson
Hyo-Jung Chun
Faith Burdick
Karen Martin

Viola

Katherine Lewis, Principal
Sharon and John Amdall Endowment
Rebecca Boelzner
Mary Heinemann
Allison Montgomery
Lowell Koons
Sharon Chung

Cello

Guest Principal
Parker Endowment in memory of H. H. Block
Yunjin Ro
Emily Munn-Wood
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Bass

Austin Vawter, Principal
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Endowment In Memory of Norbert Cieslewicz
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Flute

Yukie Ota, Principal
Augusta Foundation Endowment in the name
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Denise Cooksey
Kimberly Tegg

Oboe

Alex Liedtke, Principal
Mrs. Thomas Foster Endowment
[Second Oboe to be announced]

Clarinet

Roger Garrett, Principal
Eric Ginsberg

Bass Clarinet

Michael Grippo

Bassoon

Michael Dicker, Principal
Terry Maher

Horn

Amy Krueger, Principal
Mrs. Trenchard French Endowment
[Assistant Principal Horn to be announced]
Dawn Clark
[Third Horn to be announced]
David Snyder

Trumpet

Sarah Carrillo, Principal
David Nakazono
William Booher

Trombone

Stephen Parsons, Acting Principal
Corey Sansolo
Chris Darwell

Tuba

Terry Solomonson, Principal

Timpani

Ben Stiers, Guest Principal
Eugene and Donna Sweeney Endowment

Percussion

Peggy Bonner, Principal
Jeremy Clark

Room at London's South Bank Centre. He has given live recitals over the public radio stations of New York, Boston, Chicago, and Indianapolis. As a chamber musician he has collaborated with members of the National and Chicago Symphonies and with members of the Escher, Pacifica, Cassatt, Chicago, Ying, Chester, St. Lawrence, Essex, Lincoln, and Miami Quartets, as well as singers Aprile Millo and Anthony Dean Griffey.

A native of North Carolina, Dr. Giles studied with Byron Janis at the Manhattan School of Music, Jerome Lowenthal at the Juilliard School, Nelita True at the Eastman School of Music, and Robert Shannon at Oberlin College. He received early career assistance from the Clarisse B. Kampel Foundation and was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to study in Italy with the legendary pianist Lazar Berman.

The pianist was the recipient of a fellowship grant and the Christel Award from the American Pianists Association. He won first prizes at the New Orleans International Piano Competition, the Joanna Hodges International Piano Competition, and the Music Teachers National Association Competition. As a student he was awarded the prestigious William Petschek Scholarship at the Juilliard School and the Arthur Dann Award at the Oberlin College Conservatory.

Also a sought-after teacher, Dr. Giles is coordinator of the piano program and director of music performance graduate studies at Northwestern University's Bienen School of Music and during the summers is director of the piano program at the Amalfi Coast Music Festival. He gives master classes and lectures at schools nationwide, including Juilliard, Manhattan, Eastman, Oberlin, Indiana, Yale, and the New England Conservatory. His classes internationally have occurred throughout China as well as at Seoul National University, the Royal Danish Academy of Music (Copenhagen), the Sibelius Academy (Helsinki), the Chopin Academy (Warsaw), the Royal Northern College of Music (Manchester) and the Royal College of Music (London).

Maestro's Message

For this program, I chose to pair two Russian composers: Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff. The depth, breadth, and conflict of emotions expressed in their music is sifted through their giant intellects in a heroic attempt to "make sense of it all." The music inspires us because, as you will hear, it ceaselessly searches for resolution. It twists and turns, and may encounter dead ends, but it always seeks. In abstractly telling their own inner stories through music, they capture the poignant struggle and challenge of the human condition—for we also face existential challenges every day, in ways sometimes obvious but often imperceptible. As you listen, imagine the musical motifs and melodies as "your dilemma," the unfolding development as "your searching," the unexpected battles as inevitable, the moments of beauty as gifts, and the sheer dynamism of this music as... well, you never giving up. For your life is as heroic as this music—or it can be so—depending on the kind of composer you choose to be. Find yourself in this music: your emotional, intellectual, and courageous self. —G. *Stelluto*

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Written by Michael Allsen ©2021

The Peoria Symphony Orchestra closes the season with a program we are calling "Russian Wonders." Pianist James Giles joins us for the passionate and virtuosic first piano concerto of Tchaikovsky. We then present an enormous romantic masterpiece by Rachmaninov, his *Symphony No. 2*.

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 1 in B-flat Minor, Op. 23

This work was written in late 1874. The first performance was in Boston on October 25, 1875, with Hans von Bülow as piano soloist. Duration 32:00.

Background

The early history of this concerto provided no clue of its eventual popularity. When Tchaikovsky finished it in December of 1874, he asked Nicolai Rubinstein to listen to a performance. Tchaikovsky considered Rubinstein to be the "best pianist in Moscow" and planned

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ME—NOT THE OBVIOUS
MATERIAL BATTLES BUT
THOSE THAT WERE FOUGHT
AND WON BEHIND YOUR
FOREHEAD." —JAMES JOYCE**

to dedicate the new concerto to him, so he quite naturally sought his criticism. On Christmas Eve, he met Rubinstein at the Moscow Conservatory and played through the entire concerto, which had not yet been orchestrated, while Rubinstein sat in stony silence. In a letter to his patron, Nadezda von Meck, Tchaikovsky described how, immediately after the final chord, Rubinstein launched into a scathing attack on the music, calling it "worthless," "unplayable," and "vulgar." Deeply insulted, Tchaikovsky stormed out of the room. Rubinstein followed and attempted to conciliate the composer by offering to perform the concerto... *if* Tchaikovsky would only revise it according to his suggestions. Tchaikovsky answered, "I will not alter a single note! I will publish the work exactly as it is!"

While we only have Tchaikovsky's emotional version of this incident, it is hardly surprising that he decided to dedicate the concerto to someone other than Rubinstein. When he sent a score to the German pianist-conductor Hans von Bülow, Bülow replied enthusiastically: "The ideas are so original, the form is so mature, ripe, distinguished in style..." Bülow performed the work for the first time while on tour in Boston, and there is a historical footnote to this first performance. When Bülow sent a telegram to Tchaikovsky telling him of the ecstatic response to the concerto's premiere, it was apparently the first cable ever sent between Boston and Moscow.

What You'll Hear

The opening movement begins with a vast introduction (*Allegro non troppo*), opening with a strident, four-note horn motive. The solo part takes control almost immediately with crashing chords, expanding upon this theme. The body of the movement (*Allegro con spirito*) begins with a nervous, syncopated tune that Tchaikovsky heard from a blind Ukrainian beggar, according to one of his letters. Clarinet and woodwinds introduce a more lyrical second idea. The development ends with the first of two enormous cadenzas, and an abbreviated recapitulation leads to an even grander virtuoso cadenza.

Although dwarfed by the huge opening, the second and third movements are just as innovative. The second movement manages to combine a traditional slow movement with a lighter scherzo. The main theme of the outer sections (*Andante semplice*) is a popular French tune, *Il faut s'amuser, danser et rire* ("You must enjoy yourself by dancing and laughing"). This was apparently a great favorite of Tchaikovsky's, but it may also have been a melancholy tribute to Désirée Artôt, a soprano who had broken his heart a few years earlier. The central section (*Prestissimo*) has fleeting, scherzo-style music, brought to a

RACHMANINOFF'S SECOND SYMPHONY WAS THE WORK OF A YOUNG MAN, COMPLETED WHEN HE WAS ONLY 34. IT WAS ALSO THE WORK OF A MAN WHO HAD ALREADY SEEN HIS SHARE OF TROUBLES.

sudden conclusion by a bark from the brass and a brief solo cadenza. The finale (*Allegro con fuoco*) is a kind of rhythmic showpiece with constantly shifting and combined meters. A fiery main theme alternates with widely contrasting material, but the whole movement dances. At the end, a final solo cadenza and broadening of the tempo lead to a brilliant coda.

Sergey Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)
Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Op. 27

Rachmaninoff's Symphony No. 2 was completed in 1907. The first performance took place in St. Petersburg on February 15, 1908. Duration 57:00.

Background

Rachmaninoff's second symphony was the work of a young man, completed when he was only 34. It was also the work of a man who had already seen his share of troubles. The premiere of his first symphony in 1897 was such a disaster that Rachmaninoff seriously considered giving up composition. The critical attacks on this work contributed to a severe bout of depression, and Rachmaninoff only recovered his emotional stability and confidence in 1900. The second piano concerto, published in 1901, represents his return to life as a composer. Perhaps with the failure of his first symphony in mind, he worked on his new E minor symphony in secret. He was living in Dresden at the time, having left Moscow to escape the increasingly violent political turmoil in Russia, and did not tell even his closest friends about the project. Yet somehow a German newspaper reporter found out about the new symphony and wrote about it in a journal widely read in Russia. In February 1907, Rachmaninoff wrote to a friend: "I have composed a symphony. It's true! It's only ready in a rough draft, though. I finished it a month ago, and immediately put it aside. It has caused me a great deal of distress, and I'm not going to think about it for a while. But I'm mystified as to how the newspapers got onto it!"

Rachmaninoff returned to Russia in the summer of 1907, bringing the nearly completed score for the *Symphony No. 2* with him. Despite some difficulties working out the orchestration, the new symphony was ready in January 1908 for its first performance in St. Petersburg. This performance, which Rachmaninoff conducted, was as much a triumph as his first symphony had been a failure. A second performance, just a week later in Moscow, was equally successful. Rachmaninoff had vindicated himself—most importantly, in his own mind—as a symphonist, and the second symphony has remained in

the repertoire ever since. However, in many performances of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s—a time when long Romantic symphonies were not particularly popular—the *Symphony No. 2* was often subject to severe cuts. Rachmaninoff himself suggested a brief cut in the finale, but several later conductors cut the symphony from a work that lasts nearly an hour to a mere 35 or 40 minutes. Despite its length, Rachmaninoff's score is carefully planned in every detail, and the sort of radical surgery that was often performed upon his score distorted the symphony's form. This trend has reversed in recent years. Most modern performances of the *Symphony No. 2*—including the one at these concerts—present nearly all of Rachmaninoff's original music, making only a few minor cuts, such as omitting the repeated exposition in the first movement, or Rachmaninoff's "sanctioned" cut in the finale.

Rachmaninoff's *Symphony No. 2* is a big late Romantic work, equaling the scores of Bruckner or Mahler in length and breadth. This is not a Germanic work, however; virtually every note of this 320-page score speaks Russian. It is in many ways the continuation of the romantic tradition of Tchaikovsky and his contemporaries. Rachmaninoff's focus, here as with most of his works, is on creating an unending and beautiful flow of melody.

What You'll Hear

In the background of the entire work is a melodic motto first heard in the cellos and basses in the opening bars (*Largo*). This restless melody is transformed over and over again in the main themes of each movement. A slow introduction lays out this motto in increasingly dense texture. The tempo speeds (*Allegro moderato*), and the remainder of the movement is in sonata form. The main theme of this section is based almost completely on the motto, played in a very dense, contrapuntal texture. After an agitated transition, Rachmaninoff introduces a contrasting major key theme, again carried mostly by the strings. The lengthy development culminates in two massive orchestral climaxes. The movement ends with a recapitulation of the main themes and an understated coda.

The scherzo (*Allegro molto*) is laid out in three large sections. The opening passage develops two fast-paced melodies. The first of these, heard first in the horns, is again based on the motto from the first movement. The central section of the movement is an agitated *fugato*, which Rachmaninoff eventually combines with a chorale-style melody from the brass. The final section returns to the opening music, but the trombones enter near the end with a brief hint of the *Dies irae*. This chant melody from the Latin funeral Mass became a kind of "signature tune" for Rachmaninoff and would reappear as a main theme in several other large works, including *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini* and *The Isle of the Dead*.

The third movement (*Adagio*) is romantic throughout. The strings enter with a lush passage, and the solo clarinet then spins out a seemingly endless melody above a string background. The central section of this movement develops the symphony's motto melody in the strings. The oboe and English horn overlay the strings with a rather spooky new theme. In the concluding section, Rachmaninoff returns to the lush opening theme, now letting it expand in much broader strokes.

The finale (*Allegro vivace*) is set in sonata form. In the exposition, Rachmaninoff presents several ideas: a lively theme in triplets at the opening, a more march-like melody, and a singing string melody. Before he develops these themes, however, the tempo slows and there is a reminiscence of the third movement's main melody. The development section builds toward a peak of great intensity before Rachmaninoff recapitulates his main ideas. The most forceful orchestral passage is saved for the very end, however, when Rachmaninoff brings this immense symphony to a close. ♦



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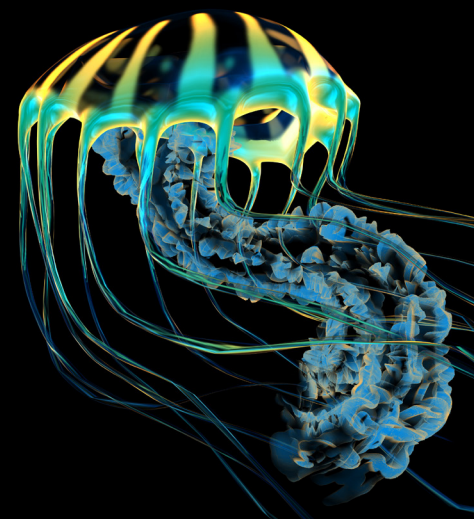
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