

Notes on the Program by DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

***Trio élégiaque* in G minor for Piano, Violin, and Cello**

Sergei Rachmaninov

Born April 1, 1873 in Oneg (near Novgorod), Russia.

Died March 28, 1943 in Beverly Hills, California.

Composed in 1892.

Premiered on January 30, 1892 in Moscow by David Krein (violin), Anatoly Brandukov (cello), and the composer.

Duration: 15 minutes

Rachmaninov entered the Moscow Conservatory in 1888 to study piano with Alexander Siloti and composition with Taneyev and Arensky. He was a brilliant student. At the age of 19, he wrote the Prelude in C-sharp minor, which carried his name to music lovers around the world (and became so frequently requested that he grew to loath the piece). He graduated from the piano curriculum in 1891 with a gold medal for excellence, and finished his studies as a composer the following year, upon which occasion the faculty unanimously voted to place his name on the Conservatory's Roll of Honor.

With a view toward gaining some notoriety in the Moscow musical world even before he left the Conservatory in the spring of 1892, Rachmaninov took part in a series of public performances in January, the most important of which was his own recital on January 30. He enlisted the participation of violinist David Krein and cellist Anatoly Brandukov for the event, and supplemented his own solo performances of works by Chopin, Tchaikovsky, Liszt, Godard, and Tausig by composing a *Romance* for cello and piano and a *Trio élégiaque* in G minor for all three instruments. The trio, as befits its author and its purpose, assigns the leading role to the piano. The work's single, expansive sonata-form movement opens with murmuring string figures ("lugubrious" instructs the score) that serve as background for the piano's melancholy main theme. After the strings are allowed their turns at the theme, the music becomes more active as it leads to the subsidiary subject, whose block chords and harmonic progressions give it a slightly ecclesiastical feeling. The development section ("Appassionato") relies mainly on the first theme for its material. A busy climax and a brief silence serve as the gateway to the full recapitulation of the exposition's themes. The principal theme is recalled one final time in the coda, which is marked to be played in the manner of a funeral march.

***Souvenir d'un lieu cher* for Violin and Piano, Op. 42**

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Born May 7, 1840 in Votkinsk, Russia.

Died November 6, 1893 in St. Petersburg.

Composed in 1878.

Duration: 17 minutes

After his disastrous marriage in the summer of 1877, Tchaikovsky fled from Moscow to his brother Modeste in St. Petersburg, and, early the next year, went on to Clarens on Switzerland's Lake Geneva. There he heard a performance of Lalo's colorful *Symphonie espagnole* that inspired him to write his own violin concerto. Work on the piece went quickly, but he was dissatisfied with his original slow movement, which he called *Méditation*, and discarded it in favor of the lovely *Canzonetta* that occupies the center of the finished Concerto. The *Méditation* lay

unused until Tchaikovsky was invited by his benefactress, Nadezhda von Meck, to visit her estate at Brailov in the Ukraine in June while she was spending the summer in Moscow. In appreciation of Mme. von Meck's hospitality, Tchaikovsky wrote for her a little set of three violin and piano pieces, his only original works for that chamber combination, which he collectively titled *Souvenir d'un lieu cher*—Remembrance of a Dear Place. Two of the movements, an elfin *Scherzo* and a tender *Mélodie*, were composed at Brailov, but the first, *Méditation*, was the piece he had left over from his sketches for the Violin Concerto. He gave the manuscript to one of the household servants when he left for Moscow on June 11th, and Mme. von Meck received the *Souvenir d'un lieu cher* upon her return to Brailov.

Sonata in C major for Two Violins, Op. 56

Sergei Prokofiev

Born April 23, 1891 in Sontzovka, Russia.

Died March 5, 1953 in Moscow.

Composed in 1932.

Premiered on December 16, 1932 in Paris by Robert Soetens and Samuel Dushkin.

Duration: 16 minutes

Prokofiev spent most of the 1920s in Paris, imbibing the bracing modernities of Stravinsky, Honegger, Poulenc, Milhaud, and the other members of *Les Six*, and devoting himself exclusively to instrumental and orchestral composition; it was the longest period of his life that did not yield an opera or vocal work. By 1932, he had grown eager to return home to Russia, where he would have to hide his *avant garde* candle under a very tightly controlled "music for the masses" bushel, so his last works in Paris—Sonata for Two Violins (Op. 56), Symphonic Song (Op. 57), and Cello Concerto (Op. 58)—form a sort of farewell to the modernism that had been a prominent strain in his creative personality since his days at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. Early in his career, Prokofiev classified his music into four distinct styles: classical or neo-classical; modern; toccata or motoric; and lyrical. The last three idioms figure in the Sonata for Two Violins: the harmonic language of the work is modern and plangently chromatic; the first and third movements are lyrical, the first haunting and introspective, the third flowing and dance-like; the second and fourth movements, brilliant and steely, are motoric, though the finale relaxes as the sonata nears its end for a sweet echo of the main theme of the opening movement.

Quintet in G minor for Piano, Two Violins, Viola, and Cello, Op. 30

Sergei Ivanovich Taneyev

Born November 25, 1856 in Vladimir-na-Klyazme, Russia.

Died June 19, 1915 in Dyudkovo, near Moscow.

Composed in 1910-11.

Duration: 45 minutes

Sergei Taneyev, one of the most prodigiously talented musicians of late Imperial Russia, was born in 1856 in the Vladimir district, 100 miles northeast of Moscow, into the family of a cultured and affluent civil servant. (An uncle, Alexander Sergeyevich Taneyev, born six years earlier in St. Petersburg, gained some fame as a composer in the Russian nationalist vein.) Sergei had his first piano lessons at age five, and entered the Moscow Conservatory before his tenth birthday; he studied piano there with Nikolai Rubinstein and composition with Peter Tchaikovsky, whose steadfast friend, trusted confidant, and respected critic he became. (Taneyev gave the Moscow premiere of

Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 in December 1875). Upon his graduation in May 1875, Taneyev became the first student to win gold medals in both performance and composition from the school, and when Tchaikovsky resigned from the faculty in 1878, Taneyev, 22, took his place teaching harmony and orchestration. He soon added piano and composition instruction to his duties, and in 1885, he became the conservatory's director. He resigned as director in 1889 to give more time to composition, but continued to teach counterpoint until 1905, when he left in protest over the repressive discipline meted out to the students involved in disturbances at the school sparked by the revolutionary movement then sweeping Russia. He withdrew into a reclusive existence in a primitive house in the distant suburbs of Moscow, receiving students and friends (who ignored the sign claiming "Sergei Ivanovich is not at home" to find, usually, a warm welcome), composing, and writing a treatise on counterpoint that still serves as an important text on the subject in Russia's music schools. He was elected to honorary membership in the Russian Musical Society in 1913, but confessed to being embarrassed by the fuss attendant upon his installation ceremony. In April 1915, Taneyev stood in the rain at the funeral of his former student Alexander Scriabin, contracted pneumonia, and died of a heart attack on June 6.

The G minor Piano Quintet of 1910-11 opens with a somber introduction that contains the work's thematic seeds. A trilled chord, a freshening of the tempo, and the presentation of the agitated main theme mark the start of the movement's sonata form; the tender subsidiary subject, in a brighter key, is largely entrusted to the piano. The development works a variety of treatments upon the exposition's ideas, from dramatic to ruminative, before a full recapitulation of the earlier themes and a fiery coda round out the movement. The *Scherzo* takes as the materials for its outer sections a march-like theme and a mercurial strain in scintillating rhythms; a lyrical, rhapsodic central episode provides formal contrast and expressive balance. The *Largo* revives the old Baroque technique of *passacaglia* by draping a continuous flow of music across a constantly repeating scalar phrase, most often heard descending in the bass, though occasionally inverted. The *Finale* comprises two large structural paragraphs: the first is tense and tightly compressed; the second, which recalls themes from the first movement, is expansive and optimistic, and brings the quintet to a jubilant close.