

**Sergey Rachmaninov (1873-1943)****The Isle of the Dead, Op. 29 • Symphony No. 1 in D minor, Op. 13**

Sergey Vasilyevich Rachmaninov was among those Russian composers who chose exile, rather than remain in Russia after the Revolution of 1917. He was born at Semyonovo in 1873 into a family of strong military traditions on his mother's side and more remotely on his father's. A tendency to extravagance had depleted his father's fortunes and made it necessary to sell off much of their land, while dissipating his wife's dowry. As a result of this, the childhood of Rachmaninov was largely spent at the one remaining family estate at Oneg, near Novgorod. The reduction in family circumstances had at least one happier result. When it became necessary to sell this estate and move to St Petersburg, the expense of educating the boy for the Imperial service proved too great. Rachmaninov could make use, instead, of his musical gifts, entering St Petersburg Conservatory at the age of nine with a scholarship.

Showing no particular industry as a student and lacking the attention he needed at home, in 1885 Rachmaninov failed all his general subject examinations at the Conservatory and there were threats that his scholarship would be withdrawn. His mother, now separated from her husband and responsible for her son's welfare, arranged, on the advice of her kinsman, the well known pianist Alexander Ziloti, that her son should move to Moscow to study with Zverev, a teacher known to impose the strictest discipline. In Zverev's house, however uncongenial the rigorous routine, he acquired much of his phenomenal ability as a pianist, while broadening his musical understanding by attending concerts in the city. At the age of fifteen he became a pupil of Zverev's former student Ziloti, a musician who had also studied with Tchaikovsky, Nikolay Rubinstein and, thereafter, with Liszt. Rachmaninov had lessons in harmony and counterpoint with Sergey Taneyev and Arensky, and his growing interest in composition led to a quarrel with Zverev and removal to the house of his relations, the Satins.

In 1891 Rachmaninov completed his piano studies at the Conservatory and the composition of his *First Piano*

*Concerto*. The following year he graduated from the composition class. His early career brought initial success as a composer, halted by the failure of his *First Symphony* at its first performance in 1897, when it was conducted badly by Glazunov, apparently drunk at the time, and then reviewed in the cruelest terms by César Cui, who described it as a student attempt to depict in music the seven plagues of Egypt. Belyayev arranged for it to be heard at a Russian Symphony Concert in St Petersburg in 1897, when it received a largely hostile reception. Rachmaninov found the experience humiliating, presuming that a better performance might have earned the work more favour. He withdrew it immediately and it was not performed again in his lifetime.

Rachmaninov busied himself as a conductor, accepting an engagement in this capacity with Mamontov's Moscow Private Russian Opera Company. He was only able to return to composition after a course of treatment with Dr Nikolay Dahl, a believer in the efficacy of hypnosis. The immediate result was the second of his four piano concertos, a work that has proved to be one of the most immediately popular of all he wrote.

The years before the Russian Revolution brought continued successful activity as a composer and as a conductor. In 1902 Rachmaninov married Natalya Satina and went on to pursue a career that was bringing him increasing international fame. There were journeys abroad and a busy professional life, from which summer holidays at the estate of Ivanovka, which he finally acquired from the Satins in 1910, provided respite. During the war, however depressing the circumstances, he continued his concert engagements, not being required for military service, as he had anticipated. All this was interrupted by the abdication of the Tsar in 1917 and the beginning of the Revolution.

Rachmaninov left Russia in 1917. From then until his death in Beverley Hills in 1943, he was obliged to rely largely on performance for a living. Now there was, in consequence, much less time for composition, as he

undertook demanding concert-tours, during which he dazzled audiences in Europe and America with his remarkable powers as a pianist. His house at Ivanovka was destroyed in the Russian civil war and in 1931 his music was banned in Russia, to be permitted once again two years later. He spent much time in America, where there were lucrative concert-tours, but established a music publishing-house in Paris and built for himself a villa near Lucerne, where he completed his *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* in 1934 and his *Third Symphony* a year later. In 1939 he left Europe, to spend his final years in the United States.

Rachmaninov wrote his *Symphony No. 1 in D minor*, his second attempt at the form, in 1895. The score was lost, but in 1945 was reconstructed from surviving orchestral parts.

The second of the three elements that make up the short slow introduction to the first movement provides a source for the first subject, heard initially from the clarinet, while the second subject is introduced first by the oboe. There is a central development that starts in fine contrapuntal style and the thematic material duly returns in varied recapitulation, with its recurrent use of the rhythmic figure with which the symphony had started. This suggests the opening of the second movement, with a following element derived from the second subject of the first movement and a principal theme drawn from its first subject. This scherzo is followed by a perhaps over-extended slow movement that starts with the same motto figure from muted violas and brings in a derivative of the second subject of the first movement. The now familiar introductory figure starts the final *Allegro con fuoco* extended in a dotted rhythmic figure, the trumpets then ushering in a *Marciale* passage, its theme derived from the second element of the opening of the symphony, always accompanied by the trumpet fanfares. The first material returns, to be superseded by a theme derived in rhythm from the second subject of the first movement. The violins introduce a subsidiary theme worthy of the *Second Symphony* and there is a passage of tranquillity at the heart of the movement, before the return of the opening theme and a return to the vigour with which the

movement had started. This breaks off in the final pages, with a concluding return to the ominous rhythmic figure with which the symphony had begun.

The second of Rachmaninov's three symphonies was completed in 1907, followed in 1909 by the symphonic poem *Die Toteninsel, The Isle of the Dead*. The latter was based on a well-known painting, or rather a black-and-white reproduction of a painting, by the Swiss-German artist Arnold Böcklin, the leading German Romantic painter of the late nineteenth century. The picture shows Charon, the ferryman of the dead of Greek mythology, who rows the dead across the River Styx on their journey to the Underworld and to the crags and cliffs of the ominous Island of the Dead of Böcklin's imagination.

In the symphonic poem Rachmaninov makes constant use of fragments of the traditional plainchant *Dies irae*, a hymn that for centuries had formed part of the Catholic Requiem Mass and had inevitable associations with death in the minds of its hearers, associations exploited by Berlioz and Liszt among others in the nineteenth century, and elsewhere by Rachmaninov himself, notably in the popular *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*. Here the listener may imagine Charon rowing his boat with its passengers across to the *Toteninsel*, their arrival provoking a musical climax. As Charon returns to the hither shore, the music subsides once more into the ghostly stillness with which it had begun.

**Keith Anderson**

The *First Symphony* was not a work that Rachmaninov chose to revisit after the disastrous première. Clearly he was not in full command of the orchestra as there are passages that are obscured by some slightly awkward orchestration. It was my good fortune to be able to spend some time with Eugene Ormandy, who worked closely with Rachmaninov. The conductor shared several of the alterations he made and several of those changes are included in this performance.

**Leonard Slatkin****DETROIT SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA****Leonard Slatkin, Music Director****Music Directorship endowed by The Kresge Foundation**

Terence Blanchard, Fred A. and Barbara M. Erb Jazz Creative Director Chair

Neeme Järvi, Music Director Emeritus

**First Violins**

Yoonshin Song  
*Concertmaster*  
 Katherine Tuck Chair  
 Kimberly A. Kaloyanides Kennedy  
*Associate Concertmaster*  
 Alan and Marianne Schwartz  
 and Jean Shapero (Shapero  
 Foundation) Chair  
 Hai-Xin Wu  
*Assistant Concertmaster*  
 Walker L. Cislser/Detroit Edison  
 Foundation Chair  
 Beatriz Budnizsky\*  
 Marguerite Deslippe\*  
 Elias Friedenzohn\*  
 Laurie Landers Goldman\*  
 Eun Park\*  
 Adrienne Rönmark\*  
 Laura Soto\*  
 Greg Staples\*

**Second Violins**

Adam Stepniewski  
*Acting Principal*  
 The Devereaux Family Chair  
 Ron Fischer\*  
 Sheryl Hwangbo\*  
 Rachel Harding Klaus\*  
 Hong-Yi Mo\*  
 Robert Murphy\*  
 Bruce Smith\*  
 Joseph Striplin\*  
 Marian Tanau\*  
 Alvin Scour

**Violas**

Alexander Mishnaevskij†  
*Julle and Ed Levy, Jr. Chair*  
 James Van Valkenburg††  
 Caroline Coadé  
 Hang Su  
 Glenn Mellow  
 Shanda Lowery-Sachs  
 Hart Holliman  
 Han Zheng  
 Catherine Compton

**Cellos**

Robert deMaine†  
*James C. Gordon Chair*  
 Dorothy and Herbert  
 Graebner Chair  
 Robert Bergman\*  
 Carole Gatwood\*  
 David LeDoux\*  
 Peter McCaffrey\*  
 Haden McKay\*  
 Una O'Riordan\*  
 Paul Wingert\*  
*Victor and Gale Girolami  
 Cello Chair*

**Basses**

Stephen Molina  
*Acting Principal*  
 Van Dusen Family Chair  
 Linton Bodwin  
 Stephen Edwards  
 Larry Hutchinson  
 Craig Rifel

Maxim Janowsky  
 Alexander Hanna†

**Harp**

Patricia Masri-Fletcher†  
*Winifred E. Polk Chair*

**Flutes**

David Buck†  
*Women's Association for the  
 DSO Chair*  
 Sharon Sparrow  
*Acting Assistant Principal*  
 Jeffery Zook

**Piccolo**

Jeffery Zook

**Oboes**

Donald Baker†  
*Jack A. and Aviva Robinson Chair*  
 Shelley Heron  
*Maggie Miller Chair*  
 Brian Ventura††  
 Monica Fosnaugh

**English Horn**

Monica Fosnaugh

**Clarinets**

Theodore Oient†  
*Robert B. Semple Chair*  
*PVS Chemicals, Inc./*  
*Jim and Ann Nicholson Chair*  
 Laurence Liberson††  
 Shannon Orme

**E-Flat Clarinet**  
Laurence Liberson

**Bass Clarinet**  
Shannon Orme  
*Barbara Frankel and  
Ronald Michalak Chair*

**Bassoons**  
Robert Williams†  
*John and Marlene Boll Chair*  
Victoria King  
Michael Ke Ma††  
Marcus Schoon  
Garrett McQueen§

**Contrabassoon**  
Marcus Schoon

**French Horns**  
Karl Pituch†  
Bryan Kennedy  
Corbin Wagner  
Johanna Yarbrough  
David Everson††  
Mark Abbott

**Trumpets**  
Stephen Anderson  
*Acting Principal*  
*Lee and Floy Barthel Chair*  
Kevin Good  
William Lucas

**Trombones**  
Kenneth Thompkins†  
Nathaniel Gurin††  
Randall Hawes

**Bass Trombone**  
Randall Hawes

**Tuba**  
Dennis Nulty†

**Timpani**  
Brian Flescher#

**Percussion**  
Joseph Becker†  
*Ruth Roby and  
Alfred R. Glancy III Chair*  
*William Cody Knicely Chair*

**Librarians**  
Robert Stiles†  
Ethan Allen

**Personnel Manager**  
Stephen Molina  
*Orchestra Personnel Manager*  
Heather Hart Rochon  
*Assistant Orchestra  
Personnel Manager*

**Assistant Conductor**  
Teddy Abrams

**Chairman of the Board**  
Phillip Wm. Fisher

**President and CEO**  
Anne Parsons

#### Legend

† Principal

†† Assistant Principal

# Substitute musician, Acting Principal

^ Extended Leave

\* These members may voluntarily revolve seating  
within the section on a regular basis

§ African-American Orchestra Fellow

**Activities of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra  
are made possible in part with the support of  
the National Endowment for the Arts.**

## Detroit Symphony Orchestra

Photo: Cybelle Codish



began in 1922 when the DSO became the first orchestra in the world to present a radio broadcast and continues today with the free Live from Orchestra Hall webcast series. Making its home at historic Orchestra Hall at the Max M. Fisher Music Center, one of America's most acoustically perfect concert halls, the DSO actively pursues a mission to impact and serve the community through music. For more information visit [dso.org](http://dso.org) or download the free DSO to Go mobile app.

## Leonard Slatkin

Photo: Victor Mangona



Internationally renowned conductor Leonard Slatkin is currently Music Director of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and of the Orchestre National de Lyon and Principal Guest Conductor of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. He is also the author of a new book entitled *Conducting Business*. His previous positions have included a seventeen-year tenure with the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra, a twelve-year tenure with the National Symphony as well as titled positions with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl, Philharmonia Orchestra of London, Nashville Symphony Orchestra and the New Orleans Philharmonic. Always committed to young people, Leonard Slatkin founded the National Conducting Institute and the Saint Louis Symphony Youth Orchestra and continues to work with student orchestras around the world. Born in Los Angeles, where his parents, conductor-violinist Felix Slatkin and cellist Eleanor Aller, were founding members of the Hollywood String Quartet, he began his musical studies on the violin and studied conducting with his father, followed by training with Walter Susskind at Aspen and Jean Morel at The Juilliard School. His more than 100 recordings have brought seven GRAMMY® Awards and 64 GRAMMY® Award nominations. He has received many other honours, including the 2003 National Medal of Arts, France's Chevalier of the Legion of Honour and the League of American Orchestras' Gold Baton for service to American music.



# RACHMANINOV

## Symphony No. 1

### The Isle of the Dead

**Detroit Symphony Orchestra • Leonard Slatkin**

