

Marlow U3A Music Appreciation Group,  
September 2009

## Romantic Piano Concertos (1)

**SERGEI RACHMANINOV**  
1873 - 1943



## Sergei Rachmaninov

1873 - 1943

He was the last major composer of the great Russian late-Romantic tradition. Most of his music was written before 1917 when he left Russia never to return.

Appropriately, some of his symphonies and piano concertos radiate passionate yearning and nostalgia.

### Early days

Brought up on a wealthy country estate but the father squandered all their money and they were forced to sell up and move to an apartment in St Petersburg 1882 (Sergey aged 9)

Parents' relationship deteriorated and they separated with his mother having care of the children. His mother was always very cold with the children and Sergey later complained that **his parents did not love him very much**

## Early days

He had musical talent from an early age and this was nurtured by his sister's Swiss Governess.

As he got older his talent was recognized to such a degree that he became one of the youngest entrants to the St Petersburg Conservatory.

He boarded with his piano teacher in a severe routine of all day practice starting at 6.00am. But he flourished and graduated with the highest possible marks

## Middle Years 1890-1917

After obtaining the coveted Great Gold Medal - an honour which had only been bestowed twice before in the history of the Conservatory, his career was assured

1891 – Piano Concerto No1

1892 – graduates as a  
Composer

1893 – successful premiere  
of opera ALEKO

1897 – Disastrous premiere  
of Symphony No1



## Middle Years 1890-1917

1899 – first international appearance, London

1900 – nervous breakdown and recovery with aid from Dr Dahl psychologist

**1901 – composes Piano Concerto No 2**

1902 – Marries cousin Natalia Satina

1908 – Symphony No2 premiered

1909 – Piano Concerto No3

1910 – Tours US

1917 – Flees Russia on outbreak of Revolution

## Later Years 1917-1936

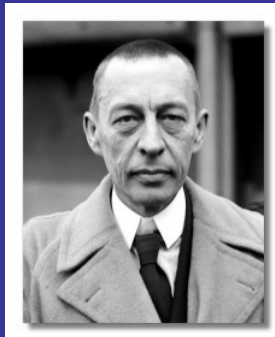
1918 – decides to live in US

1919 – Makes his first recording, continues to record with Ampico for 10 years

1926 – Piano Concerto No4

1934 – writes Rhapsody on a theme of Paganini

1936 – Symphony No3 completed



## **Piano Concerto No2, Op.18**

### **1<sup>st</sup> Movement – *Moderato***

**Eight ominous piano chords introduce a sombre first theme, contrasted with the more optimistic second; a strident martial short figure is repeated as a device to link the two**

## **Piano Concerto No2**

### **Second Movement – *Adagio Sostenuto***

**An aching theme, sparsely woven between piano, solo winds and strings, flows with a gentle sadness that seems to have no relief in sight.**

## Piano Concerto No2

### Third Movement – *Allegro Scherzando*

After a bustling start, two minutes or so in comes the nostalgic and sincere theme that brought Rachmaninov worldwide fame, played on oboe and violas and then taken up by piano.



## Piano Concerto No2

### Third Movement – *Allegro Scherzando*

The theme reoccurs in more impassioned forms before the determined but unsettled finish.