

RACHMANINOV

Symphonic Dances, Op. 45

USSR State Symphony Orchestra

Evgeny SVETLANOV



Sergei Rachmaninov
Symphonic Dances, Op. 45

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|------------------------------------|-------|
| 1 Non allegro | 11:40 |
| 2 Andante con moto. Tempo di valse | 9:59 |
| 3 Lento assai – Allegro vivace | 13:17 |

USSR State Symphony Orchestra
Evgeny Svetlanov, conductor

Recorded live at the Grand Hall of Moscow Conservatory,
February 3, 1986

Margarita Kozhukhova, producer and engineer
Larisa Abelian, editor

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943) could be justly criticised for his tendency at times to become overly morose, but no one however could question his skill in orchestration: his *Symphonic Dances* are among the most sumptuously scored works of the 20th century.

The *Symphonic Dances* (its original title was *Fantastic Dances*) was Rachmaninov's last original work and was completed quickly and in some pain (he had recently undergone an operation) in August 1940.

Once Rachmaninov had finished the short score of the *Symphonic Dances* in late August 1940 he was forced to maintain a hectic schedule so that work on the orchestration did not clash with his preparation of a concert tour due to begin on 14 October. As if that were not enough, he also transcribed the Dances for two pianos, performing them privately with Horowitz. The premiere of the *Symphonic Dances* with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy took place on 3 January 1941. Since Rachmaninov was still correcting proofs at the eleventh hour, it is hardly surprising that the new work was under-rehearsed. Despite his public admiration for Ormandy, Rachmaninov continued for some time to believe that the conductor either did not understand the music or that he had failed to prepare sufficiently. He was far happier with Dmitri Mitropoulos' interpretations and it was this conductor's New York performances which cemented the work's success.

The *Symphonic Dances* comprise of three movements, at one time titled 'Noon', 'Evening' and 'Midnight'. However there is little evidence that Rachmaninov considered a programme for the work, although he did play through the work for the choreographer Mikhail Fokine. Whatever project the two men planned was cut short by Fokine's death in August 1942. The first dance contains a melody given to the saxophone, the first and only time that Rachmaninov composed for the instrument. So determined was he to obtain the right effect that he consulted his friend Robert Russell Bennett, without question the most experienced musician on Broadway. The second dance is a ghostly waltz which spins out of control. The third dance takes us into otherworldly territory again as Rachmaninov's 'Dies irae' motif, so frequently used in the past, is subjected to the wildest treatment. Rachmaninov at one point quotes from the 'alleluya' section of his own *All-Night Vigil* (Vespers), thus leading commentators to believe that there was a programme attached after all: whoever's death had been announced by the 'Dies irae' is seen rising from the dead by the work's close..

James Murray

NOTES ON THE ARTIST

The conductor **Evgeny Svetlanov** (1928–2002) was the unsurpassed authority on Russian Romantic orchestral music in the last decades of the 20th century.

From 1965 until 2000, Svetlanov conducted the USSR State Symphony Orchestra, and recorded an extensive catalogue of Russian music, amassing the largest recorded legacy of any Russian conductor. At one point Svetlanov even claimed to have recorded "absolutely all the Russian symphonic music that has ever been written."

Svetlanov initially trained as a pianist and was also active as a composer throughout his career. From 1955, he conducted at the Bolshoi Theatre, and established a reputation for dramatic readings of Russian operas, always to high musical standards.

At the time of his appointment to the USSR State Symphony Orchestra, he had already worked with them for ten years, and the collaboration was an enduring success. Svetlanov was able to establish a leading international profile for the orchestra through extensive touring.

By the 1980s, Svetlanov had also established significant connections with several Western orchestras leading to appointments with the London Symphony Orchestra, Residentie Orchestra and the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra.

In 2000, Svetlanov was controversially sacked from his Moscow appointment by the Russian culture minister, Mikhail Shvydkoi, who cited the excessive time that the conductor was spending with foreign orchestras. However, three years after his death, the orchestra was renamed in the conductor's honour, and is known today as the State Academic Symphony Orchestra 'Evgeny Svetlanov'.

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