



Rachmaninov

plays Rachmaninov



Over a period of eighteen years involving a single record label, a single ensemble and its two successive music directors, Sergei Rachmaninov set down his complete works for piano and orchestra. He started with his most beloved concerto, the C minor, in an acoustic recording of the second and third movements with Leopold Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra, begun in December of 1923 and completed the following month. The results were successful enough to warrant recording the first movement in December, 1924; but because of the advent of electrical recording shortly thereafter, this portion was never released on 78 rpm discs. (The complete recording is available on Pristine PASC 471).

By April, 1929, recording technology had improved to the extent that a remake of the Second Concerto was warranted. This time, the venue was the orchestra's home, the Academy of Music. Forces no longer had to be reduced, nor did any more re-scoring need to be done in order for the music to register over acoustic phonographs. As was the practice of the time, multiple takes of each side were made. In 1942, as the metal parts began to show wear, Victor substituted nine of the ten sides of the album with backup takes. Both versions were transferred on Pristine PASC 521, although here, the takes originally approved by the composer-pianist are presented.

The next work to be recorded was the *Paganini Rhapsody*, set down only seven weeks after its November, 1934 première. Due to the economic constraints of the Depression, Victor was holding its sessions in a converted Camden church using reduced forces. It was recorded in one take with no pauses, with the original engineers fading down one side on one cutting turntable while they faded up the next side on another. (The two cutters were running at different speeds with different volume levels, which made linking the sides together for this transfer challenging.) The non-stop recording approach lends a great momentum and energy to the performance.

It was as a result of a Rachmaninov Festival planned by the orchestra's new director, Eugene Ormandy, that the First and Third Concertos were recorded in December, 1939, with a make-up session two months later. Victor had wanted to record the composer in these works; but Rachmaninov bargained to have them let him conduct a recording of his Third Symphony in exchange. The originals were recorded at a very high volume level, at the expense of cutting the bass to avoid blasting. I have tried to coax as much bass as possible from the original discs to present a more natural sound in these transfers.

The Fourth Concerto, composed in 1926 and premièred by the composer under Stokowski the following year, had not been part of the festival due to the composer's having withdrawn it in 1931 for further revision after its initial poor critical reception. The recording in December, 1941 followed the first performances of the final version. The composer continued to make changes to the orchestration up to the recording session, some of which are not reflected in the published score. It was fortuitous that Victor took a gamble on this work with a troubled past when it did. The following summer, the first Petrillo Ban on recording went into effect; and before it was over, Rachmaninov was dead.

Mark Obert-Thorn



disc one

RACHMANINOV Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor, Op. 18

- 1 1st mvt. - Moderato - Allegro (9:49)
- 2 2nd mvt. - Adagio sostenuto (10:43)
- 3 3rd mvt. - Allegro scherzando (10:56)

RACHMANINOV Piano Concerto No. 3 in D minor, Op. 30

- 4 1st mvt. - Allegro ma non tanto (13:56)
- 5 2nd mvt. - Intermezzo: Adagio (8:40)
- 6 3rd mvt. - Finale: Alla breve (11:29)

disc two

RACHMANINOV Piano Concerto No. 1 in F# minor, Op. 1

- 1 1st mvt. - Vivace (12:10)
- 2 2nd mvt. - Andante (5:27)
- 3 3rd mvt. - Allegro vivace (7:31)

RACHMANINOV Piano Concerto No. 4 in G minor, Op. 40

- 4 1st mvt. - Allegro vivace (9:47)
- 5 2nd mvt. - Largo (6:02)
- 6 3rd mvt. - Allegro vivace (8:49)

RACHMANINOV Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Op. 43

- 7 Introduction. Allegro vivace (0:08)
- 8 Variation 1. (Precedente) (0:21)
- 9 Tema. L'istesso tempo (0:20)
- 10 Variation 2. L'istesso tempo (0:19)
- 11 Variation 3. L'istesso tempo (0:25)
- 12 Variation 4. Più vivo (0:30)
- 13 Variation 5. Tempo precedente (0:29)

Producer and Audio Restoration
Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn

Special thanks to Nathan Brown and
Charles Niss for providing source material

Cover artwork based on a
photograph of Rachmaninov

Full discographic information can be found
online

Total duration: 2 hr 17:25

- 14 Variation 6. L'istesso tempo (0:52)
- 15 Variation 7. Meno mosso, a tempo moderato (0:59)
- 16 Variation 8. Tempo I (0:33)
- 17 Variation 9. L'istesso tempo (0:31)
- 18 Variation 10. L'istesso tempo (0:50)
- 19 Variation 11. Moderato (1:13)
- 20 Variation 12. Tempo di minuetto (1:18)
- 21 Variation 13. Allegro (0:29)
- 22 Variation 14. L'istesso tempo (0:45)
- 23 Variation 15. Più vivo scherzando (1:04)
- 24 Variation 16. Allegretto (1:20)
- 25 Variation 17. Allegretto (1:42)
- 26 Variation 18. Andante cantabile (2:35)
- 27 Variation 19. A tempo vivace (0:36)
- 28 Variation 20. Un poco più vivo (0:37)
- 29 Variation 21. Un poco più vivo (0:26)
- 30 Variation 22. Marziale. Un poco più vivo (Alla breve) (1:38)
- 31 Variation 23. L'istesso tempo (0:49)
- 32 Variation 24. A tempo un poco meno mosso (1:16)

Sergei Rachmaninov *piano*

The Philadelphia Orchestra

conducted by Eugene Ormandy (concertos 1, 3, 4)

conducted by Leopold Stokowski (concerto 2, rhapsody)

Concertos 1 (r. 1939/40), 2 (r. 1929), 3 (r. 1939/40) & 4 (r. 1941)
recorded at the Academy of Music, Philadelphia
Paganini Rhapsody (r. 1934) recorded at Church Studio No. 2, Camden,
New Jersey

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PASC 544

RACHMANINOV PIANO CONCERTOS 1 - 4, PAGANINI RHAPSODY
RACHMANINOV, THE PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA, STOKOWSKI, ORMANDY

PASC544

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