

Program Page

HOUGH FAMILY FOUNDATION MASTERWORKS

Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3

Michael Francis, Conductor
Joyce Yang, Piano

Friday, February 24, 2023, Mahaffey Theater at 8:00 pm
Saturday, February 25, 2023, Mahaffey Theater at 8:00 pm
Sunday, February 26, 2023, Straz Center, Ferguson at 2:00 pm

Carl August Nielsen
(1865-1931)

Symphony No. 4, Op. 29 "Inextinguishable" 🎵

1. Allegro
2. Poco allegretto
3. Poco adagio quasi andante
4. Allegro

Intermission

Serge Rachmaninoff
(1873-1943)

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

- I. Allegro ma non tanto
- II. Intermezzo
- III. Finale

Joyce Yang, *Piano*

🎵 Morse Family Foundation Music Collection; Established 1996

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Joyce Yang plays the Steinway Piano from the Music Gallery, exclusive agents for Steinway & Sons.

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Carl Nielsen (1865-1931)

Symphony No. 4, Op. 29, Inextinguishable

Duration: ca. 36 minutes

The Florida Orchestra has devoted the current and previous Masterworks programs to two of the Nordic region's most acclaimed symphonists, Nielsen and Sibelius, who were both born in 1865 and composed as exact contemporaries. Their styles, however, could not be more divergent: Where Sibelius funneled his music into a concise idiom, Nielsen ventured into more expansive, highly charged, adventurous territory.

His choice of expression may have been a reflection of his health; a number of heart attacks left him frail and aware of life as a fleeting wink in time. Nielsen built his symphonies on the concept of progressive tonality, in which the music moves from one tonal center onto the next, with unresolved tensions – a sort of musical plate tectonics. His works can be heard as abstractions, even though he assigned names such as the *Four Temperaments*, *Sinfonia Espansiva*, *Sinfonia Semplice*, and the masterpiece you will hear tonight, the *Inextinguishable*.

Completed in 1916 against the backdrop of world war, the symphony was conceived, in the composer's words, as "a battle between the forces of order and chaos." But despair wasn't his inspiration as much as the spirit of life, an ongoing process and elemental will to live that can't be doused. At the top of the score, Nielsen wrote "Music is life, and like it, it is inextinguishable."

All four movements are connected and played without breaks. The symphony opens with a fierce roar from the orchestra, a conflict between the keys D and E, followed by a theme in the woodwinds that serves to link the first and last movements. An *intermezzo* follows, scored mostly for winds, and leads to a tranquil *cantatina* (a lyrical song) that anchors the third movement.

Two sets of timpani – placed on both sides of the orchestra – compete in the finale and add drama by changing pitch on the skins. The theme from the opening movement reappears before the kettledrums reload, encouraging the orchestra to join forces in a brass-fueled climax.

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)

Piano Concerto No. 3 in D Minor, Op. 30

Duration: ca. 40 minutes

Rachmaninoff's favor in today's concert halls is no quirk or stylish trend. He never turned his back on the romantic in music, and he may be regarded as the most impassioned of all 20th-century composers.

He spent his life exploring the creative possibilities of the piano, and with his knack for writing a nostalgic tune – and a penchant for melancholy – he remains an audience favorite. In fact, the single-most performed piece of classical music among American orchestras today is his *Piano Concerto No. 2*.

His *Piano Concerto No. 3*, however, is a deeper, more cohesive work with a heightened development of themes. Unlike the earlier concerto, here Rachmaninoff deftly transforms the main melody of the opening into a leitmotif that holds the entire work together. The tune is subdued, almost shy, but from it grows great tension and turmoil before it returns to quiescence.

The concerto unfolds on a grand scale, with a sweeping lyricism and emotional range. It's also fiendishly difficult, in part because of the demands in negotiating the keyboard. Rachmaninoff had large hands – his thumb and pinkie could span 12 inches, more than most NBA players – and could canvas nearly two octaves.

Cast in three movements, the concerto opens with the simple but foreboding diatonic melody that sets the stage for a series of furious climaxes from the soloist. Many pianists who survive without breaking a few fingers consider this cadenza to be among the most difficult in the entire repertoire.

"This is an amazing moment for the pianist," says Joyce Yang, guest soloist in the concerto. "It's a big climb to the top, and when you get there, it doesn't end there, the energy only rises and it keeps going until the breaking point. It's a very exciting moment."

The middle movement revolves around a beautifully developed melody in F sharp minor that offers refuge after the storm before rhythmic tensions return. But rather than ending in the quiet resolve of a traditional adagio, Rachmaninoff takes us without pause into the finale and a set of variations on themes introduced earlier, which lends an organic wholeness to the entire work.

This closing section matches the vigor of the first movement and soars on a crescendo full of stops and starts that exploits every inch of the keyboard. But this is as much about the orchestra as the soloist, who together move forward in brilliantly matched parallel, and with a virtuosity that prompted TFO Music Director Michael Francis to call this work "the leviathan" among piano concertos.

Quarter note: Anyone wanting to add this concerto to your record library have dozens of options. Two endorsements are a 1982 recording with pianist Martha Argerich and Riccardo Chailly leading the Radio Symphony Orchestra of Berlin; and the staggering 1951 performance by Vladimir Horowitz, with Fritz Reiner conducting the RCA Victor Symphony Orchestra.