



**GRANT PARK
MUSIC FESTIVAL**
IN MILLENNIUM PARK

Grant Park Orchestra and Chorus
Carlos Kalmar, *Principal Conductor*
Christopher Bell, *Chorus Director*

Rachmaninov's Symphonic Dances

Wednesday, July 18, 2012 at 6:30PM

Jay Pritzker Pavilion
Grant Park Orchestra
Rossen Milanov, *Guest Conductor*
Mikhail Simonyan, *Violin*

KHACHATURIAN

Violin Concerto
Allegro con fermezza
Andante sostenuto
Allegro vivace

MIKHAIL SIMONYAN

RACHMANINOFF

Symphonic Dances, Op. 45
Non allegro
Andante con moto (Tempo di valse)
Lento assai — Allegro vivace — Lento assai —
Allegro vivace

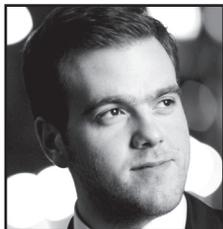
The appearance of Mikhail Simonyan
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ROSSEN MILANOV is Music Director of the New Symphony Orchestra in his native city of Sofia, Bulgaria, Princeton Symphony Orchestra and Symphony in C (one of America's leading professional training orchestras). This past season he completed an eleven-year tenure as Associate Conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra and as Artistic Director of the Philadelphia Orchestra at the Mann Center for the Performing Arts. In North America, Mr. Milanov has appeared with the orchestras of Washington, D.C., Rochester, Baltimore, Charlotte, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, New Jersey, San Antonio, Seattle, Vancouver, Jacksonville and St. Paul. His international credits include performances with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Rotterdam's Philharmonisch Orkest, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Rezydentie Orkest (The Hague), Orquesta Sinfónica del Principado de Asturias, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande (Geneva), National Symphony Orchestra of Latvia, Luzern Symphony Orchestra, Buenos Aires Philharmonic, Orquesta Nacional de Mexico, Orquesta Sinfonica de Tenerife, Belgrade Philharmonic and Royal Scottish National Orchestra, as well as major orchestras in China, Japan and South Korea. He has also conducted ballet and opera in Europe and America, and in the fall of 2012 leads a new production of Tchaikovsky's *Sleeping Beauty* at the Zurich Opera House. Mr. Milanov studied conducting at the Juilliard School (where he received the Bruno Walter Memorial Scholarship), Curtis Institute of Music, Duquesne University and Bulgarian National Academy of Music. He received the Award for Extraordinary Contribution to Bulgarian Culture from the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture, and in 2005 was chosen as Bulgaria's Musician of the Year. A committed supporter of youth and music, Rossen Milanov was Music Director of the Chicago Youth Symphony from 1997 to 2001.



MIKHAIL SIMONYAN, born in Novosibirsk, began to study violin at the age of five. In 1999, at thirteen, he made his acclaimed New York debut at Lincoln Center with the American Russian Young Artists Orchestra and his debut in St. Petersburg, Russia at the Mariinsky (Kirov) Theatre with the Mariinsky Youth Orchestra. Mr. Simonyan has earned First Prizes at the All-Russia Competition in Saint Petersburg, Siberian Violin Competition, National Prize Prizvanie in Moscow, and Salon de Virtuosi in New York. He is also a winner of the Yehudi Menuhin Foundation Award, and received the

2000 Virtuoso of the Year Award in Saint Petersburg. In 2005, after completing his studies at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, he received his country's highest recognition when President Putin received him at the Kremlin in acknowledgment of his status as one of Russia's most promising young musicians. In 2008, he won the Young Artist Award from the Classical Recording Foundation. Mr. Simonyan has appeared as recitalist and concerto soloist with major orchestras throughout America and Europe. He recently signed a multi-CD exclusive recording contract with Deutsche Grammophon; his first recording features Khachaturian's Violin Concerto and Barber's Violin Concerto and Adagio with the London Symphony Orchestra and conductor Kristjan Järvi. Mikhail Simonyan recently launched a private initiative called "Beethoven Not Bullets" to assist the newly founded Afghanistan National Institute of Music in Kabul. The mission of the Institute, the war-torn country's only music school, is to educate a new generation of musicians regardless of ethnicity or gender, revitalize music in Afghanistan and restore it as a cultural voice.



VIOLIN CONCERTO (1940) **Aram Khachaturian (1903-1978)**

Khachaturian's Violin Concerto is scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp and strings. The performance time is 35 minutes. The Grant Park Orchestra first performed this work on July 13, 1949. Nicolai Malko conducted and Fritz Siegal was the soloist.

Aram Khachaturian was one of the leading composers of the Soviet Union and the most celebrated musician of his native state of Armenia. When he arrived in Moscow in 1921 from his home town of Tbilisi, he had had virtually no formal training in music, but his talent was soon recognized, and he was admitted to the academy of Mikhail Gnessin, a student of Rimsky-Korsakov. Khachaturian's first published works date from 1926; three years later he entered the Moscow Conservatory. His international reputation was established with the success of the Piano Concerto in 1936, composed at the same time that he became active in the newly founded Union of Soviet Composers, of which he was elected Deputy Chairman of the Moscow branch in 1937 and Deputy President of the National Organizing Committee two years later. In 1939, he returned to live for six months in Armenia, where he immersed himself in the folk music of his boyhood home in preparation for composing the ballet *Happiness*. Boris Schwarz noted that the composer's synthesis of vernacular and cultivated musical styles in that work "represents the fulfillment of a basic Soviet arts policy: the interpenetration of regional folklorism and the great Russian tradition." Khachaturian's compositional colleague Dmitri Kabalevsky wrote, "The especially attractive features of Khachaturian's music are in its roots in national folk fountainheads. The captivating rhythmic diversity of dances of the peoples of Transcaucasia and the inspired improvisations of the *ashugs* [Armenia's native bards] — such are the sources from which have sprung the composer's creative endeavors. From the interlocking of these two principles there grew Khachaturian's symphonism — vivid and dynamic, with keen contrasts, now enchanting in their mellow lyricism, now stirring in their tension and drama." Khachaturian remained a proud and supportive Armenian throughout his life, serving in 1958 as the state's delegate to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. "My whole life, everything that I have created, belongs to the Armenian people," he once said. The Violin Concerto of 1940 is imbued with the music of Khachaturian's Armenian homeland.

One of the achievements of the Union of Soviet Composers was the founding in 1939 of an enclave on the Moscow River near the town of Staraya Ruza set aside for creative work and rest. Khachaturian spent the summer of 1940 there, in one of the cottages in the dense pine forest, composing a violin concerto for David Oistrakh. Khachaturian had largely prepared the formal plan for the piece in his head in advance, and recalled, "I worked without effort. Sometimes my thoughts and imagination outraced the hand that was covering the staff with notes. The themes came to me in such abundance that I had a hard time putting them in some order.... While composing the Concerto I had for my models such masterpieces as the concertos by Mendelssohn, Brahms, Tchaikovsky and Glazunov. I wanted to create a virtuoso piece employing the symphonic principle of development and yet understandable to the general public." He succeeded, and the Concerto was a great success when it was premiered on November 16, 1940 in Moscow by Oistrakh. The new Concerto solidified Khachaturian's popularity at home and abroad; he was awarded the Stalin Prize for it in 1941.

The Concerto's opening movement is disposed in the traditional sonata-allegro form, with two contrasting themes and a full development section. After a brief introductory outburst by the orchestra, the soloist presents an animated motif that soon evolves



into a bounding, close-interval folk dance. This theme, punctuated once by the strong orchestral chords from the introduction, continues for some time before it gives way to a lyrical complementary strain of nostalgic emotional character. As the movement unfolds, the soloist is required to display one dazzling technical feat after another, culminating in a huge cadenza that serves as the bridge to the recapitulation. Both of the earlier themes are returned in elaborated settings to round out the movement.

The second movement is in a broad three-part design prefaced by a bassoon solo that Grigory Shneerson, in his study of Khachaturian, said imitated the improvisations of the Armenian *ashugs*, or bards. A melancholy tune occupies the movement's outer sections while the central portion is more animated and rhapsodic in nature. The finale is an irresistible rondo, filled with festive brilliance, blazing orchestral color and sparkling virtuosity.

SYMPHONIC DANCES, OP. 45 (1940) **Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)**

Rachmaninoff's Symphonic Dances is scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, alto saxophone, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, piano and strings. The performance time is 35 minutes. The Grant Park Orchestra first performed the Symphonic Dances on August 9, 1969, with Kenneth Schermerhorn conducting.



World War I, of course, was a trial for Rachmaninoff and his countrymen, but his most severe personal adversity came when the 1917 Revolution smashed the aristocratic society of Russia — the only world he had ever known. He was forced to flee his beloved country, leaving behind family and financial security. He pined for his homeland the rest of his life, and did his best to keep the old language, food, customs and holidays alive in his own household. "But it was at best synthetic," wrote musicologist David Ewen. "Away from Russia, which he could never hope to see again, he always felt lonely and sad, a stranger even in lands that were ready to be hospitable to him. His homesickness assumed the character of a disease as the years passed, and one symptom of that disease was an unshakable melancholy." By 1940, when he composed the *Symphonic Dances*, he was filled with worry over his daughter Tatiana, who was trapped in France by the German invasion (he never saw her again), and had been weakened by a minor operation in May. Still, he felt the need to compose for the first time since the *Third Symphony* of 1936. The three *Symphonic Dances* were written quickly at his summer retreat on Long Island Sound, an idyllic setting for creative work, where he had a studio by the water in which to work in seclusion, lovely gardens for walking, and easy access to a ride in his new cabin cruiser, one of his favorite amusements. Still, it was the man and not the setting that was expressed in this music. "I try to make music speak directly and simply that which is in my heart at the time I am composing," he once told an interviewer. "If there is love there, or bitterness, or sadness, or religion, these moods become part of my music, and it becomes either beautiful or bitter or sad or religious."

It is nostalgic sadness that permeates the works of Rachmaninoff's later years. Like a grim marker, the ancient chant *Dies Irae* ("Day of Wrath") from the Roman Catholic Requiem Mass for the Dead courses through the *Paganini Rhapsody* (1934), the *Second* (1908) and *Third* (1936) *Symphonies* and the *Symphonic Dances* (1940). The *Symphonic Dances* were his last important creation, coming less than three years before his death from cancer at age 70. There is nothing morbid about them, however. They breathe a spirit of dark determination against a world of trial, a hard-fought musical affirmation of the underlying resiliency of life. Received with little enthusiasm when they were new,



these *Dances* have come to be regarded as among the finest of Rachmaninoff's works.

The first of the *Symphonic Dances*, in a large three-part form (A–B–A), is spun from a tiny three-note descending motive heard at the beginning that serves as the germ for much of the opening section's thematic material. The middle portion is given over to a folk-like melody initiated by the alto saxophone. The return of the opening section, with its distinctive falling motive, rounds out the first movement. The waltz of the second movement is more rugged and deeply expressive than the Viennese variety, and possesses the quality of inconsolable pathos that gives so much of Rachmaninoff's music its sharply defined personality. The finale begins with a sighing introduction for the winds, which leads into a section in quicker tempo whose vital rhythms may have been influenced by the syncopations of American jazz. Soon after this faster section begins, the chimes play a pattern reminiscent of the opening phrase of the *Dies Irae*. The sighing measures recur and are considerably extended, acquiring new thematic material but remaining unaltered in mood. When the fast, jazz-inspired music returns, its thematic relationship with the *Dies Irae* is strengthened. The movement accumulates an almost visceral rhythmic energy as it progresses, virtually exploding into the last pages, a coda based on an ancient Russian Orthodox chant (which he had earlier used in his *All-Night Vigil Service* of 1915) whose entry Rachmaninoff noted by inscribing "Alliluya" in the score. Was a specific message intended here? As the *Alliluya* succeeds the *Dies Irae*, did the composer mean to show that the Church conquers death? Optimism, sadness? Rachmaninoff was silent on the matter, except to say, "A composer always has his own ideas of his works, but I do not believe he ever should reveal them. Each listener should find his own meaning in the music."



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