

## Symphony No. 2 in E Minor, Op. 27 (1906-07)

Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943)

The professional career of Russian composer, pianist, and conductor Sergei Rachmaninov spanned a tumultuous era that encompassed the Russian Revolution, World War I, the rise of the communist party in his homeland, and most of World War II. After leaving Russia for good in 1917 following the revolution, he eventually settled in the United States where he was offered several prestigious conducting opportunities, most notably with the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

Although such early twentieth-century contemporaries as Debussy, Stravinsky, Bartok, and Schoenberg were ushering in a Modern era of radically new musical trends, Rachmaninov continued to compose in a style much more characteristic of the nineteenth-century Romantic era. He is particularly noted for his rich harmonies and luxurious lyricism. He conducted the premier of his Second Symphony at the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg in 1908; ten months later the composition earned Rachmaninov the Glinka Award.

*Largo—Allegro moderato:* The first movement opens with a brooding and melancholy introduction that eventually leads to a series of impassioned melodies. A more forceful, even stormy, middle section eventually returns to the lyricism from the beginning of the movement.

*Allegro molto:* Abrupt mood changes characterize this second movement scherzo. Sections featuring a quicker, lighter pace contrast delightfully with those that present a calmer and more melodious character.

*Adagio:* One of Rachmaninov's most memorable melodies opens the slow third movement and

recurs several times throughout. That opening statement leads to an extended theme in the clarinet. After building to a rather intense climax, the opening memorable theme returns for a calm close.

*Allegro vivace:* The final movement opens with an exuberant fanfare-like theme, which is eventually replaced by an extensive sweeping melody in the strings. Hints of the opening memorable theme from the third movement appear, along with reminiscences of melodies from the first and second movements as well. After a contrasting middle section, the fanfare theme returns along with other melodies from the opening of the movement. A powerful climax brings the symphony to an exuberant close.

Renee McCachren  
Professor, Catawba College