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SEASON



SPRING CONCERTS

Jean-Guihen Queyras cello

Alexander Melnikov piano

Sunday April 6 2025

From the Artistic Director

Dear Friends:

We are so excited to welcome Jean-Guihen Queyras and Alexander Melnikov back to the VRS. Theirs is a remarkable and enduring partnership; these are two outstanding musicians who obviously love playing together.

Jean-Guihen and Alexander have chosen a varied and wonderful program for their concert which will showcase their talents to the full.

We are most grateful to our Season Sponsor, the Peak Group of Companies, and to the sponsor of this concert, Stephen Fitterman. Without this support we could never bring you these wonderful performances.

As with all our performances in the Vancouver Playhouse, we are most grateful to the City of Vancouver for its grants in lieu of rent program.

Have a wonderful afternoon and be prepared to be swept away by the Rachmaninov Sonata.

Most sincerely,



Leila



CELLPHONES

The use of cellphones and recording devices is prohibited in the concert hall. Please take this opportunity to turn off all electronic devices.

音乐厅内禁止使用手机，禁止拍照，录音，录像。请观众关闭所有电子器材，感谢您的合作。

Program

Jean-Guihen Queyras, cello
Alexander Melnikov, piano

Sunday, April 6, at 3:00 pm
Vancouver Playhouse

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)
Sonata for Cello and Piano in C major
Op. 102 No. 1

Andante - Allegro vivace
Adagio - Tempo d'andante - Allegro vivace
(approx. 15 minutes)

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)
Sonata for Cello and Piano in D major
Op. 102 No. 2

Allegro con brio
Adagio con molto sentimento d'affetto
Allegro fugato
(approx. 20 minutes)

INTERMISSION

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862-1918)
Sonata for Cello and Piano in D minor

Prologue
Sérénade
Finale
(approx. 20 minutes)

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF (1873-1943)
Sonata for Cello and Piano in G minor
Op. 19

Lento - Allegro moderato
Allegro scherzando
Andante
Allegro mosso
(approx. 36 minutes)

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Jean-Guihen Queyras, cello

Early Life & Education: Jean-Guihen Queyras holds a professorship at the University of Music Freiburg and is Artistic Director of the Rencontres Musicales de Haute-Provence festival in Forcalquier. He plays an instrument by Antonio Stradivari, made in 1705, made available to him by Canimex Inc. of Drummondville, Quebec, Canada.

Performances: Jean-Guihen was a founding member of the Arcanto Quartett and forms a celebrated trio with Isabelle Faust and Alexander Melnikov; the latter is, alongside Alexandre Tharaud, a regular accompanist. He has also collaborated with zarb specialists Bijan and Keyvan Chemirani on a Mediterranean programme.

The versatility in his music-making has led many concert halls, festivals and orchestras to invite Jean-Guihen to be Artist in Residence, including the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, Vredenburg Utrecht, De Bijloke Gent and the Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg.

This Season: In the 2024–25 season, Jean-Guihen is resident artist at the Philharmonie de Paris, with the Residentie Orkest Den Haag and with the Stavanger Symphony Orchestra. He will also be performing with the Orchestre de Paris, the Orchestre National de Belgique, the Orchestre symphonique de Québec, the Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century, the Orquestra Sinfônica do Estado São Paulo, the Orchestre national du Capitole de Toulouse, the Sinfonietta Riga and the SWR Symphonieorchester under the batons of Andris Poga, Karina Canellakis, Anja Bihlmaier, Riccardo Minasi, Normunds Šnē, Michael Schønwandt and Giedrė Šlekytė, among others. Chamber music concerts with partners such as Isabelle Faust, Christian Poltéra, Antoine Tamestit, Anne Katharina Schreiber, Alexandre Tharaud, the Ensemble intercontemporain, Tabea Zimmermann, Mark Simpson, Pierre-Laurent Aimard and Alexander Melnikov from Hamburg to Vienna, London, Amsterdam, Vancouver, Seattle and Tokyo, as well as solo concerts in Strasbourg, Leipzig, Kronberg, Yokohama, Girona and Vevey round off his season.

Recordings: Jean-Guihen's discography is impressive. His recordings of cello concertos by Edward Elgar, Antonín Dvořák, Philippe Schoeller and Gilbert Amy have been released to critical acclaim. As part of a Harmonia Mundi project dedicated to Schumann, Jean-Guihen recorded the complete piano trios with Isabelle Faust and Alexander Melnikov and at the same time recorded the Schumann cello concerto with the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra under Pablo Heras-Casado. The recording *Thrace "Sunday Morning Sessions"* explores, in collaboration with the Chemirani brothers and Sokratis Sinopoulos, the intersections of contemporary music, improvisation and Mediterranean traditions. In addition to the first CD of the "Invisible Stream" Ensemble 2022, consisting of Jean-Guihen, Raphaël Imbert, Pierre-François Blanchard and Sonny Troupé, the recording of the cello concertos by Kraft and CPE Bach with the Ensemble Resonanz under the direction of Riccardo Minasi was released in 2024. Jean-Guihen records exclusively for Harmonia Mundi.



Photo credit: Marco Borggreve

Jean-Guihen Queyras is represented by Impresariat Simmenauer, Berlin, Germany.

Alexander Melnikov, piano

Early Life & Education: Alexander Melnikov graduated from the Moscow Conservatory under Lev Naumov. His most formative musical moments in Moscow include an early encounter with Svyatoslav Richter, who thereafter regularly invited him to festivals in Russia and France. He has been awarded important prizes at eminent competitions such as the International Robert Schumann Competition in Zwickau (1989) and the Concours Musical Reine Elisabeth in Brussels (1991).

Performances: As a soloist, Alexander has performed with orchestras including the Koninklijk Concertgebouw Orkest Amsterdam, Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, Philadelphia Orchestra, NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchester, HR-Sinfonieorchester, Munich Philharmonic, Rotterdam Philharmonic and the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, under conductors such as Mikhail Pletnev, Teodor Currentzis, Charles Dutoit, Paavo Järvi, Thomas Dausgaard, Maxim Emelyanychev and Vladimir Jurowski.



Photo credit: Molina Visuals

Together with Andreas Staier, Alexander Melnikov recorded a unique all-Schubert programme of four-hand pieces, which they have also performed in concert. An essential part of Melnikov's work is intensive chamber music collaboration with partners including cellist Jean-Guihen Queyras.

This Season: Highlights of the 2024-25 season include Alexander's residency at the Konzerthaus Wien with a solo programme, a chamber music concert and a concert with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Christoph Eschenbach. Concert tours take him to Japan, America and Europe, where he performs with renowned orchestras such as the Munich Philharmonic, the Konzerthausorchester Berlin, the Orquestra Gulbenkian, the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana, the Gürzenich Orchestra, the Kammerakademie Potsdam, the Basel Chamber Orchestra and the Australian Chamber Orchestra under the direction of Ivor Bolton, Maxim Emelyanychev, Hannu Lintu, Daniel Cohen, Anja Bihlmaier and Giovanni Antonini.

Recordings: Alexander Melnikov's association with the label Harmonia Mundi arose through his regular recital partner, violinist Isabelle Faust, and in 2010 their complete recording of the Beethoven sonatas for violin and piano won a Gramophone Award. This album, which has become a landmark recording of these works, was also nominated for a Grammy. Their most recent release features the Brahms sonatas for violin and piano.

Alexander's recording of the Preludes and Fugues by Shostakovich was awarded the BBC Music Magazine Award, Choc de Classica and the Jahrespreis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik. In 2011, it was also named by one of the "50 Greatest Recordings of All Time" by BBC Music Magazine. Additionally, his discography features works by Brahms, Rachmaninoff, Shostakovich and Scriabin. Joined by Isabelle Faust, Jean-Guihen Queyras, Pablo Heras-Casado and the Freiburger Barockorchester, Melnikov recorded a trilogy of albums featuring the Schumann Concertos and Trios.

Other releases include a complete recording of Prokofiev's piano sonatas, *Four Pieces, Four Pianos*, released in 2018 and highly acclaimed by critics, and following this, in 2023, his new album *Fantasie: Seven Composers, Seven Keyboards* in which he plays the pieces on the instruments of the time. In addition to this solo album, a CD including Schumann's Piano Quartet, Op. 47 and Piano Quintet, Op. 44 was released at the end of 2023, on which Alexander can be heard together with Isabelle Faust, Anne Katharina Schreiber, Antoine Tamestit and Jean-Guihen Queyras.

Alexander Melnikov is represented by Impresariat Simmenauer, Berlin, Germany.

Program Notes

Ludwig van Beethoven

Sonata for Cello and Piano in C major Op. 102 No. 1

Beethoven's two cello sonatas Op. 102, along with the preceding Op. 101 piano sonata, mark the beginning of his late period, a period in which we hear the wilful musical thoughts of a composer who has retreated from the world of sound, but with his love of that sound-world intact. The C major Cello Sonata, so irregular in its formal outlines and so free in its inner patterns of musical thought, is a typical product of that world.

The first noticeable irregularity in this sonata is that it features only two free-standing movements, each of which begins with a slow introduction. Or rather a free fantasy, because instead of building up a sense of anticipation for the section that will follow, the slow introduction of this work's first movement seems blissfully happy to merely meditate over the main motives that will recur throughout the sonata as a whole: a stepwise falling 4th and a stepwise ascent of the same interval, presented by the solo cello at the outset.



With a dynamic marking of piano and the expressive indications *tenderamente*, *dolce cantabile*, this slow introduction is a virtual love duet between piano and cello, which sing together in 3rds or echo back to each other their billing and cooing in a placid C major.

The end of this cheek-to-cheek slow-dancing comes all the more suddenly, then, when the sonata movement begins in earnest – in the key of A minor.



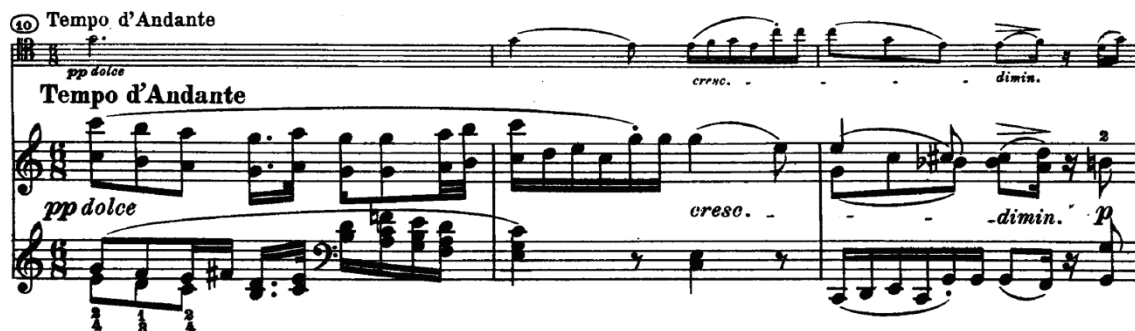
An opening theme in octaves and unisons between the piano and cello opens the exposition but expends its fury after two statements, stopping abruptly to allow a musical thought of smaller range, the second theme, to intervene.

This abruptness is a characteristic feature of the movement. Beethoven feels no real need to create transitions between sections: he merely stops, as if a new thought has occurred to him, and goes off in a new direction after a pause. Although the exposition is repeated, that is perhaps the most "normal" feature of this movement, which has a compressed development section and a recapitulation that seems ready to luxuriate in a lingering coda – but no, it decides not to after all and puts a quick end to the discussion.

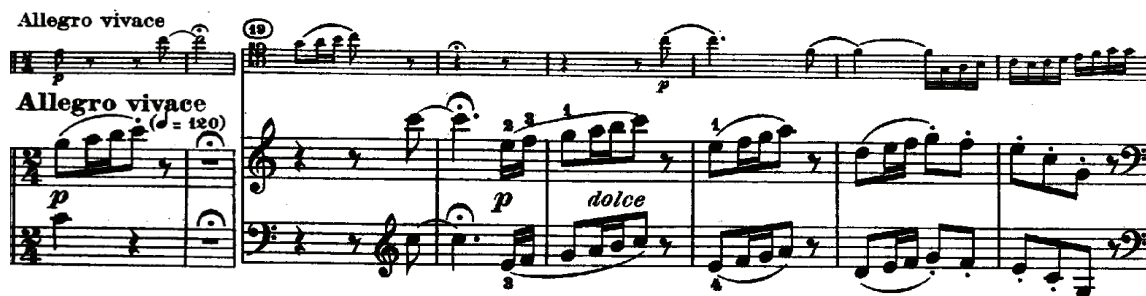
The slow introduction that opens the *Adagio* second movement is a more serious affair, introspective and reflective as if gazing at the stars.



At first, the piano and cello seem to be in another duet, trading florid phrases back and forth, but then each retreats to its own corner, the cello ruminating deep in the bass as the piano explores ever higher terrain above.



Bringing them back together is the opening theme of the first movement, recalled in a mood so lyrical that it dissolves into a dreamy triple trill before the perky theme of the *Allegro vivace* bursts its bubble with a playful game of “tag” between cello and piano using the “rising 4th” motive.



Once this movement starts, we are on psychologically healthy ground. Beethoven uses the nimble rising-4th motive in many mostly humorous or ironic ways. One of the most ingenious is when the cello plays a drone in the bass, as if it's slowly looking around for the piano, then quickly turns around and just misses “tagging” it (imitatively) with the motive.



In this context the fugato that follows is anything but dead serious. Another game of tag follows later, and the two instruments end the movement the best of friends.

Ludwig van Beethoven

Sonata for Cello and Piano in D major Op. 102 No. 2

The second of the two sonatas that Beethoven published as his Op. 102 is a particularly thorny creation – elemental, sinewy and unyielding in its pursuit of musical ideas at the expense of musical sentiments. This is not the place to look for pleasant tunes to hum in the shower.

It comprises three sharply chiselled movements: a sternly brisk first movement with a drill-sergeant edge to it, an emotional black hole of a slow movement and a full-on, gritty fugue finale to let the duffers know just who they are dealing with.

The sonata opens with an arresting fanfare, ideal for deep sleepers to program into their alarm clocks.



These four quick notes and a big leap set the tone of brusqueness and forthright direct statement that characterizes the exposition throughout.

The military bearing of its musical manner is reinforced by the frequent use of “snap-to-attention” dotted rhythms, bare-bones unison accompaniments and the odd feeling that there is a bugle somewhere playing along with its many motives based on the major triad. Even the patriotic second theme sounds like a slow-motion fanfare.



A development section is where you would expect a composer to mix things up a bit, but this movement's development section is actually where you start to feel for the first time the unbuttoned sweep of long phrases governed by an overarching harmonic unfolding in place of the exposition's “stop-and-go” pattern of delivery.

This new “smoother” mood continues into a recapitulation where the gaps are filled in and the pulse remains more continuous. The harmonic wanderings of the coda promise mystery, but then – like an adult amusing a child by hiding his face behind his hands only to spring out gleefully into full view – Beethoven steers the movement at the last moment to a resolute cadence in the home key.

* * *

The second movement, extravagantly labelled *Adagio con molto sentimento d'affetto*, is oppressively Baroque in mood, its dark emotional tenor reinforced by a dirge-like pace and an almost Brahmsian obsession with the low register of the piano. But this is the only real traditional slow movement in all the cello sonatas, a place where the cello gets to display its lyrical gifts in a pool of light at centre stage.



The movement's solemnly paced melody of even 8th notes, with a pause at the end of each phrase, suggests a chorale tune. The comparison is undercut by the oddly "limping" dotted-rhythm accompaniment it soon receives from the piano.



There is something "not quite right" about this deep lyricism, with its eerie unisons and its melodic turns that are more worrying than graceful. Relief arrives in a middle section in the major mode that restores a happier tone to the proceedings. When the opening section returns, however, the gravity of its ominous message is reinforced by low-register rumblings in the piano, and its "limping tic" has only gotten worse.

* * *

In keeping with Beethoven's emerging tendency in his late period to isolate his musical material before developing it, he begins his transition to the *Allegro fugato* finale by spelling out the rising scale figure that will become his fugue subject. It comes first in the solo cello, then is echoed back in the piano like a magician first showing you both sides of a silk handkerchief from which he is later going to miraculously pull a flapping pigeon or a bouquet of flowers.



This fugue subject, when it arrives, is both merry and dainty, but it's metrically a bit "off" in the way that it weakens the first beat of the bar. This gives it ample forward momentum but no predictable rhythmic pulse, so trying to follow the dazzling patchwork of fugal entries is a daunting exercise in mental concentration, especially given the many off-beat accents in the score.

And the merriment gets a bit crowded after a while, much like when too many people are crammed into a Volkswagen, leading to a mind-bending traffic jam of strettos in contrary motion.

The long series of buzzing trills in the texture near the end point to their successors in the "sound-symphony" finales of the last piano sonatas.

Sonata for Cello and Piano in D minor

Debussy's compact little sonata for cello and piano was written in 1915 as part of a series of instrumental sonatas meant to assert the value of French culture during a depressingly long Great War that Debussy saw as threatening France's very survival. The work comprises three movements, each successive movement shorter than the previous.

We find Debussy's trademark sense of understatement everywhere in this sonata. It unfolds in a subdued atmosphere of soft to medium-soft dynamic levels, imbued nonetheless with considerable emotional warmth. Phrases tend to be short and often unpredictable, either coquettishly playful or tender and pensive. Textures are thinned out and made more transparent by the use of streams of parallel 5ths, especially in the bass, and by means of melodic octave doublings throughout the texture.

There is little sense of “stable” melody since Debussy’s melodies are self-developing – they mutate as soon as they are announced – but to compensate, the pace of harmonic rhythm is slow. Debussy thus inverts the normal relationship between melody and harmony.

It has been suggested that the title “Sonata” for this work is equivalent to “Untitled” as the title of a painting, and the reference to visual art is quite appropriate. Debussy treats melody and tempo like the eyeball movements of a viewer in front of a painting and harmony like the moods that slowly melt into one another as the viewer gazes from one area of the canvas to another.

* * *

The first movement *Prologue* announces its motivic foundations in the first bar: a quick triplet and long note followed by a descending modal scale figure.

Lent (48 à 54 = ) Sostenuto e molto risoluto




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Rhapsodic elaborations of the triplet figure form its first theme, while tender ruminations on the descending scale figure form its second. An animated middle section prepares for the triumphant return of the opening material and its serene farewell.

* * *

The *Sérénade* that follows lives up to its title with ample pizzicato writing for the cello and a fair imitation of guitar strumming in the piano.

The musical score for the *Sérénade* movement is written for cello and piano. The tempo is marked **Modérément animé (72 = ♩)**. The cello part begins with a **pizz.** (pizzicato) instruction and a **pp fantasque et léger** marking. The piano part is marked **pp** and features a descending bass line with a **p** (piano) marking. The score is in 4/4 time and consists of four measures.

Capriciously paced and leering with portamento slides, this movement pursues its evening entertainment goals with infinite delicacy.

* * *

In contrast to the spare scoring of the previous movements, the *Finale* simply bubbles over with running notes, but the scamper is often interrupted by – or superimposed with – long strands of lyrical melody.

It has a distinctly Spanish flavour with its frequent use of the Phrygian-scale descending bass figure typical of flamenco music.

The musical score for the *Finale* movement is written for cello and piano. The tempo is marked **Animé (92 = ♩)** with the character **Léger et nerveux**. The cello part begins with a **pizz.** (pizzicato) instruction and a **p** (piano) marking. The piano part is marked **p** and features a descending bass line with a **p** (piano) marking. The score is in 2/4 time and consists of four measures.

In this last movement, upbeat dancelike sections alternate with less hurried, more sensuous passages that loiter rather than progress through their harmonic terrain.

Sergei Rachmaninoff

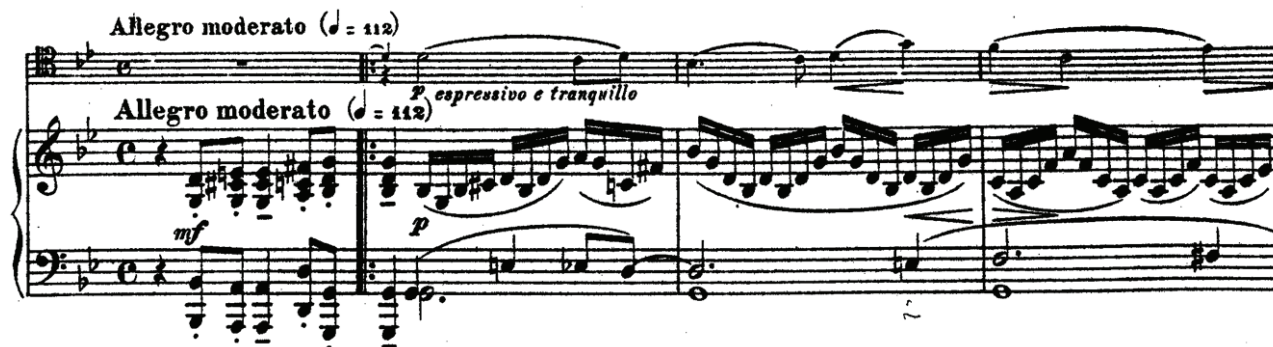
Sonata for Cello and Piano in G minor Op. 19

Rachmaninoff's piano music is renowned both for its lushness of scoring and for the technical challenges it presents to any pianist with a hand smaller than a catcher's mitt. The role given to the "accompanying" instrument in his Cello Sonata in G minor is no exception. The keyboard writing is just as opulent, its technical demands every bit as challenging as anything in his concertos or major works for piano solo. The Sonata features piano textures swimming with countermelodies in the mid-range riding sidecar to sumptuous main melodies ringing out in the right hand above, regardless of whatever throbbing lyricism might also emerge below in the baritone range from the cello. Most of the themes in the work are introduced by the piano, and one could almost believe, as has often been said, that the work is really just a big piano sonata with cello accompaniment.

Written in 1901, around the same time as Rachmaninoff's famous Piano Concerto No. 2, this sonata is remarkable for its expressive range and the orchestral heft of its textures. As Steven Isserlis has pointed out, many of its themes bear the stylistic imprint of Orthodox hymns, especially in their use of close intervals, their obsessive repetition of single notes and their bell-like sonorities. The first movement begins with a slow introduction



that slips in much of the thematic material that will be pursued in the following *Allegro moderato*.

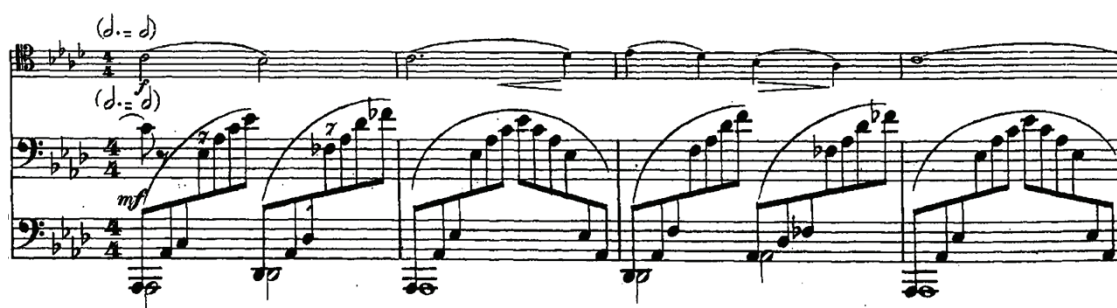


Of special note is the rising semitone intoned in the cello's mid-range that opens the work. This oft-repeated motive pervades the themes of the exposition and drives the momentum of the stormy development section, which is end-weighted, merging into the recapitulation at its climactic point of highest tension, just as in the first movement of the Second Piano Concerto. The movement closes with the punchy, rap-on-the-door rhythmic gesture that was to become this composer's signature sign-off: RACH-man-in-OFF!

The second movement *Allegro scherzando* is remarkable for its emotional volatility. It begins with a worrisome patter of triplet 8th notes reminiscent of Schubert's *Erlkönig*.



But lyrical impulses soon begin to mix in with all the fretting, and the middle section is a swaying duet of no small sentimental charm.



The *Andante* third movement is the jewel of this sonata, its quivering harmonic ambivalence between major and minor a bittersweet and vaguely exotic sonic background to the bell-like repeated notes of its opening phrase.



Dark and brooding, the long phrases of this elegiac movement build up to an impassioned climax before ebbing into a consoling calm of warm contentment.

The *Allegro mosso* finale in a triumphal G major is a sonata-form movement of abundant contrasts. It features an upbeat “sleigh ride” of an opening theme built up out of short motives, doggedly repeated, like the opening themes of the second and third piano concerto finales.



The stand-out melody of this movement is its heartbreaking second theme announced in the cello, a wistful anthem of tribute to every underdog who has ever struggled against overwhelming odds.



From time to time, however, these themes yield to the type of fervent military march that so often emerges in Rachmaninoff's finales. Just before the end, the pace slows to a crawl in a coda that seems to want to pass in review the movement's best lyrical moments.

Will this be the end? No, of course not. Our dreaming duo awake from their reverie and scamper off to the work's brilliant conclusion like a pack of squealing schoolchildren let loose to find Easter eggs.

Program notes by
Donald G. Gíslason, 2025

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