RACHMANINOV SYMPHONY 2
This evening is a concert of sumptuous melody. Canadian composer Randolph Peters’s beautiful *Butterfly Wings and Tropical Storms* is a celebration of nature, and of the wonder of chaos and the unpredictable. Henning Kraggerud joins us for the magnificent Violin Concerto by Sibelius, the only concerto he ever wrote. It is a sweeping work—from its desolate opening to its thrilling dance-like finale, it is actually unlike anything else in his output. The music has a darkly dramatic quality. Similarly, Rachmaninoff’s stunning Second Symphony takes us on a profound and heartfelt journey, intensely personal, filled with yearning. Rachmaninoff has become so popular on the basis of his piano works and concertos that we sometimes forget what a formidably skilled composer he was. This is a true symphony in every sense, in some ways more directly connected to the great symphonic tradition of Beethoven and Brahms than to the Russian tradition of Tchaikovsky’s symphonies. It truly transports us.
Randolph Peters

*Butterfly Wings and Tropical Storms*

Born: Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, Dec 28, 1959

Composed: 2002

The seemingly absurd idea—that infinitesimal disturbances caused by the flight of a butterfly could be multiplied over months and years and eventually result in a tropical storm—was the basis for a whole new area of science. Chaos science grew out of this breakthrough discovery first observed by mathematician and meteorologist Edward Lorenz. He called it the “butterfly effect”.

Music, like the weather, also has patterns and unpredictability. Both often contain a fine inner ordering that masquerade on the surface as randomness. It is not just artists who know that in our interconnected world, small changes magnified over time can lead to cataclysmic results.

Financial assistance by the Manitoba Arts Council.

Program note by the composer

For award-winning Canadian composer Randolph Peters, music is a passport, a way to explore the world. Peters’s career has taken his music across the world, with commissions from ensembles such as the Winnipeg, Vancouver, and Edmonton symphony orchestras, the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, Kronos Quartet, Hannaford Street Silver Band, Elmer Iseler Singers, and Orchestre symphonique du Québec.

Although he has composed in a number of different genres, Peters especially enjoys telling stories through his work in opera and film music.

Peters has composed over 100 film scores including *The Diviners* (1993) and *Lost in the Barrens* (1990). He was Composer-in-Residence for the Canadian Opera Company (COC) from 1990 to 1993, during which time he composed *Nosferatu*, his first opera. In 1999, the COC premièred his most successful opera to date, *The Golden Ass*, with an original libretto by Robertson Davies. Peters has recently joined the music faculty of the School of Arts, Media, Performance & Design at York University.
Jean Sibelius

Violin Concerto in D Minor, Op. 47

Born: Hämeenlinna, Finland, Dec 8, 1865
Died: Järvenpää, Finland, Sep 20, 1957
Composed: 1903–1904; rev. 1905

To be a famous virtuoso violinist was the great unfulfilled ambition of Sibelius’s life: “Dreamt I was twelve years old and a virtuoso,” he confided to his diary, in 1915. His only concerto was for violin, as were most of his other works for solo instrument with orchestra.

This is in many ways an unusual concerto. Though passionate and full of Romantic yearning, it conspicuously lacks the sparkle and sensuousness of the violin concertos of, say, Mendelssohn or Bruch or Tchaikovsky; the music is often dark, gloomy, brooding, alternately static and driving in rhythm, sometimes rife with cross-rhythms, and with those hard, cold, open sonorities so typical of Sibelius’s orchestra. Moreover, there is little interplay between orchestra and soloist; rather, the two forces are presented in blocks. The violin sometimes takes the melody, sometimes adds counterpoint to an orchestral melody; solo cadenzas as well as orchestral tutti serve as transitions, but of true dialogue there is almost none.

The form of the first movement, too, is unusual: the drama is in the sequence of many diverse ideas, rather than the intensive development of one or two. The main theme—long, meditative, hauntingly expressive—is introduced at once by the violin; at length, the main theme works up to a climax (with a mighty blast of brass). A solo cadenza serves as a bridge to a whole series of secondary themes, all distinct in character, sonority, key, and rhythm; most are introduced by the orchestra, with the violin contributing an important lyrical theme in the high register. In place of the expected development section, Sibelius has an extended solo cadenza, based on the main theme.

The second movement is a dark romance, melancholy and elegiac in character, concise but dramatic in form. The finale is a bustling rondo, in a polonaise-like rhythm. The proud, strutting rondo theme is introduced by the violin, while the second theme, featuring more Sibelian cross-rhythms, is introduced by the orchestra, then extended passionately by the violin. Near the end of the movement, Sibelius cleverly combines elements from both themes to make a transition into a short but powerful coda, in which the huge orchestral sonorities and sweeping violin figures seem to surge in great waves.

Program note by Kevin Bazzana

A SECOND CHANCE

The leading local critic, Karl Flodin, called the Violin Concerto boring, too virtuosic, “a mistake”, after its 1904 première in Helsinki, with the composer conducting. Crushed, Sibelius withdrew the original version. In June of 1905, Sibelius revised the concerto—he made substantial cuts and changes to the outer movements, re-orchestrated all three, and reduced the virtuoso element considerably. The première of the revised version took place in October, in Berlin, with no less a conductor than Richard Strauss.
THE DETAILS

Sergei Rachmaninoff

Symphony No. 2 in E Minor, Op. 27

Born: Semyonovo, Russia, Apr 1, 1873
Died: Beverly Hills, California, USA, Mar 28, 1943
Composed: 1900–1901

In 1897, the première of Rachmaninoff’s ambitious and intensely dramatic First Symphony proved such an unmitigated disaster that it plunged the 24-year-old composer into a depression so profound that he was virtually unable to compose. He needed three years and the help of a psychiatrist to revitalize his creative muse.

By the autumn of 1906, he came to feel that his activities as pianist and conductor were leaving too little time for his first love: composition. Seeking a retreat, he chose Dresden, Germany. He leased a villa, where he would spend several months during each of the next two-and-a-half years. In that idyllic setting, he was free to relax, to ponder, and to allow his inherently expansive creative impulses to define their limits.

During this period, he composed several important scores, including Piano Sonata No. 1 and the symphonic poem The Isle of the Dead. Having finally exorcised the demon of his First Symphony’s failure, he was able to consider the creation of a successor. He took great care with it, sincerely wishing it to succeed. His efforts won total vindication when the first performance, which he conducted himself in St. Petersburg on February 8, 1908, scored a resounding triumph.

As would be the case in all three of his symphonies, the Second is bound together by a brief, simple recurring theme, a “motto”. This one is played by the double basses at the beginning of the first movement’s slow, brooding introduction. The main Allegro presents a balance of restless, dramatic, and yearning elements. In its urgency and rhythmic drive, the following scherzo leans toward the tart style of Prokofiev, but only Rachmaninoff (or perhaps his idol, Tchaikovsky) could have written the soaring second theme.

The third movement Adagio is the symphony’s beating heart, an outpouring of passionate lyricism virtually unsurpassed in all music. The principal theme is a long, glowing melody introduced by solo clarinet. As the movement develops, it touches repeated heights of rapture, before dying away into contented stillness. The symphony concludes with a surging, joyful rondo. Fleeting reminiscences of previous movements crop up, en route to the exhilarating conclusion.

Program note by Don Anderson

“I try to make music speak simply and directly that which is in my heart at the time I am composing. 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.”

—Sergei Rachmaninoff
Henning Kraggerud

violin


Norwegian violinist Henning Kraggerud is Artistic Director of the Arctic Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra, with a tenure recently extended to 2020. A natural and instinctive artist, Henning consistently draws audiences and critics towards the genuine quality of his playing.

In the current season, Henning returns to the Toronto Symphony, Vancouver Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, and Los Angeles Chamber orchestras, as well as the Danish National Symphony Orchestra and the Swedish Chamber Orchestra, with whom Henning tours to Mexico. He makes débuts with the Brussels Philharmonic and the Tonkünstler Orchestra in Vienna, and performs with the China NCPA and Macao orchestras.

A dedicated chamber musician, Henning regularly performs both on violin and viola at major festivals and venues with artists such as Steven Isserlis, Joshua Bell, Lawrence Power, Leif Ove Andsnes, Natalie Clein, Christian Poltéra, and Jeremy Menuhin.

Henning composes his own music, performing many of his own works, arrangements, and cadenzas in concert. As of 2014, Henning’s reputation as a composer was sealed by the première of Equinox: 24 Postludes in All Keys for Violin and String Orchestra, composed as musical counterparts to a story by world-famous author Jostein Gaarder. The current season sees the UK première of Equinox with the Manchester Camerata under Gábor Takács-Nagy.

Henning is Professor at the Barratt Due Institute of Music in Oslo, and International Chair in Violin at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester.

Henning Kraggerud plays on a 1744 Guarneri del Gesù, provided by Dextra Musica AS, a company founded by Sparebankstiftelsen DNB.

Travel for Henning Kraggerud provided by: AIR CANADA