

Toronto Symphony Orchestra

Sir Andrew Davis, Interim Artistic Director

Wednesday, September 26, 2018 at 8:00pm

Saturday, September 29, 2018 at 8:00pm

Kirill Karabits, conductor

Nicola Benedetti, violin

Valentin Silvestrov

Serenade for String Orchestra

Sergei Prokofiev

Violin Concerto No. 2 in G Minor, Op. 63

I. Allegro moderato

II. Andante assai

III. Allegro, ben marcato

Intermission

Sergei Rachmaninoff

REV. 1938

Symphony No. 3 in A Minor, Op. 44

I. Lento – Allegro moderato

II. Adagio ma non troppo

III. Allegro

Nicola Benedetti's appearance with the TSO is generously supported by Marianne Oundjian.

ABOUT THE WORKS

Valentin Silvestrov Serenade for String Orchestra

15
min

Born: Kiev, Ukraine, September 30, 1937
Composed: 1978; rev. 2004

Ukraine-born Valentin Silvestrov is among today's distinguished composers. During the 1960s, he was one of the leading representatives of the "Kiev avant-garde", whose music had been ferociously criticized by the conservative Soviet establishment. His works were consequently rarely played in his native city at the time, but a small and dedicated group of proponents ensured they were performed, when possible, in Russia or in the West. Circumstances eventually shifted and the composer and his music became an established presence in his home country as well as at numerous international festivals. In 2017, Silvestrov celebrated his 80th birthday with many concerts across the world featuring his works spanning a broad range of genres,

including eight symphonies (to date), and many concertos, chamber works, and choral pieces.

Silvestrov has come to call his compositional style "meta-music", declaring that, "I do not write new music. My music is a response to and an echo of what already exists." There is indeed a self-reflexive aspect to his work; that is, his compositions are at once in dialogue with musics of the past, while also being themselves eroded versions (that is, "echoes") of them. This Serenade for String Orchestra appears to exemplify this aesthetic; you get the impression that you are hearing fragments of an original from the 19th century (when the serenade as a genre was prevalent) but also that these very fragments, as they are together, create something new and striking.

MORE ABOUT THE COMPOSER



Valentin Silvestrov came to music relatively late, at the age of 15. At first, he taught himself, and then, between 1955 and 1958, he went to an evening music school while, during the day, studying to become a civil engineer; from 1958 to 1964, he studied composition and counterpoint, respectively, with Boris Lyatoshinsky and Lev Revutsky at Kiev Conservatory. He then taught at a

music studio in Kiev for several years. He has been a freelance composer in Kiev since 1970. Noteworthy in the context of tonight's performance, Valentin Silvestrov was a friend and colleague of the late Ivan Karabits, who was also a celebrated composer and conductor, as well as the father of tonight's conductor, Kirill Karabits, whose own acclaimed recordings and live concert performances of Silvestrov's music continue to promote the voice of this important international musical figure.

The Serenade is a single, continuous movement, within which four main sections can be identified. After an initial outburst in the lower strings, the first section proceeds with utterances of motivic fragments, as if individual voices in a crowd (the orchestra is divided into 19 parts). There is a searching quality to these motifs, which is underscored by indeterminate tonality. Gradually, the texture coalesces to reveal two specific elements that define the second section: first, a triplet motif, then a rising figure in the

lower strings. The music gains momentum and intensity as the rising figure dominates, culminating in a series of cluster chords. From this climax, a melody in the minor mode, pensive and wistful, emerges in the violins, and is developed in the third section against a murmuring backdrop. The mode brightens to major in the closing section; the strings' cascading passages seem to take on a luminous quality. On a final F-major chord, the Serenade ebbs away.

Program note by Hannah Chan-Hartley

Sergei Prokofiev

Violin Concerto No. 2 in G Minor, Op. 63

26
min

Born: Sontzovka, Russia, April 27, 1891

Died: Moscow, Russia, March 5, 1953

Composed: 1935

Sergei Prokofiev composed two violin concertos—the first completed in 1917, the year before he left Russia (initially for the United States), and the second in 1935, the year before he returned, permanently, to what had become, over the course of his first four years abroad, the USSR.

Prokofiev's life and music were closely intertwined with the genesis and history of the Soviet Union. The irreverent young composer/pianist left Russia in 1918, with the blessing of the powers that be, lured by the West and its promises of increased creative freedom and wealth. Over the next two decades, he lived a nomadic existence in the West. He composed a great deal of music, including operas, ballets, and concertos. He also performed solo recitals and concerts with orchestra. But he was never able to establish what he had hoped would be a solid niche for himself in Western musical circles. With that lack of success in mind, his thoughts began to turn back nostalgically to his homeland. Several visits during the early '30s confirmed his hope that he would be

welcome there. He returned, to stay, in 1936. The music he composed during the remainder of his career is observably less daring and irreverent than the works of his youth. This mellowing in style resulted partially from political pressures under Stalinist rule. But it also mirrored his own emotional development.

The two violin concertos bookend his years away from the USSR. The whimsical No. 1 dates from the summer of 1917, the same year as his first symphony, the "Classical" Symphony. The warmer, more substantial, and more folk-influenced Violin Concerto No. 2 was commissioned by admirers of the Franco-Belgian violinist Robert Soetans. The première took place in Madrid, Spain, on December 1, 1935, with Soetans as soloist and Enrique Fernández Arbós conducting. It was largely composed during the course of a tour that Soetans and Prokofiev were making of Spain and northern Africa, one devoted primarily to performing recitals for violin and piano.

Of the work, Prokofiev himself wrote: "The number of places in which I wrote the Concerto

ABOUT THE WORKS

shows the kind of nomadic concert-tour life I led then. The main theme of the 1st movement was written in Paris, the first theme of the 2nd movement at Voronezh, the orchestration was finished in Baku and the premiere was given in Madrid.”

The first movement of the concerto begins with the solo violin playing a plaintive theme with the distinct flavour of Russian folk music but at odds with its jagged rhythm. The second subject of the movement is a melody in G minor, also subdued at first but building in energy through a succession of rapid changes in rhythm and mood, to an energetic, abrupt, and almost dismissive close.

The slow second movement is sweetly song-like and deceptively simple, with the orchestra

initially playing “second fiddle” to the violin as the theme is developed. By the movement’s end, though, the roles have been reversed, with the orchestra commanding a fragment of the opening theme, punctuated by pizzicato accompaniment from the violin.

The final movement is designated *Allegro, ben marcato* (literally “well marked”) and lives up to its name, bright in spirit and highly rhythmic (including castanets, perhaps as a nod to the “nomadic concert-tour life” he was engaged in while writing it). Overall, it has a dance-like quality ranging from the genteel to the rustic—virtually a satire of the gypsy-flavoured rondos in violin concertos by composers such as Brahms—en route to a tumultuous close.

Program note by Don Anderson

Sergei Rachmaninoff Symphony No. 3 in A Minor, Op. 44

39 min
Born: Semyonovo, Russia, April 1, 1873
Died: Beverly Hills, United States of America, March 28, 1943
Composed: 1936

Sergei Rachmaninoff was born in Semyonovo in the Novgorodny Oblast (region) of north west Russia and died in Beverly Hills, California, USA, having left Russia for the United States with his family in 1918. He composed Symphony No. 3 over the course of 1935 and 1936. It was his second-last orchestral work (*Symphonic Dances* in 1940 was the last) and one of only six he wrote during his 25 years in the USA—years during which a concert career, as pianist and conductor, dominated his musical life. Leopold Stokowski conducted the Philadelphia Orchestra in its première on November 6, 1936.

The debut of the Third Symphony drew a disappointing, and likely disappointed,

response from audiences and press alike. Some found it too much of an advance on his earlier works; others, not enough. Concert performances have remained relatively rare, though like other previously neglected Rachmaninoff compositions, the reputation of this elegant, ingenious, and often surprising work has grown significantly over the last 30 years.

Last performed by the Toronto Symphony Orchestra in December 2010, the entire work is bound together by a theme that recurs in various guises and transformations in each movement. This chant-like motto appears quietly at the very opening of the first movement. The first main theme is

a questioning idea scored for oboes and bassoons. The cellos introduce the second subject, a meltingly nostalgic melody that extends Rachmaninoff's run of gorgeous, ultra-romantic themes; instead of fading away wistfully, as one might expect, it gathers momentum and expands into an exultant, full-throated climax.

In the *Allegro moderato* main body of the first movement, Rachmaninoff focuses solely on developing the first theme. He achieves this with impressive variety. In emotional terms, the treatment displays great bitterness and borders on violence, climaxing in a march-like episode bedecked with percussion. The main themes return, their wistful longing intensified, before the movement comes to rest, in delicately scored exhaustion.

The slow middle movement is in three panels. Once again it opens and closes with the motto,

appearing initially on the horns, filigreed with harp accompaniment. Stirrings of restlessness insinuate themselves, eventually welling up to introduce the brisk, quasi-satiric, and flashingly scored central panel. An abbreviated, less opulent version of the opening panel closes the movement, pizzicato motto and all.

Optimism radiates from the bright, energetic opening of the episodic *Allegro* finale, only to be shadowed soon afterward by the menacing return of the motto. Rachmaninoff then uses the first melody as the theme for an athletic fugue; the finale's opening theme returns in its original, vivacious form. After a substantial passage characterized by meditation, the movement gradually banishes the shadows that have dogged it, and, regaining the fervour with which it began, powers forward to a resounding conclusion.

Program note by Don Anderson

THE ARTISTS



Kirill Karabits conductor

These performances mark Kirill Karabits's TSO début.

The 2018/19 season marks Kirill Karabits's 10th anniversary as Chief Conductor of the acclaimed Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. In September 2016, he also assumed the position of General Music Director and Principal Conductor of the Deutsches Nationaltheater and Staatskapelle Weimar, recently leading the Staatskapelle Weimar on their first tour of the USA, and in August 2018, presenting the world première of *Sardanapalo*, a rediscovered Italian opera by Franz Liszt.

In North America, Karabits has worked with the Cleveland, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Chicago Symphony Orchestras, and the 2018/19 season will include his New York début at the Lincoln Center, with Mikhail Pletnev. Other highlights will include débuts with the Toronto, Cincinnati, and Seattle Symphony Orchestras, as well as the Wiener Symphoniker at the Musikverein, a return to the Deutsche Oper, and a UK tour with the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain.

A prolific opera conductor, Karabits has conducted Deutsche Oper (*Boris Godunov*) and Oper Stuttgart (*Death in Venice*), Glyndebourne Festival Opera (*La bohème* and *Eugene Onegin*), Staatsoper Hamburg (*Madama Butterfly*), English National Opera (*Don Giovanni*), and a performance of *Der fliegende Holländer* at the 2013 Wagner Geneva Festival, in celebration of the 200th anniversary of the composer's birth.

THE ARTISTS

Working with the next generation is of great importance to Karabits and, as Artistic Director of I, CULTURE Orchestra, he conducted them on their European tour in August 2015 with Lisa Batiashvili as soloist and a summer festivals tour in 2018, including concerts at the Concertgebouw and Montpellier Festival. In 2012 and 2014, he conducted the televised finals of the BBC Young Musician of the Year Award (working with the Royal Northern Sinfonia and BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra).

He was named Conductor of the Year at the 2013 Royal Philharmonic Society Music Awards.



Nicola Benedetti violin

Nicola Benedetti made her TSO début in March 2010.

Nicola Benedetti is one of the most sought after violinists of her generation. Her ability to captivate audiences with her innate musicianship and dynamic presence, coupled with her wide appeal as a high-profile advocate for classical music, has made her one of the most influential classical artists of today.

With concerto performances at the heart of her career, Benedetti is in much demand with major orchestras and conductors across the globe. In the 2017/18 season, she made her début with the Orchestre de Paris and collaborated with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Philadelphia Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Bremen Philharmonic, Warsaw Philharmonic, Dallas Symphony, Atlanta Symphony, New World Symphony and Baltimore Symphony with Marin Alsop, in addition to undertaking a U.K. and North American tour with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment.

Her orchestral collaborations also include the London Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, National Symphony Orchestra of Washington D.C., Orchestra of the Mariinsky Theatre, Leipzig Gewandhausorchester, Frankfurt Radio Symphony, Camerata Salzburg, Czech Philharmonic, Danish National Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, and the Chicago Symphony at the Ravinia Festival. This performance marks her fourth engagement since 2010 with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra.

In addition, Benedetti has developed her own education and outreach initiative titled The Benedetti Sessions, providing hundreds of aspiring young string players the opportunity to rehearse, undertake and observe masterclasses culminating in a performance alongside Benedetti herself.

Winner of Best Female Artist at both 2012 and 2013 Classical BRIT Awards, she records exclusively for Decca (Universal Music). Her most recent recording of Shostakovich & Glazunov Violin Concertos has been met with critical acclaim. Her recording *Homecoming: A Scottish Fantasy* made her the first solo British violinist since the 1990s to enter the Top 20 of the Official U.K. Albums Chart.

Nicola Benedetti was appointed as a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) in the 2013 New Year Honours, in recognition of her international music career and work with musical charities throughout the United Kingdom.

She plays the Gariel Stradivarius (1717), courtesy of Jonathan Moulds.