



Timo Andres & David Kaplan

Friday 27 April 2018 7.30pm
Milton Court Concert Hall

Rachmaninov Symphonic Dances (for two pianos)

interval 20 minutes

Stravinsky The Rite of Spring (for two pianos)

Timo Andres piano

David Kaplan piano

Part of Barbican Presents 2017–18

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Welcome

Tonight we welcome back the American piano duo Timo Andres and David Kaplan. Last year they memorably premiered Andres's double concerto *Steady Hand* at a concert celebrating John Adams's 70th birthday.

They return with two towering orchestral masterpieces of the 20th century. If Stravinsky's ballet *The Rite of Spring* is these days best known in its orchestral guise, from that haunting high-lying bassoon solo onwards, this was not always the case. In fact the piece was initially published as a piano duet and it was in its keyboard incarnation that many first got to know it. Stripped

of its orchestral plumage, it arguably becomes still more savage in effect.

Rachmaninov was born less than a decade earlier than Stravinsky, yet he never really relinquished his Romantic musical language. The *Symphonic Dances* may have been composed in the USA in 1940 – over two decades after he'd left his beloved homeland forever – but in its heightened musical emotion and sense of longing, it's Russian through and through. That intensity is superbly conveyed when the piece is heard, as tonight, on two pianos.

I hope you enjoy the concert.

Huw Humphreys, Head of Music, Barbican

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Sergey Rachmaninov (1873–1943)

Symphonic Dances, Op 45, (for two pianos) (1940)

1 Non allegro

2 Andante con moto

3 Lento assai – Allegro vivace

Rachmaninov and Stravinsky share many bonds of musical allegiance – both were composers, pianists and conductors (a significant element of Rachmaninov's early career in particular), and Russians who settled in America – yet musically they face in opposite directions. Like many composers of his generation and a little older, Rachmaninov struggled to adapt to radical change in the prevailing musical style after the First World War, when his vein of lyrical self-expression came to be viewed as indulgent and vulgar. Stravinsky, on the other hand, just nine years younger, not only embraced the new style, but had already embodied it.

After 1917, when he abandoned Russia and settled in America, Rachmaninov virtually stopped composing. Thirty-nine of his 45 opus numbers were composed by 1917, yet he lived for another 26 years. This slowdown was partly because the pressure he was under to earn a living – with a young family to support – forced him to devote most of his time and energy to touring as a pianist. It was also because he realised that the Romantic effusion of the musical language that came so naturally to him now seemed outdated and largely irrelevant. 'I cannot cast out the old way of writing, and I cannot acquire the new,' he wrote. 'I have made intense efforts to feel the musical manner of today, but it will not come to me.'

The works that Rachmaninov composed during his American years – including the Fourth Piano Concerto, *Variations on a Theme of Corelli*, *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* and the Third Symphony – take different approaches in the way they assimilate a more modern musical style, or at least in the way they side-step the old one. In 1940, spurred on by a celebration of his music during

the 1939–40 season, which marked the 30th anniversary of his first performance in America (the premiere of the Piano Concerto No 3 was given in New York in 1909), he started composing what would become his final work. The *Symphonic Dances*, written for the Philadelphia Orchestra and Eugene Ormandy, was completed in a four-stave short score in August 1940, and soon finalised in its version for two pianos, before being lavishly orchestrated. This is a triumphant summation of Rachmaninov's career as a composer, and one of his finest scores, in both its orchestral and two-piano guise.

Rachmaninov was generally reluctant to reveal any extra-musical inspirations for his work, but when he played the *Symphonic Dances* to the choreographer Mikhail Fokine – who many years earlier had worked with Stravinsky on *The Firebird* and *Petrushka*, and had recently devised a ballet using the score of Rachmaninov's *Paganini Rhapsody* (Covent Garden, 1939) – he explained that the three movements followed the sequence Middy – Twilight – Midnight.

The first movement is in ternary form. After one of Rachmaninov's most haunting openings, the C minor outer section is characterised by stamping chords and the rhythmic propulsion of its piercing melodic lines (woodwind calls in the orchestral version). The central episode takes us to the remote key of C sharp minor, and one of Rachmaninov's great tunes – he eventually cast this for the alto saxophone, a unique sound in the composer's output – surrounded by undulating and interweaving lines. After building up a lyrical head of steam, the music subsides into a magical modulation that takes us to C major, before the return of C minor and

the stamping chords of the first section. Towards the end of the movement, as the music resolves again to a calm C major, Rachmaninov quotes a broad theme taken from his First Symphony, written way back in his early twenties and whose disastrous premiere had plunged him into a bout of depression and creative self-doubt. This work was completely unknown in 1940 (the score had been left in Russia and was lost, only to be reconstructed after Rachmaninov's death), and the significance of this self-quotation isn't clear. Perhaps it was some sort of long-awaited exorcism of old ghosts.

The second movement follows in the rich tradition of the symphonic waltz, as established by Berlioz and Mahler. Beginning with a snarl, the music at times takes on the character of a *danse macabre*. Its shadowy nature makes this a perfect evocation of the twilight the composer described.

The third movement, again in a ternary form, plays out amid a battle of significant musical quotations. As well as another reference to the long-lost First Symphony, there is an ongoing struggle between the *Dies irae* chant – a recurring motif in Rachmaninov's work – and a quotation from the *All-night Vigil* (or *Vespers*), Op 37. This can ultimately be seen as a triumph of good over evil, as the *Dies irae* chant is finally overcome. In the closing pages, just as a new liturgical chant holds sway, Rachmaninov writes the word 'Alliluya' (in Latin script, with that spelling) in the score, as if he had some premonition that these would be the final pages of music he would compose. It is a fitting conclusion to his compositional career.

Tantalisingly, Rachmaninov proposed to record the *Symphonic Dances* with Vladimir Horowitz, along with the earlier Second Suite for two pianos, but astonishingly his record company, RCA, declined.

interval 20 minutes

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971)

The Rite of Spring (for two pianos) (1913)

Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* is the third of the great ballets he wrote for Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes which first brought him international attention. Composed for the 1913 Paris season, following the success of *The Firebird* (1910) and *Petrushka* (1911), the original ballet was choreographed by the young dancer Vaslav Nijinsky, and the uncompromising nature of both the music and – especially – the overtly brutalist choreography led to now infamous protests at the premiere, on 29 May 1913, with howls of derision from more conservative ballet-goers prompting an increasingly vocal response from the composer's supporters.

The Rite is now most commonly heard divorced from its stage presentation, as a concert work brilliantly scored for large orchestra. After its notorious Paris premiere, there were only a handful of further performances, in Paris and

London, before it fell out of the Ballet Russes' repertoire. The score was first published in its piano-duet arrangement, and musicians and enthusiasts got to know the work through this edition. Moreover, before the ballet's premiere, it was on the piano that this startling music was first heard. Stravinsky told his teacher Rimsky-Korsakov that he composed at the piano, where he worked out his ideas. He played through excerpts of the score to Diaghilev, and then performed the first part to an invited audience that included Debussy. Shortly before the premiere, Debussy joined the composer and played the whole ballet from the newly minted piano-duet score. Unlike *Petrushka* and *The Firebird*, there is no piano part in the orchestral score of *The Rite of Spring*, but the instrument played a key part in the music's gestation and early dissemination.

Naturally, the piano-duet version of *The Rite* served the practical purpose of providing a version suitable for ballet rehearsals. Most musical households, too, possessed a piano, so with the amateur market in mind it made sense to publish an arrangement for two players at one instrument. But when presented as a concert work in its piano version, there are enormous advantages to playing it on two pianos. The first is that the duet version is almost impossibly cramped, the players needing to jostle for elbow room, their hands often intertwined and competing for the same space on the keyboard. Second, the extra pair of pedals allows for greater expressive freedom, control and independence. And it also gives the players the option, if they wish, to flesh out textures and add extra details from the orchestral score that Stravinsky could not encompass on a single piano.

Much of the sound of *The Rite* is indelibly associated with its orchestral colouring. The wailing bassoon of the opening, for example, its fearsomely high tessitura generating such a distinctive timbre, can't truly be reproduced on the piano. Yet when heard in this way – whether on one instrument or two – other aspects of the music come through with startling clarity. The rhythmic incisiveness and drive, the harmonic foundations, the massively sculpted building blocks of the musical architecture, and the music's ritual primitivism all emerge in sharp relief.

The work's subtitle is 'Pictures of Pagan Russia in two parts'. Stravinsky described it as 'a musical-choreographic work, [representing] pagan Russia ... unified by a single idea: the mystery and great surge of the creative power of spring'. He later claimed that the scenario stemmed from a dream he had while completing *The Firebird*, of a pagan rite with sage elders seated in a circle while a young girl danced herself to death, in a sacrifice to ensure the safe arrival of spring. Stravinsky's descriptions of the genesis of his music are notoriously unreliable (he had earlier stated

that the musical ideas came first and the pagan setting was suggested by the music). Nevertheless, whatever the inspiration, the ballet was given the working title 'The Great Sacrifice', and a two-part structure was devised with the help of the archaeologist, painter and designer Nicholas Roerich, an expert in ancient Slavic culture and rituals.

The first part, 'The Adoration of the Earth', consists of games, ritual dances and a procession of sages, culminating in a frenzied dance; the second part, 'The Sacrifice', has a darker aspect, with mysterious games ('Mystic Circles of the Young Girls') leading to a young maiden being chosen to perform the sacrificial dance in front of the elders.

Stravinsky famously claimed that he wrote *The Rite* in a kind of trance: 'Very little immediate tradition lies behind *The Rite of Spring* – and no theory. I had only my ear to help me; I heard and I wrote what I heard. I am the vessel through which *The Rite* passed.' This too is somewhat misleading: *The Rite* is deeply rooted in Russian musical tradition, and Stravinsky owed far more to his teacher Rimsky-Korsakov than he would ever admit. The way the music is put together, with its architectural blocks placed next to and on top of each other rather like a mosaic, is prefigured in the music of Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky; and the harmonies and dissonances derive either from superimposing common chords, rather as in both *The Firebird* and *Petrushka*, or from modally inflected ('oriental') scales and harmonies that had previously been utilised by Rimsky, Mussorgsky and Debussy. Many of the melodic ideas, too, derive directly from folk tunes – even that opening bassoon solo, which can be traced back to a Lithuanian wedding song. Stravinsky worked hard to develop and integrate such an inherited wealth of material into his distinctive musical language, and, whatever his claims, *The Rite* occupies a central place within the great lineage of Russian musical tradition.

Programme note © Tim Parry

About the performers

Michael Wilson



Timo Andres

Timo Andres piano

Composer/pianist Timo Andres was born in Palo Alto in 1985, grew up in rural Connecticut and now lives in Brooklyn, New York. He is a Nonesuch Records artist and his latest disc of orchestral works, *Home Stretch*, has been critically acclaimed, as was his 2010 debut album for two pianos, *Shy and Mighty*.

Notable works include *Everything Happens So Much*, commissioned and premiered by the Boston Symphony Orchestra under its Music Director Andris Nelsons; *Strong Language*, a string quartet for the Takács Quartet, commissioned by Carnegie Hall and the Shriver Hall Concert Series; *Steady Hand*, a two-piano concerto commissioned by the Britten Sinfonia and premiered here at the Barbican Centre with the composer and David Kaplan as soloists; and *The Blind Banister*, a piano concerto for Jonathan Biss. This last work was co-commissioned by the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra with Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts and the Orchestra of St Luke's, and was a Pulitzer Prize finalist in 2016.

He has also written works for the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

Chamber music includes pieces for yMusic, Eighth Blackbird, Gabriel Kahane, musicians of the New World Symphony and a piano quintet for Jonathan Biss and the Elias Quartet, co-commissioned by Carnegie Hall, Wigmore Hall, the Amsterdam Concertgebouw and San Francisco Performances.

As a pianist, Timo Andres has given solo recitals at Lincoln Center, the Wigmore Hall, the Phillips Collection, (le) Poisson Rouge and National Sawdust, among others. He has toured with Brad Mehldau and given the world premiere of a piano concerto by Ingram Marshall – written specifically for him – with John Adams and the LA Philharmonic. He has toured internationally with Philip Glass, performing the complete Glass *Études* alongside the composer. He recently appeared at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, where he received the City of Toronto Glenn Gould Protégé Prize; Glass selected Andres as the recipient of this award.

Highlights this season include writing new works for the Music Academy of the West and for Inbal Segev and Metropolis Ensemble; and performances at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Ravinia's Steans Institute of Music, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary. He performs Ingram Marshall's Concerto with the New World Symphony under John Adams in a concert that also includes *The Blind Banister* played by Jonathan Biss. He also joins Evan Christ and the Orchester Cottbus Staatstheater, gives solo recitals at Bargemusic and for San Francisco Performances and collaborates with the Kronos Quartet and Los Angeles Dance Project.

Timo Andres earned both his bachelor's and master's degrees from the Yale School of Music. He is one sixth of the Sleeping Giant composers' collective, with whom he has written for the Albany Symphony, Carnegie Hall and Eighth Blackbird, among others.

Dario Acosta



David Kaplan

David Kaplan piano

David Kaplan is renowned for his adventurous programming, as well as his colouristic flair and technical ease. Recent highlights include appearances at the Barbican Centre with Britten Sinfonia, Miami's Arsht Center with Itzhak Perlman, and in recital at the Ravinia Festival, Sarasota Opera House, Washington's National Gallery, Music on Main in Vancouver and Strathmore in Baltimore. This season, he makes his debut at the Berlin Philharmonie, performing Beethoven's Piano Concerto No 3 with the Berlin Symphony Orchestra.

His interest in connecting music of the past and present has resulted in *New Dances of the League of David*, a suite that incorporates newly commissioned miniatures into Schumann's *Dauidsbündlertänze*. Among the 16 participating composers were Augusta Read Thomas, Caroline Shaw, Marcos Balter, Gabriel Kahane and Andrew Norman.

He has premiered works by numerous other composers, including Alex Weston, Matthew Aucoin and Timo Andres. For a new programme called *Chaconne*, featuring works by Beethoven, Brahms, Ligeti, Rzewski and Gubaidulina, he has asked for new works from Anthony Cheung and

Christopher Cerrone, to be premiered in 2019. He is a Resident Artist of the Metropolis Ensemble, for which he curated an innovative piano series last autumn featuring more than a dozen artists in works by composers as disparate as J S Bach, Steve Reich, Richard Strauss and Morton Feldman.

Chamber music is also important to him and he has appeared with the Attacca, Ariel, Enso, Hausmann and Tesla Quartets, violinists Rachel Lee Priday and Arnaud Sussmann and cellists Ashley Bathgate, Joshua Roman, Benjamin Capps and Nick Canellakis. Since 2007 he has performed as part of a piano duo with Timo Andres. He is also a core member of Decoda, the Affiliate Ensemble of Carnegie Hall, which performs frequently in New York's most exciting venues, as well as holding residencies in Abu Dhabi, Mexico and Scotland.

He has also appeared at leading chamber music festivals, including the Seattle Chamber Music Festival, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Chamber Music Northwest, Bargemusic and the Canadian festivals of Banff and Orford. In addition, he has been a guest at the Ravinia, Tanglewood, Bard and Mostly Mozart festivals. He is the Artistic Director of Lyrica Chamber Music, a community series in Morris County, NJ currently in its 31st season.

David Kaplan has recorded music by Mohammed Fairouz with soprano Kiera Duffy for Naxos; and, with Timo Andres, the two-piano disc *Shy and Mighty* (2010) on Nonesuch.

His distinguished mentors over the years have included the late Claude Frank, Walter Ponce, Richard Goode and Emanuel Ax. He studied conducting at the Universität der Künste Berlin with Lutz Köhler, under the auspices of a Fulbright Fellowship from 2008 to 2010. He was the recipient of a DMA from Yale University in 2014 and is now lecturer in piano for 2016–18 at the University of California, Los Angeles.

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