



Colonel Jason K. Fettig, Director

UNITED STATES MARINE BAND
Sunday, April 24, 2022 at 2:00 P.M.
Rachel M. Schlesinger Concert Hall and Arts Center
Northern Virginia Community College
Alexandria Campus
Major Ryan J. Nowlin, conducting

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943)
transcribed by Donald Patterson*

Piano Concerto No. 3 in D minor, Opus 30

Allegro ma non tanto

Intermezzo

Finale

SSgt Christopher Schmitt, soloist

INTERMISSION

Antonio Vivaldi (1678–1741)

“Transit aetas, volant anni” from *Juditha triumphans*

MSgt Sara Sheffield, mezzo-soprano

MSgt Brian Turnmire, mandolin

MGySgt Karen Grimsey, harp

Ottorino Respighi (1879–1936)
transcribed by Donald Patterson*

Roman Festivals

Circenses

The Jubilee

October Festival

The Epiphany

*Member, U.S. Marine Band

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PROGRAM NOTES

Piano Concerto No. 3 in D minor, Opus 30

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943)

transcribed by Donald Patterson

Born to a musical family in Oneg, Russia, Sergei Rachmaninoff is one of the greatest pianists and melodists of all time. He embraced a compositional style influenced by Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, which combined Russian Romanticism with balletic grace and moody expressiveness. Although his critical status fell somewhat during the postwar dominance of modernism, audiences have continually enjoyed his music. Publisher Boosey and Hawkes states that “the critics are realizing that the public was right all along: Rachmaninoff’s music often attains greatness—there is individuality in its harmonic richness, orchestral coloration and melodic warmth which will guarantee it a permanent and much-loved place in the repertoire.”

Rachmaninoff began studies at the St. Petersburg Conservatory at age nine and went on to study at the Moscow Conservatory, where he was a pupil of Sergei Taneyev and Anton Arensky and was mentored by Tchaikovsky. Before he completed his studies he had already composed what is arguably his most popular work, the Prelude in C-sharp minor for piano. His early career balanced the often conflicting demands of performing and composing; Rachmaninoff also accepted a post as conductor of the Bolshoi Theater in 1904. The family’s country estate at Ivanovka, in the countryside south-east of Moscow, offered a haven for the composer to work in the years leading up to the Russian Revolution. It was during this period that he composed the Piano Concerto No. 3.

Following the October Revolution of 1917 and the loss of his estate, Rachmaninoff accepted an invitation to perform concerts in Scandinavia, took his wife and two daughters with him, and never again returned to his native country. The family sailed to America in 1918. Although Rachmaninoff lived in the United States until his death in 1943 and became a citizen a few weeks before his death, he retained an unwavering sense of identity as a Russian, recreating many of the habits and customs from home in his adopted country.

The première of Rachmaninoff’s Piano Concerto No. 3 took place in November 1909 with Walter Damrosch and the New York Symphony, with the composer as soloist. Later on in the tour he performed the work with Gustav Mahler conducting the New York Philharmonic. Although the concerto was well-received, the work’s dedicatee, pianist Joseph Hoffman, never dared to play it. When Vladimir Horowitz championed it in the 1930s, the concerto finally began to be played widely. With its extreme technical requirements, it remains one of the most difficult concerti in the piano’s repertoire.

In the concerto’s first movement, Rachmaninoff introduces the main theme immediately. This simple yet haunting melody in D minor leads to a second theme in the major mode that begins with a march-like character but becomes gentler and more lyrical as it develops. Brilliant passagework and thundering climaxes define this intensely dramatic movement, along with a sizeable cadenza. The second movement typifies Rachmaninoff’s characteristic lushness. Dreamy at the start and slowly escalating in intensity, the never-ending melodies spin out as if improvised, and the soloist carries the ensemble through giant waves of a musical storyline. At the very end of the second movement, the music re-energizes and drives directly into the robust

finale. Three strong chords in the band signal a call to arms, and the pianist launches into an energetic theme made up of rhythms reminiscent of a fanfare or march. Rachmaninoff contrasts variations on this “fanfare” theme with lyrical material and then weaves this together with the themes from the first movement. A powerful and evocative coda drives the concerto to an exhilarating conclusion.

Staff Sergeant Christopher Schmitt, piano soloist

Piano player Christopher Schmitt of Fairfax Station, Virginia, joined “The President’s Own” United States Marine Band in August 2013. Staff Sgt. Schmitt began his musical training on the piano at age five and graduated from the Seton School in Manassas, Virginia, in 2004. He attended the New England Conservatory (NEC) in Boston before transferring to The Juilliard School in New York where he earned a bachelor’s degree in performance in 2009, a master’s in 2011, and a doctorate in 2016. His teachers included Marjorie Lee of Virginia, the late Patricia Zander of NEC, and Julian Martin of Juilliard. Prior to joining the band, Staff Sgt. Schmitt taught privately and gave master classes in New York and in the Northern Virginia area.

“Transit aetas, volant anni” from *Juditha triumphans*

Antonio Vivaldi (1678–1741)

Antonio Vivaldi was born in Venice, the son of professional violinist Giovanni Battista, who performed at St. Mark’s Basilica. Vivaldi was originally trained for the priesthood, most likely as a way for him to receive an education, and he was ordained in 1703. Nicknamed “the Red Priest” because of the red hair he inherited from his father, Vivaldi’s days as a priest were limited. In 1706 he withdrew from the priesthood due to ill health and embarked on a professional career as a composer and violinist. He was not only regarded as a fine violinist but a daring and progressive composer, developing new forms of music and freely experimenting with existing ones.

In 1703, Vivaldi accepted a post at the Ospedale della Pietà, the flagship of four state-supported schools in Venice for orphaned, abandoned, or terminally ill girls. The Pietà was famous for its emphasis on music education, and Vivaldi was appointed *Maestro de concerti*, charged with teaching the girls violin, directing the orchestra, and leading Sunday and Feast Day concerts. Vivaldi was associated with the school for more than forty years and it was during his time there that he composed many of the nearly 500 solo concerti in his catalogue. From 1713 to 1719 he also served as choirmaster, during which time he gave extra attention to composing religious and vocal music. While enjoying monetary success through most of his career, Vivaldi suffered some financial hardship towards the end of his life. After moving to Vienna where he had hoped to have commissions from Emperor Charles VI, the emperor died suddenly and Vivaldi lost his chance at a steady income. He began selling his manuscripts to survive and died in 1741. Like Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, he was buried in a poor man’s grave.

Vivaldi’s music fell into obscurity after his death, but began to come to light again in the early twentieth century. A revival of his instrumental concerti came first, followed by an important discovery of a collection of vocal music in Turin in the late 1920s. *Juditha triumphans* was one of the largest and most fascinating works in the Turin collection. Composed in 1716 for the Ospedale della Pietà, it is the only surviving oratorio of the four he is known to have composed. *Juditha triumphans* is based on the story told in the apocryphal Book of Judith from

the Bible. While its virtuous female heroine was no doubt meant to be instructive to the girls of the Pietà, the plotline carried pertinent, timely symbolism as well. In that same year, Venice had won a decisive battle against the Ottoman Turks. Thus the oratorio's story, the setting, and main characters represent a retelling of this then-current event and of the church's eventual triumph.

"Transit aetas, volant anni," sung by Judith as she seduces Holofernes (only then to decapitate him after he falls asleep), offers a moment of uncanny respite inside a plot brimming with murder, conquest, and intrigue. The music is poised and lyrical, with constant interplay and imitation between the mandolin solo and vocal line. The harp adjoins the mandolin's sound with its own plucked sonority. The aria follows a typical ABA *da capo* form, where a short middle section, here in the minor mode, provides contrast between two matching outer sections.

Master Sergeant Sara Sheffield, mezzo-soprano

Mezzo-soprano vocalist and concert moderator Master Sergeant Sara Sheffield joined "The President's Own" United States Marine Band in May 2005, becoming the first featured female vocal soloist in Marine Band history. Master Sgt. Sheffield began her musical instruction on piano at age nine and voice at age sixteen. After graduating from Jacksonville (Texas) High School in 1997, she attended the University of North Texas in Denton and earned a bachelor's degree in vocal performance in 2001. In 2016 she earned an executive master's degree in business administration from George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. Prior to joining "The President's Own," Master Sgt. Sheffield was a member of the U.S. Army Band's Army Chorale at Fort Myer in Arlington, Virginia.

Roman Festivals

Ottorino Respighi (1879–1936)

transcribed by Donald Patterson

It would be difficult to find a twentieth-century composer with a greater command of the many sounds and colors of the orchestra than Ottorino Respighi. This talent is perhaps best illustrated in the three large-scale works that made him a household name, the so-called Roman Trilogy: *Fontane di Roma* (*Fountains of Rome*), *Pini di Roma* (*Pines of Rome*), and his monumental showpiece, *Feste Romane* (*Roman Festivals*). Although Respighi was born in Bologna, Italy, he will always be most closely associated with his adopted city of Rome. The first work in Respighi's famous trilogy, *Fountains of Rome*, premièred in 1916 and was received with tremendous enthusiasm. It was not until 1924 that its sequel, *Pines of Rome*, was unveiled, but it was well worth the wait. This work became his most popular and holds a place in the core repertoire of orchestras worldwide.

The final dazzling installment of the Trilogy was cut from a slightly different cloth than its predecessors. *Roman Festivals* was composed during 1928 and 1929, though Respighi's widow, Elsa, once insisted that he wrote the work in just nine days. It is the longest of the three and by far the most ambitious, both in scope and in its more dissonant and exotic harmonic language. And while *Fountains* and *Pines* are content to merely evoke musical impressions of their static subjects, *Festivals* goes straight for the action; each of its four interlocked movements depicts a specific scene from a celebrated time in the ancient city's history, from antiquity to the present. The work is written for a massive orchestra, including expanded winds, piano four-hands, celesta, organ, mandolin, and a percussion section replete with unusual instruments designed to generate maximum brilliance and energy.

In the preface to the score, Respighi offers a vivid description of the scene depicted in each of the four movements:

Circenses (Games at the Circus Maximus):

A threatening sky hangs over the Circus Maximus (the Coliseum), but it is the people's holiday: "Ave, Nero!" The iron doors are unlocked, the strains of a religious song and the howling of wild beasts mingle in the air. The crowd comes to its feet in frenzy. Unperturbed, the song of the martyrs gathers strength, and then is drowned out in the tumult.

The Jubilee:

Pilgrims trail down the long road, praying. Finally, the summit of Monte Mario appears to ardent eyes and the gasping spirits of the Holy City: "Rome! Rome!" A hymn of praise bursts forth, the churches ring out their reply. [This movement is built largely on the twelfth century German Easter hymn "Christ ist erstanden" ("Christ is Risen").]

October Festival (L'Ottobrata):

The Ottobrata in the Roman castelli (castles) covered with vines; echoes of the hunt, tinkling bells, songs of love. Then in the tender twilight arises a romantic serenade. [The serenade, after the last elfin horn calls fades in the distance, is played by a mandolin, against the gentlest of twilight backgrounds.]

The Epiphany:

The night before the Epiphany in the Piazza Navona: a characteristic rhythm of trumpets dominates the frantic clamor; above the swelling noise float, from time to time, rustic motifs, saltarello cadenzas, the strains of a barrel-organ in a booth, and the call of a barker, the harsh song and the lively stornello with its expression of the popular sentiment—"Lassatase passa, somo Romani!" ("Let us pass, we are Romans!")

Respighi believed *Roman Festivals* represented the "maximum of orchestral sound and color," and felt he had exhausted the medium, writing, "With the present constitution of the orchestra, it is impossible to achieve more, and I do not think I shall write any more scores of this kind. Now I am much more interested in small ensembles and the small orchestra." Indeed, Respighi turned largely to the chamber orchestra in his remaining eight years, composing his wonderfully crafted suites of ancient airs and dances and several other pieces based on older forms of music. Although the intimate beauty of these later pieces reveals a composer at the height of his craft, Respighi's name will always be best remembered for his spectacular trilogy that brings the legendary city of Rome to life in an unforgettable blaze of vibrant aural colors.