

# GREEN BAY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Christoph Campestrini, *Conductor*  
Arnaldo Cohen, *Piano*

Saturday, October 10, 2009

ZHOU TIAN (b. 1981)

*A Thousand Years of Good Prayers*

WORLD PREMIERE

COMMISSIONED BY THE GREEN BAY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF (1873-1943)

Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor, Op. 18

- I. Moderato
- II. Adagio sostenuto
- III. Allegro scherzando

— INTERMISSION —

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897)

Symphony No. 3 in F major, Op. 90

- I. Allegro con brio
- II. Andante
- III. Poco allegretto
- IV. Allegro

Notes on the Program by DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

*A Thousand Years of Good Prayers*

Zhou Tian

Born on December 22, 1981 in Hangzhou, China.

*Composed in 2009.*

*WORLD PREMIERE.*

*COMMISSIONED BY THE GREEN BAY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA.*

*Scored for piccolo, three flutes, two oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, two B-flat clarinets, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, piano, harp and strings.*

Chinese-American composer Zhou Tian was born in 1981 in the city of Hangzhou, China, 100 miles southwest of Shanghai, and did his undergraduate work in composition and piano at the Shanghai Conservatory. In 2001 Zhou came to the United States to attend the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, where he studied composition with Richard Danielpour and Jennifer Higdon and piano with Meng-Chieh Liu. Zhou subsequently earned a master's degree at the Juilliard School as a student of Christopher Rouse, and he is currently a doctoral candidate at the University of Southern California in composition (Stephen Hartke and Donald Crockett are his principal teachers) and piano (Antoinette Perry). Zhou's music has been performed by the Minnesota Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, American Composers Orchestra, St. Cloud Symphony, Curtis Symphony, Guangzhou Elite Symphony, Tanglewood Festival Chorus, New Fromm String Quartet, Bakken Trio, Biava Quartet, Arditti Quartet, percussionist Pius Cheung and other noted ensembles and soloists. His current projects include a sonata commissioned by Jeffrey Khaner, Principal Flutist of the Philadelphia Orchestra, a violin sonata commissioned by the Curtis Institute, and an original score for the film *Eternal Beloved*, which opens in China in 2009. Zhou's distinctions include First Prize in the Washington International Competition for Composers, First Prize in the Kathryn Thomas International Composition Competition, Julius Hemphill International Composers Award, Presser Foundation Music Award, three ASCAP/Morton Gould Young Composer Awards, and composition fellowships from the Aspen, Tanglewood and Fontainebleau music festivals; he was Composer-in-Residence for the young artists chamber series Music In the Loft in Chicago for the 2007-2008 season.

Zhou Tian composed *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* in 2009 for the Green Bay Symphony Orchestra on a commission from the Green Bay Commission Club. Of the work, he wrote, "*A Thousand Years of Good Prayers*, or '*Qian Nian Jing Qi*,' is an old Chinese saying regarding family relationships. It says a good relationship in the family, whether between parents or between parents and children, always takes a thousand years of good prayers to bring about. For years, this was just an old saying to me until I started having difficult times with my father recently. Then I thought about this saying again and finally realized its true meaning — that we should not only appreciate a good relationship, but really appreciate the very existence of that relationship, the chance that we can be together as a family. In reality we all have frustrations and complications in the relationships we have, but what's important is that as long as we appreciate it with respect and understanding, it is then a good relationship. It is then worth a thousand years of good prayers. My personal experience inspired me to write this piece, which I see as a work to celebrate the ideas behind this old saying. It might be old, but it's never been truer than it is today."

Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor, Op. 18

Sergei Rachmaninoff

Born April 1, 1873 in Oneg (near Novgorod), Russia

Died March 28, 1943 in Beverly Hills, California

*Composed in 1900-1901.*

*Premiered on October 14, 1901 in Moscow, conducted by Alexander Siloti with the composer as soloist. Scored for pairs of woodwinds, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, cymbals, bass drum and strings.*

When he was old and as mellow as he would ever get, Rachmaninoff wrote these words about his early years: "Although I had to fight for recognition, as most younger men must, although I have experienced all the troubles and sorrow which precede success, and although I know how important it is for an artist to be spared such troubles, I realize, when I look back on my early life, that it was enjoyable, in spite of all its vexations and bitterness." The greatest "bitterness" of Rachmaninoff's career was brought about by his Symphony No. 1, a work that had such a disastrous premiere he forbade any other performances of the piece while he was alive. The total failure of the First Symphony at its premiere in 1897 was a traumatic disappointment to him, one that thrust him into such a mental depression that he suffered a complete nervous collapse.

An aunt of Rachmaninoff, Varvara Satina, had recently been successfully treated for an emotional disturbance by a certain Dr. Nicholas Dahl, a Moscow physician who was familiar with the latest psychiatric discoveries in France and Vienna, and it was arranged that Rachmaninoff should visit him. Years later, in his memoirs, the composer recalled the malady and the treatment: "[Following the performance of the First Symphony,] something within me snapped. All my self-confidence broke down. A paralyzing apathy possessed me. I did nothing at all and found no pleasure in anything. Half my days were spent on a couch sighing over my ruined life. My only occupation consisted in giving a few piano lessons to keep myself alive." For more than a year, Rachmaninoff's condition persisted. He began his daily visits to Dr. Dahl in January 1900. "My relatives had informed Dr. Dahl that he must by all means cure me of my apathetic condition and bring about such results that I would again be able to compose. Dahl had inquired what kind of composition was desired of me, and he was informed 'a concerto for pianoforte,' which I had given up in despair of ever writing. In consequence, I heard repeated, day after day, the same hypnotic formula, as I lay half somnolent in an armchair in Dr. Dahl's consulting room: 'You will start to compose a concerto — You will work with the greatest of ease — The composition will be of excellent quality.' Always it was the same, without interruption." Almost like a movie script from the Hollywood where Rachmaninoff eventually settled, the good doctor's unusual cure worked. "Although it may seem impossible to believe," Rachmaninoff continued, "this treatment really helped me. I started to compose again at the beginning of the summer." In gratitude, he dedicated the new Concerto to Dr. Dahl.

Rachmaninoff wrote the second and third movements of his rehabilitative Concerto in the summer and early autumn of 1900 in Italy, Novgorod and Moscow; this incomplete version was heard at a charity concert in Moscow on October 14th, with the composer at the keyboard and Alexander Siloti conducting. The opening movement was completed by the following spring, and the premiere of the finished work was given on October 14, 1901 with the same two principals and the orchestra of the Moscow Philharmonic Society. The C minor Concerto was the first orchestral work to carry the name of Rachmaninoff into the world's concert halls. (His ubiquitous C-sharp minor Prelude of 1892 had been a piano-bench and recital favorite for a decade.) Other advances in Rachmaninoff's life soon followed — many successful musical compositions, an appointment as the opera conductor of the Moscow Grand Theater, and a triumphant career as a concert pianist. There always remained buried away in his innermost thoughts, however, those ghosts of self-doubt and insecurity that Nicholas Dahl could never have totally exorcised from the dour composer's psychological constitution.

The C minor Concerto begins with eight bell-tone chords from the solo piano that herald the surging main theme, which is announced by the strings. A climax is achieved before a sudden drop in intensity makes way for the arching second theme, initiated by the soloist. The development section, concerned largely with the first theme, is propelled by a martial rhythm that continues with undiminished energy into the recapitulation. The second theme returns in the horn before the martial mood is re-established to close the movement.

The *Adagio*, a long-limbed nocturne with a running commentary of sweeping figurations from the piano, contains some beautiful concerted instrumental writing. The finale resumes the marching rhythmic motion of the first movement with its introduction and bold main theme. Standing in bold relief to this vigorous music is the lyrical second theme, one of the best-loved melodies in the entire

orchestral literature, a grand inspiration in the ripest Romantic tradition. (Years ago, this melody was lifted from the Concerto by the tunesmiths of Tin Pan Alley and fitted with sufficiently maudlin phrases to become the popular hit *Full Moon and Empty Arms*.) These two themes, the martial and the romantic, alternate for the remainder of the movement. The coda rises through a finely crafted line of mounting tension to bring this work to an electrifying close.

## Symphony No. 3 in F major, Op. 90

Johannes Brahms

Born May 7, 1833 in Hamburg

Died April 3, 1897 in Vienna

*Composed in 1882-1883.*

*Premiered on December 2, 1883 in Vienna, conducted by Hans Richter.*

*Scored for woodwinds in pairs plus contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani and strings.*

Brahms had reached the not inconsiderable age of 43 before he unveiled his First Symphony. The Second Symphony followed within eighteen months, and the musical world was prepared for a steady stream of similar masterworks from his pen. However, it was to be another six years before he undertook his Third Symphony, though he did produce the *Academic Festival* and *Tragic Overtures*, the Violin Concerto and the Second Piano Concerto during that time. When he got around to the new symphony, he was nearly fifty, and had just recovered from a spell of feeling that he was “too old” for creative work, even informing his publisher, Simrock, that he would be sending him nothing more. It seems likely — though such matters always remained in the shadows where Brahms was concerned — that his creative juices were stirred anew by a sudden infatuation with “a pretty Rhineland girl.” This was Hermine Spiess, a talented contralto who was 26 when Brahms first met her in January 1883 at the home of friends. (Brahms was fifty.) A cordial, admiring friendship sprang up between the two, but this affair, like every other one in Brahms’ life in which a respectable woman was involved, never grew any deeper. He used to declare, perhaps only half in jest, that he lived his life by two principles, “and one of them is never to attempt either an opera or a marriage.” Perhaps what he really needed was a muse rather than a wife. At any rate, Brahms spent the summer of 1883 not at his usual haunts in the Austrian hills and lakes, but at the German spa of Wiesbaden, which just happened to be the home of Hermine. Work went well on the new symphony, and it was completed before he returned to Vienna in October.

Brahms’ Third Symphony, the shortest of his four works in the form, is the most clear in formal outline, the most subtle in harmonic content and the most assured in contrapuntal invention. No time is wasted in establishing the conflict that charges the first movement with dynamic energy. The two bold opening chords juxtapose bright F major and a somber chromatic harmony in the opposing moods of light and shadow that course throughout the work. The main theme comes from the strings “like a bolt from Jove,” according to Olin Downes, with the opening chords repeated by the woodwinds as its accompaniment. Beautifully directed chromatic harmonies — note the bass line, which always carries the motion to its close- and long-range goals — lead to the pastoral second theme, sung softly by the clarinet. The development section is brief, but includes elaborations of most of the motives from the exposition. The tonic key of F is re-established, not harmonically but melodically (note how the bass leads the way), and the golden chords of the opening proclaim the recapitulation. A long coda based on the main theme reinforces the tonality and discharges much of the music’s energy, allowing the movement to close quietly, as do, most unusually, all the movements of this Symphony.

The second and third are the most intimate and personal movements in Brahms’ orchestral music. A folk-like theme appears in the rich colors of the low woodwinds and low strings to open the second movement. The central section is a Slavic-sounding plaint intoned by clarinet and bassoon that eventually gives way to the flowing rhythms of the opening and the return of the folk theme supported by a new, rippling string accompaniment. The romantic third movement replaces the usual scherzo. It is ternary in form, like the preceding movement, and utilizes the warmest tone colors of the orchestra.

The finale begins with a sinuous theme of brooding character. A brief, chant-like processional derived from the Slavic theme of the second movement provides contrast. Further thematic material is introduced (one theme is arch-shaped; the other, more rhythmically vigorous) and well examined. Brahms dispensed here with a true development section, but combined its function with that of the recapitulation as a way of tightening the structure. As the end of the movement nears, the tonality returns to F major, and there is a strong sense of struggle passed. The tension subsides, and the work ends with the ghost of the opening movement's main theme infused with a sunset glow.

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