



472 671-2

# RACHMANINOFF LILACS

Daisies  
Moments musicaux  
Variations on a theme of Corelli

SCOTT DAVIE  
OVERS PIANO



SERGEI RACHMANINOFF (1873-1943)

1	Margaritki (Daisies) after Op. 38 No. 3 (1916), trans. 1922, rev. 1940	2'34
2	Siren (Lilacs) after Op. 21 No. 5 (1902), trans. 1913, rev. 1941	2'50
	<b>Variations on a theme of Corelli, Op. 42 (1931)</b>	18'38
3	Theme (Andante) – Var. 1 (Un poco più mosso) – Var. 2 (L'istesso tempo) – Var. 3 (Tempo di minuetto) – Var. 4 (Andante) – Var. 5 (Allegro [ma non tanto]) – Var. 6 (L'istesso tempo) – Var. 7 (Vivace) – Var. 8 (Adagio misterioso) – Var. 9 (Un poco più mosso) – Var. 10 (Allegro scherzando) – Var. 11 (Allegro vivace) – Var. 12 (L'istesso tempo) – Var. 13 (Agitato) – Intermezzo – Var. 14 (Andante [come prima]) – Var. 15 (L'istesso tempo) – Var. 16 (Allegro vivace) – Var. 17 (Meno mosso) – Var. 18 (Allegro con brio) – Var. 19 (Più mosso – Agitato) – Var. 20 (Più mosso) – Coda (Andante)	
	<b>Six moments musicaux, Op. 16 (1896)</b>	[29'17]
4	No. 1 in B-flat minor (Andantino)	8'02
5	No. 2 in E-flat minor (Allegretto), rev. 1940	3'12
6	No. 3 in B minor (Andante cantabile)	5'11
7	No. 4 in E minor (Presto)	3'12
8	No. 5 in D-flat major (Adagio sostenuto)	4'35
9	No. 6 in C major (Maestoso)	5'05
10	<b>Hopak</b> after MODEST MUSSORGSKY (1839-1881) <i>The Fair at Sorochintsy</i> (c. 1880) – Finale; trans. Sergei Rachmaninoff, 1923	1'48
11	<b>Lullaby</b> after PYOTR TCHAIKOVSKY (1840-1893) <i>Cradle Song</i> , Op. 16 No. 1 (1872); trans. Sergei Rachmaninoff, 1941	4'34
12	<b>The Bumble Bee</b> after NIKOLAY RIMSKY-KORSAKOV (1844-1908) <i>The Tale of Tsar Sultan</i> (1900) – Act 3; trans. Sergei Rachmaninoff, c. 1929	1'14
	Total Playing Time	60'55

Scott Davie, *Overs piano*

For many years, the most persistent criticism of Rachmaninoff's music was that it was anachronistic; that, somehow, such tonal music belonged to a different age. Famously, until 1980 his entry in the *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* was still predicting that his music would not survive in the repertory after his death, and that its success was only a result of the composer's charismatic performances of his own works: his very success as a pianist in the West had outweighed his former reputation as a Russian composer. Now 60 years hence, it is clear that, for all its homage to his traditions and forebears, Rachmaninoff's music is very much a product of its time. Rachmaninoff was keenly aware of the problems facing composers in the early decades of the 'new music', and he remained unimpressed by the notion that originality was somehow more important than comprehensible musical argument. When towards the end of his life he again produced major new works (Opp. 40-45), the very fact that he had succeeded in radically modernising his style whilst retaining his artistic voice was missed by most critics.

The works in this recital traverse Rachmaninoff's creative life from the *Six moments musicaux* of his early maturity to

the *Variations on a theme of Corelli* from his later years in exile. The transcriptions date largely from the period immediately after Rachmaninoff's departure from Russia in 1917. During this time he was obliged to turn his hand to concert-giving for immediate subsistence, and he did not create major original compositions.

It is well known that the critical failure of Rachmaninoff's first symphony (Op. 13, 1895) at its premiere in 1897 was followed by a personal crisis of confidence, a four-year creative trough, and a subsequent mellowing of his composing style. As late as 1916, the novelist Marietta Shaginian recorded a conversation with Rachmaninoff when he spoke of those events:

*He told me about his First Symphony ... He assured me that everything I was constantly writing to him about was already in it, but no one had seen it. He cited the example of a tree; if you pinch its young shoot with a finger it stops growing, and that is how he was 'pinched' at his very dawn, when he was sending out his shoots ... Any would-be musician not ashamed to court failure in music got crowned with laurels as an innovator, was*

*proclaimed 'advanced', 'original' and God knows what, but his own originality had been stifled in the bud.*

Hard self-criticism from a composer always riven by doubt, but yet always possessed of a distinctive musical personality (allied to a sure craftsmanship often overlooked by admirers and detractors alike).

The **Six moments musicaux**, Op. 16 were written shortly before this crisis. All six pieces were completed between October and December 1896 and were published immediately by Jurgenson, in Moscow, with a dedication to Rachmaninoff's friend and folksong collector, Alexander Zatayevitch. Whilst all of the *Moments musicaux* stand individually as complete entities (indeed, two or three of them are better known as single pieces), there is much use in hearing them as a unified set. In addition to a grouping that alternates between slow and fast speeds, there is a close relationship between the harmonic keys of each work. The first and second pairs (one and two, three and four) are interrelated by the interval of a fifth (E-flat – B-flat; E – B) whilst externally they are a semitone removed from each other (E-flat – E; B-flat – B). This semitone relationship also links the remaining two

pieces, now moved from minor to major tonalities. The melodic interval of a sixth also links many of the themes in the set.

No. 1 opens with a languid melody in B-flat minor, seemingly repeated but which is instead truncated and sustained by a low B-flat pedal note on its second hearing. A middle section in G-flat major is written predominantly in  $\frac{7}{4}$  (a similar use of this time signature can be noted in the second subject of the first movement of the first symphony). A rapid and delicate cadenza draws the music back to B-flat minor where the original idea returns, this time transformed by swift semiquavers over the identical harmonic sequence that commenced the work. In a short coda, the second subject is briefly remembered, this time in the dominant key of F major. No. 2 is the only work from the group that Rachmaninoff revised (really very little altered in its essentials from the original, but producing greater clarity), and he used it frequently in the last years of his concert career, recording it in 1941. The piece is ternary in structure and its rapid passage-work immediately draws comparison with piano writing such as the accompaniment to the song *Vesennie vodi* (Spring Waters), Op. 14 No. 11, also dating from 1896. It is heard on this recording in the revised version of 1940.

The third *Moment musical* is a dark and heart-wrenching lament, the dotted rhythm and the semitonal melodic step of the opening bar pervading the entire piece. Rachmaninoff's statement of the melody in thirds and the harmonic modulations that make up the middle section of the work seem to be a premonition of the second movement of his second symphony which followed in 1906. The mood is broken with the fourth piece of the set. The left-hand passage that opens the work accompanies the theme throughout. The quasi-militaristic subject matter – defined by the upward leap of a sixth – is contrasted with more fluid melodic lines in the central section before the original idea returns with even greater insistence, leading to a devastating and resolute close. A sense of calm is restored in No. 5, with the music moving to the 'warmer' key of D-flat major. This piece is again in ternary form and its deceptively simple and understated melody is again heard throughout in thirds. The melody evolves and moves toward a climax in the middle of the piece yet the accompaniment remains underpinned by a D-flat pedal note. It is only for three bars – directly before the return of the opening melody – that this bass note changes. Ultimate resolution is not found, however, until the final piece of the set, No. 6. The effect here

is almost orchestral, with an imitation of tremolo strings rippling throughout the work beneath a fanfare-like brass chorale. There is throughout a reference to church bells of all sizes – a characteristic of much of Rachmaninoff's output. After two statements of the theme, the music moves to more distant tonal areas, all the while building to the inevitable climactic return of the theme in its home key. At this point, the melody appears in canon at the bar, and the full resources of the piano – both its range and volume – are utilised. A brief and delicate coda is heard (reminiscent of the melodic lines of the opening work in the set as well as being a continuation of the subsidiary melody) before the music comes to a forceful and satisfying close.

Almost 10 years after his departure from Russia, Rachmaninoff returned to composition in 1926 with the fourth piano concerto (Op. 40) and the *Three Russian Songs* for chorus and orchestra, Op. 41. However, following this he again ceased composing original works for four years – probably in some measure due to the vicious critical reception to the new concerto, criticism as unwarranted as that apportioned to the first symphony 30 years earlier. Then in 1931 he published his *Variations on a theme of Corelli*, Op. 42: his only original work for

solo piano from his 26 years in exile. Undoubtedly conceived as a work for his performance repertoire, Rachmaninoff's comments about the piece show a cool detachment, and betray his ineluctable self-doubt. He noted that he omitted individual variations from performances of the work if he sensed the audience was not enjoying the recital. Even comments from his friend, Alfred Swan (who possibly heard the first private performance of it in the house at Clairefontaine where it was written), reveal Rachmaninoff's casual and dismissive approach. The famous theme, *La Folia*, was of course not written by Corelli, although it forms the basis of a set of variations in his Violin Sonata, Op. 5 No. 12. Indeed, Rachmaninoff's dedication of this composition to his friend, Fritz Kreisler, (who had also produced a version of variations on this theme) may provide a clue as to how he came upon his original title. The cover-page on the original manuscript in the Library of Congress in Washington shows some evidence of Rachmaninoff seeking to alter the title, and the first printing of the work simply reads *Variations* Op. 42 on the cover, but retains the reference to Corelli above the first page of the music.

There are many similarities that can be

noted between this work and the composition that followed it, the *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, Op. 43 (1934), also a theme and variations. However, the present work is on a smaller scale and, for most of its 20 variations, remains in the key of D minor. After a statement of the theme, there follow four variations that remain at a moderate tempo before an increase of pace at Variation 5. Again, from Variation 8, the pace is slower before the Allegro scherzando of Variation 10 leads to three variations of even greater speed. An Intermezzo, really a free variation, is highlighted by Baroque-like ornamentation of the opening notes of the theme, interspersed with rapid cadenzas, subtly moving the music to D-flat major. Here, the music returns to the opening tempo and the theme is richly harmonised. The following variation, also in D-flat major, is distinctly understated and restrained. The music then returns to D minor and the five variations that ensue are of successively greater scope and excitement. The penultimate variation carries an inherent pessimism to greater depth with its extended peroration borrowed from the chorus of the damned souls in Rachmaninoff's opera in the same key of D minor, *Francesca da Rimini*, Op. 25 (1906). The final variation seems to imply an ending of great virtuosity and infernal

spirit, but Rachmaninoff does not allow matters to remain thus. Instead, it passes into a magical coda, as if it were seeking redemption (and calling to mind the transfiguration at the close of Rachmaninoff's great choral symphony of 1913, *The Bells*, Op. 35). A lone melodic voice reaches skyward in search of a cadence in the major tonality, but this is dispelled by the quiet return of the theme in the final four bars, where the music ends, as simply as it began, in D minor.

Rachmaninoff's songs – about 70 in number – have always been seen as some of his most intimate compositions, and it is perhaps regrettable that he published piano transcriptions of only two of them. Whilst the manuscript of the original song version of *Daisies* (the third of the *Six poésies pour chant et piano*) was left undated, it was presumably written at the same time as the other five songs in Op. 38: 1916. The simple text, by Igor Severyanin, describes a small flower, likening its white glow to the joy of summer. Rachmaninoff had made the piano transcription by 1922 – he performed it in a Queen's Hall recital in London on 20 May that year. Although the publication of 1940 is marked “revised and as played by the composer,” we do not know what changes

may have been introduced meanwhile because the published score conforms to the only extant manuscript. *Lilacs* is the fifth in the set of Twelve Songs, Op. 21, and it was written in April 1902, following the great creative surge that commenced with the composition of the second piano concerto (Op. 18). The text is by Ekaterina Beketova and, in it, the poet likens love to the small fragrant flowers of the lilac bush. The song was transcribed as a piano solo in 1913 and published the following year. (Rachmaninoff performed it at the Queen's Hall on 6 May, 1922 and recorded it in 1923.) The version presented here is from a slightly-altered, “revised and as played by the composer,” edition of 1941. Rachmaninoff recorded this version in 1942.

Of the 12 composers whose music Rachmaninoff transcribed for piano solo, only three were from his native Russia. The *Hopak* of Mussorgsky (a *hopak* being a type of peasant dance) appears at the conclusion to both versions of his unfinished opera, *The Fair at Sorochintsy*. Excepting the omission of four bars, and slight alterations of the introduction and coda, the transcription follows Mussorgsky's own piano version of the dance. As one might expect, Rachmaninoff's use of the piano is more

idiomatic than Mussorgsky's, yet every detail of the original articulation and phrasing is faithfully followed.

Rachmaninoff was 20 years old when Tchaikovsky died, but he had already become a great influence on the young composer. Indeed, Tchaikovsky was part of the judging panel that awarded him the Gold Medal of the Moscow Conservatory for his graduating work, the one act opera, *Aleko*. The transcription of Tchaikovsky's *Lullaby* in 1941 was Rachmaninoff's last musical work, and it is perhaps fitting that in it he returned not only to his former friend and teacher, but also to the music of his homeland. Bearing in mind that Rachmaninoff often stated his immeasurable sadness at having to leave his country of birth forever, the title alone conveys not just a little tender irony. Rachmaninoff retains Tchaikovsky's original seven bar piano introduction, based on a falling minor sixth – fifth – minor third motive, yet as the song progresses, this motive gradually interweaves with the vocal line and then, ultimately, subsumes it: by the final line of the song, the melody itself is vanquished. The final cadence of the work is perhaps the most desperately searching three bars of music that Rachmaninoff wrote.

A similar sense of homage to a fellow Russian composer, yet in a much lighter

vein, is Rachmaninoff's transcription of Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Bumble Bee* (these days more popularly known as *The Flight of the Bumble Bee*). The original work – often performed without its original vocal parts as an orchestral scherzo – appears as the concluding episode of Act 3 Scene 1 in the opera *The Tale of Tsar Sultan*. This ubiquitous work is well-known as both an amusing encore piece and as an exacting test of velocity.

Scott Davie



Scott Davie

With a repertoire that embraces music from the earliest works for keyboard up to the music of the present day, Scott Davie is becoming increasingly well-known to Australian audiences as a soloist and chamber musician. He spent his student years at the Sydney

Conservatorium of Music High School before moving to London to further his studies. During this time he was a student at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama where he studied piano with Leslie Howard and Geoffrey Parsons as well as composition with Malcolm Williamson.

Recent concert appearances have seen Scott Davie perform as soloist in the second and third piano concertos and the *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* of Rachmaninoff, and in other works for piano and orchestra by Beethoven and Gershwin. His repertoire also includes Rachmaninoff's first piano concerto and the original 1926 version of his fourth piano concerto, on which he has also written extensively. His live performances are frequently broadcast on both ABC Classic FM and 2MBS FM, and his interest in the works of Australian composers from the first half of the 20th century resulted in a CD for the Artworks label with violinist Asmira Woodward-Page. Forthcoming activities include lecturing in Russian music history at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and completing a Ph.D. on the works of Rachmaninoff.

## Overs Piano, 225 (No. 003)

---

**R**on Overs has been rebuilding concert pianos for Australian institutions for 15 years. During this time he has developed several design enhancements to improve tone, touch and tuning stability. In 2000, after designing an improved grand piano action (patent pending), Ron Overs began producing his own 225cm grand piano using an imported case and iron plate. Further features of the Overs 225 grand piano include new sound board and string scale design, with specially shaped and hardened capo' bars and front duplex terminations. In just 12 months, the distinctive Overs tone created by these changes to traditional piano design has been acclaimed both at home and internationally. An all Australian made, 280cm concert grand piano is currently under development. This CD recording features the third of these instruments. [www.overspianos.com.au](http://www.overspianos.com.au)

**Executive Producers** Robert Patterson, Lyle Chan  
**Product Manager** Anna-Lisa Whiting  
**Recording Producer** Peter Taplin  
**Recording Engineer** Michael McClintock  
**Editing** Michael McClintock  
**Mastering** ?????  
**Booklet Design** Imagecorp Pty Ltd  
**Photography** Michael Chetham  
**Cover Painting** The Rooks have Returned, 1871 (oil on canvas) by Aleksei Kondratevich Savrasov (1830-97), Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia / Bridgeman Art Library

Recorded 7-10 January 2002 at the Music Workshop, Sydney Conservatorium of Music

Special thanks to the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, Peter Thomas and Adrian McPhee.

*In memoriam* Bertha Read

© 2002 Australian Broadcasting Corporation.  
© 2002 Australian Broadcasting Corporation.  
Distributed in Australasia by Universal Classics & Jazz, a division of Universal Music Group, under exclusive licence.  
Made in Australia. All rights of the owner of copyright reserved.  
Any copying, renting, lending, diffusion, public performance or broadcast of this record without the authority of the copyright owner is prohibited.

