

**SAN DIEGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**  
**“RACHMANINOFF 3”**  
**A JACOBS MASTERWORKS CONCERT**  
**Rafael Payare, conductor**

April 3, 4 & 5, 2020

**SOFIA ASGATOVNA GUBAIDULINA** *Fairytale Poem*

**SERGEI RACHMANINOFF**

**Piano Concerto No. 3 in D minor, Op. 30**

Allegro ma non tanto

Intermezzo

Finale

**Alexander Gavrylyuk, piano**

INTERMISSION

**DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH**

**Symphony No. 5 in D minor, Op. 47**

Moderato

Allegretto

Largo

Allegro non troppo

*Fairytale Poem*

SOFIA GUBAIDULINA

Born October 24, 1931, Christopol, Tatar Republic

Sofia Gubaidulina graduated from the Kazan Conservatory in 1954 and went on to the Moscow Conservatory, where she studied piano with Nikolai Peiko and composition with Vissarion Shebalin. Drawn to both experimental music and to the spiritual dimension of music, Gubaidulina established herself as one of the leading members of the avant-garde in the Soviet Union at a time when that was a difficult identity. In 1975 she was one of the co-founders of Astreya, a folk-instrument group dedicated to improvisation. Gubaidulina came to international attention in the 1980s when violinist Gidon Kremer championed her violin concerto *Offertorium*, and she has since appeared regularly in the West, receiving a number of commissions from European and American orchestras and festivals. Her *Feast During a Plague*, jointly commissioned by the Philadelphia Orchestra and Pittsburgh Symphony, drew rave reviews during its first performances in February 2006. Since 1992 Gubaidulina has made her home near Hamburg.

In 1971 Gubaidulina was asked to provide background music for a children's radio play titled *The Little Chalk*, based on a Czech fairy tale. Her music was performed as part of that production, but she then decided to publish the score separately, and since then it has been performed as a purely orchestral work. The original fairy tale told a charming story, but Gubaidulina sensed a larger meaning behind that gentle story and came to regard it as "a parable about an artist's destiny." Her summary of the fairy tale makes clear the connection between a piece of chalk and the role of the artist in society: "The main character is a small piece of chalk used for writing on school chalkboards. The chalk dreams that someday it will draw wonderful castles, beautiful gardens with pavilions, and the sea. But, day in, day out, it is forced to write boring words, numbers, and geometric figures on the board. The children grow with each day, but the chalk becomes smaller and smaller. The chalk gradually becomes despondent and loses all hope of ever having a chance to draw the sun and the sea. Soon it will be so small that it will no longer be used in the school classroom and will end up being thrown away. Then the chalk once again finds itself in total darkness and thinks that it has died. What it thought was the darkness of death is actually the inside of a boy's trousers pocket. The boy pulls the chalk out of

his pocket and in the light of day begins to design castles, gardens with pavilions, and the sea with the sun on the asphalt. The chalk is so happy that it does not notice how it meets its end while drawing this beautiful world.”

### **Piano Concerto No. 3 in D minor, Op. 30**

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

Born April 1, 1873, Oleg

Died March 28, 1943, Beverly Hills

When Rachmaninoff made his first concert tour of America during the 1909-10 season, he was frank about his motives: he needed money to support his family and he wanted to buy an automobile. During the summer of 1909, he composed a new piano concerto, his third, specifically for the tour, and he brought a dumb keyboard with him on the ship so that he could practice the new piece without disturbing fellow passengers (this experience proved so dissatisfying that he never tried it again). Rachmaninoff gave the premiere of the Third Piano Concerto with the New York Symphony under the direction of Walter Damrosch on November 28, 1909, and then played it extensively during his American visit: he toured with the Boston Symphony, performing the concerto in Philadelphia, Baltimore, New York, Hartford, and Buffalo, and he gave a further performance with the New York Philharmonic conducted by Gustav Mahler in January 1910.

This is one of the greatest of all piano concertos – and one of the most difficult. Its unusual length, complex textures, powerful chordal writing and brilliance make it a supremely demanding piece for pianists. The Third Concerto has all the Rachmaninoff virtues – gorgeous melodies, lush sonorities and exciting climaxes – and it is easy to overlook how original this music is: almost the entire concerto grows out of the first movement’s opening theme, one of the most haunting melodies Rachmaninoff ever wrote.

Over rustling, muted strings, the solo piano in octaves lays out this lengthy opening statement, a melody of unmistakably Russian character. So “Russian” does this theme sound, in fact, that many have searched for its source. Years later, Rachmaninoff dismissed these efforts with some amusement: “The first theme of my 3rd concerto is borrowed neither from folk song forms nor from church sources. It simply ‘wrote itself’! ...If I had any plan in composing this theme I was thinking only of sound. I wanted to ‘sing’ the melody on the piano as a singer would

sing it – and to find a suitable orchestral accompaniment, or rather one that would not muffle this singing. That is all!” This “singing” theme will reappear in countless transformations throughout the concerto. The second subject, a precise little march, is laid out first by strings and then woodwinds. Soon the piano takes this up and magically transforms it into a soaring episode – such elaboration and extension of basic theme-shapes is one of the pleasures of this concerto.

Rachmaninoff wrote a cadenza for the first movement, then went back and wrote a much more difficult one. This second cadenza is so long that it becomes almost a separate world within the movement, and Rachmaninoff accompanies the piano with brief wind solos in the course of it. The massive first movement winds down with an unexpectedly brief recapitulation: the two principal themes make quick reappearances, and the movement vanishes on barely-audible strokes of sound.

The second movement, marked *Intermezzo*, is in ternary form. It opens with the orchestra’s wistful introduction (Rachmaninoff marks the falling main theme *ben cantabile*) before the piano slips in almost unnoticed and then develops the orchestra’s opening ideas at length. Gradually the first movement’s germinal theme appears in the background, and Rachmaninoff builds the central episode – on a quick waltz rhythm – from a subtle transformation of this theme for solo clarinet over rippling piano accompaniment. Once again, there is only a hint of a reprise, and the piano drives the music without pause into the finale, marked simply *Alla breve*.

Powerful orchestral chords unleash a torrent here, with the piano announcing the propulsive ideas: a pounding march-like main theme and a syncopated chordal second subject. Along the way Rachmaninoff offers reminiscences, transformed once again, of material from the first movement. At the close, the syncopated chordal theme of this movement rises up to become a Big Tune that pushes the concerto to its overpowering climax and the knock-out close.

### **Symphony No. 5 in D minor, Op. 47**

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

Born September 25, 1906, St. Petersburg

Died August 9, 1975, Moscow

Shostakovich’s Fifth is at once the most popular symphony since Mahler and the most enigmatic. It was composed in the aftermath of the savage January 1936 attack by *Pravda* on

Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mzensk District*, an attack that Shostakovich believed (probably correctly) had been ordered by Stalin himself. Before that, Shostakovich had been the bright young star of Soviet music, hailed as a product of that system and acclaimed around the world for his witty, sardonic music. Now, virtually overnight, he found himself in disgrace, his career in ruins, and he himself perhaps ticketed for a labor camp.

After a great deal of soul-searching, Shostakovich composed his Fifth Symphony very quickly (from April 18 to July 20, 1937), and its triumphant premiere in Leningrad on November 21 of that year signaled his artistic and political rehabilitation. Shostakovich is often quoted as having called this symphony "a Soviet artist's reply to just criticism"; in fact he did not say that, though he did endorse that description. One of the most striking features of this music is Shostakovich's return, after his experimental works of the 1920s and early 1930s, to classical form, a move that has signaled capitulation to some Western critics. But it may well be that Shostakovich felt that there was justice in the *Pravda* description of his music as "fidgety, screaming, neurotic" and that his music did need greater balance and restraint and stability.

Simply because a work is conservative does not mean that it is inferior, and there is a great deal of superb music in the Fifth Symphony. This is an intensely dramatic score, so powerful that it is easy to overlook the control and unity of Shostakovich's writing. The *Moderato* opens with ominous canonic exchanges between string sections, and these give way to the violins' quietly-twisting main theme. Almost incidentally, Shostakovich introduces the simple rhythmic motif (long-short-short) that will saturate and unify the entire symphony. There follows a beautiful episode: over string accompaniment that pulses along on the rhythmic motif, first violins sing a melody full of wide leaps. But the wonder is that this peaceful theme, which sounds completely new, is actually a subtle transformation of the powerful canonic introduction to the symphony. This sort of ingenious transformation of material marks the entire Fifth Symphony.

The entrance of the piano (with the rhythmic cell) signals the beginning of the development. It has been said that in this symphony Shostakovich does not so much develop his material as brutalize it, and now themes that had been peaceful at their introduction are made shrill, almost hysterical in their intensity. The movement reaches a climax on a furious tam-tam stroke as brass stamp out the rhythmic cell. After all this fury, Shostakovich resolves the tensions beautifully – the themes now return peacefully and, with its energy spent, the movement ends

quietly.

The *Allegretto* is a very brief scherzo-and-trio, and many have felt the influence of Mahler in this bittersweet movement that waltzes past in quick-step time. Much of the fun here lies in the instrumental color – the sardonic solo clarinet, the solo violin’s slides in the trio and the rattling sound of the xylophone – before Shostakovich rounds things off with a bit of the trio tune.

After the classical clarity of the first two movements, the *Largo* is more complex. Its scoring is unique: Shostakovich eliminates the brass, divides the strings into eight parts, and gives a prominent role to the harps, piano, and celesta. Shostakovich wrote this movement in one great arc (it reportedly took him only three days to compose), and the *Largo* features lean textures, an icy sound, and some of the most beautiful melodies Shostakovich ever wrote. It rises to a great climax, then falls away to end quietly on the spooky sound of harp harmonics.

Out of this quiet, the finale rips to life with pounding timpani, ringing brass and boundless energy; an angular second subject arrives in the solo trumpet over whirring strings. The militaristic bombast of this movement has bothered some listeners, but Shostakovich rescues the movement by his stunning transformation of this bluff beginning. Gradually these themes are made to slow down and sing, and material that had been strident on its first appearance yields unsuspected melodic riches in the subdued center section. Shostakovich gathers his forces and drives the symphony to a triumphant (if somewhat raucous) close in D Major.

Music this dramatic cries out for interpretation, and ideological critics on both sides of the Iron Curtain have been happy to supply violently divergent explanations of its “meaning.” Prompted by authorities to provide a politically-correct program for this music, Shostakovich obliged: “The theme of my symphony is the stabilization of a personality. In the center of this Composition – conceived lyrically from beginning to end – I saw a man with all his experiences. The finale resolves the tragically tense impulses of the earlier movements into optimism and the joy of living.” So existential an explanation even led to this symphony’s being labeled the “*Hamlet Symphony*” in some Soviet circles. More recently, the Fifth Symphony has become the *locus classicus* of what might be called “The Great Shostakovich Debate” between those who regard this symphony as a sincere (and consciously heroic) work and those Western critics who wish to rescue Shostakovich from his past and who are unwilling to accept the proposition that great music might have been composed under the Soviet system. These critics have been able to

accept this symphony only by declaring the entire piece ironic: its triumph, they say, is hollow, a conscious nose-thumbing at a political regime that insisted on happy endings from its artists.

To such extremes have ideological critics on both sides of the Iron Curtain been driven by their politics – and it is clear that the Cold War lives on in the minds of those engaged in this debate. Perhaps, well into a new century, it may be possible to approach Shostakovich's symphony as it *should* be understood: as music. Heard for itself, it remains – eighty-plus years after its composition – an exciting work, satisfying both emotionally and artistically. Far from being a capitulation, Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony marks a refinement of his musical language and an engagement with those classical principles that would energize his music for the next 40 years.

**-Program notes by Eric Bromberger**

### **PERFORMANCE HISTORY**

**by Dr. Melvin G. Goldzband, San Diego Symphony Archivist**

The San Diego Symphony Orchestra has not before performed any music by Sofia Gubaidulina. In contrast, the finger-busting Third Piano Concerto by Rachmaninoff was introduced to San Diego Symphony audiences when William Kapell played it and Fabien Sevitzyk conducted it during the 1952 season. The performances at the current concerts represent the 11th outing of this work with this Orchestra. Most recently, it was conducted by Jahja Ling during the 2017-18 season. Behzod Abduraimov was the soloist.

Perhaps Shostakovich's most famous, and perhaps most popular symphony is his Fifth, with its fame buttressed by a number of socio-political theories of supposedly secret meanings in the work. Probably regardless of that, it has been an audience favorite here since this Orchestra first performed it. As a guest conductor in the 1966-67 season, Izler Solomon introduced the work to San Diego audiences. Since then, it has been repeated 13 times throughout the seasons, including these performances. The most recent performance here of this work was conducted by Jahja Ling during the 2017-18 season. (In fact, it was on the very same program as the most recent "Rach 3" performance, as noted above.) Ling had previously led a performance of the Fifth here during the 2010-11 season.