



Works  
for Piano  
and Orchestra

RACHMANINOFF Piano Concerto No. 3 in D minor, Op. 30  
TUBIN Concertino for piano and orchestra

Mihkel POLL piano

Estonian National Symphony Orchestra

Mihhail GERTS conductor





Special thanks to Mr. Enn Kunila

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RACHMANINOFF, TUBIN  
Works for Piano and Orchestra

Sergei RACHMANINOFF (1873–1943)  
Piano Concerto No. 3 in D minor, Op. 30 (1909)

Eduard TUBIN (1905–1982)  
Concertino for piano and orchestra (1945)

Mihkel POLL piano  
Estonian National Symphony Orchestra  
Mihhail GERTS conductor

While composers **Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943)** of Russia and Estonian **Eduard Tubin (1905–1982)** are of different generations, their individual life circumstances have much in common. Both had to escape from their homelands as refugees to the United States and Sweden, respectively. Rachmaninoff did so as a result of the October Revolution of 1917 while Tubin fled the Soviet Union's occupation of Estonia in 1944. The two never met, but Tubin did have the good fortune to attend one of Rachmaninoff's recitals in Vienna in 1938, which left a deep impression on the young composer. His typically Estonian shyness precluded him from making an introduction to the famous Rachmaninoff. Although the music of these two composers is strikingly different, they are both symphonic dramatists at heart.

Dubbed the 20th century's "King of Piano", Rachmaninoff wrote his **Piano Concerto No. 3, Op. 30** in the summer of 1909, in the composer's summer residence of Ivanovka, in Central Russia. The concerto was finished in September of that year in Moscow. In October, he embarked on his first American concert tour where he would perform his new work, which received its premiere on November 28, 1909 with the New York Symphonic Society conducted by Walter Damrosch. The second performance with the New York Philharmonic proved an unforgettable experience for the composer, not least because it was executed under the baton of Gustav Mahler, whom, along with Arthur Nikisch, Rachmaninoff considered among the best conductors of the age. He was especially impressed with

the attention Mahler paid to every detail in the orchestral accompaniment during rehearsals. The concerto received its Russian premiere in the Spring of 1910 in Moscow. Considered one of the most difficult works in the repertoire, it was performed by only a select few pianists in the first decades after its conception. József Hofmann, to whom the work is dedicated, never performed it, claiming that it just wasn't to his liking.

The melodic intensity of the Piano Concerto No. 3, in combination with the expressive power of its harmonic progressions, together with the composer's masterful use of latent polyphony give the work a Rachmaninovian quintessence. Virtuosity is used not as a shiny object to be marvelled at, but rather as an integral component of a truly magnificent structure. Taking the initiative right from the beginning, the pianist is the protagonist of the work, who is given the opportunity to shine during the monologues and cadenzas. The orchestra, however, is more than a mere accompaniment to the soloist, introducing important musical material, such as the opening perfect fourth motif in the timpani, which figures prominently throughout the work. The orchestra can be said to have been integrated into the piano part, at times entering into a dialogue as an equal, and at other times playing a supportive role.

The main theme, introduced at the opening of the work, is beloved for its organic lyricism. It is as if Rachmaninoff drew it from the well of his childhood milieu:

Slavonic chant, Russian folksong, the romanzas performed at the manor house. The composer later remarked that in writing the main theme, he didn't take example from anyone, letting the melody emerge of its own volition. "I wanted the piano to 'sing' the melody, as if it were sung by a singer." One can almost hear the silent breathing of Rachmaninoff's Russia, as is described by Rachmaninoff's depiction of the natural beauty of Ivanovka: "The steppe was a seemingly infinite sea of fields of wheat, rye and oats ... ." Lyricism is contrasted with fanfare-like motifs, until the aspiring second theme is introduced. It is worth noting that of the two cadenzas written for this concerto, Mihkel Poll chose to play the first, which is more technically demanding.

The second movement *Intermezzo* begins with an heroic theme played by the orchestra, which could be seen as a Rachmaninovian counterpart to Wagner's endless melody. The orchestra lends support to the piano's expressive bursts of romantic passion. Before the recapitulation of the main theme, the winds enter with a waltz-scherzo, which is as unexpected as it is haunting. The third movement, which follows *attacca*, is motoric, dominated by march-like rhythmic motifs. It hearkens back to the first movement by continuing its dramatic arch and the composer's masterful use of motivic transformation. The music balances impassioned yearning with playful and rustic capriciousness, as well as breathtaking lyricism. Preceding the virtuosic finale of the third movement, the piano and orchestra

enter with the grandiose and songful second theme, almost as a wistful expression of love to his disappearing Russia.

It is worth mentioning that both the Rachmaninoff's Concerto and the Tubin's Concertino begin with a perfect fourth figure in the timpani. Eduard Tubin, one of the most remarkable symphonists of the 20th Century, had the tendency to colour dramatically important passages with timpani passages. Such is the case with the third movement of the Concertino, in which the timpani marks the start of the coda, after the cadenza. While Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3 can be seen as a lyrical swan song to Tsarist Russia, Tubin's Concertino was conceived in a markedly different milieu.

Tubin was born in the village of Torila, Estonia and went on to study at the Tartu Higher Music School with Heino Eller, one of Estonia's most legendary composition instructors. Eller's long list of distinguished students includes such names as Arvo Pärt, Jaan Rääts and Lepo Sumera. In 1930 Tubin's final dissertation - the Piano Quartet in C sharp minor - established him as a major Estonian compositional voice. By 1944, aged 39, Tubin had composed four symphonies, many instrumental works and the ballet *Kratt*. In September of that year he was forced to escape to the West from the advancing Soviet forces, who would occupy the country for the next five decades, together with tens of thousands of his compatriots (many of whom were members of Estonia's cultural elite).

The **Concertino** was the first large-scale work Tubin wrote after settling in Sweden. He was encouraged to write the piece by conductor and pianist Olav Roots, another Estonian exile to Sweden, who had also studied with Heino Eller. Tubin began working on the piece on December 19, 1944, completing it on February 19, 1945. These months were spent in a displaced persons camp in the Stockholm suburb of Neglinge. Roots and Tubin presented a two-piano version of the work to the Stockholm Concert Society. The positive reception it received made it possible for the work to be programmed in the Stockholm Konserthusets's 1946/47 season. However, the work received its premiere on October 16, 1945 with Olav Roots and the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Tor Mann. Roots described the Concertino as follows: "In this work, the themes are delineated in so sculptural a manner, the thematic development is so dense, and the whole work is so comprehensive in terms of form that it should be considered one of the most interesting works by Tubin."

The Concertino is composed of three *attacca* movements. Tubin treats the concerto genre as a form equal to any other symphonic form, without compromising the effectiveness and virtuosity of the solo part. The piece has similarities to Stravinsky, Bartók and Kodály, with whom he had studied in Budapest in 1938. The first movement is strikingly rhythmic and vivacious. The second movement seems to treat the piano as the composer's meditative "inner self", making way for the harrowing climax from the piano and orchestra, the pathos of which is

reminiscent of Tchaikovsky, Grieg and Rachmaninoff. The emphatically subjective cadenza makes way for a violin solo, which emerges as a vision of the composer's homeland. The toccata-like finale is preceded by a transition, in which the timpani plays a prominent role. In this movement, the musical material undergoes an almost unrelenting symphonic development. It is almost as if this movement's meditative cadenza (evocative of the previous movement) poses the question, "to be or not to be", right up until the orchestral coda, which brings the work to a resplendent close.

*Kristel Pappel*

Translated by *Riho Esko Maimets*







**Mihkel POLL.** Having performed at major concert venues including Wigmore Hall and Barbican Hall in London, the Great Hall of the St. Petersburg Philharmonia and the Béla Bartók National Concert Hall in Budapest, Mihkel Poll is one of Estonia's brightest musical talents.

Poll has given recitals and performed chamber music throughout Europe, in the US and China. His debut in Wigmore Hall was hailed as "singularly impressive" by Classical Source. Poll has been Artist-in-Residence with the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra with whom he has toured under Neeme Järvi. Recently he made his debut at the Grande Salle Pierre Boulez of Paris Philharmonie, performing Liszt's *Totentanz* with The Pasdeoul Orchestra under Elena Schwarz.

Poll regularly appears as a soloist with orchestras, having given performances with orchestras such as The City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the Sarasota SO, the Nordic SO and the Latvian and Estonian national symphony orchestras. He has worked with conductors such as Neeme Järvi, Arvo Volmer, Paul Mägi, Anu Tali, Olari Elts, Mikhail Agrest, Mihhail Gerts and Elena Schwarz.

Future appearances include his London orchestral debut at the Queen Elizabeth Hall with the Corinthian Chamber Orchestra and a tour with the Neue Lausitzer Philharmonie.

In 2009 Mihkel Poll's debut CD *20th Century Piano* was released by Ondine. In 2015 his second solo album

was released under DUX label with works from Enescu, Bartok, Tüür and Kõrvits, receiving the „Best Estonian Classical Album 2016" award.

Poll has won numerous prizes at international competitions including First Prize and the Orchestra's Special Award at the Rina Sala Gallo International Piano Competition in Italy (2004), First Prize and a special prize at the Tallinn International Piano Competition in Estonia (2006) and First Prize at the Ferrol International Piano Competition in Spain (2006).

Born in 1986 in Estonia, Mihkel Poll studied at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre in Tallinn with Prof. Ivari Ilja, recently receiving a PhD in Music, and at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London with Prof. Ronan O'Hora. He has also attended the master classes of Prof. Eliso Virsaladze at the Scuola di Musica di Fiesole in Italy.

He is the recipient of The Music Endowment Annual Award (2004 and 2018) and the Presidential Young Cultural Figure Award (2013).



Hailed by critics for his “astonishing precision, highly expressive gestures and warmth” as “a name to remember”, the Estonian conductor **Mihhail GERTS** has made a name for himself following recent successful debuts with the Orchestre dell’Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France with the acclaimed baritone Matthias Goerne as soloist.

Gerts has established a regular collaboration with orchestras such as RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, Sinfonia Varsovia, National Philharmonic of Russia and Estonian National Symphony Orchestra. Forthcoming dates include debuts with the Staatskapelle Dresden, St. Petersburg State Academic Symphony Orchestra, Gulbenkian Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre National d’Île-de-France, as well as returning to Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Ulster Orchestra, Orchestre National des Pays de la Loire, Bremer Philharmoniker etc.

Highlights from the last seasons include a successful debut with Opéra de Saint-Etienne in Benjamin Godard’s *Dante et Béatrice*, as well as debuts with NHK Symphony Orchestra, Osaka Philharmonic Orchestra, Helsinki Philharmonic, Orchestre Philharmonique de Luxembourg, Stavanger Symphony Orchestra etc.

In addition to his symphonic concert career, Gerts has also gained extensive operatic experience as First Kapellmeister and deputy GMD of the Hagen Theater (2015 to 2017) and resident conductor of the Estonian

National Opera (2007 to 2014). During these years, he conducted over forty different productions of opera and ballet, most recently a new production of *The Flying Dutchman* by Richard Wagner. As a guest conductor, he has appeared at the Teatro La Fenice, Teatro delle Muse, Mikhailovsky Theater St. Petersburg, Belarus National Opera, and many others.

Gerts studied conducting at the Estonian Academy of Music in Tallinn and the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler in Berlin. In 2011 he received his PhD. From 2013 to 2017 he was a scholarship holder of the German Music Council Dirigentenforum Programme, and in 2014 was a finalist in the London Symphony Orchestra’s Donatella Flick Competition and Evgeny Svetlanov Conducting Competition.

Mihkel POLL

Estonian National Symphony Orchestra

Mihhail GERTS



# Works for Piano and Orchestra

Sergei **RACHMANINOFF** (1873–1943)  
Piano Concerto No. 3  
in D minor, Op. 30 (1909)

- 1 Allegro ma non tanto 17:08
- 2 Intermezzo: Adagio 10:51
- 3 Finale: Alla breve 14:09

Eduard **TUBIN** (1905–1982)  
4 Concertino 22:22  
for piano and orchestra (1945)

Total Time: 64:43

Mihkel **POLL** piano  
Estonian National Symphony Orchestra  
Mihhail **GERTS** conductor



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