



## Radu Lupu

Why is Radu Lupu such a special figure in music?

Romanian pianist Radu Lupu began playing the piano at the age of six, and gave his first public performance aged 12. He studied with the great Romanian pianist and teacher Florica Musicescu, who also taught Dinu Lipatti. In 1963 Radu Lupu won a scholarship to the Moscow Conservatory, where he was taught by Heinrich Neuhaus and his son, Stanislav Neuhaus. Recognition was swift: Lupu won the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition in 1966, and the George Enescu International Piano Competition the following year. With characteristic humility, he continued to study despite these successes, staying on at the Conservatory until 1969. It was in 1969 that Radu Lupu won the Leeds International Piano Competition and gave his first London recital.

Today, in an age when musicians may communicate with their audiences in numerous ways, from interviews to social media to podcasts, Radu Lupu has remained steadfast in his choice to communicate almost entirely through music itself. In a rare interview dating from 1992, Lupu described the ethos behind his performances: “It is richness of experience and fantasy, and the ability to

transport. The artist should have his own voice. Everyone tells a story differently, and that story should be told compellingly and spontaneously. If it is not compelling and convincing, it is without value.”

Even if the pianist himself remains true to his principles of privacy, other musicians are quick to praise his exceptional musical powers. On the occasion of Radu Lupu’s 70th birthday, Paavo Järvi, who conducts tonight’s concert, said: “I have learned more from Radu than from any other musician.” Pianist and conductor Daniel Barenboim expanded on this theme: “I have known, admired and loved Radu Lupu since 1969 or 1970. He is one of the most extraordinary musicians, because he combines thorough knowledge and preparation with an ability to improvise as if he was discovering what he is doing at the spur of the moment. This is indeed a very rare combination!”

Reviews of Radu Lupu’s performances are similarly effusive. In 2014 *The Guardian* described Lupu’s playing as “radiant, inward and bewitching”, reminding us that there is “an impressive number of very fine pianists to enjoy at the moment, but only a handful of genuinely great ones, and Radu Lupu is, unquestionably, one of those. Yet in the UK, opportunities to wonder at Lupu’s very special playing have become increasingly rare over the past two decades, while his ventures into London’s concert halls have been rarer still.” How fortunate, then, to hear Radu Lupu in concert with the Philharmonia performing Beethoven, one of the composers for whose music he has a special affinity.

## LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

(1770–1827)

**Overture, *Coriolan*, Op. 62 (1807)**  
(8mins)

Beethoven completed the Overture to Collin’s *Coriolan* in 1807 in the wake of the Symphony No. 4 and the Piano Concerto No. 4. Collin’s tragic play of 1804 concerns the Roman leader Gaius Marcus Coriolanus, banished from Rome and determined to march upon the city in an attempt to avenge his disgrace. Ultimately, Coriolanus believes his only means of regaining his honour is to kill himself.

*Coriolan* marked a significant turning-point in Beethoven’s output, shifting away from the lyrical towards a new ‘heroic’ phase. The overture is just one of Beethoven’s middle period works in which the key of C minor becomes synonymous with heroism, other examples being the ‘Funeral March’ of the *Eroica* Symphony, No. 3, and the Symphony No. 5. Beethoven uses rhetorical gestures to emphasise the play’s moods rather than its narrative, broadly evoking the story’s dramatic arc by slowly building up tension. *Coriolan* is also remarkable for its structural integration: the arresting slow introduction is not merely tacked on to the ‘Allegro’; rather, it anticipates the rhythmic and thematic material that follows. The overture was premiered alongside the first performances of the Piano Concerto No. 4 in March 1807 at the palace of Prince Lobkowitz, one of Beethoven’s patrons.



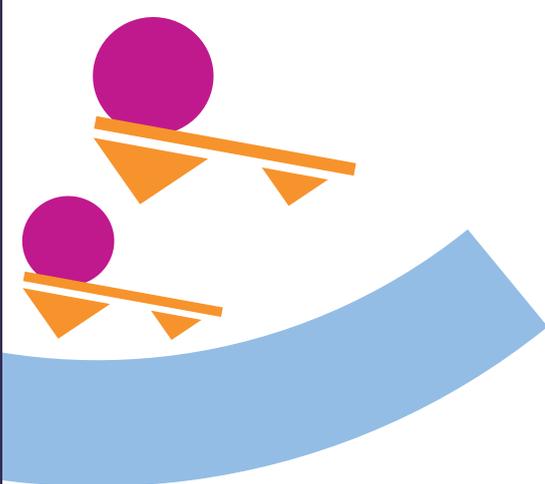
**Piano Concerto No. 4 in G, Op. 58 (1805–06)**  
(34mins)

*Allegro moderato*  
*Andante con moto*  
*Rondo (Vivace)*

Beethoven conceived his Piano Concerto No. 4 in early 1804, when he sketched just five bars of the work. This short passage would prove crucial to the concerto’s composition, remaining largely unchanged in the final version, and generating a significant amount of material as well as establishing the piece’s lyrical nature. As with the Symphony No. 4, the concerto is characterised by an original approach to the linking of different sections. What’s more, the five-bar phrase structure (an expansion of the more conventional four-bar phrase) reappears in the main theme of the second movement, and is transformed into a phrase of ten short bars in the third, unifying the concerto with an expansive structural language.

Beethoven continued to work on the Piano Concerto No. 4 in 1805 and completed it during 1806, the same year in which he finished the *Appassionata* Sonata (No. 23), the *Razumovsky* Quartets and the Violin Concerto. The Fourth Piano Concerto’s first performances were given privately, with Beethoven as soloist, in a programme that included the *Coriolan* Overture. Beethoven performed the concerto again at its public premiere on 22 December 1808 in Vienna, and, with the exception of the challenging *Razumovsky* Quartets, these works were greeted warmly by Viennese audiences and patrons. The *Allgemeine*

>>



*musikalische Zeitung* (a German-language musical newspaper) pronounced the Piano Concerto No. 4 to be “the most admirable, singular, artistic and complex Beethoven concerto”.

The opening of Beethoven’s Fourth Piano Concerto was unprecedented, with the standard orchestral introduction supplanted by music for piano alone. This innovation heralds a newfound intimacy between soloist and orchestra that can be heard throughout the concerto. The soloist’s phrases can be heard growing out of the orchestral texture, and in the slow movement the sense of dialogue between soloist and orchestra is compelling, the piano apparently pleading with a forceful ensemble. This movement flows seamlessly into the final ‘Rondo’, which, far from being a finale of perfunctory jollity, is a movement filled with the tussle between power and lyricism that has pervaded much of the work. Even during the final bars, twinkling piano writing sustains a sense of delicacy until the last moment, when a crescendo for both soloist and orchestra unfurls a final, joyful flourish.

Interval (20 mins)

## SERGEI RACHMANINOV (1873–1943)

### Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Op. 27 (1906–07) (60mins)

*Largo – Allegro moderato*  
*Allegro molto*  
*Adagio*  
*Allegro vivace*

The premiere of Rachmaninov’s Symphony No. 1 in 1897 was a disaster. Rachmaninov said of the conductor, Glazunov: “I am amazed how such a highly talented man as Glazunov can conduct so badly... He feels nothing when he conducts. It’s as if he understands nothing.” Rachmaninov’s wife claimed that Glazunov had been drunk. Fellow composer César Cui lamented the work’s “meaningless repetition of the same short tricks”, and Rachmaninov himself later dismissed the symphony as “weak, childish, strained and bombastic”. The humiliation of the premiere plunged Rachmaninov into a mood of despair and there followed a fallow period of three years, during which sketches for another symphony were discarded. Against this backdrop, the composition of the Second Symphony must have been an intimidating prospect, but in the interim Rachmaninov had regained some confidence with successful works such as the Second Piano Concerto (1900-1).

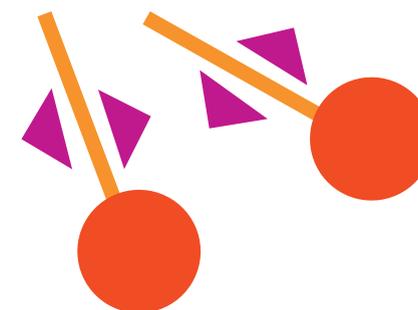
It was not until 1906 that Rachmaninov, still unconvinced of his skills as a symphonist, attempted a fully-fledged second symphony. This was an unsettled time for the Rachmaninov family. Political unrest in Russia drew them away from Moscow to Italy, where they stayed near Pisa. Their daughter’s ill health took them back to Russia, but the atmosphere there proved

uninspiring and they left again when she had recovered, this time settling for a while in Dresden, where Rachmaninov composed the Symphony No. 2.

Rachmaninov was initially dissatisfied with early drafts of the Second Symphony, no doubt anxious to avoid the fate of the First, but after extensive revisions the work was premiered in St Petersburg on 8 February 1908, conducted by the composer. The occasion was a great success, and the symphony won Rachmaninov his second Glinka Award (the first had been for the Piano Concerto No. 2). This version of the symphony was on a massive scale, and was soon trimmed down considerably.

The work opens with a slow introduction so generous that it builds to its own climax even before the main ‘Allegro’ begins. This is ushered in by a cor anglais solo, leading into a blustery movement with a tumultuous central section in which the main themes are developed.

In the animated second movement Rachmaninov uses a fragment of plainchant to which he frequently returned in his large-scale works: the ‘Dies irae’ (Day of Wrath) chant from the Roman Catholic Mass for the Dead. This is announced in the opening bars by the French horns, after which the movement fizzes along until it reaches a contrasting melody of yearning romanticism. There is a central section of intricate counterpoint (interwoven musical lines), a technique learned with Sergei Taneyev, the work’s dedicatee and a pupil of Tchaikovsky.



The third movement is one of Rachmaninov’s most celebrated, its sumptuous textures finely wrought yet apparently effortless. There are two main themes, the first heard initially in the violins, the second introduced by the solo clarinet. Material from these achingly beautiful melodies sustains an apparently limitless succession of undulations and climaxes, layered together to create rich harmonies.

The fourth movement opens with an orchestral fanfare, answered by a march played in the woodwinds. A long-breathed theme in the strings is answered by material that refers back to the third movement. Rachmaninov then explores and develops the principal ideas, and the symphony concludes with one of his most irrepressible codas.

Feature & programme notes by Joanna Wyld  
© Philharmonia Orchestra/Joanna Wyld