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BRUSSELS PHILHARMONIC

BRAHMS & TCHAIKOVSKY

MICHAEL SANDERLING, DIR.
BRUSSELS PHILHARMONIC
NIKOLAI LUGANSKY, PIANO

17.12.2021 & 18.12.2021

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WELCOME

The *2nd Piano Concerto* of Johannes Brahms is a work of epic stature – even if he himself referred to it as “a tiny little piano concerto”... it is known among pianists as ‘the long terror’, a highly demanding marathon.

The work caused Brahms many a headache, because after a first piano concerto, in 1858, which had a cool reception, it took him more than twenty years to get up his courage to write a second. In 1881, he considered the time was ripe: Brahms was at the height of his career and was one of the few composers who could make a living solely from publishing his music. And he wrote: “Despite everything, the first concerto will still please people, and the second one is to sound rather different”.

His prediction came true. The first concerto ultimately made its way to the concert hall, and the second feels much more self-assured and mature. At the height of his career, Brahms achieved for the first time the perfect mix of inspiration and technique – at last, he felt that he was a fully fledged composer.

Destiny: the fatal power that stands as a threat between human beings and their happiness. Anger and jealousy put a spanner in the works and always cast a dark shadow. This timeless theme also figures in Tchaikovsky's *4th Symphony*. As turbulent as his life, the work shows the composer alternating between heart-rending romanticism and subdued classicism – expressive, personal and unconventional.

It must have been a desperate Tchaikovsky who, in warm and sunny Italy, gave shape to the ice-cold opening measures of his *4th Symphony*.

His marriage, which was to provide an acceptable façade for hide his homosexual leanings, ran aground after just a few months. Devastated, he fled from Moscow, first to Saint Petersburg and later to Paris, Switzerland and Italy.

There he found liberation and peace, and an emotional outlet in his music. He finished his 4th Symphony, among other works, in Italy, delivering an intensely autobiographical composition. He tried to encapsulate his whole life in the symphony, with imagination and fate as the common thread – for, as he put it, “the power of fate is too powerful ever to be overcome – merely endured, hopelessly.”

ARTISTS & PROGRAMME

· Brussels Philharmonic ·

Michael Sanderling, conductor · Nikolai Lugansky, piano

Johannes Brahms

Piano Concerto No. 2 B-flat major, op. 83

- I. Allegro non troppo*
- II. Allegro appassionato*
- III. Andante*
- IV. Allegretto grazioso*

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Symphony No. 4 in F minor, op. 36

- I. Andante sostenuto – Moderato con anima
– Moderato assai, quasi andante –
Allegro vivo*
- II. Andantino in modo di canzone*
- III. Scherzo: Pizzicato ostinato – Allegro*
- IV. Finale: Allegro con fuoco*

DISCOVER MORE

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A symphonic orchestra in your pocket? The BXLphil app brings your Brussels Philharmonic experience to a whole new level: better, faster, smarter. Never miss another update or livestream thanks to the smart alerts, and get access to exclusive content.

WOLFGANG APP [App Store](#) / [Google Play](#)

Real time programme notes for Tchaikovsky's *4th Symphony* - during the second half of this concert you can keep your phone near: while the orchestra is playing, the free Wolfgang app tells you what is happening – at the very moment – in the music.

SYMFOMANIA! DIY (8+) FR / ENG / NL

Playing, singing, drawing, listening... and mostly: enjoying Tchaikovsky's 4th Symphony! Discover this fun kit for young music loving do-it-yourselfers.

PROGRAMME NOTES

Brahms' Second Piano Concerto is a work of epic allure. Pianists know it as 'the long terror', a very demanding war of attrition. The work also caused Brahms headaches, for after a first, coolly received piano concerto in 1858, it took him more than twenty years for him to dare to write a second. In 1881, he thought the time was right: he was at the height of his career and was one of the few composers who could make a living from his published compositions alone. Self-assured, he stated: "Despite everything, audiences will end up liking the first concerto, and the second one will sound very different". A prediction that would come true, since his *Second Piano Concerto* met with lavish praise. A few years earlier, Tchaikovsky had finished his *Fourth Symphony*. A work that would be highly significant in both his personal life and his career.

A concerto of epic allure

A carefree holiday in sunny Italy was the basis for Johannes Brahms' (1833-1897) *Second Piano Concerto*. More than twenty years would pass before the composer would dare to write a second piano concerto, after his first, which was not a success. In 1881, at the height of his career, the 58-year-old composer achieved for the first time his long-awaited mix of inspiration and technique. Brahms replaced the traditional three-movement structure of the concerto with a four-movement, symphonic form. He also conceived the role of the soloist differently, namely, as an equal partner of the orchestra. Brahms incorporated the piano into the orchestra, as it were, which is why it bears the name of 'Symphony with piano obligato'.

The first movement opens with a melody in the horn and immediately transports the listener to the Alps. The piano then enters with a cadence

that leads to the exposition of the full orchestra, in which a lyrical and rhythmical main theme is presented. By contrast to the first movement, the scherzo movement, *Allegro appassionato* is dark and tragic. The intimate and serene *Andante* is a bit like chamber music piece for the pianist, a solo cellist and the woodwinds. Brahms later uses the heavenly melody of the cello in his song *Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer*, in the clarinets, in turn, we hear echoes of the song *Todessehnen*. The concerto ends with a lively *Allegretto grazioso*, or a final dance, as tradition requires it. The finale is a seven-part virtuoso rondo with considerable Hungarian influences.

Brahms himself was the piano soloist at the première of the work 9 November 1881 in Budapest. It was an instant success, and even Franz Liszt found the concerto to his taste: "At first reading, the work seemed to me a little grey in tone. I have, however, come gradually to understand it. It possesses the pregnant

character of a distinguished work of art, in which thought and feeling move in noble harmony."

Father of the Russian romantic symphony

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) composed his *Fourth Symphony* between 1877 and 1878, while he was also putting the finishing touches on his opera *Yevgeny Onegin*. These were tumultuous years for the composer: in 1877 he married the young Antonina Milyukova, shortly after he had received a heartfelt love letter. In it, she declared her love for him and threatened to commit suicide if he should reject her.

Tchaikovsky hoped he could make her happy with a life 'as brother and sister', as he proposed. That way, he could pretend to the outside world to be living a normal family life, while at the same time following his own path. But Antonina only came to understand later what Tchaikovsky had meant by the condition he proposed. Their marriage was a difficult one, and just a few

months after their wedding, Tchaikovsky fled abroad.

Critics have been all too ready to interpret this symphony as an autobiographical reflection of this troubled phase in Tchaikovsky's life. But although his marital crisis may well have influenced the symphony indirectly, its main lines had already been laid down earlier. Although his letters to his patroness, Nadezhda von Meck (1831-1894), are misleading in this regard. The rich widow and the composer engaged in a longstanding correspondence without ever having met each other. After finishing his symphony, Tchaikovsky wrote her a long letter, as a sort of guide to his symphony. In it, he referred among other things to Beethoven's *Fifth* Symphony, and compared his symphony to a battle against fate, that "is too powerful for an individual to overcome." But the idea that he was trying in this way to sum up his own life and fate is doubtful.

The symphony did always have special significance for Tchaikovsky. In a letter to Nikolai Rubinstein in January 1878, he had written: "It seems to me that this is my best work. Of my two latest creations, i.e., the opera and the symphony, I favour the latter." A month later, Rubinstein conducted the successful première in Moscow. Tchaikovsky's younger brother Modest described the enthusiastic mood during the performance: "If ever a symphonic work produced a furore after its performance, then it was your symphony. After the first movement, the applause was moderate – how should I say? – something like what is usually heard after the first movement of a symphony by Beethoven or Schumann; after the second movement, there was considerably more applause – such that Nápravník was even obliged to take a bow; after the Scherzo – a *fff* clamour, stamping and cries of 'bis'. Nápravník bowed once more, and the noise only intensified, until the conductor raised his baton. Then everyone fell silent until only your

pizzicato could be heard ... After this, more cries, calls, bows by Nápravník, and so on. The end of the Finale was greeted with unanimous applause, calls and stamping of feet ... The performance was very lively, but in the last movement... breathtaking."

Ten years later, Tchaikovsky was still convinced this was one of his best works. He wrote to von Meck: "It turns out that not only have I not cooled towards it, as I have cooled towards most of my compositions, but on the contrary I am filled with warm and sympathetic feelings towards it. I don't know what the future may bring, but presently it seems to me that this is my best symphonic work."

Commentary by Aurélie Walschaert

MICHAEL SANDERLING

CONDUCTOR

www.michaelsanderling.com

Michael Sanderling is Chief Conductor of the Luzerner Sinfonieorchester (LSO), commencing from the 2021/22 season and following many years of successful collaboration. Guest engagements take him to leading orchestras worldwide. In recent seasons he has appeared with the Berliner Philharmoniker, WDR Sinfonieorchester Köln, SWR Symphonieorchester, Tonhalle Orchester Zürich, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Orchestre de Paris, NHK Symphony Orchestra and Toronto Symphony Orchestra. He enjoys a particularly close and regular collaboration with the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig and Konzerthausorchester Berlin.

In addition to his engagements in Lucerne, the 2021/22 season sees Michael Sanderling appear with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano Giuseppe Verdi, Orquestra Sinfónica do Porto, Iceland Symphony Orchestra, Frankfurter Museumsorchester, Konzerthausorchester Berlin and Gürzenich Orchester Köln, among others. In the US, he makes his debut with the Seattle Symphony Orchestra.

From 2011 to 2019, Michael Sanderling was Principal Conductor of the Dresdner Philharmonie. During his tenure he distinguished the orchestra as one of Germany's foremost ensembles, leading the musicians in a wide variety of concert formats in Dresden and on numerous international tours. The recordings of the complete symphonies of Beethoven and Shostakovich for Sony Classical document this special collaboration. Sanderling held his first

principal position with the Kammerakademie Potsdam, as Artistic Director from 2006 to 2011.

Michael Sanderling's discography includes recordings of the core works of Dvořák, Schumann, Prokofiev, Tchaikovsky, and the complete symphonies of Beethoven and Shostakovich. Most recently, a recording of piano works by Hummel, Weber and Mendelssohn with Matthias Kirschnereit and the hr-Sinfonieorchester Frankfurt was released by Berlin Classics.

In the opera pit, Michael Sanderling's previous appearances include a new production of Sergei Prokofiev's *War and Peace* at Oper Köln.

In 1987, at the age of 20, Michael Sanderling was appointed principal cellist of the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig under Kurt Masur, and from 1994 to 2006 he held the same position with the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin.

Michael Sanderling is a passionate supporter of the next generation of young musicians. He teaches at the Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst in Frankfurt am Main, and regularly works with the Bundesjugendorchester, Junge Deutsche Philharmonie and Schleswig-Holstein Festival Orchestra. Together with the Luzerner Sinfonieorchester he will continue and strengthen the collaboration with the Lucerne School of Music.

NIKOLAI LUGANSKY PIANO

www.nikolaylugansky.com

Nikolai Lugansky is a pianist who combines elegance and grace with powerful virtuosity, a true incarnation of the Russian tradition on the international classical stage. Recognised as a master of Russian and late romantic repertoire, Lugansky is renowned for his interpretations of

Rachmaninov, Prokofiev, Chopin and Debussy. He has received numerous awards for recordings and artistic merit.

He regularly works with top level conductors such as Yuri Temirkanov, Kent Nagano, Mikhail Pletnev, Gianandrea Noseda and Vladimir Jurowski. Concerto highlights for the 2021/22 season include performances with the Berliner Philharmoniker, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Brussels Philharmonic, Orquesta Nacional de España, Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra and BBC Symphony Orchestra. In summer 2022, Lugansky will tour South America with the Orchestre Philharmonique Royal de Liège.

Described by *Gramophone* as "the most trailblazing and meteoric performer of all" Nikolai Lugansky is a pianist of extraordinary depth and versatility. As a regular recitalist the world over, he performs in venues such as Amsterdam

Concertgebouw, the Vienna Konzerthaus and Wigmore Hall in London. Lugansky appears at some of the world's most distinguished festivals, including the Aspen, Tanglewood Ravinia and Verbier festivals. Chamber music collaborators include Vadim Repin, Alexander Kniazev, Mischa Maisky and Leonidas Kavakos.

Nikolai Lugansky has won several awards for his many recordings. His recital CD featuring Rachmaninov's *Piano Sonatas* won the Diapason d'Or, whilst his recording of concertos by Grieg and Prokofiev with Kent Nagano and the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin was a *Gramophone* Editor's Choice. Lugansky has an exclusive contract with Harmonia Mundi and his recording of Rachmaninov's *24 Preludes*, released in April 2018, was met with enthusiastic reviews. He was described as having "an ability to enchant the ear... with a deep feeling for the music" (*The Financial Times*). His recording of solo piano music by Debussy was released in the

2018 anniversary year and his most recent release, '*César Franck, Préludes, Fugues & Chorals*' (March 2020) won the Diapason d'Or. He most recently released '*Beethoven: Late Piano Sonatas*' (December 2020) and will release a further recording of Beethoven sonatas later this season.

In addition to performing, Lugansky has been a professor at the Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatory since 1998. He is also the Artistic Director of the Tambov Rachmaninov Festival and is a supporter of, and regular performer at, the Rachmaninov Estate and Museum of Ivanovka.

In June 2019 Nikolai Lugansky received the Russian Federation National Award in Literature and Art, for his contribution to the development and advancement of Russian and international classical music culture over the past 20 years. Lugansky was awarded the honour of People's

Artist of Russia in April 2013, which is the highest honorary title for outstanding achievement.

BRUSSELS PHILHARMONIC

www.brusselsphilharmonic.be

Brussels Philharmonic was founded in 1935 by the Belgian public broadcaster (National Broadcasting Institute (NIR/INR)). Since its creation, it has worked with top international conductors and soloists. The orchestra was and is known as a pioneer in performing contemporary music – a reputation that brought world-renowned composers such as Bartók, Stravinsky and Messiaen to Brussels. To this day, Brussels Philharmonic has continued this tradition, including a 21st-century work in almost every concert programme.

The orchestra's historic home port is the Flagey building in Brussels, the heart of Europe, where it rehearses and performs in Studio 4 – in acoustic terms one of the top concert halls in the world – and which serves as its home base for concerts in Belgium and the rest of the world.

The leading French conductor Stéphane Denève is the music director of Brussels Philharmonic. His passion for 21st-century music and personal mission to create dialogue between the repertoire of the past and the future is fully in keeping with the orchestra's DNA. Starting in the 2022-23 season, Kazushi Ono will take up the baton as music director of Brussels Philharmonic.

At the international level, Brussels Philharmonic has made a name for itself, with regular appearances at the major venues and festivals, such as Carnegie Hall in New York, the Philharmonie de Paris, Wiener Musikverein, Grosses Festspielhaus Salzburg, Usher Hall in

Edinburgh and Cadogan Hall in London. International representation by IMG Touring has brought further tours and concerts on new stages both in Europe and beyond (e.g. Japan in 2017, North America in 2019).

Another speciality for which Brussels Philharmonic has gained an international reputation is the recording of soundtracks for series, games and films, including the Oscar-winning score for '*The Artist*' (music by Ludovic Bource). In Belgium, the orchestra is a regular partner of the Film Fest Gent and of MotorMusic, and participates each year in concerts with iconic films (both blockbusters with award-winning scores and black-and-white classics with a new soundtrack).

Meanwhile, the orchestra has proved to be a pioneer in other respects as well. Besides ground-breaking initiatives such as the Tax Shelter, the establishment of a foundation for the

purchase of string instruments, and more recently the partnership with Brussels Airlines, the orchestra embraces innovation in every area and all levels of its activities. The gentlemen of the orchestra are dressed by Café Costume in the custom-designed Symphonic Sporting Jacket, with technical innovations in the field of fabric and cut, and 2021 saw the release of the orchestra's own smartphone app.

The various recordings of Brussels Philharmonic (Deutsche Grammophon, Palazzetto Bru Zane, Klara/Warner Classics, Film Fest Gent, Naxos, Brussels Philharmonic Recordings) have been warmly received by the international press and gaining awards such as the ECHO Klassik, Choc de Classica de l'année and Diapason d'Or de l'année.

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BRUSSELS PHILHARMONIC

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concertmaster

Henry Raudales

violon I

Sylvie Bagara, Olivia Bergeot,
Eva Bobrowska, Annelies Broeckhoven,
Cristina Constantinescu, Juliette Janssen,
Arisa Kobayashi, Frederic Preusser,
Eva Pusker, Justine Rigutto, Anton Skakun,
Alissa Vaitsner, Gillis Veldeman

violon II

Sébastien Greliak (1), Vania Batchvarova,

Caroline Chardonnet, Aline Janeczek,
Mireille Kovac, Eléonore Malaboef, Sayoko
Mundy, Naoko Ogura, Julien Poli, Stefanie Van
Backlé, Bram Van Eenoo, Veerle Van Roosbroeck

viola

Tine Janssens (1), Griet François (2),
Philippe Allard, Marina Barskaya,
Phung Ha, Hélène Koerver,
Agnieszka Kosakowska, Barbara Peynsaert,
Patricia Van Reusel, Stephan Uelpenich

cello

Kristaps Bergs (1), Diego Coutinho,
Barbara Gerarts, Julius Himmler, Sophie Jomard,
Bénédicte Legrand, Emmanuel Tondus,
Elke Wynants

double bass

Jan Buyschaert (1), Nassim Attar,
Catharina Feyen, Daniele Giampaolo,
Benjamin Heymans, Simon Luce

flute

Lieve Schuermans (1), Jill Jeschek (2),
Nil Tena Puyo (2)

oboe

Joost Gils (1), Maarten Wijnen

clarinet

Maura Marinucci (1), Danny Corstjens (2)

bassoon

Karsten Przybyl (1), Alexander Kuksa

horn

Benjamin Chartre (1), Mieke Ailliet (2),
Claudia Rigoni, Luc Van den Hove

trumpet

Rudy Moercant (2), Luc Sirjacques

trombone

Guido Liveyns (1), Tim Van Medegael (2),
Sander Vets

tuba

Jean Xhonneux (2)

timpani

Gert François (1)

percussion

Gert D'haese (2), Titus Franken (2),
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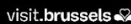
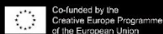
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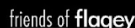
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