Russian National Orchestra

Mikhail Pletnev, Founder & Principal Conductor

George Li, piano













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RUSSIAN NATIONAL ORCHESTRA

MIKHAIL PLETNEV

FOUNDER & PRINCIPAL CONDUCTOR

GEORGE LI

PIANO

Saturday, February 23, 2019, at 7:30 pm Hancher Auditorium, The University of Iowa

Vocalise

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943)

Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, Op. 18

Rachmaninoff

- I. Moderato
- II. Adagio sostenuto
- III. Allegro scherzando

INTERMISSION

Symphony No. 6 in E-flat Minor, Op. 111

Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953)

- I. Allegro moderato
- II. Largo
- III. Vivace

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS



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The Russian National Orchestra was founded in 1990 by pianist and conductor Mikhail Pletnev and today is widely recognized as one of the world's top orchestras. Maintaining an active international schedule, the RNO appears in the music capitals of Europe, Asia, and the Americas, is a frequent guest at festivals such as Edinburgh, the BBC Proms, and Festival Napa Valley, and presents the RNO Grand Festival each September to open the Moscow season.

RNO concerts are often aired on National Public Radio, the European Broadcasting Union, and Russia's Kultura channel. Their discography, launched with a high praised 1991 CD recording of Tchaikovsky's Pathétique, now numbers more than 80 critically acclaimed recordings. The orchestra's recording of Sleeping Beauty, conducted by Mikhail Pletnev, is, according to the BBC, among the most listened to classical music recordings of the last 75 years. In 2004 the RNO became the first orchestra in Russian history to win a Grammy Award.

The RNO is unique among the principal Russian ensembles as a private institution funded with the support of individuals, corporations, and foundations in Russia and throughout the world.

MIKHAIL PLETNEV

FOUNDER AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Mikhail Pletnev's genius as pianist, conductor, and composer enchants and amazes audiences around the globe. He was Gold Medal and First Prize winner of the 1978 Tchaikovsky International Piano Competition when he was 21, a prize that earned him early recognition worldwide. An invitation to perform at the 1988 superpower summit in Washington led to a friendship with Mikhail Gorbachev and the historic opportunity to make music in artistic freedom.

In 1990 Pletnev formed the first independent orchestra in Russia's history. Many of the country's finest musicians joined Pletnev in launching the



Photo: © Courtesy of Russian National Orchestra

Russian National Orchestra. Under his leadership, the RNO achieved in a few short years a towering stature among the world's orchestras. Pletnev describes the RNO as his greatest joy and continues to serve as its Artistic Director and Principal Conductor.

Pletnev's performances and recordings have proved him to be an outstanding interpreter of an extensive repertoire, both as pianist and conductor. His recordings have earned numerous prizes including a 2005 Grammy Award for his own arrangement of Prokofiev's Cinderella. He received Grammy nominations for Schumann's Symphonic Etudes (2004) and the Rachmaninov and Prokofiev third piano concertos No. 3 (2003). His album of Scarlatti's Sonatas (Virgin/EMI) received a 1996 Gramophone Award. BBC Music Magazine called the recording "piano playing at its greatest... this performance alone would be enough to secure Pletnev a place among the greatest pianists ever known." His recording of the complete Beethoven symphonies and piano concertos (Deutsche Grammophon) was named "Best of 2007" by The New Yorker.

Pletnev's compositions include works for orchestra, piano, strings, and voices. His transcriptions of *Nutcracker Suite* and *Sleeping Beauty* were selected for the 1998 anthology *Great Pianists of the 20th Century* (Philips Classics).

Today he is one of Russia's most respected and influential artists. Pianist, conductor, composer, and cultural leader—all are significant facets of Mikhail Pletnev's life as an artist. Yet he considers himself, simply, a musician.

GEORGE LI

PIANO

Since winning the Silver Medal at the 2015 International Tchaikovsky Competition, pianist George Li has rapidly established a major international reputation and performs regularly with some of the world's leading orchestras and conductors.

In the 2018-19 season, Li makes his debuts with the London Philharmonic, Montreal Symphony, Tokyo Symphony, and Royal Liverpool Philharmonic; embarks on an 11-city recital tour of China; and tours the United States with the Russian National Orchestra and Mikhail Pletnev and Kirill Karabits.



Photo: © Simon Fowler

Concerto highlights include performances with the New York Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Philharmonia Orchestra, Rotterdam Philharmonic, DSO Berlin, Frankfurt Radio Symphony, Oslo Philharmonic, Orchestre National de Lyon, Sydney Symphony, and St. Petersburg Philharmonic. He frequently appears with Valery Gergiev and the Mariinsky Orchestra.

In recital, Li performs at venues including Carnegie Hall, Davies Hall in San Francisco, the Mariinsky Theatre, Munich's Gasteig, the Louvre, Seoul Arts Center, Tokyo's Asahi Hall and Musashino Hall, NCPA Beijing, Shanghai Poly Theater, and Amici della Musica Firenze, as well as appearances at major festivals including the Edinburgh International Festival, Ravinia Festival, Aixen-Provence Festival, and Montreux Festival.

Li is an exclusive Warner Classics recording artist, with his debut recital album released in October 2017, which was recorded live from the Mariinsky.

RUSSIAN NATIONAL ORCHESTRA

MIKHAIL PLETNEY, FOUNDER & ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

2019 United States Tour

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PROGRAM NOTES

By Rob Cline

Vocalise (1912)

Sergei Rachmaninoff

Born in Semyonov, Russia, April 1, 1873 Died in Beverly Hills, California, March 28, 1943

Written around 1912 and published as the last in a set of fourteen songs, Rachmaninoff's *Vocalise* remains one of the composer's most popular compositions. While the other songs in the collection were set to poetry by Russian romantic writers, the vocalise is wordless, placing the focus on the lovely melody. Rachmaninoff created several arrangements of the work, including tonight's arrangement for piano and orchestra.



Rachmaninoff in 1920

Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, Op. 18 (1901)

Sergei Rachmaninoff

After the disastrous premiere of his First Symphony, Rachmaninoff eventually turned to hypnotism to help him overcome implacable writer's block. Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor premiered in November 1901 with the composer—whose hand span was quite impressive and put to full use in the piece—at the piano. The performance was exceptionally well received. Rachmaninoff dedicated the score to Dr. Nicolai Dahl, the hypnotist who helped him recover his confidence as a composer.

Symphony No. 6 in E-flat Minor, Op. 111

Sergei Prokofiev

Born in Sontsovka, Ukraine, April 23, 1891 Died in Moscow, Russia, March 5, 1953

In the aftermath of a minor heart attack that undermined his dynamic lifestyle, Prokofiev began his Sixth Symphony in the spring of 1945 as a response to the end of World War II. He was under doctor's orders to rest, but would hurriedly compose in secret in a notebook he kept hidden. He completed the work early in 1946. It was premiered to acclaim, shortly thereafter condemned by the government, and eventually recognized as work by a great Russian composer—a composer awarded the Stalin Prize in 1951.



Prokofiev in 1940

The Sixth Symphony blends seemingly contrasting moods. Prokofiev suggested this was the only appropriate response to the moment in which it was composed: "Yes, we are rejoicing in our magnificent victory [that ended the war], but thousands of us have been left with wounds that can't be healed—health ruined for life, dear ones gone forever. We must not forget this."





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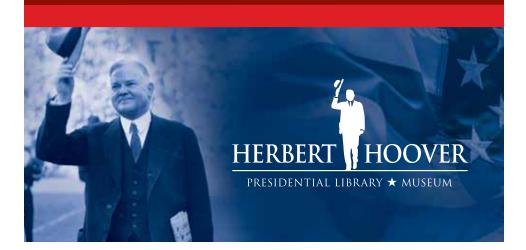
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FROM THE ARCHIVES FOR HANCHER PERFORMANCES

Rachmaninoff's *Vocalise* (from *Fourteen Songs*, Op. 34, No. 14)

ITZHAK PERLMAN, violin; SAMUEL SANDERS, piano 1974 | April 25

BEVERLY HOCH, soprano; MARGO GARRETT, piano 1982 | March 17

Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto

UNIVERSITY OF IOWA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA JAMES DIXON, conductor; KENNETH AMADA, piano

1973 | June 20

1979 | October 24

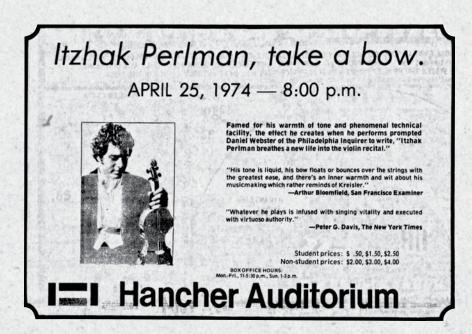
1987 | September 23

1992 | March 4

WILLIAM LARUE JONES, conductor; KSENIA NOSIKOVA, piano 2017 | March 29

Prokofiev's Sixth Symphony

RUSSIAN NATIONAL ORCHESTRA MIKHAIL PLETNEV, conductor 2019 | February 23



An ad for Itzak Perlman's April 25, 1974, performance at Hancher Auditorium ran in that week's *Daily Iowan*. Perlman and pianist Samuel Sanders performed a program of music including Rachmaninoff's *Vocalise*.



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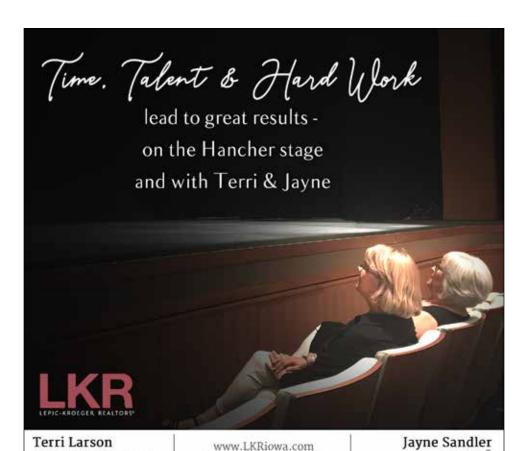
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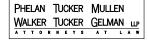
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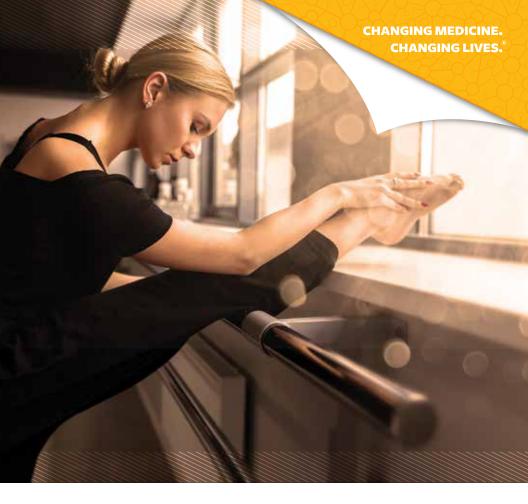




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