

A painting of a winter scene. In the foreground, a large, curved wooden boat is partially submerged in a body of water, its surface covered in snow and ice. The water is dark and turbulent. In the middle ground, several bare trees stand on a snowy bank. In the background, a city is visible across the water, with a prominent golden spire. The sky is overcast and grey.

Rachmaninov
4 Piano Concertos
Paganini Rhapsody

Oleg Marshev
Aarhus Symphony Orchestra
James Loughran



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4 Piano Concertos
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Sergei Rachmaninov (1873–1943)

DAC OCD 582 CD 1

Piano Concerto No 1 in F sharp minor, Op. 1 28:50

[1] *Vivace 13:01*

[2] *Andante 6:54*

[3] *Allegro vivace 8:30*

Piano Concerto No 2 in C minor, Op. 18 36:22

[4] *Moderato 11:35*

[5] *Adagio sostenuto 12:11*

[6] *Allegro scherzando 12:17*

DAC OCD 583a CD 2

Piano Concerto No 3 in D minor, Op. 30 45:42

[1] *Allegro ma non tanto 18:42*

[2] *Adagio 11:54*

[3] *Alla breve 14:53*

DACOCD 583b CD 3

Piano Concerto No 4 in G minor, Op. 40 28:09

[1] *Allegro vivace* 10:36

[2] *Largo* 7:08

[3] *Allegro vivace* 10:07

Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini in A minor, Op. 43 26:35

[4] *Introduction* 0:08

[5] *Variation I (Precedente)* 0:20

[6] *Theme* 0:20

[7] *Variation II* 0:20

[8] *Variation III* 0:27

[9] *Variation IV* 0:30

[10] *Variation V* 0:30

[11] *Variation VI* 1:03

[12] *Variation VII* 1:08

[13] *Variation VIII* 0:37

[14] *Variation IX* 0:36

[15] *Variation X* 0:59

[16] *Variation XI* 1:33

[17] *Variation XII* 1:39

[18] *Variation XIII* 0:31

[19] *Variation XIV* 0:49

[20] *Variation XV* 1:07

[21] *Variation XVI* 1:46

[22] *Variation XVII* 3:02

[23] *Variation XVIII* 3:38

[24] *Variation XIX* 0:28

[25] *Variation XX* 0:37

[26] *Variation XXI* 0:26

[27] *Variation XXII* 1:46

[28] *Variation XXIII* 0:56

[29] *Variation XXIV* 1:15

Oleg Marshev, piano
James Loughran, conductor
Aarhus Symphony Orchestra



A CONSISTENT DEVELOPMENT?

SOME THOUGHTS ON RACHMANINOV'S WORKS FOR PIANO AND ORCHESTRA

Rachmaninov's boyhood friend, Matvej Presman, later recalled a day during a holiday in Crimea when the thirteen-year-old composer-to-be, who had been thoughtful and melancholy for some time, called him to the piano and played him a piece. At the end he said, "Do you know what that is?" "No, I don't", replied Presman. "What do you think", he continued, "of the harmonic pedal in the bass in relation to the chromaticism of the upper part?" Presman replied approvingly, whereupon Rachmaninov, very pleased, declared, "I wrote the piece, and I'll dedicate it to you".

Though the piece in question has not survived, it is still easy to see that the child was father to the man. Over and again in his work we find a slow-moving and basically very simple harmonic outline, distantly derived perhaps from Orthodox chants, as a backdrop for often feverishly chromatic activity, and in none of the five works here is it more evident than in the Piano Concerto no. 1 in F sharp minor, op. 1. Let us take a close look at the first few pages.

The opening gesture was by now a habitual one for a romantic piano concerto, looking back to both Schumann and Grieg. In place of Schumann's single-shot chord and Grieg's timpani-roll Rachmaninov has a fanfare for the brass and wind and, as with the other two composers, the soloist's entry is not just a virtuoso flourish but a thematic signpost which returns at strategic points in the movement. Rachmaninov also follows Schumann and Grieg in that the piano's introduction leads to a gentle theme on the orchestra. But, in place of their piquant wind bands, Rachmaninov indulges in all the panoply of strings which is his hallmark. Indeed, this theme might serve as an entry test for the listener new to Rachmaninov. Are you bowled over as the strings soar into their triplet descending-scale motive? Then you're going to like practically everything he does. Does its aura of a Hollywood sunset set your teeth on edge (but remember the debit is the other way round)? Then you may as well stop here. But note that he is far from undisciplined; this triplet figure derives from the piano's opening flourish, while the ascending-scale motive which starts the second theme is an inversion of it. The ascending- and descending-scale

motives are confronted in the development, so there is no question of a coincidence. Indeed, scale-motives, usually descending, tend to pervade key themes and moments of the whole concerto although at this point we should be careful, since gloomily descending motives occur frequently through the composer's entire production.

When the piano takes up this first theme we notice how, under the long notes, the pianist is playing filigree decorations of extreme, almost acerbic, chromaticism. In fact, the abiding impression of this concerto is of songful simplicity wrapped in pungent, nervous, passage work from the soloist, and this to a greater degree than the relatively diatonic 2nd or even 3rd Concertos. How can this be? We had better have a look at a few dates.

This first concerto was completed in 1891 (the first movement a year before), and underwent a wholesale revision in 1917, by which time the 2nd (1901) and 3rd (1909) Concertos had been written. And in fact the first theme in the original version is accompanied at this point by simple harmonic arpeggios. Has Rachmaninov's revision introduced an extraneous element, a garish "tarting up" of a simple original? Presman's story, quoted at the beginning, would seem to show that the contrast between a slow-moving backdrop and neurotic chromatic activity was inborn in him and the revision has simply brought out something already implicit but which he was perhaps not technically able to realise at the age of 18. The concerto as revised is certainly consistent in its language; while it has youthful freshness it also represents a bridge between the straightforward romanticism of nos. 2 and 3 and the more acerbic world of the 4th Concerto. Any reservations are likely to centre on the finale since, while the soloist dashes around most glitteringly the themes are too cluttered to lodge in the memory as do those of the other concertos. The first-time listener familiar with the later works may be surprised to find that the slower, romantic music of the central section does not return to make a grandiose peroration at the end. He may be more surprised still to know that it actually did so in the original version; the more experienced Rachmaninov evidently felt it could not take such treatment, as the similar themes in the later concertos (for all the critical flak they have attracted) can.

The child of Presman's story was father to the man in another sense. He

suffered from a deep sense of insecurity and negative criticism could all but destroy him. It is a sobering thought that Presman in that moment held the future of a great composer in his hands. Had he failed to reassure Rachmaninov that his piece was good, who knows if he would not have struck down his budding talent for ever.

It was the harsh criticism received by the 1st Symphony (1895, first performed in 1897) which brought him to such despondency that he sought help from the hypnotist Dr. Nikolaj Dahl in 1900. The upshot was the Piano Concerto no. 2 in C minor, op. 18. This is a work which has travelled the world, and with it the persistent image of the despairing composer lying on his couch while the white-coated hypnotist wrests the music from him bar by bar. Indeed, the moon-struck opening chords and the surging main theme are just the sort of music a composer might be expected to write under hypnotism. The mundane truth seems to be that Rachmaninov had a few sessions with Dahl and then, feeling much better, took a holiday at Varazze on the Italian Riviera, where he sketched the second and third movements of the new concerto. He performed these in Moscow in December of the same year without even waiting to complete the first movement. This followed in 1901 and critical disaster almost struck just five days before the première. A well-meaning friend told him that the opening section of the first movement sounded like an introduction not a first theme, and listeners would take the second theme to be the real beginning of the concerto. Since most listeners today would agree that this movement is a model of clear formal layout one can only wonder at the insecurity of a composer who could write such a piece and then believe such an unfounded criticism. In his desperate reply he declared that the entire first movement was ruined and from now on seemed to him “wholly revolting”.

Fortunately the concerto had a success five days later from which it has never looked back, quickly displacing the Rubinstein 4th as *the* Russian romantic piano concerto. A blow-by-blow account of such a well-known piece is hardly necessary, but the subtlety of the second movement deserves particular comment. After four bars' introduction on the orchestra the soloist enters, apparently playing simple arpeggios. But some notes within these arpeggios have special emphasis and the effect is like pebbles being dropped on the placid

surface of a pond. And these notes are *off* the beat, so that when the orchestra enters with its melody the piano and orchestra seem slightly out of phase. These very simple means account for the powerful sense of uneasy repose which prevails throughout the movement.

The success of this work restored Rachmaninov's confidence in himself and he thereafter composed steadily and fairly prolifically until he left Russia in 1917. The Piano Concerto no. 3 in D minor, op. 30 was written in 1909 to be taken on a tour of the United States. The first performance was on 28th November of the same year, in New York under Walter Damrosch. In January he repeated it under the direction of Gustav Mahler and was most impressed at the trouble the latter took over rehearsals.

This concerto contains a number of important formal innovations. Considering the weight it bears in the work – not just in the first movement but as a motto reappearing in the other movements – the opening theme sidles in with disarming simplicity. And yet somehow we understand that this is the beginning of something big. The second theme, too, starts with innocent little exchanges between soloist and orchestra, flowering romantically only later. The development section begins in the *original key* with a restatement of the main theme. The chief precedent for this very unusual procedure was Brahms's 4th Symphony. In Rachmaninov's case, it provides him with the solid ground from which to write a long, rhapsodic development which is crowned with a massive cadenza based on the main theme. At the climax of this the music crashes into its original D minor, and the attentive listener might wonder if this is actually not the start of the recapitulation. But no, another surprise is in store. The music dies away and the first theme is heard on the flute, oboe, clarinet and horn. But then the soloist wrenches the music into the distant key of E flat and begins *another* cadenza, this time on the second theme. After this the recapitulation really does begin, but so telescoped is its brief reminder of the two principal themes that it seems more like a coda.

The second movement is virtually monothematic, based entirely on the falling motive with which it begins, yet so rich is the pianistic decoration that it never outstays its length. It contains a reference on the orchestra to the main theme of the first movement and incorporates a short scherzo-like section based

again on that theme.

The finale, like the first movement, uses the device of a much delayed recapitulation. Indeed, when the recapitulation does arrive the first theme is practically dismissed with a passing reference, for it has dominated the development and now it is the turn of the second theme which now builds up into a proud climax to the whole work.

It is extraordinary that a composer with the ability to reinvent classical formal patterns so perfectly to suit his own needs should have had such self-doubts as to allow substantial cuts and a shortened cadenza to be wished upon him. It was in this form that he recorded it himself and complete performances with the large cadenza (as on the present disc) became the norm only about twenty years ago.

In 1917 Rachmaninov left Russia for ever and his career was thereafter based in the United States. Coincidentally, the fairly steady stream of compositions all but dried up. The ostensible reason for this was that his most likely way of earning a living in his new country was by giving piano recitals. While he had made regular appearances as a soloist during his Russian years, this was almost a sideline beside his work as composer and conductor and his repertoire was not large. The task of studying new repertoire, let alone performing it (typically, between 10th November 1922 and 31st March 1923 he gave 71 recitals in places as distant as Canada and Cuba) was time-consuming. Culture shock could have been another reason, and in fact such pieces as he did write were usually composed while on holiday in Europe. Traditionally, the reason given is that his inspiration left him and those who maintain this view (explaining away the Paganini Rhapsody as a fluke) usually drag in the Piano Concerto no. 4 in G minor, op. 40 as “evidence”.

Certainly, the gestation period of this work was not easy. We know from Rachmaninov himself that it was begun before he left Russia though we do not know what stage it had reached. He waited till 1926 before taking it in hand, completing it that same summer in Dresden. He immediately realised it was too long (he told Medtner it would need to be performed over several evenings, like the *Ring*) and during the second part of his holiday, in Cannes, made substantial cuts. He gave the first performance in Philadelphia in March 1927.

American critics had by now labelled Rachmaninov as a pianist who also composed a bit, and reaction was venomous (“Chaminade might safely have perpetrated it on her third glass of vodka” was but one comment). Radical cutting followed (91 bars went from the finale); in this form it was published in 1928 and Rachmaninov played it a few times during 1929. Critical reaction was not much better and the work was withdrawn again. In 1938 he spoke of revising it, and finally made radical structural revisions, as well as further cuts, in 1941. The piece still had little success and Rachmaninov died in 1943 without establishing it in the repertoire. It remains the least performed of his concertos (though one great pianist, Michelangeli, chose to record just this one). Criticism usually centres on its more acerbic, angular language, the idea being that Rachmaninov was trying to dress up his old style in the name of modernism. If we remember Presman’s story and take into consideration the musical language which emerged from the revision of the first concerto (dating from about the same time as the first sketches of the fourth) we can see a perfectly consistent development, a gradual realisation of something which Rachmaninov had in him from the beginning.

The first movement is certainly an extraordinary affair, in which Rachmaninov faced the problem of how to write in sonata form in a style where harmonic side-slips are so much the order of the day that it is often not easy to understand which key the music is in. On the face of it the design is clear; a striding main theme, a romantic second subject, a development which leads of purposefully with a derivative of the main theme, a crashing climax leading to... Well, it doesn’t lead back to the main theme at all, it subsides straight into a so much varied version of the second theme that it seems more development, and the main theme returns only at the end, a quiet memory of itself on the orchestra against iridescent arpeggios from the piano. But these structural “signposts” are like signposts in the desert, they don’t point where they seem to point because of the lack of a stable tonality, on which these structural “signposts” traditionally depend. The title says the work is in G minor but after the orchestra’s opening surge on the dominant of that key, the piano’s dramatic theme absolutely refuses to establish that key. The second theme is *around* rather than *in* B flat major (the “normal” key for the second theme of a work in

G minor), with flattened leading-notes and other chromatics undermining it from the start, the development, for all its dramatic signals, dumps the music into C major and a recapitulation of the second theme which keeps well away from G major (which is where it “ought” to be). In fact, I cannot find a single bar before the very last two which are actually in G minor. We have the dominant at the beginning and arrive at the tonic only at the end. And this is the natural consequence of working with themes that do not establish tonality. Poor Rachmaninov. Similar attempts at restructuring sonata form by Bruckner and Sibelius have been held up as proof of their genius. When Rachmaninov does something similar, too many critics have taken it as proof of his incompetence.

Criticism of the second movement generally centres upon the resemblance of its principal theme to “Three Blind Mice”. I have already pointed out that Rachmaninov was haunted by descending-scale figures all through his career; and if a composer is to be accused of cribbing from “Three Blind Mice” every time he uses three descending notes the list of offenders would be a lengthy and honourable one, with Beethoven’s “Les Adieux” Sonata at its head. Come to think of it, in a concerto conceived at the time when Rachmaninov was preparing to leave his native land for ever, if he was quoting anything at all, might he not have been quoting “Les Adieux”? This tender dialogue between soloist and orchestra provides both musical and tonal repose, while the finale, mostly in brittle toccata style with fewer romantic moments than in the earlier works, at last establishes the concerto’s home key and concludes by restating material from the first movement, triumphant in the G major which eluded it the first time round.

Rather than a romantic concerto, this work is an self-ironic statement on the difficulties of a composer who wishes to write a romantic concerto when both the world and himself have taken another direction. Those who insist on seeing it as a failure must at least admit that it fails because it is attempting something much more difficult and radical than in the previous works. The present writer believes it is the finest of the four and holds that, as a commentary on the problems of writing a romantic concerto in an unromantic world, it is at least on the level of the Schönberg concerto, and a good deal less unpleasant.

The final work needs no special pleading. The Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, op. 43 was written in 1934 and was an immediate success at its première in November of that year. Although called a Rhapsody it is actually a set of variations; but the title of Rhapsody leaves Rachmaninov free to shift the music into distant keys (which variations are not supposed to do), to introduce the *Dies Irae* plainchant theme (it first appears at variation 7) and to leave gradually behind the tight structure of the original theme, allowing the variations to flower often very freely. Compared with the language of the fourth concerto this marks a return to a more stable harmonic language, but the brilliance and the acerbity remain. Compared with the earlier works it wears its heart on its sleeve only rarely, but when it does bare its soul it pulls all the stops out, culminating obviously in the 18th variation.

In conclusion, one can only marvel that the composer could write five such varied works, with a clear line of development from each to the next, while at the same time remaining true to his own particular tone of voice as few composers have.

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Born in Baku, ex-USSR, Oleg Marshev trained with Valentina Aristova at the Gnesin School for Highly Gifted Children and with Mikhail Voskresensky at the Moscow Conservatory where he completed his Performance Doctorate in 1988 gaining the Diploma with Honour. Marshev is thus a direct representative of the fifth generation of Russian pianists since Liszt, through Alexander Siloti, Konstantin Igumnov and Voskresensky's teacher, Lev Oborin.

Marshev's First Prize in the 1988 "Pilar Bayona" International Piano Competition (Spain) proved the first in a series of illustrious competition victories which have confirmed the artist's reputation as one of the most talented Russian pianists of his generation: in 1990 he took First Prize and the Gold Medal at the AMSA World Piano Competition of Cincinnati; in 1991 First Prize at the Concorso Pianistico Internazionale "Citta di Marsala" and the following year he was awarded the coveted *Primo Premio Assoluto* in the Italian capital's premier competition, the Concorso Pianistico Internazionale "Roma 1992".

In addition to numerous engagements in his native country, Marshev has performed in Hungary, Poland, Spain, Germany, Holland, France, Scandinavia, Japan, New Zealand and in the United States and Canada. 1991 saw his New York debut with a highly acclaimed recital at the Lincoln Center "Alice Tully Hall" which led to an invitation to perform at the Amsterdam Concertgebouw. Resident in Italy, the artist gives concerts regularly in that country's leading music centres, from Messina, Catania and Palermo in the south, via Rome and Tuscany to the major cities of the north such as Turin and Milan. He is also in increasing demand as a teacher, holding masterclasses in Spain, Italy and the USA, and as a competition jury member (including that of the World Piano Competition in Cincinnati).

Marshev's activities also extend to the recording studio: in addition to the present recordings numerous compact discs are available on Danacord. All these releases have been received to critical acclaim by leading international publications such as *Gramophone*, *High Fidelity*, *Fanfare*, *In Tune*, *Fono Forum*, *Diapason*, *Cd Classica* and *Repertoire des Disques*.

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James Loughran, a Scot, born in Glasgow, first came to notice when he won the Philharmonia Orchestra's Conducting Competition in 1961. The jury members included Otto Klemperer, Carlo Maria Giulini and Sir Adrian Boult. Subsequently, he became Principal Conductor of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra as well as making his debut conducting opera at Covent Garden, Sadler's Wells, the Netherlands Opera and the Scottish Opera.

In 1971, he was appointed successor to Barbirolli by the Hallé Orchestra and in 1979-83 he was Principal Conductor of the Bamberger Symphoniker. James Loughran made outstanding recordings of the Beethoven and Brahms Symphonies during those years and his recording of Holst's "The Planets" won him a Gold Record. In July 1993 the Japan Philharmonic Orchestra conferred the title of Permanent Guest Conductor upon James Loughran, and he has regularly conducted in Japan.

Although James Loughran has a reputation as an excellent conductor of romantic music, he has championed contemporary composers and forged a policy of commissioning new works for the orchestras under his direction.

James Loughran has regularly conducted European orchestras from Stockholm to Barcelona as well as in the USA and Australia.

In 1996 James Loughran committed himself to Denmark's Aarhus Symphony Orchestra as Chiefconductor, and in 1998 the orchestra recorded Brahms' Serenades under his direction. The CD was released in January 1999 and followed in 2000 by a CD recording of Dvorák's Serenades.

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Aarhus Symphony Orchestra, founded in 1935, has established itself as one of the cultural flagships of the city of Århus. The artistic cornerstone of the orchestra's activities is the symphonic concert season. In addition to the main concert season, the multifaceted activities of the orchestra include a large number of family concerts, Saturday matines, chamber concerts, summer concerts and free concerts in the foyer or the concert hall of Musikhuset Aarhus (Concert Hall Aarhus), which holds 1477 seats. Since its opening in 1982, Musikhuset Aarhus has been the main venue of Aarhus Symphony Orchestra, but in addition to its home-based activities, the orchestra gives concerts in a number of venues throughout the country.

Aarhus Symphony Orchestra offers a wide range of concert events, presenting a varied concert repertoire, spanning music history from the baroque over classicism to romantic and contemporary music and featuring Danish as well as foreign artists of international standard, among which can be mentioned Maxim Vengerov, who will perform with the orchestra in the 2002/2003 season. Throughout its existence, the orchestra has premiered more than 120 works, and the orchestra commissions new works to be premiered every year, primarily by Danish composers.

Recording is another important element in Aarhus Symphony Orchestra's activities. Two complete symphonic cycles have been recorded by the orchestra: Vagn Holmboe's symphonies (1992–1997) conducted by Owain Arwel Hughes, and Schubert's symphonies (released in the autumn of 2001), conducted by Hans Graf. A recording conducted by Danish Bo Holten, comprising the complete music composed to Danish texts by Frederick Delius has won international acclaim and has been

extremely well received by the critics of a number of international magazines, among which the Gramophone reviewed the recording in its „Editor’s Choice” column in September 2000. A CD comprising Delius, orchestral works with Norwegian inspiration has been recorded by Bo Holten and Aarhus Symphony Orchestra and will be released in 2002. The present recording of Rachmaninov’s complete works for orchestra and piano is the third recording by Aarhus Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Chief conductor James Loughran:

In 1999 a recording of Brahms’ serenades was released, followed in 2000 by a recording of Dvorák’s serenades.

Internationally acclaimed Scottish James Loughran has been the chiefconductor of Aarhus Symphony Orchestra since 1996, and a number of other distinguished conductors have held the post before him, including Ole Schmidt, Norman Del Mar, Jorma Panula and Eri Klas.

Aarhus Symphony Orchestra gives concerts at the annual Århus-based NUMUS Festival of contemporary music, and also the Royal Academies of Music in Copenhagen and Århus are among the cultural institutions with whom the orchestra co-operates on a regular basis. Co-operation with professional and amateur choirs, childrens’ choirs and youth choirs is another facet of the orchestra’s activities. A very close and fruitful co-operation with Den Jyske Opera (The Danish National Opera) dates back as far as 1947, and has offered great artistic challenges and victories, including the complete performances of Wagner’s Der Ring des Nibelungen (1987 and 1996) and performances of operas by Richard Strauss: Elektra, Salome and Die schweigsame Frau (1998 –2000). A cycle of Puccini operas launched in 2001 includes Tosca, Madama Butterfly and in 2003 La Bohème with Angela Georghiu and Roberto Alagna. The Aarhus Symphony Orchestra has also co-operated with the Royal Danish Ballet and the Leipzig Ballet.

Aarhus Symphony Orchestra has toured Norway, Sweden, Finland, Canada, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Russia, Spain, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom and Germany and has given concerts at the Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival and the Edinburgh Festival. In May 2003 the Aarhus Symphony Orchestra will embark on a concert tour to China.

Aarhus Symphony Orchestra

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Ole Schmidt, conductor; Anker Blyme, piano (Dacapo 8.224110)**

**Franz Schubert: Complete Symphonies and four ouvertures;
Hans Graf, conductor (Kontrapunkt 3231 8; 32321/22, 32319/20)**

Recordings: Frichsparken, Aarhus, May and October 2001

Recording Producer and Supervisor: Lennart Dehn

Balance Engineer, editing and mastering: Torbjörn Samuelsson

Executive producer: Jesper Buhl

Front cover and inlay: St Petersburg At the Exchange by Alexy Lieberov

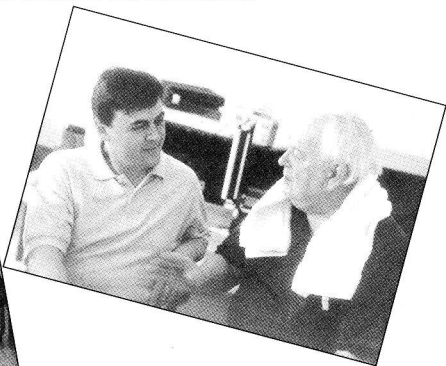
Photo p. 2 of Oleg Marshev © Danacord

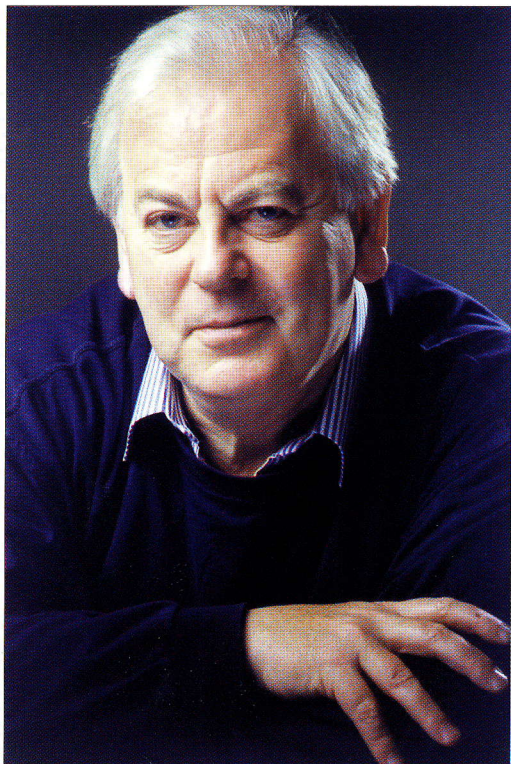
Photo p. 22 of Lennart Dehn, Oleg Marshev and James Loughran ©Torbjörn Samuelsson

Photo p. 23 of James Loughran © Eric Thorburn

Photo booklet back Aarhus Symphony Orchestra ©Anders Bach

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Balance Engineer,
Editing and Mastering:
Torbjörn Samuelsson

Cover painting:
Alexy Lieberov

Executive producer:
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Sergei Rachmaninov

(1873 - 1934)

Piano Concerto No 1
in F sharp minor, Op. 1 28:50

Piano Concerto No 2
in C minor, Op. 18 36:22

Piano Concerto No 3
in D minor, Op. 30 45:42

Piano Concerto No 4
in G minor, Op. 40 28:09

Paganini Rhapsody
in A minor, Op. 43 26:35

Oleg Marshev, piano
James Loughran, conductor
Aarhus Symphony Orchestra