

NORTH CAROLINA **SYMPHONY**

Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto No 2

FRI, MAR 7, 2025 | 8PMNOON

MEYMANDI CONCERT HALL, RALEIGH

North Carolina Symphony

Leonard Slatkin, *conductor*

Olga Kern, *piano*

PROGRAM

Cindy McTee (b. 1953)

Timepiece

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)

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

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

Olga Kern, *piano*

About the Artists



Leonard Slatkin, *conductor*

In 2005, Leonard Slatkin led the North Carolina Symphony in a special concert to celebrate the restoration of Memorial Hall in Chapel Hill.

Leonard Slatkin is Music Director Laureate of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra (DSO), Directeur Musical Honoraire of the Orchestre National de Lyon (ONL), Conductor Laureate of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra (SLSO), Principal Guest Conductor of the Orquesta Filarmónica de Gran Canaria, and Artistic Consultant to the Las Vegas Philharmonic. He is also a composer, author, and educator.

To celebrate his 80th birthday, he is returning to orchestras he led as Music Director, including the DSO, ONL, SLSO, and National Symphony Orchestra (Washington, DC). Additional 2024/25 highlights include the New York Philharmonic, Nashville Symphony, National Symphony Orchestra (Ireland), Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra, and Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra. His composition *Schubertiade: An Orchestral Fantasy* and his arrangement of Scarlatti keyboard sonatas for orchestral wind ensemble receive world premieres this season.

Slatkin has received six Grammy awards and 35 nominations. Naxos recently reissued his SLSO recordings featuring Gershwin, Rachmaninoff, and Prokofiev. Other recordings include *Slatkin Conducts Slatkin*—a compilation of pieces written by generations of his family.

A recipient of the National Medal of Arts, Slatkin also holds the rank of Chevalier in the French Legion of Honor. He received the ASCAP Deems Taylor Special Recognition Award for his debut book, *Conducting Business: Unveiling the Mystery Behind the Maestro* (2012), which was followed by *Leading Tones: Reflections on Music, Musicians, and the Music Industry* (2017) and *Classical Crossroads: The Path Forward for Music in the 21st Century* (2021). His two latest books, published in 2024, comprise essays that supplement the score-study process.

Born in Los Angeles to a distinguished musical family, Slatkin began his musical training on the violin and first studied conducting with his father, followed by Walter Susskind at Aspen and Jean Morel at Juilliard.



Olga Kern, *piano*

In 2002, Olga Kern performed Schumann's Piano Concerto in A Minor, Op. 54 with the North Carolina Symphony in Raleigh.

Pianist Olga Kern launched her U.S. career in 2001 at the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, winning a Gold Medal—the only woman in the last 50 years to do so. She has since performed with ensembles including the St. Louis, Baltimore, and Dallas symphony orchestras; National Symphony Orchestra (Washington, D.C.); Milan's Filarmonica della Scala; Tokyo's NHK Symphony Orchestra; São Paulo State Symphony Orchestra; Stuttgart Philharmonic; and Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. She has toured the United States with two orchestras from the United Kingdom, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, in 2018 and 2022.

In the 2024/25 season, Kern appeared at the Virginia Arts Festival and opened the San Diego Symphony's summer season. She recently joined conductor Leonard Slatkin for concerts with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and has also been featured as soloist with orchestras including The Florida Orchestra, Des Moines Symphony, and Johannesburg Philharmonic. Her recital schedule has included visits to Portugal, India, and Italy.

Engagements in the 2023/24 season included performances of Rachmaninoff's monumental four concertos and *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* with the Austin Symphony and with Virginia Symphony Orchestra, a nationally broadcast New Year's concert with the Czech Philharmonic, and tours of South Africa and Asia.

Kern has served as a jury chair of several competitions including the Olga Kern International Piano Competition, of which she is Artistic Director. A dedicated educator, she has been on the piano faculty of the Manhattan School of Music since 2017, and in 2019, she was appointed the Connie and Marc Jacobson Director of Chamber Music at the Virginia Arts Festival. She also established Aspiration, a foundation that provides financial assistance to musicians around the world.

Kern is a Steinway Artist and Spirio Steinway piano ambassador. Her discography includes works of Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff, Chopin, Brahms, and Shostakovich.

About the Music



Timepiece
CINDY MCTEE (b. 1953)

THE STORY

Timepiece was commissioned by the Dallas Symphony Orchestra for its 100th Anniversary Season and premiered in February 2000. Composer Cindy McTee states that she chose the title "...not only for its connection to the celebration...but also for the manner in which musical time shapes the work." Over her career, McTee has received commissions from ensembles including the National Symphony Orchestra and Houston Symphony. In addition to Guggenheim and Fulbright fellowships and awards from the National Endowment for the Arts and the American Academy of Arts and Letters, among others, her work has earned performances in Carnegie Hall on five separate occasions.

McTee has noted the influence of Carl Jung on *Timepiece*—in particular, the psychiatrist's depiction of the "tensions between the oppositions of conscious and unconscious, of thought and feeling, of mind and body, of objectivity and subjectivity. So too have the integration and reconciliation of opposing elements become important aspects of my work." The composer embodies these dualities in the piece through musical idioms that can be interpreted in contradictory ways, such as a repetitive rhythmic figure that can be viewed as time suspended or as time recurring. In her description, she writes:

"The piece begins slowly, 'before' time, in a womb-like, subjective, holding place. And then a clock-like pulse emerges, takes control, and provides the driving force behind a sustained, highly energized second section... Discipline yields to improvisation, and perhaps most importantly, humor takes its place comfortably alongside the grave and earnest."

LISTEN FOR

- A slow introduction which depicts the suspension of time, with sudden bursts of energy interrupting the stillness
- The extensive percussion section—particularly the wood block, which represents the ticking of a clock
- The steady rhythmic pulse of the fast section

INSTRUMENTATION

Piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, two clarinets, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, piano, strings



Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, Op. 18
SERGEI RACHMANINOFF (1873-1943)

THE STORY

In 1895, Sergei Rachmaninoff began his first substantial piece, his First Symphony. At the age of 22 he already displayed what many of his teachers considered to be infinite potential, both as a pianist and as a composer. He was ready to take his first steps into the spotlight of Russia's music scene. However, the premiere was a disaster and critics were merciless. Rachmaninoff fell into a deep depression and was unable to compose for three years.

Eventually he began daily visits to Dr. Nicolai Dahl, a neurologist who studied hypnosis. Rachmaninoff later recalled, "I heard the same hypnotic formula repeated day after day while I lay half asleep in an armchair in Dahl's study. 'You will begin to write your concerto. You will work with great facility... The concerto will be of an excellent quality.' It was always the same without interruption. Although it may sound incredible, this cure really helped me." Slowly Rachmaninoff overcame his paralysis, completing his Second Piano Concerto in 1900. He dedicated the piece "To Monsieur N. Dahl," and the premiere brought him tremendous success, signaling his arrival as one of Russia's foremost composers.

LISTEN FOR

- The ominous opening of the Concerto, with the soloist alone striking nine steadily growing chords, which spark the haunting main theme of the movement in the strings
- The entrance of the gorgeous main theme of the second movement, first begun by the flute and taken over by the clarinet with the soloist taking on the role of accompanist
- The final moments of the third movement—following a brief solo improvisatory moment, the entire orchestra bursts into a romantic melody, with the soloist providing the swirling accompaniment

INSTRUMENTATION

Solo piano; two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, strings



Symphony No. 6 in B Minor, Op. 74, "Pathétique"
PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840-1893)

THE STORY

Tchaikovsky provided no clues as to the story intended behind his Sixth Symphony and in fact wrote to his favorite nephew saying "Let them guess!" The French title given to the work is *pathétique*, but the composer's title in Russian would translate as "passionate" or "emotional." Though it is tempting to see the darkness of the work as a clear sign of Tchaikovsky's impending death, which came only a few days after he conducted the premiere, there is little evidence to suggest the composer intended to take his own life.

Though it received a frosty response from critics, Tchaikovsky had written to his nephew, "To me, it would be typical and unsurprising if this symphony were torn to pieces or little appreciated... But I would absolutely consider it to be the best, and in particular, the *most sincere* of all my creations. I love it as I have never loved any of my other musical offspring."

LISTEN FOR

- The juxtaposition of two themes in the first movement of the Symphony: the first extraordinarily dark with the bassoon playing in its lower register, the second—one of the most memorable melodies in classical music—introduced by the strings
- The disjointed five-beat time of the second movement waltz giving it a stumbling, uneven feel
- The virtuosity of the winds and strings in the opening of the third movement—scampering music which transforms into a triumphant march
- The quiet, hopeless finale to the fourth movement, a contrast to the dramatic conclusions of previous Tchaikovsky symphonies

INSTRUMENTATION

Piccolo, three flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, strings

The Musicians of the North Carolina Symphony

Carlos Miguel Prieto,
Music Director
*The Maxine and
Benjamin Swalin
Chair*

Grant Llewellyn,
Music Director Laureate

Sophie Sze-Ki Mok,
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To Be Filled, Concertmaster *The
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Meymandi and Family Chair*

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Karen Strittmatter Galvin, Assistant
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Pablo Sánchez Pazos
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*The North Carolina Symphony
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The Nancy Finch Wallace Chair

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The Blanche Martin Shaw Chair

David Kilbride,
Assistant Principal

Qi Cao

Janet Gayer Hall

Chris Jusell

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Viola

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Peng Li, Assistant Principal,
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Yewon Ahn**
Anonymously Endowed

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Lisa Howard Shaughnessy
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Samuel Sykes*

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Rajesh Prasad,
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*The Albert and Susan Jenkins
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Stephanie Wilson,
Principal Orchestra Librarian
*The Mary Colvert and Banks C.
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Taylor Troyer,
Assistant Orchestra Librarian

*Acting position

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