

Program Notes

by April L. Racana

Wed. March 7 The 116th Tokyo Opera City Subscription Concert

Fri. March 9 The 904th Suntory Subscription Concert

Sun. March 11 The 905th Orchard Hall Subscription Concert

Friedrich Gulda (1930-2000)

Concerto for Myself (Sonata concertante for Piano and Orchestra)

Born in Vienna, Austria, Friederich Gulda learned to play the piano from the age of seven, enrolling in the Vienna Music Academy in 1942 where he continued his piano studies and began taking music theory courses. In 1946 he won first prize at the International Competition in Geneva and began touring in concerts worldwide. He became especially renowned for his performances of Beethoven works, along with J.S. Bach, Mozart, Schubert, Chopin, Debussy and Ravel, being regarded as one of the most out-standing pianists of the 20th century.

From the 1950's his interest in jazz diverted his attention, when he began exploring improvisation and composition, writing some songs and instrumental pieces that would combine the jazz and classical realms. His concerts also included works from both genres. In 1951, following a performance with the Chicago Symphony, Gulda sat in at a local club with Dizzy Gillespie trading improvisations. Over the ensuing years, the pianist would perform at various jazz festivals, including Birdland in New York City and at the Newport Jazz Festival. Eventually he would form his own jazz ensemble called the Eurojazz Orchestra which would perform both classical and jazz pieces. And in 1966 he even put together a modern jazz competition in Vienna.

In 1970, Gulda was recognized and awarded the Vienna Academy's Beethoven Ring, but ultimately declined the award to express his concerns with what he considered too strict of an educational system. This criticism of the system and "dedication to 'anti-bourgeois' music" was considered by him to be his destiny, where it is explained on his official website that "he attempted to express his conviction artistically, [and] sometimes eccentrically (to swim against, rather than with, the tide)."

In 1982 Gulda's work with jazz pianist Chic Corea began a long-running professional relationship between the two. They traded improvisations mixing jazz and classical idioms on his album "The Meeting" (1982) on several tracks including 'Someday My Prince Will Come' and the Miles Davis tune 'Put Your Little Foot Out', as well as Brahms' *Wiegenlied*.

In 1988, Gulda's *Concerto for Myself* would be his ultimate expression of his 'anti-bourgeois' conviction and in the liner notes to the live recording that was released he went on to explain:

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“My work has always been much better received by the general public than by the ‘experts in the field,’ the trade press, the critics. I have never had cause to complain of a lack of appreciation of my compositions on the part of the audience... The typically stiff and inhibited contemporary reaction to ‘classical’ music is swept aside, the people applaud unrestrainedly between movements of a cyclical work or at certain points they often clap naively in the middle of the music itself. In a word, whenever any normal audience applauds, namely, when it enjoys something...or if the audience balks, mistaking the cheerfulness and humor of my music for common farce and cynical joking, and reacts accordingly, then the blame rests with the devastating influence of the self-proclaimed reigning critical elite and their henchmen, so to speak, the petty nobility, the critics who write for the daily press...

...What if the audience refuses to agree that the only signs of genuine ‘serious music’ are a studied spasm on stage and frowns in the orchestra seats, followed by column after column of pseudo intellectual drivel two days later in the newspaper? What if the people see [the] ‘avant garde’ for what it really is, namely, a sad, deplorable ‘arriere garde’, which has simply slept through the most significant musical developments of this century and continues to slumber on?

What if the audience wakes up and finally refuses to let you take the real musical raptures, which have been long buried, but which have always existed: a physically palpable rhythm, a melody which moves the heart, improvisational spontaneity, a euphonic harmony, a coalescence through the shared experience of a dancingly-musical celebration – what if the people finally refuse to let you take these eternal, timeless pleasures of music and withhold them, ban them, spoil them and slander them as mere jokes – what then, gentlemen?”

Subtitled as a “Sonata concertante for Piano and Orchestra” it was actually hailed by some critics as a “declaration of love to classical music”, but one reviewer rightly remarked that the elements from the jazz genre are just as prominent, not least of which is the use of a drum-set and electric bass on stage with the orchestral ensemble. The opening movement (*Allegro*) is also subtitled as “The New in View/Then Old Is New”. Tribute to the ‘old’ can be heard in certain melodic themes reminiscent of the traditions of Mozart or Beethoven, mixed with the ‘new’ jazz-influenced improvisational ‘licks’. The sonata form in this case means the first section, the exposition, is repeated exactly as originally stated, which is not always the case in a concerto, where the orchestral version of the exposition might be performed by the soloist in a slightly different variation.

The second movement, (*Aria con variazioni. Adagio*) also indicates a subtitle “Lament for U” and features an oboe solo at various point in this slower section. The third movement is marked as a “Free Cadenza”, and incorporates many of the ‘avant-garde’ techniques of

the more modern ‘classical’ world, including the use of cluster chords played alternately by either his fist or forearm, as well as special effects created by manipulating the inner workings of the piano directly. The closing movement (*Rondo Finale*) is subtitled “For U And U/And You And You/All Of Me/For All Of You”. It opens with the full orchestral ensemble in an upbeat closing fanfare, which alternates with the piano and its rhythm section to bring in a taste of a Latin-American samba style to the mix closing the work in a rousing festival atmosphere.

Considered eccentric by many, Gulda wrote in a letter to the German critic Franz Endler, “I am the most important creative Viennese musician of the second half of our century. This is because I have composed valid works that lead our music out of the blind alley of twelve-tonery and of other, unworldly, anti-musical and anti-human practitioners and give it back to the relaxed affection and love of the public.” Some have questioned the fact that his limited compositional output of three concertos in the 1980’s would qualify for the former, but others admire him for his work blending the various genres in an effort to forge a new pathway for music in the future.

Work composed: 1988 **World premiere:** March 9th, 1988, Munich

Instrumentation: flute, 2 oboes(optionally doubling on oboe d’amore), 2 bassoons, 2 horns in F, 3 trumpets, 2 trombones, timpani, electric bass, drums, strings, solo piano

Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943)

Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Op. 27

Although Rachmaninov is well known as a successful composer, conductor and performer, it seemed he felt he could only do his best when concentrating on one role at a time. In fact, it was during a composing drought after an unsuccessful performance of his First Symphony that he was given the opportunity to focus on his conducting, for which he was received warmly. It was in this same period, when he was battling his own demons regarding his compositional abilities that he went several years with virtually no works forthcoming.

Following his first attempt at writing in the symphonic genre, Rachmaninov’s *Symphony No. 1* was received with such strong criticism that it put the composer off from composing any works at all for several years. In fact, it took the assistance of a specialist, Dr. Nikolay Dahl, and post-hypnotic suggestion for the composer to regain enough self-confidence to try his hand at composing again. His *Piano Concerto No. 2* (1901) was his first attempt at writing again and was a great success, even receiving the Glinka Award in 1904.

However, it would be another two years before the composer would begin to pen his Second Symphony. In 1906, Rachmaninov made the decision to relocate with his family

to Dresden to concentrate his efforts on composing. It was there that he began to write his next symphony. In the summers he would return to the family estate, Ivanovka, and continue work throughout most of 1907. He was not satisfied with the results as he stated in response to inquiries about his latest work:

“...I really did finish a symphony, but to this must be added the phrase ‘in rough draft.’ I have not announced it to the world because I want first to complete it in final form. While I was planning the orchestration, the work became terribly boring and repulsive to me... I can tell you... that I am displeased with the piece.”

Whether his disappointment in the work was due to lingering self-doubts or simply his own critical ear, is difficult to know. But perhaps due to his former Moscow Conservatory teacher, Alexander Ziloti, taking the proverbial bull by the horn and deciding to have the composer premiere this new work (without his initial consent) in St. Petersburg, Rachmaninov persevered and completed the work, directing the premiere on February 9, 1908. This and subsequent performances in Moscow and Warsaw were received warmly and reaffirmed the composer’s abilities to create exceptional orchestral works, even receiving another Glinka Award later that year.

The four movements follow traditional Romantic Russian symphonic form with the *Scherzo* following the first movement and the lyrical slow movement (*Adagio*) preceding the final movement. The work takes the listener through a wide range of dramatic moods, from the dark, mysterious opening motive in the low strings that winds its way through calming and even soaring melodic lines. Even the ancient chant for the dead, the *Dies irae*, that Rachmaninov was to use in a number of his works, can be heard initially in the brass chorale at the close of the *Scherzo* movement, and is referred to in subsequent movements.

Eventually, Rachmaninov would work with conductor Nikolai Sokolov to make significant cuts to the work, with the idea that it was otherwise too lengthy for most conductors to program. These cuts eliminated nearly one third of the entire work, the revised version being performed by conductors for many years. But eventually the full ‘uncut’ version was brought back into favor and is now more frequently performed, as will be presented by the TPO for this concert series.

Work composed: 1906-1907 **World premiere:** 1908, Petersburg

Instrumentation: 3 flutes (3rd doubling on piccolo), 3 oboes (3rd doubling on English horn), 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, cymbals, glockenspiel), strings

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