

Sunday, July 10, 2:30pm

The George W. and Florence N. Adams Concert

BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**ANDRIS NELSONS** conducting**RACHMANINOFF***Vocalise***Helen GRIME****Trumpet Concerto, *night-sky-blue* (2022)**

(American premiere; co-commissioned by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Andris Nelsons, Music Director, through the generous support of the New Works Fund established by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency)

HÅKAN HARDENBERGER, trumpet

{Intermission}

RACHMANINOFF**Symphony No. 3 in A minor, Opus 44**

Lento—Allegro moderato

Adagio ma non troppo—Allegro vivace—Tempo come prima

Allegro

Notes on the program**Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)***Vocalise*, Opus 34, No. 14

Composition and premiere: Rachmaninoff wrote his *Vocalise*, Op. 34, No. 14 in 1915 (the draft is dated 1 April) for soprano with piano accompaniment, but transcribed the song for soprano and orchestra for its public premiere in January 1916. Countless transcriptions by others followed. The composer worked closely with the soprano Antonina Nezhdanova while finishing the song and dedicated it to her. The present version is for orchestra alone.

Though he tired of performing his equally popular C-sharp minor Prelude, Rachmaninoff had a soft spot for the famous *Vocalise*, especially in the orchestral rendition of this evening's performance. In 1915, vocalises (pieces for voice without words) were primarily written as exercises or warm-ups, yet Rachmaninoff—inspired by soprano Antonina Nezhdanova with whom the composer worked closely toward the end of the compositional process—crafted a stunning vocalise for the concert hall, a lamentation that captures the longing, sorrow, and nostalgia at the twilight of Silver Age Russia. With Nezhdanova, Rachmaninoff revised parts, added expressive descriptions, marked breaths, and even changed the key from E-flat minor to C-sharp minor. When the piece was complete (inscribed “21 September 1915, Moscow”) he rewarded her efforts with a dedication.

The *Vocalise* unfolds in three parts, beginning with a lyric meditation on the pitches of the *Dies irae* that subtly balances melodic repetition with developing variation in a gentle atmosphere of rhythmic freedom. The second section elaborates the first, and the third brings the piece to a peaceful close.

STEVEN LEDBETTER

Helen Grime (b. 1981)**Trumpet Concerto, *night-sky-blue* (2022)**

Composition and premiere: Helen Grime wrote her Trumpet Concerto at the request of trumpeter Håkan Hardenberger. It was commissioned by the Koussevitzky Foundation, Library of Congress, the London Symphony Orchestra, and the Boston Symphony Orchestra, with the generous support of the New Works Fund established by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency. The score is dedicated “to the memory of Serge and Natalie Koussevitzky.” The concerto was premiered by soloist

Håkan Hardenberger with the London Symphony Orchestra led by François-Xavier Roth at the Barbican, London, on April 3, 2022. This afternoon's performance is the American premiere.

Writing for a trumpet player like Håkan, who has brought to life so many remarkable pieces of music over his career, was a huge inspiration for me. He is a performer whose technique is second to none, which gave me an enormous sense of freedom as a composer. Håkan already knows my music as a conductor, having conducted the Swedish premiere of my Percussion Concerto with the Swedish Chamber Orchestra and Colin Currie. Writing the Trumpet Concerto over the course of the pandemic, the uncertainty and shifting reality and circumstances of the past year played a part in suggesting the work's structure, which is full of transformation, cast in a single movement formed of multiple, shifting and connected sections and textures.

—Helen Grime

Helen Grime was born in York, England, but raised in Ellon, Scotland, near Aberdeen. As a child she attended music schools in Edinburgh, where she was enrolled in a nurturing, broad-based music program. Grime learned piano and oboe and began experimenting with improvisation and composing. In school she was encouraged to take lessons in composition; impressively, the prominent English composer Sally Beamish was one of her early teachers. She studied oboe and composition at the Royal College of Music, where her composition teachers were Julian Anderson and Edwin Roxburgh.

In 2008 Grime was a Composition Fellow of the Tanglewood Music Center; while here her chamber work *Into the Faded Air* was performed by TMC Fellows. That summer the TMC celebrated the centennial of American composer Elliott Carter, which featured performances led by Oliver Knussen, a frequent mentoring presence at Tanglewood. Through him the Aldeburgh Festival commissioned Grime's *A Cold Spring*, which he premiered at there in 2009. He led her *Everyone Sang* at Aldeburgh in 2011 and at Tanglewood in August 2012; later that month he conducted the BBC Symphony Orchestra in the world premiere of her brief *Night Songs* at the BBC Proms.

As composer-in-association with the Hallé Orchestra Grime wrote *Near Midnight* and her Double Concerto for clarinet, trumpet, and orchestra; for her composer-in-residence tenure at London's Wigmore Hall she wrote a piano concerto for her husband, pianist and composer Huw Watkins. Other concertos include those for violinist Malin Broman and the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra and for percussionist Colin Currie, premiered by the London Symphony Orchestra under Marin Alsop's direction in 2019. Sir Simon Rattle chose Grime as one of several composers to write pieces for his first season as music director of the London Symphony Orchestra in 2017, resulting in a two-part piece: the brief *Fanfares*, premiered at the LSO's opening concert of the 2017-18 season, and the three-movement *Woven Space* (which incorporates *Fanfares*), premiered in April 2018. The first performance having been delayed for a year due to the pandemic, her *Meditations on Joy*, co-commissioned by the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the BBC, was premiered in Berlin in March 2021.

Grime's Clarinet Concerto was commissioned by the Tanglewood Music Center and was premiered during the Festival of Contemporary Music in 2009. Her Ten Miniatures for solo piano was performed here in 2010; the orchestral *Everyone Sang* and the chamber work *Seven Pierrot Miniatures* were played in 2012, and her *Embrace* for clarinet and trumpet, commissioned for the 75th anniversary of the Tanglewood Music Center, was premiered in 2015, during which summer she also served on the TMC faculty. She has also taught at the Royal Holloway, University of London, and is now a professor of composition at London's Royal Academy of Music.

Grime's *Limina* was commissioned by the Boston Symphony Orchestra for the Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra, which premiered it under Killian Farrell's direction in July 2019. Giancarlo Guerrero led BSO performances of *Limina* at Symphony Hall in February 2020.

Grime's musical voice thrives on the individual precision and virtuosity of the musicians who play it, though that virtuosity is often transformed into washes of color and texture in which distinct voices are subsumed. In her concertos, especially, the dichotomy between the blended ensemble musical environment and singular voices—the soloist as well as unique voices within the ensemble—creates the dramatic narrative. In *night-sky-blue* contrast and conflict coexist with Grime's pursuit of the pure beauty of sound via timbre, harmony, and melody. The character of the soloist's line is maintained through an audible, recurring motif that evolves from lyricism to virtuosic display, in turn effecting the constant rebuilding of the orchestra's sonic world. Scherzo-like passages emerge from adagios, tempos are layered and dovetailed, sparkling high passages blend with deep bass. "It's very much a nocturnal kind

of piece,” Grime says of her Trumpet Concerto *night-sky-blue*, which was in part inspired by the idea of a garden at night and is one of several night-oriented works by the composer. “I was thinking of transformation, and things being unsettled, and just when you think you’re somewhere, you’re not quite where you thought you were; you move into something else. This sense of repetition, but the repetition never being quite the same.”

ROBERT KIRZINGER

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) **Symphony No. 3 in A minor, Opus 44**

Composition and premiere: Rachmaninoff began work on his Third Symphony in May 1935, completing two-thirds of it that summer and drafting the rest. He finished the score on June 29, 1936. Leopold Stokowski led the Philadelphia Orchestra in the world premiere later that year, on November 6, 1936. Lorin Maazel led the first Tanglewood performance with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra on August 12, 1994; the BSO’s first Tanglewood performance, on August 5, 2007, was led by Ludovic Morlot, and Hans Graf led the BSO’s most recent Tanglewood performances in August 2017.

Rachmaninoff’s three symphonies span most of his working life. The First was composed in 1895 and the Third came forty years later, and though all three are filled with the richly pensive, romantic melody and sonorous orchestral colors that audiences admire in his piano concertos, the First and the Third remain unfamiliar. However strongly the composer’s basic personality is imprinted in the score of the Third, some listeners felt that he had scanted their desire for lushly orchestrated melody and gone “modern.” Others charged that it belonged to the turn of the century and was forty years out of date. Regardless, the symphony failed to capture the hearts of audiences instantly (as his Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini had done two years previously) and triggered some surprisingly negative reviews.

Rachmaninoff was deeply disappointed—he composed nothing for the next seven years. Yet he hoped for its future success: “It has been heard once in every capital in the musical world; it has been condemned in them all. But it’s quite possible that in fifty years’ time it will be rediscovered like Schumann’s Violin Concerto and become a sensational success.”

The Third Symphony, one of the small number of works to be composed during Rachmaninoff’s self-imposed exile from Russia after 1917, is indeed one of his strongest and most original compositions, revealing both his sure touch with orchestral color as well as a newfound compactness and willingness to forgo the sometimes rambling (however gorgeous!) structural deviations found in the earlier works.

This is the only Rachmaninoff symphony in three movements; he chose to adopt a procedure that he had already used successfully in his concertos, making a middle movement serve as a combination of slow movement and scherzo. It features two characteristic elements of Rachmaninoff’s work that reflect the composer’s basic fatalism—a “motto” theme at the outset that recurs in different guises throughout and the eventual appearance of the “Dies irae” melody from the plainsong Mass for the Dead.

Rachmaninoff originally scored the opening motto conventionally for horns and trumpets, but he reconsidered, transforming it into a tentative, mysterious motive, quietly intoned by muted solo cello, horns, and clarinets. It is a modal stepwise theme in three notes that winds and turns back on itself and it bears a family resemblance to the “Dies irae” theme that will emerge in the finale.

Having presented this motto just once, Rachmaninoff launches into the main section of the sonata form movement. The principal theme, first heard in the woodwinds, is sweetly mournful while the second, presented warmly by the cellos, is one of those richly romantic Rachmaninoff melodies that win all hearts at once. Both are developed compactly with rhythmic energy propelled by racing triplet figures, and while the development makes no use of the second theme, it is lavishly extended in new colors in the recapitulation. Hushed staccato strings remind us of the motto as the movement closes.

The middle movement, with its colorful scoring and theatrical feel, revises the motto theme and arouses expectation that is discharged in the bold and vigorous finale, where the “Dies irae” theme is grows more and more prominent. Following the dark hints which that melody always seems to bring with it, Rachmaninoff works up to a vivid and brilliant close, designed to show off the virtuosity of the modern symphony orchestra with tremendous éclat.

STEVEN LEDBETTER