

## The Concerto out of Depression



### Tragic Backstory

In Rachmaninov's first ever symphony, everything went terribly. Before the official performance in front of an audience, many musicians criticized the symphony, even after all the changes Rachmaninov made. Many great musicians, such as Tchaikovsky, have praised Rachmaninov, but even with his past awards and honors, the symphony turned out horrendous.

The audience was angry due to the absolute mess and cacophony of terrible sound due to the conductor being drunk and completely unable to keep the instruments together. Not many knew about the severity of the consequences, but Rachmaninov was so shocked that he could not compose anything for three years, eventually leading to one of the worst parts of his career: depression.

### Who the concerto was dedicated to

Rachmaninov's family was extremely concerned for him, and this led to Rachmaninov even going to a hypnotist. Dr. Nicolai Dahl, who also has some musical experience, motivated Rachmaninov slowly but surely over the course of a few months. Eventually, Rachmaninov dedicated the entire concerto to him, which makes him possibly the only hypnotist to have such a grand concerto dedicated to him.

## **First Movement**

The entire concerto begins with large, dark chords and sounds almost like church bells, which were very common in Russia at the time. Large hands are almost a necessity for this piece due to its grandness and extremely fast runs. After the large chords, the melody is played by the violins as the piano runs through passages. Finally, it crescendos quickly at the end and finishes loudly.

## **Second Movement**

The entire orchestra, especially the violins, begins as the soloist enters shortly thereafter. However, instead of being dark, the second movement is sweet and romantic as the orchestra carries the main melody. Interestingly, the piano adds details instead of being the main part of this movement.

## **Third Movement**

Technically difficult yet beautiful, the third movement is similar to the first in that it is dark but grand. The whole movement seems to build up until the finale, as the runs take them there. Specifically, in this concerto, there is much rise and fall until the last chord. Conversely, it is quite different from the second movement, as instead of the piano accompanying the orchestra's melody, the orchestra is completely supporting the piano. Last but certainly not least, it all ends with a grand coda where the orchestra and piano intertwine as the music comes to a close.

## **Legacy of the Concerto**

Probably Rachmaninov's greatest and most famous concerto, piano concerto no. 2, has such a dark yet rewarding backstory. In the first ever showing of the piece, Rachmaninov himself was the soloist, and the entire audience loved the piece. However, just like any other Rachmaninov piece, great technique and amazing musicality are needed to play the concerto well. To this day, this grandiose, magnificent piece is performed worldwide.

## **Sources:**

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Piano-Concerto-No-2-Rachmaninoff>

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<https://www.classicfm.com/composers/rachmaninov/guides/rachmaninov-facts/irina-4/>