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Tell your friends how much fun you (will have) had with these recitals from Ilya Yakushev. Tell ‘em they’ve just got to come to the next one. (Ilya Rashkovskiy on January 19, 21, and 22.) Maybe even urge them to subscribe to the rest of the season. We will treat them very well.

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Fond regards,

Bill Crane
Executive Director

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Editor’s note – When I asked Ilya for his “official” biography he also sent this charming note, which I thought was the best part of what we might learn about him. I trust he won’t mind our sharing it with you:

As far as being just a “normal” human being - I enjoy building stuff…. This is not a “normal” kind of hobby for a pianist, but that is what I really enjoy doing while being away from piano. I did a lot of work on my house as it was being built and continue to enjoy working on our property and the house if anything needs to be renovated/updated. Anything that I can do with my own hands (that includes chopping firewood!) gives me a great pleasure. Also, like every little kid, I love my cars and I love working on them . . . . Those are my main passions after my family and piano. I hope you don’t get disappointed in me after hearing this.

Russian pianist Ilya Yakushev, with many awards and honors to his credit, continues to astound and mesmerize audiences at major venues on three continents. In the 2021-22 season, Ilya Yakushev performed as piano soloist with Wisconsin Philharmonic, La Crosse Symphony, Hunterdon Symphony and St. Petersburg Philharmonic in addition to over 30 recitals in North America. Highlights of Yakushev’s 2022-23 season include appearances with the Meridian Symphony, San Luis Obispo Symphony, St. Petersburg Philharmonic, Dubuque Symphony, Las Vegas Philharmonic, and Fort Wayne Philharmonic. He will also play recitals in the US and Russia.

In February 2014, British label Nimbus Records published his “Prokofiev Sonatas Vol. 1” CD. American Record Guide wrote “Yakushev is one of the very best young pianists before the public today, and it doesn’t seem to matter what repertoire he plays – it is all of the highest caliber”. Volume 2 was published in January 2017, as well as an all-Russian repertoire CD in September 2017.

In past seasons, he has performed in various prestigious venues worldwide, including Glinka Philharmonic Hall (St. Petersburg), Victoria Hall (Singapore), Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall (New York), Davies Symphony Hall (San Francisco), and Sejong Performing Arts Center (Seoul, Korea). His performances with orchestra include those with the Mariinsky Theatre Orchestra, St. Petersburg Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, BBC Concert Orchestra, Boston Pops, Rochester Philharmonic, Utah Symphony, and many others.

Winner of the 2005 World Piano Competition which took place in Cincinnati, Ohio, Mr. Yakushev received his first award at age 12 as a prizewinner of the Young Artists Concerto Competition in his native St. Petersburg. In 1997, he received the Mayor of St. Petersburg’s Young Talents award, and in both 1997 and 1998, he won First Prize at the Donostia Hiria International Piano Competition in San Sebastian, Spain. In 1998, he received a national honor, The Award for Excellence in Performance, presented to him by the Minister of Culture of the Russian Federation in Moscow. Most recently, Mr. Yakushev became a recipient of the prestigious Gawon International Music Society’s Award in Seoul, Korea.

Mr. Yakushev attended the Rimsky-Korsakov College of Music in his native St. Petersburg, Russia, and subsequently came to New York City to attend Mannes College of Music where he studied with legendary pianist Vladimir Feltsman.
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FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN (1732-1809)
Sonata in D Major, Hob. XVI:37
   Allegro con brio
   Largo e sostenuto
   Finale: Presto ma non troppo

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756-1791)
Adagio in B minor, K. 540 (1788)

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF (1873-1943)
Three Preludes
   Op. 23, No. 5 in G Minor (1901)
   Op. 32, No. 12 in G-sharp Minor (1910)
   Op. 3, No. 2 in C-sharp Minor (1892)

GEORGE GERSHWIN (1898-1937)
Three Preludes
   Allegro ben ritmato e deciso
   Andante con moto e poco rubato
   Allegro ben ritmato e deciso

ALEXANDER SCRIBANI (1871-1915)
Two Pieces for the Left Hand, op. 9 (1894)
   Prelude in C-sharp Minor, Andante
   Nocturne in D-flat Major, Andante

SERGEI PROKOFIEV (1891-1953)
Sonata No. 7 in B-flat Major, op. 83 (“Stalingrad” 1942)
   Allegro inquieto
   Andante caloroso
   Precipitato

FRANZ LISZT (1811-1886)
Années de Pèlerinage (1835-46)
   6. Vallée d’Obermann
   Widmung (“Dedication,” 1849)
      Transcribed from the song by Robert Schumann

GEORGE GERSHWIN (1810-1849)
   Rhapsody in Blue (1924)
Any worthwhile musical performance — recital or concert — must have variety in it, of course, but, too, it must have a coherence among its several parts and therein explore many corners of human emotion and experience. This seems especially true of the solo piano recital because of its inherently intimate nature. (This is, after all, one artist telling all of us his or her most profound feelings and strivings to reveal the profundity of chosen masterpieces of composed music.) Happily, in this weekend’s recitals by the wonderful young Russian pianist Ilya Yakushev, we will be treated to a splendid variety with much that will be familiar and just a touch of adventure.

**SATURDAY / OCT 8**

**HAYDN**  
**Sonata in D Major**

“I was cut off from the world. There was no one to confuse or torment me, and I was forced to become original.”

— Franz Josef Haydn

When looking over the vast range of music titled “piano sonatas,” it is useful to recall that prior to Beethoven, the great body of pieces written in the 18th century for that genre was intended mainly as instructional material for piano students, rather than being primarily for public performance and display of virtuoso technique. Of course, Domenico Scarlatti wrote nearly 600 sonatas that serve all those purposes (and others for his patron, such as being soporifics), and there are other like examples. But, a moment in music history worth noting is Haydn’s composition of this D Major sonata specifically for a pair of talented sisters, Franziska and Maria Katherina von Auenbrugger.

They played often in aristocratic salons and there gained admiration from Haydn and even Mozart’s father, Leopold. It is easy to see why this sonata has remained popular. The extra-happy main theme of the opening movement, to my ears, invokes the spirit of a Scarlatti sonata, but works it through everything required in Classical sonata style. The second movement, in significant contrast, is recognizable as a sarabande, one of those “required” movements in a Baroque suite, and even shares that period’s characteristic dotted rhythms and imitative counterpoint, to poignant effect. Without a break, it leads right into the final movement, a rondo, marked “innocently,” built on a fine little tune that may stick with a listener today well beyond just this performance. The sonata is one of a set of six published by the Viennese firm of Artaria in 1780.

**MOZART**  
**Adagio in B minor**

“. . . one of the most perfect, most deeply felt, and most despairing of all his works.”

— Mozart scholar Alfred Einstein

Mozart was quite a busy fellow in 1788 (but, then again, he was busy all the time, it seems), a year in which he wrote the D Major piano concerto, “Coronation,” K. 537, and the last of several arias for his singer sister-in-law, Aloysia Weber, three late symphonies and several piano trios, while he most certainly must have been thinking a lot about the Vienna premiere of his opera Don Giovanni in May of that year. Today’s Adagio is from this busy time and is, interestingly, almost unique in his catalogue in being a stand-alone movement, unconnected to other movements, as in a sonata, for example.

Besides being busy, Mozart was also in the circumstance of deteriorating finances. Vienna was at war with the Turks and the Viennese, hence, were less interested in music. There were far fewer commissions and concerts. Thus, it must be noted that no specific events appear to have prompted the composition of this beautiful slow movement, with its elegant simplicity.

The “architecture” of the Adagio is the quite normal binary form (two halves, each repeated), the second half containing the development and recapitulation of the theme, shown in the exposition in the first half, the two halves quite balanced in length. A short coda (a p.s. or an add-on), with a sudden switch to a major key, via some very florid writing, lends a serenely cheery ending.

The proceedings before that happy ending are dramatic in several ways. From the very beginning, in which the melody outlines the tonic chord of the key of the whole piece, the first chord to harmonize the melody is a “wrong” one, a diminished seventh, something that would have been surprising to Mozart’s contemporaries’ ears. The key of B minor is unusual, too, as is the generous use of chromaticism throughout. Jagged, instrumentally
conceived melodies (not like the operatic-style melodies often found in the piano sonatas) and emotionally expressive devices normal in the Classical era, such as pleading appoggiaturas, dramatic silences, and vivid contrasts of piano and forte, add to the drama. Uncharacteristically, compared to many of his other keyboard compositions, the B minor Adagio is marked in great detail as to dynamics, accents, and the like. It is so good for pianists to have those marks when striving for full expressiveness.

RACHMANINOFF
Three Preludes

“Musically speaking, the cycle of Preludes is a treasure trove of tangible, breathing atmosphere, of arresting narratives and emotional snapshots, endlessly varied.”

— Pianist Boris Giltburg

A fun note about the Rachmaninoff that we are to hear in today’s recital is the fact that Rachmaninoff himself played these Preludes and other of his own compositions in recital in Portland in 1921 at the Marquam Grand Opera House, which was located on SW Morrison Street, between 6th Avenue and Broadway, facing what is now Pioneer Courthouse Square. At that recital, as was true everywhere he played, the crowd begged for the “It Prelude,” so called by Rachmaninoff, because audiences everywhere would chant “Play it! Play it!” so great was the popularity of the C-sharp Prelude (the “Bells of Moscow”), the third of the three to be heard today.

In composing his Preludes, Rachmaninoff joined many others, among them Bach, Chopin, Scriabin, Kabalevsky, and Shostakovich, to name a few, in crafting wonderful pieces in all the major and minor keys, 24 altogether, useful both pedagogically and for concert performance. They are noble smaller works among his large catalogue of works for solo piano and piano with orchestra. When he died in Beverly Hills in 1934, he was deservedly exceptionally famous both as a pianist and as a composer. It must be noted that almost all of the music for which he is best known was composed before the Russian revolution that forced him and his family to go into exile in December of 1917. His unparalleled concert career, traveling all over the United States and elsewhere, was much due to financial necessity, as he had to support his family.

In these Preludes, definitely not musical miniatures, we can note a scale and an ambition along the lines of Chopin’s Études; that is, demanding of technique and equally rewarding musically. In them, we can hear his typical preference for minor modalities, aching nostalgia, quite athletic pianism at times, and his predilection for bell sounds. (Think of the opening of the second piano concerto!) As we’ve come to expect from him, here is an abundance of melody full of sighs and yearning, colored by plaintive countermelodies. I think it is fair to call him the last of the Romantics. Ironically, he did not benefit much financially from his most famous composition, that C-sharp Minor Prelude, because at the time Russia was not party to the 1886 Berne Convention concerning the payment of royalties, so that he only received about 40 rubles as a publishing fee, equivalent to about two months’ wages of a factory worker.

GESHWIN
Three Preludes

“I frequently hear music in the very heart of noise.”

— George Gershwin

By the time he wrote his Three Preludes in 1926, George Gershwin was pretty much an international sensation because of his thrilling Rhapsody in Blue, written just two years earlier and, apparently instantly gaining an enthusiastic crowd of fans everywhere. (You have to come to tomorrow’s recital to hear Ilya play the Rhapsody. You’ll be glad you did!) Interestingly, they are just about the whole of the piano music that Gershwin published in his lifetime. In 1925, he said in an article for Vanity Fair that he was at work on a set of 24 preludes, like so many composers, as noted above. But, the whole set seems never to have been achieved.

The three that we do have in this set are brim-full of character. Who couldn’t love the jazzy rhythms, evocative harmonies, and left-hand striding all over the lower side of the keyboard? What about that melancholy and ambiguity in the second one, “til it is interrupted by an ample second melody in the middle? The whirlwind of the third Prelude is just a little hallelujah all by itself.

The songwriter Kay Swift, long a friend of Gershwin’s, said of the first of the set, “George composed the first prelude in one sitting… It was not just an improvisation; he already had it worked out in his head. The other two came a little bit later. . . . I don’t know why he published only three; there were others. But he loved to play the three preludes and included them whenever he could!” Jascha Heifetz transcribed the Three Preludes for violin and piano in 1942. Both the originals and the transcriptions figure largely in the repertoires of their respective instruments.

SCRIABIN
Two Pieces

“Scriabin isn’t the sort of composer whom you’d regard as your daily bread, but is a heavy liqueur on which you can get drunk periodically, a poetical drug, a crystal that’s easily broken.”

— Sviatoslav Richter

There is a bit of an “ouch” to the tale behind the Scriabin’s two pieces in Opus 9. Like all too many over-worked pianists, he had seriously injured his right hand when practicing Liszt’s Réminiscences de Don Juan and Balakirev’s Islamey. In fact, he had reason to believe that the injury might permanently derail his right hand, so that we might hear this Prelude and Nocturne as a deponent reflection of his circumstance. Happily, he did recover and in later works marked his composing with vigorous left-hand technique.

If one, by chance, were to hear these pieces with eyes closed, their voluptuous beauty, wrapped in growing sensuousness and rhythmic freedom, together with daring harmonies, would so

1802
First leopard exhibited in the United States, Boston (admission 25 cents)

1803
Chief Justice John Marshall declares that any act of the U.S. Congress that conflicts with the Constitution is void

1803
Arrival of the first horses in Hawaii
quickly engage the listener with their charms. With eyes open, any listener, even those who know the pieces well, would be dumbfounded by the technical demands of such complex music being created with just one hand.

PPI’s audiences have heard a good bit of Scriabin in the last couple of years and know, perhaps, from related program notes that Scriabin was deeply interested in spiritual and other-worldly things, to put it mildly. In much of his later works, for me, it becomes challenging to discern everything that is going on, not only in musical substance, but also in metaphor and “spiritual expression.” The pieces on today’s program, thankfully, are rather more accessible and might be taken first of all as exceptionally intimate portraits of a composer’s most urgent inner longings, albeit hampered by a then-tragic limitation.

PROKOFIEV
Sonata No. 7

“Prokofiev made an immense, priceless contribution to the musical culture of Russia. A composer of genius, he has expanded the artistic heritage left to us by the great classical masters of the country’s music — Glinka, Mussorgsky, Borodin, Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff.”
— Dmitri Shostakovich

“Within the vast, virtually limitless piano repertoire, the piano sonatas of Sergei Prokofiev occupy a special place. Apart from Alexander Scriabin early in the century, Prokofiev was the only major twentieth-century composer to pay such consistent attention to the form.... They are a constant presence in concert programs and are considered an indispensable part of the repertoire by almost every serious concert pianist.”
— Boris Berman

“Prokofiev played with his hands on a level with the keyboard, with extraordinary sureness of wrist, a marvelous staccato. He rarely attacked from on high; he wasn’t at all the sort of pianist who throws himself from the fifth floor to produce the sound. He had a nervous power like steel, so that even though he played level with the keyboard he was capable of producing sonority of fantastic strength and intensity, and in addition, the tempo never, never varied.”
— Francis Poulenc

There is a terrible and wonderful apropos to having the second of the three “War Sonatas” of Prokofiev as the conclusion of this recital. Politics have no standing in the reasons we have assembled for a recital today. But, it is fitting that we note that we live in strident times. Great artists have always responded to life’s biggest challenges and these sonatas, particularly today’s No. 7, for me, are boundlessly admirable monuments to the vigor and resistance of the human spirit in the face of calamity.

On another occasion, I wrote this about Prokofiev: “He, of course, delighted in being a ‘bad boy’ of music. Maybe not every day of his life, but he certainly liked to more than challenge the conventions and practitioners of music of his day. His bold proclamations of startling harmonies and brusque melodies certainly unglued his early audiences. And, as we know, he got into a good bit of trouble with Soviet authorities, as did so many composers of his time, putting him in an easily recognizable place in the history of modern music. Originally focused on a career as a performer, which he achieved well, he soon turned to composition and took great pleasure in shocking his audiences with surprising dissonances and harmonies with extra hot sauce.”

Sketched as early as 1939, this sonata was completed at the beginning of 1942, around the time that Prokofiev was in the Caucasus, where he had fled from Moscow to escape the approaching German invaders.

“We are brutally plunged into the anxiously threatening atmosphere of a world that has lost its balance. Chaos and uncertainty reign. We see murderous forces ahead. But this does not mean that what we lived by before thereby ceases to exist. We continue to feel and love. Now the full range of human emotions bursts forth. Together with our fellow men and women, we raise a voice in protest and share the common grief. We sweep everything before us, borne along by the will of victory. In the tremendous struggle that this involves, we find the strength to affirm the irrepresible life-force.” — Pianist Sviatoslov Richter on Prokofiev’s Seventh Sonata, which he premiered in 1943 after only four days of preparation! The Sonata was hailed as a triumph at that premiere in Moscow’s Hall of the House of Trade Unions, with Prokofiev in the audience. It won him his first of six Stalin Prizes.

On a personal note, I want to tell you that I first heard this sonata on a recording by American pianist Loren Hollander when I was a Missouri farm boy of 15 and had my life radically changed by the toccata of the final movement. Actually, it scared the daylights out of me. Its 7/8 time signature and relentless propelling forward still haunt me.

1830

Vincenzo Bellini’s opera “I Capuleti e i Montecchi” premiered at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice, Italy

1831

“America (My Country ’Tis of Thee),” with lyrics by Samuel Francis Smith, had its first public performance at Park Street Church in Boston, Massachusetts

1832

Gaetano Donizetti’s opera “L’elisir d’amore” premiered in Milan
BEETHOVEN
Moonlight Sonata

“[In Beethoven’s music] the dreamer will recognize his dreams, the sailor his storms, and the wolf his forests.”

— Victor Hugo

Lucky us to hear another great artist giving us his take today on surely the most familiar of all the Beethoven sonatas. Will you indulge me the republication of notes I wrote for the “Moonlight” just over a year ago?

The “Moonlight Sonata,” along with the Mona Lisa, the Michelangelo David, the Venus de Milo, etc., is so well entrenched in our modern brains that any of us listening this afternoon would do well to strive to bring fresh, new ears to it, perhaps even pretending never to have heard it before. The list of derivative uses to which the first movement has been put would, indeed, be insanely long. It is not wrong, though, just to love the sonata on hearing it today, as it is, like the other things mentioned above, a mighty fine piece of art.

It is a remarkable departure from the orthodox matters of form and structure that had helped to define a sonata. In 1801, Beethoven departed significantly from those normal practices and even marked the indication “sonata like a fantasy.” Musicologist Eric Blom said of both sonate quasi fantasie of opus 27 that they “show the composer emancipating himself from the classical sonata pattern and doing it as drastically as possible by substituting pieces in a freely chosen form for the traditional first movement that was always the most important part of a sonata, though not invariably in what we now call sonata form.”

Curiously, Opus 27 No. 1 is one of Beethoven’s least known sonatas and No. 2 is no doubt the best known. It’s nickname over which so many swoon, “Moonlight,” was not given by Beethoven, but rather from the German critic and poet Ludwig Rellstab, who once commented that the first movement made him think of “a vision of a boat on Lake Lucerne by moonlight.” Well, Beethoven never saw that lake and that fay description works only for the first movement. Twenty-seven number two was very popular in Beethoven’s lifetime, although it was decidedly not his favorite and he never saw that lake and that fay description works only for the first movement. Twenty-seven number two was very popular in Beethoven’s lifetime, although it was decidedly not his favorite and he never saw that lake and that fay description works only for the first movement. 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his pieces, including a few of his hundreds of transcriptions of other composers’ much-admired compositions (as we will today with Widmung of Schumann) and many extracts from his Years of Pilgrimage, collections of very evocative pieces “describing” his experiences during his many years of travel. Today’s selection comes from time spent in Switzerland in the late 1830s.

That Vallée d’Obermann is undoubtedly an homage to the main character of a novel, Oberman by one Étienne Pivot de Sénancour, a work that so very much captured the sense of the Romantic sensibility in art. Its story of a young man enthralled, yet overwhelmed and confused, by nature, hence pierced by feelings of longing, is so typical of the writing, music, and visual art of the time. Oberman’s yearning leads him to choose a life of utter simplicity in hopes of escaping his inner emotional struggles. What a tale! It didn’t entirely work out as hoped.

Liszt’s travels in Switzerland obviously inspired this composition. It is easily recognizable as being quite literary in conception. We hear in its main theme, a descending scale figure, manipulated harmonically and effectively throughout the composition, describing something of the turmoil of the sensitive young hero. It’s quite an evocation of a purple tale that might raise our modern eyebrows. But, we hear a miraculous transformation of the theme in the end when the descending scale is harmonized and modeled into a melody of warmth and consolation, then into quite a noble, almost cinematic, climax. It must have been breathtaking to its first hearers, they who lived, of course, unlike us, without recordings and all sorts of over-stimulation. I can never listen to Liszt without thinking of swarms of salonistes swooning and fainting.

WIDMUNG

Liszt was such a good colleague/pal to so many other composers of his day, transcribing all sorts of music into versions for solo piano, in part to provide a way for further promulgating of new music in that time when recordings and radio, etc., had not even been dreamt of. As much as they must have been grateful for the favor, we, too, can be glad to have these wonderful companion pieces, suitable for the concert hall and for enjoyment with friends at home.

Liszt’s choice of Widmung (Dedication) must have been easy as it was immediately very popular in Schumann’s own day and its text is beguiling:

You my soul, you my heart,
You my rapture, O you my pain,
You my world in which I live,
My heaven you, to which I aspire,
O you my grave, into which
My grief forever I’ve consigned!
You are repose, you are peace,
You are bestowed on me from heaven.
Your love for me gives me my worth.
Your eyes transfigure me in mine,
You raise me lovingly above myself,
My guardian angel, my better self!

I could easily listen to or play this transcription several times a week. Let me know if you’d like a copy of the score to have at home.

GERSHWIN
Rhapsody in Blue

“...a sort of musical kaleidoscope of America, of our vast melting pot, of our unduplicated national pep, of our blues, our metropolitan madness.”

— George Gershwin on his Rhapsody

One would be hard put to find an adult American who wouldn’t immediately recognize the Rhapsody in Blue from hearing even a few randomly selected measures. Beside fairly frequent appearances on concert programs, the Rhapsody has been put into dozens of “useful” circumstances. At the opening ceremony of the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, 84 pianists played it simultaneously! Some years ago, I spent several between-flights hours in the lower level of Chicago’s O’Hare Airport on the motorized walkway, back and forth, neon decorations overhead, with a continuous loop of R&B playing mesmerizingly all the while.

Written in 1924, Rhapsody was Gershwin’s first major composition, the original being for orchestra (jazz ensemble, really) and piano, with the solo piano version coming later. Commissioned by band leader Paul Whiteman for an all-jazz concert in honor of Lincoln’s Birthday, it had its premiere in a concert titled “An Experiment in Modern Music” in February that year at the Aeolian Hall in New York. Whiteman had let out news that Gershwin was writing a new piece for the concert – after Gershwin had initially declined the invitation – but, explaining a rival’s plan to steal his idea for the experimental concert, Whiteman convinced Gershwin to jump into it.

He had only five weeks until the concert, so set right to work. He later explained that while on a train to Boston, the whole theme began to come together in his mind. He told his biographer, Isaac Goldberg, in 1931:

“It was on the train, with its steely rhythms, its rattle-ty bang, that is so often so stimulating to a composer... I frequently hear music in the very heart of the noise. And there I suddenly heard — and even saw on paper — the complete construction of the rhapsody, from beginning to end. No new themes came to me, but I worked on the thematic material already in my mind and tried to conceive the composition as a whole. I heard it as a sort of musical kaleidoscope of America, of our vast melting pot, of our unduplicated national pep, of our metropolitan madness. By the time I reached Boston, I had a definite plot of the piece, as distinguished from its actual substance.”

George’s brother Ira, with whom he collaborated on much music in the ensuing years, suggested the interesting title after seeing a gallery exhibition of James McNeill Whistler’s paintings, which had titles such as Nocturne in Black and Gold and Arrangement in Grey and Black (a.k.a. “Whistler’s Mother.”) That sealed a certain fate, for sure. My favorite comment from a critic about R&B is this one from Samuel Chotzinoff in the New York World: “...made an honest woman out of jazz.”

1839
Congress prohibited dueling in the District of Columbia

1841
China cedes Hong Kong to the British during the First Opium War

1841
The first detective story, Edgar Allan Poe’s “Murders in the Rue Morgue,” published
A THRILLED AUDIENCE!

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