

# **ROMANTIC MASTERWORKS**

## **RACHMANINOFF AND SAINT-SAËNS**



### **Masterworks Series**

Saturday, May 17, 2025 · 7:30pm · Scheidt Family Performing Arts Center

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Sunday, May 18, 2025 · 2:30pm · Scheidt Family Performing Arts Center

**Robert Moody**, conductor  
**Sheng Cai**, piano

## **PROGRAM NOTES**

*by Michelle Pellay-Walker*

### **Giovanni Gabrieli (1551—1612): Canzon Septimi Toni a 8**

Giovanni Gabrieli was an important composer and organist in what came to be known as the *Venetian School* of musical style; its primary influence eventually led from the Renaissance to the beginnings of what we now know as the Baroque era. Gabrieli became the principal organist at the Basilica San Marco di Venezia in 1585; the Basilica's spacious interior, along with its live acoustics, gave rise to a musical style which exploited its sound-delay to advantage: Thus, the Venetian polychoral style came into being, an antiphonal style in which groups of singers and instruments played sometimes in opposition, and sometimes together, most often united by the sound of the organ. *Canzon Septimi Toni a 8* is from a collection of motets, canzonas, and sonatas called *Sacrae Symphoniae* (published in 1597), and will feature members of the Memphis Symphony Orchestra's brass section, playing in two antiphonal groups from opposite sides of the stage.

### **Karena Ingram: RAINN**

RAINN, by Baltimore-based composer Karena Ingram, was commissioned by the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation Orchestral Commissions Program, an initiative of the League of American Orchestras in partnership with the American Composers Orchestra. Ms. Ingram was the recipient of this commission in 2023, and this weekend marks the premiere performances of the work. It is scored for woodwinds in pairs, full brass, timpani, percussion, and strings. Ms. Ingram gives the following description in the conductor score:

"When I first came across the work of RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) in 2016, they reported that "every 98 seconds, an American is sexually assaulted." In 2024, that number has dropped to 68 seconds.

Sexual violence breaks a victim down, forcing them to grieve a loss of self. They then rebuild a new version of themselves, made to endure the harsh realities around them.

Approximately every 68 seconds, the audience will be forced to feel that break and rebuild through music. Each section mimics a stage of the grieving process. Each rehearsal mark denotes a specific timestamp, but the orchestra need not strictly adhere to it.

I write to honor those who have been forced to break down, grieve, rebuild, and endure.”

The usual steps of the grieving process are specifically notated in the musicians’ scores: Denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

**Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921): Piano Concerto No. Five in F Major, Opus 103, “Egyptian”**

First Performance: Salle Pleyel Concert Hall (Camille Saint-Saëns, soloist): Paris, May 1896.

There was a 20-year gap between the composing of Camille Saint-Saëns’ Fourth Piano Concerto and his Fifth—which is also his last. The Fifth Piano Concerto was written to celebrate the 50th anniversary of his debut at the Salle Pleyel, which took place in 1846. Saint-Saëns, who wrote the piece whilst on winter holiday in Luxor, Egypt, described it as “representing a sea voyage.” This concerto is quite exotic, and incorporates Spanish and Javanese stylistic gestures in addition to Middle-eastern music. The orchestral scoring features a rather large woodwind section (including piccolo, English horn, and bass clarinet), full brass, timpani, percussion, and strings. It is in the usual fast-slow-fast movement structure one associates with a concerto; the second movement *andante* is particularly interesting in that it is partially based on a Nubian love song that Saint-Saëns heard as he sailed on the Nile in a ‘dahabiah’ boat.

**Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943): Symphony No. 2 in E Minor, Opus 27**

First Performance: Marinsky Theatre (Sergei Rachmaninoff, conductor): Saint Petersburg, February 1908

One of Sergei Rachmaninoff’s most popular compositions, the Symphony No. 2 in E Minor was written in 1906-1907 and premiered in Saint Petersburg, conducted by the composer, in February 1908. It is dedicated to Sergei Taneyev, Rachmaninoff’s counterpoint instructor at the Moscow Conservatory. The First Movement’s opening theme, beginning in the lower strings before transferring to the violins, is a *motto* that will subsequently reappear at various points in each of the following movements. A lengthy sonata form follows the introduction, with the exposition repeat omitted in most performances. The Second Movement *scherzo*, where the *Dies Irae* will make its inevitable appearance, features Rachmaninoff’s contrapuntal mastery at its finest in the Trio. The heartbreakingly beautiful Third Movement, an adagio, brings back the *motto* as the basis for its central section. The finale, a wild ride—to say the least!!—continues the idea of cyclic linkage with references back to movements two and three, in addition to the *motto* theme. Because of its substantial length, the symphony has been subjected to numerous revisions and cuts over the years—none of them the work of the

composer himself—though most orchestras today perform the work with those cuts restored. Many recordings exist in both cut and uncut versions, and some of the latter even include the exposition repeat in the opening movement.

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