

Epic Rachmaninov – October 19 & 20, 2019

Acana

Tania León
b. 1943

Born in Havana, Cuba, composer, conductor and educator Tania León started playing piano at age four. She studied at Cuba's National Conservatory, and moved to New York in 1967 to study at New York University.

In 1969, she became a founding member and first musical director of the Dance Theater of Harlem. She is the founder and artistic director of *Composers Now Festival* and has instituted the Brooklyn Philharmonic Community Concert Series. She has been a life-long promoter of young composers and Latin Classical music. Her awards are too numerous to list here.

León composed *Acana* in 2008 on a commission from SUNY-Purchase College and the Orpheus Chamber orchestra. In the score, she writes:

Acana is a work inspired by a poem dedicated to a tree of the sapotaceas family. The poem of the same name written by the Cuban Laureate Poet Nicholas Guillen is part of a collection of poems called "*El Son Entero*" published in "*La Gaceta del Caribe*" in 1944.

Guillen's poem *Acana* tells the story of this tree, one with wide spreading roots found across León's native Cuba.

The *Acana* tree is indigenous to the American Meridian. The wood of this tree is remarkably strong. It is commonly used to construct support beams of rustic homes and depending of the region is used to many varied purposes.

Acana includes melodic and rhythmic motives characteristic of Cuban music, from indigenous to jazz. The trumpet section solos that begin and close the work represent the wind that blows across centuries and are also a musical metaphor for the roots of the tree. There is a contrapuntal interplay of textures between legato strings, fluttering upper winds and underlying percussion riffs.

Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor, Op. 18

Sergey Rachmaninov
1873-1943

By 1895 Sergey Rachmaninov felt confident enough to compose a symphony. The premiere took place in St. Petersburg in 1897 but was a dismal failure, in large part due to the shoddy conducting of Alexander Glazunov who was under "the influence." It produced in the young

composer a severe depression, and for three years he was unable to do any significant composing. He finally went for therapy in 1900 to Dr. Nikolay Dahl, an internist who had studied hypnosis and rudimentary psychiatry in Paris. The result was one of the first well-known successes of modern psychotherapy. Although the composer was able to return to creative work, relapses into depression dogged him for the rest of his life.

Rachmaninov expressed his gratitude to Dr. Dahl by dedicating the Second Piano Concerto to him. The first performance, in November 1901 with the composer at the piano, was an instant success. It is Rachmaninov's most frequently performed and recorded orchestral work. It even found its way into Hollywood as background music to the World War II movie *Brief Encounter*.

The first movement opens with dark, plodding unaccompanied chords on the piano that increase in intensity and volume, gradually joined by the orchestra and leading to the first theme. The effect is like the tolling of the giant low-pitched bells common in Russian churches. The second broadly romantic theme is a Rachmaninov signature. The lyrical mood is sustained throughout until the coda with its sudden conclusion in a dramatic burst of energy.

In the *Adagio sostenuto*, muted strings, followed by the piano left hand hesitantly accompany the high woodwinds. The right hand then joins the woodwinds in dreamy interplay. After a brief energetic cadenza, the atmosphere of the beginning returns.

The beginning of the third movement in the lower range of the orchestra is deceptively gentle, enhancing the surprise of the sudden sparkling piano cadenza. The main theme, introduced by the violas and oboes, is intensely passionate – in the same vein as the second theme of the opening movement. After a surprisingly calm episode, the tempo increases to *presto*, culminating in a glittering climax.

Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 4 – Program notes to come

Program notes by:
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