



# RACHMANINOFF'S THE BELLS

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 21, AT 7 PM

FRIDAY & SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 22 & 23, AT 8 PM

## NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

GIANCARLO GUERRERO, *conductor*

PAUL JACOBS, *organ*

NASHVILLE SYMPHONY CHORUS

TUCKER BIDDLECOMBE, *chorus director*

### RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

*Serenade to Music* – **14 minutes**

### HORATIO PARKER

*Concerto in E-Flat Minor for Organ and Orchestra, Op. 55 (1902)* – **22 minutes**

*Allegro moderato - Andante*

*Allegretto, ma ben marcato*

*Allegro moderato, molto risoluto*

**Paul Jacobs, organ**

– **INTERMISSION** –

### SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

*The Bells, Op. 35* – **35 minutes**

*Allegro, ma non tanto*

*Lento*

*Presto*

*Lento lugubre*

This concert will be recorded live for future broadcast and commercial release. To ensure the highest-quality recording, please keep noise to a minimum.

This concert will last one hour and 50 minutes, including a 20-minute intermission.

## PROGRAM SUMMARY

The Nashville Symphony and Chorus join together for two splendid yet far too rarely heard works. Vaughan Williams wrote his *Serenade to Music* to words from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* to celebrate one of England's great conductors and humanists, Sir Henry Joseph Wood. Sergei Rachmaninoff was inspired by the poetry of Edgar Allan Poe to write his unnumbered choral symphony *The Bells*, in which the metaphor of bells ringing traces the human life cycle. Between these we hear another unjustly neglected work: the thrilling Organ Concerto by Horatio Parker, a tireless advocate for music education and the teacher of Charles Ives.

# RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

## *Serenade to Music*

Born on October 12, 1872, in the village of Down Ampney in Gloucestershire in southwest England

Died on August 26, 1958, in London

**Composed:**  
1938

**Estimated length:**  
14 minutes



### **First performance:**

October 5, 1938, in London, with Sir Henry Wood conducting

### **First Nashville Symphony performance:**

April 3, 1951, with music director William Strickland

Growing up in a well-off family that counted Charles Darwin as a relative, Ralph Vaughan Williams took until early middle age to establish himself as a composer. Over time, he evolved a style influenced by his research into England's early music and folk heritage, while a period of study with the French composer Maurice Ravel enhanced his command of the orchestra.

He wrote *Serenade to Music* at the request of the conductor Sir Henry Joseph Wood (1869-1944) as part of a special concert marking Wood's 50th anniversary as a conductor. Wood was a champion of musical accessibility who founded the annual Proms concerts in London, which are now run by the BBC and are still regarded as a highlight of the classical music season. Vaughan Williams wanted to create a highly personal tribute in the form of a work for voices and orchestra praising music itself.

The vocal scoring is unusual: rather than a generic chorus, Vaughan Williams tailored *Serenade* for a handpicked choir of 16 solo singers: four each of sopranos, altos and tenors; two baritones; and two basses. These were renowned performers of the era who had ties to Woods and to Vaughan Williams himself. His idea was to spotlight their individual vocal personalities in brief solos, and he even inscribed each singer's initials at the corresponding moment in the score. But he

later arranged this music into more pragmatic alternative versions to facilitate performance. For example, there are versions for solo violin and orchestra, for solo vocal quartet plus chorus and orchestra, and — as in the version we hear on this program — for chorus and orchestra, with each solo line sung by small groups or sections.

For his text, Vaughan Williams chose a fitting paean to music from the first scene of the final act of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. The scene is set outdoors in the moonlight at Belmont, the idyllic estate that belongs the resourceful heiress Portia, whose ingenuity saves the day. It begins with Jessica (Shylock's daughter) and Lorenzo, the lover for whom she has left her father, as both await Portia's return. The couple have recently eloped, and they reflect on the magical atmosphere of this night. Lorenzo invokes the "sweet harmony" enveloping them as they gaze at the stars. Vaughan Williams culled lines from this passage and repeated a phrase to create a self-contained text for *Serenade to Music*.

## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Even the words of the Bard can only describe, but never imitate, the power of music itself. Yet here is an instance of a composer using music to illuminate the power

of words. Vaughan Williams imagines a musical equivalent to the wondrous combination of lyricism, otherworldly reflection and romantic elation found in Shakespeare's verse. He encourages us to imagine that we are privileged to hear the music that the characters in the play are describing. The word "serenade" additionally suggests the nocturnal mood that sets the stage for their moment of epiphany.

A brief orchestral introduction sets out the main musical ideas. One of these involves a bluesy shift between major and minor that evokes a haunting melancholy. Harmonic shifts convey the text's sense of wonder, eliciting the light and shadow of Shakespeare's observations — including a

noticeably troubled darkening of atmosphere around the image of "the man that hath no music in himself." It's easy to sympathize with this suspicion of the Philistine indifferent to art: "let no such man be trusted." Yet for all this variety, Vaughan Williams gives the piece a satisfying sense of unity, bringing this gorgeous music to a gently tapered close with a reminiscence of the opening that now fades with seraphic calm.

*Serenade to Music is scored for chorus and an orchestra of 2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), oboe, English horn, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle, bass drum, harp and strings.*

## TEXT FOR SERENADE TO MUSIC

*How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!  
Here will we sit and let the sounds of music  
Creep in our ears: soft stillness and the night  
Become the touches of sweet harmony.*

Look how the floor of heaven  
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold:  
There's not the smallest orb that thou behold'st  
But in his motion like an angel sings,

Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins;  
*Such harmony is in immortal souls;*

But whilst this muddy vesture of decay  
Doth grossly close it in, *we cannot hear it.*

Come, ho! and wake Diana with a hymn!  
With sweetest touches pierce your mistress' ear,  
*And draw her home with music.*

I am never merry when I hear sweet music.  
The reason is, your spirits are attentive —

The man that hath no music in himself,  
Nor is not mov'd with concord of sweet sounds,  
Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils;

The motions of his spirit are dull as night  
And his affections dark as Erebus:  
*Let no such man be trusted.*

Music! hark!  
It is your music of the house.  
Methinks it sounds much sweeter than by day.  
Silence bestows that virtue on it

How many things by season season'd are  
To their right praise and true perfection!

Peace, ho! the moon sleeps with Endymion  
And would not be awak'd. *Soft stillness and  
the night  
Become the touches of sweet harmony.*

# HORATIO PARKER

Concerto in E-Flat Minor for Organ and Orchestra, Op. 55 (1902)

Born on September 15, 1863,  
in Auburndale, Massachusetts

Died on December 18, 1919,  
in Cedarhurst, New York

**Composed:**  
1902

**Estimated  
length:**  
22 minutes



## First performance:

December 1902, with the  
Boston Symphony and the  
composer as the soloist

## First Nashville Symphony performance:

These are the Nashville  
Symphony's first performances  
and will be recorded live for a  
forthcoming release on Naxos.

In 1894, a precocious student named Charles Ives enrolled at Yale University, becoming part of the first class to be taught by Horatio Parker, who had just launched his career at Yale the same year. Challenging Parker with his decidedly unconventional approach to composition, Ives would spar with his mentor; decades later, he lobbed stinging criticisms when recalling the strictures of an (often anonymous) “routine-minded professor.”

Yet, as the musicologist Gayle Sherwood Magee writes, it was under Horatio Parker’s guidance that the rebellious Ives acquired “the tools to become an accomplished composer.” Parker was tirelessly devoted to education and essentially worked himself to a premature death at the age of 56.

Horatio Parker came of age when such Boston-based figures as George Chadwick (one of his own teachers) were seeking to define an authentically American voice for classical music. Still, they drew heavily on developments from German Romanticism. Parker, for example, spent a formative period from 1882 to 1885 studying in Munich.

Back in the U.S., Parker made a living as an organist, choirmaster and teacher — including a stint at the new National Conservatory of Music in New York, which Dvořák had just been hired to direct. Along with church music

and orchestral pieces, Parker wrote a large-scale, Romantic oratorio, *Hora novissima* (1893), in which he attempted to come to terms with the deaths of his infant son and his father. Setting a text by the medieval Benedictine monk Bernard of Cluny, *Hora novissima* offers an ecstatic vision of Paradise. It won Parker national attention, and he became known above all for such choral compositions as *St. Christopher* and *Morven and the Grail*. He also wrote for the theater: Although it was a critical failure, *Mona* (1912) was the first full-length opera by an American produced at the Metropolitan Opera.

The Organ Concerto was commissioned by the Boston Symphony, which requested a work in which the composer might appear as the soloist. At the time, a concerto for organ and orchestra was considered novel by Parker’s peers, but the work was dubbed “an imposing and brilliant composition” by one critic.

## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Although relatively compact, the Organ Concerto is the largest of Parker’s orchestral works. The composer omits the woodwind section entirely, creating an orchestral soundscape of brass, timpani, harp and strings, in and out of which he weaves

the solo organ.

The first movement is unusually structured in two parts. The first begins with a forceful chord from the king of instruments emphasizing the home key of E-flat minor, over which the strings pronounce the dignified main theme. A gentle second theme, expressing both solace and longing, poses contrast. These ideas — at times presented in a kind of call-and-response between organ and ensemble — are developed in the rest of the first section. The tempo then shifts to Andante for the second, meditative section of further transformations. Setting mood of chamber music-like intimacy, this section starts with a duet between the organ

and solo violin, the harp later entering. Other solo passages follow, leading to an ecstatic climax and a subdued conclusion in B major.

The second movement is scherzo-like in character, beginning with a rhythmic motto from the timpani; a lyrically contrasting middle section spotlights the organ. In the finale, again starting with drums, Parker builds a thrilling fugue from the imposing opening theme. Speeding up in the coda, the concerto comes to rest on another grand chord, now in the major.

*In addition to solo organ, Parker's Concerto is scored for 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, harp and strings.*

## ABOUT THE SOLOIST



**PAUL  
JACOBS**  
organ

Heralded as “one of the major musicians of our time” by Alex Ross of *The New Yorker*, the internationally celebrated organist Paul Jacobs combines a probing intellect and extraordinary technical mastery with an unusually large repertoire. He has performed to great critical acclaim on five continents and in each of the 50 United States. The only organist ever to have won a GRAMMY® Award — in 2011, for Messiaen’s towering *Livre du Saint-Sacrement* — Jacobs is an eloquent champion of his instrument.

Jacobs has transfixed audiences, colleagues and critics alike with landmark performances of the complete works for solo organ by J.S. Bach and Messiaen. He made musical history at age 23, when he gave an 18-hour marathon performance of Bach’s complete organ works on the 250th anniversary of the composer’s death. A fierce advocate of new music, Jacobs has premiered works by Mason Bates, Michael

Daugherty, John Harbison, Stephen Paulus, Christopher Theofanidis and Christopher Rouse, among others.

No other organist has been repeatedly invited to perform as a soloist with prestigious orchestras. Jacobs regularly appears with the Chicago Symphony, The Cleveland Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Lucerne Symphony Orchestra, Minnesota Orchestra, Montréal Symphony, National Symphony Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, among others.

Highlights of Jacobs’ 2019/20 season include performances of Michael Daugherty’s *Once Upon a Castle* with the Philadelphia Orchestra and Kansas City Symphony; three orchestral engagements with maestro Giancarlo Guerrero, including programs with the Nashville Symphony, Bamberg Symphony and NFM Wrocław Philharmonic; a recital for the inauguration of the newly restored Hazel Wright organ at the Christ Cathedral in Garden Grove, California; and a Paris recital at the Maison de la Radio, presented by Radio France and the Orchestre National de France.



# SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

*The Bells, Op. 35*

Born on April 1, 1873,  
in Semyonovo, Russia

Died on March 28, 1943,  
in Beverly Hills, California

**Composed:**  
January-August  
1913

**Estimated  
length:**  
35 minutes



**First performance:**

December 13, 1913, in  
Saint Petersburg, with  
the composer conducting

**First Nashville Symphony  
performance:**

December 3-5, 2009, with Music  
Director Giancarlo Guerrero

**F**or the concert honoring Sir Henry Wood at which *Serenade* was premiered, Sergei Rachmaninoff appeared in person as the soloist in his Second Piano Concerto. Wood's enthusiasm for the Russian composer extended to championing his unusual composition *The Bells*, an extraordinary unnumbered symphony written a few years before Rachmaninoff left his Russian homeland for permanent exile.

Rachmaninoff cherished *The Bells*, which was inspired by Edgar Allan Poe, as the favorite among his works — even preferring it over the concertos he wrote for himself as a piano soloist. He chose to include it on the program of the final concert he conducted, with the Chicago Symphony in 1941.

Rachmaninoff was also very fond of another of his choral works, the *All-Night Vigil* or *Vespers*, which he wrote two years later. Perhaps at least part of his enthusiasm toward these pieces in later years was related to his American exile. These scores embody different aspects of Rachmaninoff's reminiscences of the rituals and sounds of his youth and of a long-since-vanished Russia.

Though he was not a conventionally pious man, Rachmaninoff retained memories of the Russian Orthodox liturgies to which his grandmother took him as a boy. Though he is most often associated with the piano,

the sounds of chant and tolling ceremonial bells were firmly lodged in his imagination — the Third Piano Concerto, for example, starts off with a theme that could easily be mistaken for chant. “The sound of church bells dominated all the cities of Russia I used to know,” Rachmaninoff wrote in his memoirs. “They accompanied every Russian from childhood to the grave, and no composer could escape their influence.”

In the winter of 1913, while exhausted from overwork and on a much-needed vacation with his family in Rome, Rachmaninoff received in the mail a copy of Poe's poem “The Bells,” in a translation by the Russian Symbolist poet Konstantin Balmont. It had been sent by an anonymous admirer, who suggested that Rachmaninoff should try putting it to music. As was the case with later-19th-century French writers such as Charles Baudelaire, a number of Russian composers of the early 20th felt an uncanny attraction to Poe's world.

Rachmaninoff began composing *The Bells* while staying in the same apartment, by the Piazza di Spagna, where Tchaikovsky had vacationed in Rome decades before — even using the same desk as his illustrious predecessor. A family emergency compelled Rachmaninoff to leave Rome and return to Russia. He completed *The Bells* at the beloved

summer estate owned by his wife's family — just a few months after Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* had its history-making premiere.

Possibly written in 1848, Poe's "The Bells" was published posthumously. It's often singled out as an ingenious example of onomatopoeia: the technique of using language to imitate the actual sounds being described. The Russian title is *Kolokola* and is also onomatopoeic, although Balmont's translation does not contain as much manic repetition as the English original and even inserts some lines to moderate the horror evoked by Poe's vision.

Rather like Vaughan Williams with Shakespeare, Rachmaninoff explores the resonance of the words in musical terms. To this end, he takes advantage of coloristic effects, word painting and different combinations of chorus and orchestra, as well as the repetition of thematic ideas.

Poe's original poem comprises four dramatically contrasting stanzas. "All the world's a bell," as it were: We find four different stages of a universal life course rung out, from birth to death (as opposed to the seven delineated by Shakespeare in "All the world's a stage" from *As You Like It*). Rachmaninoff structures these as four distinct movements of a symphony, each characterized by a unique atmosphere and a corresponding sequence of signature bell sounds.

## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The opening Allegro, the briefest of the four movements, presents the optimistic and sweet sound of "silver bells." Along with the

carefree joys of youth, these bells foreshadow the "universal slumber" of death that is waiting beyond their promise. Rachmaninoff works this duality into his score by contrasting the lighthearted timbres and mirthful music

for tenor and chorus with a gently hummed, wordless choral passage, which suggests the "generations past all number" who have gone before and remain as echoes. As the joyful mood returns, a softly rocking motif that progressively descends emerges in the upper strings. It will serve as a unifying device across the remaining movements.

This melodic idea returns at the start of the slow movement, a warmly lyrical ode for solo soprano and chorus that omits percussion. Though its harmonies are beguiling, the "golden" happiness of tender "wedding bells" is not entirely unclouded. Rachmaninoff's music conveys a sense of fateful, solemn ritual, even suggesting at times a funereal aspect that poses a counterpart to the bride's soaring rapture.

Rachmaninoff transforms Poe's stanza on the bells of alarm, which sound the alert to a nighttime fire, into an energetic scherzo at breakneck speed. At the start, these "brazen" bells — symbolizing the anxieties of adult life and approaching infirmity — ring in a confusion of overlapping layers. There is no solo voice, only the collective terror of the crowd adding to the din of panic. Even when the momentum subsides, the underlying sense of fear eventually regathers in fresh outbursts.

The lengthy final movement is the most remarkable. Rachmaninoff's model is Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony, the "Pathétique,"

“ ”

*Rachmaninoff cherished The Bells, which was inspired by Edgar Allan Poe, as the favorite among his works — even preferring it over the concertos he wrote for himself as a piano soloist.*

which had introduced the radically unsettling design of a slow movement as the conclusion to an epic symphony. Following Poe's description of the "mournful" bells whose "stern monody" rings out the fate of all, Rachmaninoff similarly resorts to a slow finale, marked *lento lugubre* — "lugubriously slow."

This finale of death knells begins with a desolate orchestral introduction that features an inconsolable solo for the English horn. The voice of the solo bass is most fitting here, shadowed by the chorus. The music passes into a worried Allegro that harshly reworks the first movement's "tolling" motif and then slows again for another passage of choral

humming. In the final pages, for orchestra alone, Rachmaninoff allows a consoling glimmer of transcendence.

*In addition to the soprano, tenor and baritone soloists and mixed choir, The Bells is scored for 3 flutes (3rd doubling piccolo), 3 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 6 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, tubular bells, glockenspiel, triangle, tambourine, cymbals, snare drum, bass drum, tam-tam, piano, celesta, harp, organ (ad lib) and strings.*

— Thomas May is the Nashville Symphony's program annotator.

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# NASHVILLE SYMPHONY CHORUS

**TUCKER BIDDLECOMBE**, *Chorus Director*

SOPRANO	Beverly Anderson <sup>†</sup>	Kacie Dunham	Jennifer Lynn	Ashlinn Snyder
	Katie Arata	Allison Espada	Alisha Austi Menard	Paige Stinnett
	Esther Bae	Becky Evans-Young	Jean Miller	Clair Susong
	Amie Bates	Amy Frogge	Jessie Neilson	Marva A. Swann
	Jill Boehme	Kelli Gauthier	Angela	Marjorie Taggart
	Stephanie Breiwa	Rebecca Greer	Pasquini Clifford	Angie Thomas*
	Christine Brosend	Grace J. Guill <sup>†</sup>	Samantha Petry	Ashley Vance
	Daphne Bugelli	Ally Hard	Kristine Phillips	Jan Staats Volk <sup>†</sup>
	Sara Jean Curtiss	Stacey Haslam	Beth Pirtle Ring	Camille Winton
	Claire Delcourt	Vanessa D. Jackson*	Renita J.	Sylvia Wynn
	Katie Doyle	Katie Lawrence	Smith-Crittendon	Callie Zindell
ALTO	Carol Armes	Erin Elgass	Valerie Kamen	Stacy L. Reed
	Kathy Bearden	Cara Frank	Leah Koesten	Debbie Reyland
	Tessa Berger	Dana Purser Gary	Stephanie Kraft	Anna Lea Ritchie
	Mary Bond	Katherine Gillett	Emily Longenecker	Allie Senyard
	Vinéecia Buchanan	Elizabeth Gilliam <sup>†</sup>	Shelly McCormack	Hannah Sims
	Mary Callahan*	Debra L. Greenspan	Asha Moody	Anjali Sivaainkaran
	Cathi Carmack <sup>†</sup>	Bevin Gregory	Jessica Moore	Madalynne Skelton
	Kelsey Christian	Judith Griffin	Stephanie Moritz	Caroline Kimbrey Talbert*
	Lisa Cooper <sup>†</sup>	Leah Handelsman	Shelia Mullican	Deanna Talbert
	Helen Cornell	Amanda Hopkins	Valerie Nelson	Kathryn Whitaker
	Carla M. Davis <sup>†</sup>	Sidney Hyde	Lisa Pellegrin	Maggie Zeilmann
	Amanda Leigh Dier	Liza Marie Johnston	Annette Phillips	
TENOR	Anthony R. Barta	Kory Henkel	John Perry	Benjamin Tyrrel
	Robert Bennett	William F. Hodge <sup>†</sup>	Keith Ramsey	Richard Colby White
	Eric Boehme	Ron Jensen	David M. Satterfield**	Richard Wineland
	Kevin Brenner	Mitchell Lane	Zach Shrout	Scott Wolfe
	Brett Cartwright	Scott Lee	Daniel Sissom	John Logan Wood
	Taylor Chadwick	Lynn McGill	Eddie Smith	Jonathan Yeaworth
	Joe A. Fitzpatrick	Don Mott	Stephen Sparks <sup>†</sup>	
	Fred Garcia	Devin Mueller	Joel Tellinghuisen	
	Danny Gordon*	Ryan Norris	Christopher Thompson	
BASS	Gilbert Aldridge	Duane Hamilton	Adam Mamula	William E. Squires
	James Cortner	Andrew Hard	Bruce Meriwether	Larry Strachan
	Nick Davidson	Luke Harnish	Andrew Miller	David B. Thomas**
	Dustin Derryberry	Richard Hatfield <sup>†</sup>	Christopher Mixon	Alex Tinianow
	Frank Ellsworth	Carl Johnson	Chandler Montgomery	Brian Warford*
	Mark Filosa	Kenneth Keel	Steve Myers	Eric Wiuff
	Ian M. Frazier	Justin Kirby	Alec Oziminski	Hunter Yates
	Stuart Garber	William Loyd	Steve Prichard	
	George Goetschel	Taylor Lucy	Daniel Silva	
	Tim Goodenough	Rob Mahurin	Merv Snider	

\* Section Leader

<sup>†</sup> 25+ year members

**Andrew Miller**, *president*

**Sara Crigger**, *librarian*

**Jeff Burnham**, *accompanist*