

Tchaikovsky & Kalinnikov

📅 SEPTEMBER 30, 2018

🕒 2:30 P.M.

📍 THE ISABEL

JOSEPH JOHNSON *Cello*
EVAN MITCHELL *Conductor*

Program

Vocalise RACHMANINOFF (1873-1943)

Variations on a Rococo Theme, Op. 33, TH 57 TCHAIKOVSKY (1840-1893)

Intermission

Symphony No. 2 in A Major KALINNIKOV (1866-1901)

Moderato; Allegro non troppo

Andante cantabile

Allegro scherzando

Andante cantabile; Allegro vivo

Today's Music

WITH EVAN MITCHELL

You may have guessed that I adore Russian music. This is the second all-Russian program the Kingston Symphony has mounted since I've been here, and where the first was all about power and sweep, this one focuses on the characteristic aspects of Russian music that make it memorable, monumental, and unmistakable.

The Rachmaninoff Vocalise is a singular piece by one of my favourite Russian composers. It's a long, soulful melody, constantly exploring a new purpose and direction. It's also a song without words, meant to be sung on a vowel. As a matter of pure expression, it represents the very best of Russian melody-making with a healthy dollop of the melancholy and introspection which Rachmaninoff practically trademarked. The orchestral arrangement we play today was written by the composer and captures all the appeal of the original, with a wider sound palette.

Tchaikovsky's Rococo Variations is a jewel in the crown of the cello repertoire. Created as a homage to Mozart's perfection of form, this piece represents Tchaikovsky at his most intimate, which is an oft-neglected side of his compositional personality. Even at its most emphatic, you're drawn in. That's an integral part of what makes this piece so magical, and is a critical element of good Russian music.

Finally, we come to Vasily Kalinnikov, the virtual unknown. Kalinnikov was the son of a policeman, a prodigy who couldn't afford the fees at the Moscow Conservatory. He showed himself to be a burgeoning talent and found vocal champions in Rachmaninoff and Tchaikovsky (hence the pairing of their works on this program), but his life was plagued with poor health. He was forced to resign from his musical posts and he died of tuberculosis just before his 35th birthday. His orchestral legacy is made up of two symphonies, the first of which is performed very rarely, the second virtually never. Had he lived ten years longer, I'm fairly certain we would all know Vasily Kalinnikov's name.

Kalinnikov's second symphony is worthy of being part of the standard repertoire. It's bursting with surprise, craft, and joyful expression at every turn. This piece is magnificent, devoid of any gloom. For a man destined to have a short life, his music is as optimistic as any you'll find. From its glorious fanfare, to its exquisite English horn feature in the second movement, to its manic scherzo, to its monumental finale, this is real music. My hope is that you're able to share our delight in the discovery of this piece, as we celebrate the great Russian orchestral tradition.