

SERGEI  
RACHMANINOFF

IN HIS OWN  
WORDS

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## Preface

Rachmaninoff was, by all accounts, a reluctant interviewee and could be wary if he did not have oversight of what was being written. However, over the course of three decades or so, from 1909 to 1943, he did commit himself to well over 40 interviews, which identify and illuminate his thoughts on his own compositions and, revealingly, on the art of playing the piano, his harsh responses to much of the contemporary music around him, his reminiscences of his years in Russia and his reactions to living and working in the USA and Switzerland, together with a fascinating range of insights into aspects of his professional career and his family life. There is no known recording of Rachmaninoff's voice, but these interviews that he gave speak eloquently on their own.

The earliest interviews were sparked by Rachmaninoff's first visit to the USA in 1909, when he was already world-famous for his Prelude in C sharp Minor, the classical "hit" of its day which pursued him wherever he went, though, as he was apt to point out, he had in fact composed many other, more substantial things as well. After his emigration from Russia in 1917, the emphasis of Rachmaninoff's working life shifted from that of composer-pianist to that of pianist-composer, moreover a pianist reckoned to be one of the finest of his day. Interviews became part of the paraphernalia of a major touring artist, along with the pianos he had to take with him on his travels and the exhausting train journeys between one venue and another. As he once said, "We make our winter home in the railroad cars", the summer one being, at least for much of the 1930s, his beautiful villa Senar at Hertenstein on the shores of Lake Lucerne.

This anthology brings all this material together for the first time. Indeed, most of the interviews have not been republished since the day they initially appeared in their respective newspapers, journals or magazines. As this is intended to be a work of reference as well as one for general reading, the texts of the interviews are transcribed exactly as they first appeared, in the hope that any future researchers

will be saved the bother of seeking out what are, in some cases, extremely obscure sources. In this regard, it should be said that there are very occasional racial references which might have been commonplace at the time but which nowadays are unacceptable. Variant spellings of composers' names have been preserved, as have the differences between English and American orthography, along with a host of errors and misunderstandings. These, together with other details that might help to fill in a context that has been lost with the passage of time, are tackled and expanded upon in explanatory footnotes. Foreign language interviews have been translated into English, but the original Russian, French, Dutch or German texts have been appended. Russian dates before February 1924 are given in their dual Old (Julian) and New (Gregorian) style, save when referring to a specific date on which an article was printed: in those cases only the Old Style date is given.

The aim of this edition was to be as complete as possible. Inevitably, the very moment it is published, its completeness will be compromised by the discovery, somewhere, of some other interview. If that is indeed the case, I should be very grateful if readers would let me know.

Geoffrey Norris