

CHILDREN'S PROGRAM NOTES FOR FESTIVAL CONCERTS

JULY 3 · ASPEN FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA

WHO IS PERFORMING TODAY?

Aspen Festival Orchestra
Robert Spano *conductor*
Renée Fleming *soprano*

WHAT IS BEING PLAYED TODAY?

R. STRAUSS: Four Last Songs
RACHMANINOFF: Symphonic Dances, op. 45
Selected songs and arias

LEARN ABOUT THE MUSIC!

R. STRAUSS: Four Last Songs

Four Last Songs were composed by Richard Strauss in 1948 when he was 84 years old. The songs are “Frühling” (Spring), “September,” “Beim Schlafengehen” (When Falling Asleep), and “Im Abendrot” (At Sunset). The songs were based on poems that Strauss read, but they were also very personal to him. All but “Frühling” (Spring) deal with the idea of death, and Strauss passed away in 1949, a year before the pieces were performed for the first time. The songs aren't sad, though; instead, they're beautiful and calm.

Two things to listen for are the soprano—a female singer with a high voice—and the prominent French horn parts. These aspects of the music also represent important parts of Strauss's life, as his wife was a famous soprano and his father was a professional horn player. Composers often find ways to express their personal lives in their music, and Strauss's Four Last Songs are a great example of this.

- Did you hear the soprano singer?
- Did you hear the French horn?
- If you were composing a work like this, what would your Four Last Songs represent about your life? How would you express your personal life through your music?

RACHMANINOFF: Symphonic Dances, op. 45

This is the last work by Russian composer Sergei Rachmaninoff, who wrote it in 1940. It consists of three movements, which are sort of like chapters in a book. Each movement sounds different, but they're all connected by one big idea, and together they tell the whole story the composer had in mind.

This is an appropriate final piece by Rachmaninoff, as it quotes some of his previous work. A quote is the same in music as it is in writing – it means Rachmaninoff took part of the music in an older work and put it in this newer work. Some people see Symphonic Dances as a nice summation of the composer's music throughout his lifetime.

Symphonic Dances is very energetic and rhythmic, meaning it has a fast beat and you might want to dance when you hear this work!

Something unusual about this piece is Rachmaninoff's use of the alto saxophone, which has a smooth, high, rounded sound. Saxophones are instruments that are best known in jazz and concert bands, and they don't usually appear in orchestras. Make sure you listen for this rare treat!

- If you were writing a piece of music, which of your favorite songs would you “quote” in it?
- Do you enjoy the saxophone sound in this piece? Do you think saxophone would sound good in the Strauss piece we heard earlier in the program?
- Rachmaninoff wrote this for a very large orchestra. Can you feel the rhythm in your body as well as hearing it in your ears? Where do you feel it thumping in you?

music is what feelings sound like