

Alexander Glazunov - Saxophone, Violin And Piano No.2 Concertos (1988)

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1. *Violin Concerto in A minor Op.82* Sergei Stadler, violin The Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra Conducted by Vladimir Ponkin
2. *Piano Concerto No.2 in B major Op.100*
Dmitri Alexeiv, piano U.S.S.R. Radio Symphony Orchestra Conducted by Yuri Nikolaevsky
3. *Saxophone Concerto in E flat major Op.109*
Lev Mikhailov, saxophone The Soloists Ensemble of the U.S.S.R. Radio Sym Orch.
Conducted by Alexander Korneiev

During his stay in Paris late in life, Glazunov heard the saxophone-rich band of the Garde Républicaine and was inspired to write two saxophone works: a chamber piece for four saxophones and this concerto for alto sax and string orchestra. Glazunov seems immune to the saxophone jazz that had invaded Paris; the concerto is entirely classical, although it does include some of the mildly folk-like themes akin to what Glazunov had employed in his earlier Russian scores. The one-movement work is a free rhapsody, essentially lyrical and sometimes melancholy, with a few extroverted scherzo interjections. For the most part, the strings keep to an unobtrusive supporting role. The tempo frequently changes and the concerto requires the soloist to demonstrate every musical skill: smooth, cantabile playing in the many slow sections; tonal control across a wide dynamic range as the melody winds up and down the scale; and, in the most intricate, animated passages, nimble fingering and effective glissandos. At almost the exact midpoint, the saxophone takes a long, increasingly agitated cadenza that dies away into a pathetic, sighing gesture; this is the basis of a sardonic transition to what initially seems to be a tarantella finale. Glazunov doesn't maintain the dancing rhythm all the way to the end, though; the soloist reminisces about the earlier, more lyrical themes while remaining animated, and the concerto concludes with trills and conventional bravura gestures. ---James Reel, Rovi

This attractive violin concerto, small but offering plenty of special effects for the soloist, is probably the most widely played of Glazunov's works. It elegantly wraps up various Romantic takes on the concerto idea into an easily grasped package. The three movements of the

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traditional concerto are contained within the fast-slow-fast structure of this work's single movement, and the entire work, moreover, unfolds from the melodic material stated at the beginning, giving the concerto the character of a single sonata form movement. The moody slow section serves as a "development" of the opening material and builds to a spectacular cadenza. The final section, serving the function of a recapitulation, unleashes more soloistic fire. This concerto was a concert-hall favorite in the first half of the twentieth century and has continued to hold the stage even as most of Glazunov's other work has declined in popularity outside Russia. ---Rovi

Cast in a more traditional form -- that is, in three movements -- than the composer's Piano Concerto No. 1 (1911), Alexander Glazunov's Piano Concerto No. 2 is an altogether more reserved and mature work than its predecessor. The opening theme of the first movement (Andante sostenuto), which sets the mood for the entire work, forms a foundation upon which the composer liberally sprinkles dance-like rhythms and carefully crafted decorative motifs. The brief but powerful Andante draws much of its inspiration from the thematic material of the lyrical finale of the composer's Piano Sonata No. 1 (1900). The Allegro finale is crowned by an anthem-like recapitulation of the main theme in the finest neoclassical tradition. ---Tim Mahon, Rovi

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