

**Sergei RACHMANINOFF (1873-1943)**

- 1 Prelude in C sharp minor, Op.3 No.2 (arr. Sargent) 4:30**

LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Recorded: Queen's Hall, London, 24 September 1931 (HMV C2292)

**Piano Concerto No.2 in C minor, Op.18**

- 2** I. Moderato 9:22  
**3** II. Adagio sostenuto 12:14  
**4** III. Allegro scherzando 10:56

CYRIL SMITH piano

LIVERPOOL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

Recorded: Philharmonic Hall, Liverpool, 12-13 June 1947

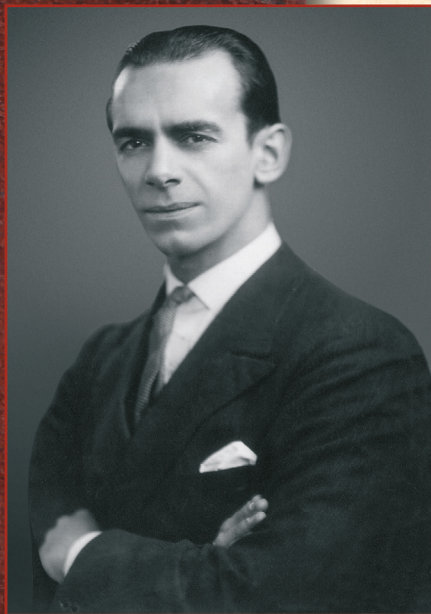
(US Columbia LP ML 4176 from UK Columbia DX 1424-28)

**Symphony No.3 in A minor, Op.44**

- 5** I. Allegro moderato 13:23  
**6** II. Adagio ma non troppo 12:18  
**7** III. Allegro 13:22

BBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Recorded: Abbey Road Studios, London, 5 May 1953 (HMV ALP1118)



**SIR  
MALCOLM  
SARGENT**

**RACHMANINOFF**

**Prelude in C sharp minor**

**Piano Concerto No.2**

**Symphony No.3**

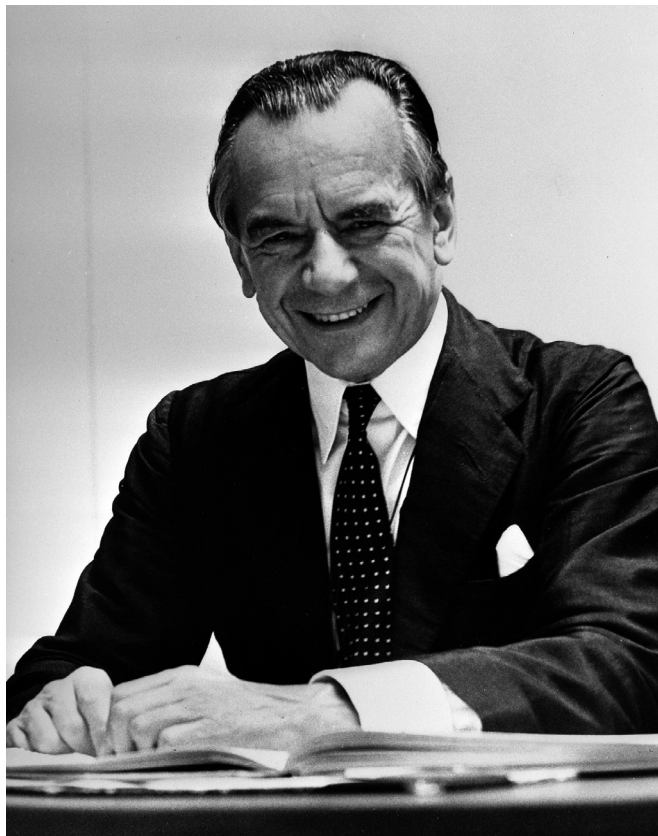
**CYRIL SMITH**

**London Symphony  
Orchestra**

**Liverpool Philharmonic  
Orchestra**

**BBC Symphony  
Orchestra**

*Recorded 1931, 1947 & 1953*



#### **A GUILD HISTORICAL RELEASE**

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GHCD 2414



GHCD 2393



GHCD 2409

This CD brings together for the first time three very rare performances of the music of Serge Rachmaninoff recorded over a 22-year period by the greatly significant British conductor Sir Malcolm Sargent (1895-1967), performances which in many ways will come as something of a revelation to today's music-lovers – and also perhaps to those of older generations, who recall seeing Sargent in his prime but for whom these recordings are a distant memory.

Although Sargent was very highly regarded in two areas of the conductor's craft – that of inspiring and directing a large choir, and of conducting a concerto – the range of his repertoire was surely wider than that of almost any other British conductor of his generation, centred in his case on the annual BBC Henry Wood Proms in London's Royal Albert Hall, where in the post-World War II seasons he was called upon to conduct music from virtually the entire orchestral repertoire as well as new compositions.

Consequently, because Sargent would undertake to perform music from every era – from Purcell to Shostakovich – his reputation tended to suffer somewhat, in that many felt the breadth of his repertoire implied a less than complete understanding of individual works. It is true that Sargent could, on rare occasions, direct performances that might have been less than fully committed, but when he was on form – in the vast majority of his programmes – he could aspire to the highest class.

Sargent began his musical life as an accomplished pianist and organist. He was also a composer – his orchestral 'Impression on a Windy Day' remains a minor masterpiece of English Impressionism – and when he found himself asked to direct music with which he had the greatest empathy, he could rise to the occasion with deep insight and dignity.

We open this collection with the rarest recording of the three – Sargent's own exceptionally fine orchestration of Rachmaninoff's Prelude in C sharp minor, Opus 3 No 2. This orchestration dates from around 1930, and the recording, with the London Symphony Orchestra, was made in September 1931 for HMV's plum-label series. Not only is the recording of good quality for the period, but also the control Sargent exerts over the LSO of the day (he was 36 years old when the record was made) is equally exceptional, enabling us to appreciate the inherent mastery of his orchestration, so that – if one were coming new to the work – it would appear to be an original piece for orchestra rather than for the piano. Equally, we should remember that in the very early 1930s, Rachmaninoff was in his prime, a greatly-loved pianist and composer throughout the musical world, by which time this Prelude had become his virtual 'signature-tune', having been arranged many times (Rachmaninoff had sold the copyright in the work as a teenager in Russia thirty years before, and gained no income from the countless performances it enjoyed – the Prelude was first published in Britain in 1897 by Alfred Lengnick and Company).

In the early 1920s, Sargent occasionally appeared as a concerto pianist. One of the works he performed in

that role was Rachmaninoff's Second Concerto, so when he came to make his first recording of the Concerto, his knowledge of the piece was total. He later made a second recording, for HMV, with Moura Lympany (it was also her second recording of the Concerto), but in concert he often partnered the Russian-born but naturalised British virtuoso Benno Moiseiwitsch in the work. For example, in the fifteen years of Henry Wood Proms seasons 1948-63, Sargent conducted the Concerto on no fewer than twelve occasions, six of them with Moiseiwitsch as soloist. A short while after Rachmaninoff died in 1943, a day or so before what would have been the composer's 70th birthday, Moiseiwitsch and Sargent gave an all-Rachmaninoff memorial concert at the Royal Albert Hall in London, in which Moiseiwitsch played the Second and Third Concertos and the *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* in the same programme, repeating it a short while later.

However, of native British pianists, Cyril Smith was the outstanding Rachmaninoff interpreter of his generation: the Proms archives reveal that between 1938 and 1955 Smith played a Rachmaninoff concerto in 16 programmes – a wholly unique record (Smith also played other concertos during those 17 seasons), indicative of the esteem in which he was held in this repertoire. Curiously, although he played the *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* on seven occasions at the Proms (from 1941-52), and the Third Concerto in six programmes (from 1938-55), with the First on two occasions (1952 and '53), he only played the Second Concerto once – in 1950 – during his 23 years as a Proms soloist.

Cyril Smith had recorded No. 2 with Sargent conducting on June 12-13, 1947 for English Columbia – the performance on this disc – as well as the *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* (also with Sargent) and the Second Suite for two pianos with his wife, Phyllis Sellick, for Columbia. Writing of this Second Concerto release, originally issued on four 12" 78rpm discs in November 1947, Hubert J Foss enthused: 'this is a very fine recording of an excellent performance. It is certainly the best recording yet made by Cyril Smith, whose....tone has deepened here in a new mellowness. Even so, it is on the whole Sir Malcolm Sargent to whom the undoubted success is mainly due. He builds up the climaxes so well, lays out each movement with such clarity of form, minimises the over-emotional quality.... and yet retains a fullness and warmth of expression that are the music's real virtues.' At the time this recording of the Second Concerto was made, Sargent was chief conductor of the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, a post he was to hold from 1942-48, and with whom the orchestra made its first recordings for HMV and Columbia in 1945.

Rachmaninoff's Third Symphony was the composer's penultimate orchestral work – indeed, his penultimate work of all – being composed in 1936 in Switzerland and premiered in November of that year in Philadelphia with Leopold Stokowski conducting. Rachmaninoff himself conducted the first recording of the Symphony in 1939 with the Philadelphia Orchestra, but the work made little headway until the 1950s. Of all notable British

conductors of the time, Sargent believed very strongly in the Symphony, conducting it five times at the Henry Wood Proms between 1948 and 1955, always with the BBC Symphony Orchestra. So when these artists came to make this recording of the Symphony on May 5, 1953 – the first to be made in Europe (there had been a very fine Russian recorded performance with Nikolai Anosov conducting the USSR State Symphony) – both Sargent and the BBC orchestra were wholly familiar with the score: we can certainly appreciate the excellence of the orchestra's woodwind section in this recording. It is also perhaps worth mentioning that the first public performance in the United Kingdom of Rachmaninoff's last orchestral work, the Symphonic Dances Opus 45, was given by Sargent and the BBC Symphony in 1954 – fourteen years after the music was first performed in Philadelphia, with Eugene Ormandy conducting.

What is interesting in this performance of Rachmaninoff's Third Symphony is that Sargent has clearly thought the work through from the score alone, and has not attempted to copy Rachmaninoff's own recorded performance – very fine indeed though that be – except in two small details. This is that in Rachmaninoff's recording, the composer-conductor makes a small cut of two (repetitious) bars in the first movement, between figures 26-27: Sargent follows Rachmaninoff at this point, and neither conductor observes the repeat in that first movement. But in all other respects Sargent's performance shows that he is entirely his own man: for example, in the first movement's second subject Rachmaninoff in his recording elongates the second bar from 4/4 to 5/4, making the last two quavers into crotchets, although that is not in the score: Sargent is faithful to the printed page, and in some ways his is a more aggressive account overall than the composer's, revealing perhaps an extraordinary and little-appreciated suggestion of the influence of Mahler in the climax of the first movement, as the music seemingly falls from a great height in a tragic descent. Equally, in the great second movement, Sargent does not attempt to outdo Rachmaninoff's intensity in the long rising initial violin phrase, and in the coda to the finale Sargent's control over those powerful closing pages is astonishing: his slower tempo for the concluding bars ramming the final cadence home with a vengeance.

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