



SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Presents

**Alexia Wixom, Violin**  
**Edward Newman, Piano**

Sunday, April 14, 2024

3:30 pm

PepsiCo Recital Hall

### **Program**

Vocalise, Op. 34

Sergei Rachmaninoff  
(1873-1943)

Violin Concerto No. 4 in D Minor, Op. 31  
*Andante-Moderato*  
*Adagio Religioso*

Henri Vieuxtemps  
(1820-1881)

### *Intermission*

Violin Sonatina No. 1 in D Major, Op. 137  
*Allegro Molto*  
*Andante*  
*Allegro Vivace*

Franz Schubert  
(1797-1828)

This recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Degree in Bachelor of Arts. Alexia Wixom is a student of Dr. Elisabeth Adkins.  
The use of recording equipment or taking photographs is prohibited.  
Please silence all electronic devices including watches, pagers, and phones.

## Program Notes

### ***Vocalise (1915)*** ***Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)***

Sergei Rachmaninoff was born into a wealthy Russian family with a country estate situated near Lake Illmen in the Novgorod region of Russia. His father, a retired army officer, lost the entire family fortune through disastrous financial ventures and subsequently deserted the family. Sergei's cousin, Aleksandr Siloti, who was a well-known concert pianist and conductor, recognized his considerable musical abilities and arranged for him to study piano with the noted teacher and pianist Nikolay Zverev in Moscow. Under Zverev's strict tutelage Sergei gradually grew into one of the greatest piano virtuosos of his time. Later he studied music at the Moscow Conservatory, graduating at the age of 19 and winning a gold medal for his one-act opera *Aleko*.

By 1905 Rachmaninoff had established an international reputation as a pianist and composer and held an appointment as a conductor at the Bolshoi ballet. However, he was clearly worried by the revolutionary fervor that was spreading through Russia, and in 1906 he moved with his family to Dresden where he enjoyed one of the most fertile periods of his creative life, composing among other things his second symphony, the *Isle of the Dead* and his third piano concerto. He returned to Moscow in 1910, but when the revolution finally came in 1917, he left Russia forever, making his home in the United States of America.

*Vocalise* is the fourteenth song in a series of fourteen published by composer Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) in 1915. The first thirteen songs were set to poems written by Russian romantic poets including, Pushkin, Polonsky, Korinfsky, and Shaginyan. In contrast, the *Vocalise* was written without words, relying entirely on the beauty of the melodic line for its success. Originally composed in 1912, Rachmaninoff revised the piece in 1914 (at age 41) before its publication in *14 Songs, Op. 34*.

Some critics have questioned Rachmaninoff's decision to cast the song without words, but others have proposed:

*"Like Mendelssohn, Rachmaninoff felt that not all music required text to convey intense emotion; rather, the absence of [text] is one of the contributing factors to its immense emotional intensity and sorrow."*

Rachmaninoff and Nezhdanova premiered *Vocalise* on January 24, 1916. After the premiere, the composer arranged the piece for orchestra and soprano and for orchestra alone. In the years after its composition, Rachmaninoff made several arrangements including ones for solo piano, violin and piano, and orchestra. Others have arranged the work for a variety of combinations of instruments.

### ***Violin Concerto No. 4 in D Minor, Op. 31 (1850)*** ***Henri Vieuxtemps (1820-1881)***

The name that comes most prominently to mind when discussing the post-Paganini generation of violinists is that of Belgian-born Henri Vieuxtemps, whose virtuosity and compositions (including seven violin concertos) were praised in his time by Berlioz and Schumann. Vieuxtemps attracted huge audiences in Europe and the United States. He appeared as a soloist with the major orchestras, playing chiefly his own works and presenting duo concerts of sonatas with Anton Rubinstein and Sigismond Thalberg. He would frequently feature the works of Beethoven (in particular) and other composers.

One of his accomplishments was re-introducing the Beethoven *Violin Concerto* to the world. Fourteen-year-old Vieuxtemps (he had made his public debut at age six) brought the piece to Vienna in 1834. The performance was one of the rare occasions it had been heard since its unsuccessful premiere in 1806. Vieuxtemps rapturously received performances in Vienna and in Berlin, solidifying the work as a centerpiece of violin repertory.

With Vieuxtemps there were reportedly no tricks, no theatrical flourishes, no attempt merely to dazzle. However, there were fantastic technical challenges as today's music demonstrates.

Of his own concertos, *Violin Concerto No. 4 in D Minor* was his favorite. It was written around 1850, while he was serving a five-year stint both as solo violinist to Czar Nicholas I in St. Petersburg and Master Teacher at the city's conservatory. It is a grandly imposing work in four movements; however, this performance will only highlight the first and second movement. The orchestra's opening few bars of the

concerto is gentle, lush, and romantic; However, the melody is also dramatic and slightly melancholy. When the melody reaches a crescendo infused with a dark edge, it hints at the unknown.

The violin then makes its expressive and singing entrance - free and interpretive. The violin is forward moving with increasing tempo and power in the higher notes. There comes a certain forcefulness in the chords, virtuosity in the runs and harmonics that showcase the whole range of the instrument. The solo is drifting and energetic.

The second movement, *Adagio religioso*, convincingly shows that Vieuxtemps could not only set the strings ablaze, but could also invent melodies of beguiling, sensuous warmth.

### ***Violin Sonatina No. 1 in D Major, Op. 137 (1816)*** **Franz Schubert (1797-1828)**

Franz Schubert was an Austrian composer who bridged the worlds of Classical and Romantic music. He's most noted for his melodies and harmonies in his songs (lieder) and chamber music. Between 1814 and 1816, Schubert worked as a teacher in his father's school in suburban Vienna. He cared little for the situation and soothed his frustration by composing; writing nearly 150 songs, the *Second and Third Symphonies*, a mass, other church music, several piano pieces, and a half a dozen operettas and melodramas in 1815 alone. The torrent of music continued, and he stole enough time from his pedagogical duties to compose some two hundred pieces between the *Third Symphony* and the *Fourth Symphony* (Tragic), completed in April 1816. Music, not teaching, was his passion.

Schubert, however, was apparently not quite ready to give himself over completely to his art. When an advertisement appeared in the *Wiener Zeitung* on February 17, 1816, for a position at the German Normal School at Laibach (now Ljubljana), he applied for the job. According to the Laibach advertisement, the winning applicant "must be a thoroughly trained singer and organist, as well as an equally good violin player." As a result, he quickly composed three sonatinas for violin and piano in March and April of 1816.

It is unknown, however, whether he intended these works to enhance his chances at Laibach or to be played at the convivial Schubertiades. When Schubert did not get the job in Laibach, he decided that he had had more than his fill of teaching. He left his father's school that spring to devote himself to composing full-time and never again held a regular position.

These sonatas were composed about the same time as Schubert's self-labeled "*Tragic*" *Symphony, No. 4*, with the last two of the group in minor keys that reflect some of the symphony's dark passion, as well as the revolutionary stance of Beethoven, the young Schubert's musical idol.

*Sonata in D Major* was composed in 1816 and is more on the model of Mozart, valuing formal grace and lyric charm over emotional heroics. Its superficial simplicity – the unison triadic sequences of the opening theme, say – masks some instinctive sophistication, such as the imitative counterpoint, and dramatic personal touches, such as the shift to minor mode for the recapitulation of that triadic theme. The main subject of the *Sonatina No. 1 in D Major* is a climb up and down the tonic chord trailed by a few chromatic scale notes, which is remarkably like the opening of Mozart's *Violin and Piano Sonata in A Minor, K. 304*. The subject is stated at the outset in unison by the two partners and provides virtually all of the thematic material for the final dialogue that composes the remainder of this compact sonata-form movement.

The second movement is a miniature marvel, a compact A-B-A form with the piano taking the lead in the initial dance and the violin in the central little song. The bookend dance is more fully conversational and follows a deft chromatic transition.

For a finale, Schubert offers unbridled joy in athletically leaping form, equably alternating the melodic lead between the instruments. The closing *Allegro vivace* is a sunny rondo, based on the dapper melody trotted out by the violin to launch the movement.