



DE 3071

# THE SEA AND THE GULLS

RACHMANINOFF

- SYMPHONY NO. 2
- VOCALISE
- THE SEA AND THE GULLS

(Etude Tableau op. 39 no. 2 arr. Respighi)

James De Preist conductor  
The Oregon Symphony



DE 3071

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ORIGINAL DIGITAL RECORDING

**THE SEA AND THE GULLS**  
**Orchestral Music of Sergei Rachmaninoff**

- [1] La Mer et les Mouettes (The Sea and the Gulls)  
(Etude-Tableau op. 39 no. 2, orch. Respighi) (8:36)**

Symphony No. 2 in E minor, op. 27 (51:53)

- [2] Largo; Allegro moderato (16:44)**
- [3] Allegro molto (8:34)**
- [4] Adagio (13:55)**
- [5] Allegro vivace (12:25)**

- [6] Vocalise op. 34 no. 14 (orch. Rachmaninoff) (7:12)**

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 68:00

**JAMES DePREIST, conductor**  
**OREGON SYMPHONY**

*This recording was made possible by a grant from  
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Recorded: *October 22 & 23, 1987, Arlene Schnitzer  
Concert Hall, Portland, Oregon*

Monitor Loudspeakers: *JBL 4412*  
Monitor Amplifier: *JBL UREI 6290*  
Digital Recorder: *Sony PCM-1630, DMR-4000*  
Digital Editor: *Sony DAE-1100A*  
Microphones: *Sanken CU 41, Sennheiser MDH 20,  
Schoeps Mk 41, Milab DC 63, Neumann KM 84*  
Console: *Soundcraft Series 200B*

Design: *Harry Pack, Tri Arts and Associates*

## NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

In his reminiscences, Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) recalls the “four notes of the great bells in the St. Sophia Cathedral of Novgorod, which I often heard when my grandmother took me to town on church festival days.” He also remembers that as a young boy he escorted his grandmother to the churches of St. Petersburg and then went home to his piano and played the Russian Orthodox Chants they had just heard. The three works on this program were composed during Rachmaninoff’s most productive period (1900-1916) while still living in his beloved Moscow, dominated by these sounds. When the October Revolution erupted in 1917 the Rachmaninoffs — whose fortune stemmed from the land — fled Russia forever, and by November, 1918 they had settled in New York City. From that time on, American orchestras played a crucial, catalytic role in making Rachmaninoff’s music known through performance and recording. The *Etude-Tableau op. 39 no. 2*, in Respighi’s orchestration, the *Symphony No. 2 in E Minor*, and Rachmaninoff’s orchestration of his song *Vocalise* were all performed in the United States: American orchestras gave the former and latter pieces their premieres. The present program thus reflects both the composer’s stylistic ties to his homeland, to Russian church music, and his strong associations with American ensembles and conductors.

In December, 1929 Rachmaninoff received a delight-

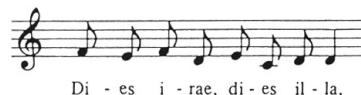
ful proposal from Serge Koussevitzky who wished him to select a group of his *Etudes-Tableaux op. 33, op. 39* (piano pieces) for orchestration by Ottorino Respighi. The commissioned orchestrations would be published by Koussevitzky’s own music publishing house and would have their first performance by the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

In the view of Rachmaninoff, Respighi’s great gift for orchestral color and imagery made him the perfect choice. The two composers also shared a similar outlook on musical composition. Both were confirmed Romantics, endorsing personal, emotional expression rather than the use of precompositional technique (such as serialism). “Music, I have always felt, should be the expression of a composer’s complex personality; it should not be arrived at cerebrally, tailor-made to fit certain specifications,” Rachmaninoff wrote, and Respighi made nearly identical statements denouncing “systems” and “pseudo-schools.” Rachmaninoff knew, then, that Respighi would appreciate the emotive, programmatic contents of the *Etudes-Tableaux* which he had concealed since the time both sets were completed, in 1911 (op. 33) and in 1916-17 (op. 39). On January 2, 1930, after choosing five of the pieces for orchestration, he wrote his collaborator a letter which is a goldmine for interpreters of his music: it discusses programmatic associations that

contemporary listeners and reviewers sensed — one Moscow reviewer described the “faint shadows” of op. 39 no. 2 — but never knew. “Will you permit me, Maître, to give you the secret explanations of their composer? These will certainly make the character of these pieces more comprehensible and help you to find the necessary colors for their orchestration... The first Etude in A minor [Op. 39, No. 2] represents the Sea and Seagulls. [This program was suggested by Mme. Rachmaninoff]”. Respighi’s orchestrations of the five Etudes-Tableaux were published in 1931 and given their first performance under Koussevitsky in December of that year.

**The Sea and the Gulls** is a beautiful miniature in A minor based on a simple triplet figure and a falling and rising motif. The notes of the falling motifs occur between pitches of the triplets, creating a cross rhythm. The piece is permeated by the opening four notes of the celebrated Western plainchant for the Mass of the Dead, “Dies irae” (Day of wrath — see Example A). We first hear this mournful melody sung out by violas and clarinets and by the second violins whose triplet figure is an embellishment of the “Dies irae” theme. Wistfulness brightens at the beginning of the middle section when the brass assume prominence and introduce C major chords. Even here, however, the four- or sometimes three-note “Dies irae” quotations reverberate in the cellos and occasionally in the brass. The climactic fortissimo theme played twice in full strings in a high register is a transformation of the ominous plainchant’s first three notes.

### Example A



In several striking passages Respighi’s orchestration re-creates pedal effects of the piano. The most remarkable of these occurs in the final three measures where Respighi blends two harmonies that would be held by the piano pedal. In the final measure, in imitation of the piano pedal lifting and the sound dissolving, Respighi has all instruments but the cellos cease playing. The cellos slide downward by step to an A minor triad, resolving the final B of the solo clarinet, and we are left with this wisp of cello sound.

Rachmaninoff conducted the premiere of his **Symphony No. 2 in E Minor** on January 26, 1908 in St. Petersburg and then on February 2, 1908 in Moscow. The Moscow performance’s triumphant critical success and the awarding of the Glinka Prize in December prompted him to select the Second Symphony for his American conducting debut on his first U.S. tour in 1909. As a composer living in the U.S. Rachmaninoff came to admire the artistic quality of several American orchestras and was increasingly impressed by the discrimination of American audiences. The Philadelphia Orchestra, which premiered the Second Symphony in 1909, consistently received his highest praise and was most directly involved in performing and recording his music during his lifetime.

Here then was a collaboration and a friendship. Our present conductor, Maestro DePreist, grew up in Philadelphia where he was “blessed with the chance to regularly hear Rachmaninoff’s favorite orchestra in loving performances of his music. It was through these performances that I came to know and love the Second Symphony.” Under Stokowski and then under Oramandy, the Philadelphians performed the Second Symphony sometimes in its complete version but most often in the cut version approved by Rachmaninoff. The conductor therefore has “valid options” which must be offered to the listener. On the present recording, Maestro DePreist presents an option never before heard on disc. He performs the cut version, while restoring one cut — the glorious clarinet theme reprise in movement three.

All but the first movement of the Symphony No. 2 were composed in Dresden where Rachmaninoff sought refuge in 1906 from professional and administrative duties, especially his posts as conductor of the Moscow Private Russian Opera and opera conductor at the Bolshoi Theatre. He intended his new symphony to remove the stain of his first which received a disastrous premiere in 1897 and was harshly attacked by the press. Critical reaction to the Second was glowing: “Despite [Rachmaninoff’s] 34 years, he is one of the most significant figures in the contemporary music world, a worthy successor to Tchaikovsky... This was confirmed most impressively by the new E minor Symphony... how fresh, how beautiful it is.”

The first movement begins with an extended *Largo* in which the opening idea, deep in cellos and double basses, is a motto theme that will recur throughout the symphony. The stepwise movement suggests origins in a Russian Orthodox Church chant. Rachmaninoff maintains the somber religious mood by following the motto with wind and brass chords evocative of a chorale. In counterpoint with the chorale, the first violins play a lively turning theme which expands the opening motto. The *Largo* builds slowly to a climax and then subsides, diminishing in texture and closing as it began, with the motto heard in the solo English horn.

The principal theme of the *Allegro moderato*, full of Romantic sadness, is based on the motto and introduced by unison violins. Rachmaninoff states it twice: with the cut observed by Maestro DePreist, there is a lovely symmetry achieved by the recurrence of the two-bar woodwind introduction. The transition to the second theme is marked by an emphatic use of triplets and a build-up in tempo and dynamics culminating in a fortissimo climax with the entire orchestra. The excitement ebbs, and we are left once again with a solo wind instrument, the clarinet, leading us directly into the second theme. This is a wistful figure in the woodwinds answered by soft strings.

In his descriptive comments on the Second Symphony, James DePreist speaks of “delays in gratification” which are a quintessential trait of Rachmaninoff’s symphonic style. Many occur in the development of

movement one, where Rachmaninoff often continuously repeats a melodic figure (horn and trumpet calls, for example) with only slight variation. Maestro DePreist treats these phrases as plateaus, building slightly in dynamic level with each plateau and sometimes stepping back.

The *Allegro molto*, a scherzo, opens boldly with a horn theme based on the “Dies iiae”. The setting, however, is a festive march. Rachmaninoff gives his theme a strong rhythmic profile, a lively tempo, and a drum-like string accompaniment. The strings respond with a sprightly, dancing, staccato line. For Maestro DePreist, the scherzo is pictorial: “Rachmaninoff takes us on a fantastic trip. We start off at a gallop and about a minute later find ourselves in an oasis of beauty so totally out of character with the rest of the movement, that the resumption of the trip is clearly reluctant, almost apologetic.” The “oasis of beauty” is a gorgeous song in the violins scored, like so many of Rachmaninoff’s string melodies, in octaves, and moving characteristically by step. Even when the drum rhythm of the opening returns to prepare for the scherzo, memories of the string melody hover in a sustained high E in first violins. Then the scherzo resumes, peaks, and fades slowly into rhythmic impulses. A suspenseful measure of silence follows: we have no idea what picture will appear next before our eyes. It is an “argument” conveyed musically by a fugato. The second violins pitch the opening attack, incisive and deliberate. They are answered by first violins,

then by lower strings, woodwinds, until the entire orchestra is embroiled in the storm. Our trip continues with a new vision: a mysterious “parade” in brass and percussion which files on amidst persistent eighth notes of the fugato. The procession is short-lived, hence more mysterious. Repeated horn and trombone calls signal the return of the scherzo.

In the complete version of the Second Symphony, notes James DePreist, “the beau-tiful slow theme returns before the end. In the cut version, it does not, and I find its absence magical. This is clearly a case of remembered beauty surpassing beauty revisited.” The omission of the slow violin theme also increases the dramatic thrust towards the end and makes the brass “benediction” in the coda a welcome repose.

“Now we come to the third movement and if this be our destination, it surely is heaven.” The *Adagio* is “the heart of the symphony. It is the most relaxed of the movements, the most searching and introspective.” We begin with a violin theme moving in thirds. It introduces an “exquisite clarinet solo — at once meditative and serene, nostalgic, tender and innocent.” The orchestra answers the second theme with a third.

Rachmaninoff’s reprise of this material is a transformation, a fascinating study in doubts. “We are not starting over; we are struggling with something.” Tentative statements of the opening theme alternate with assured, until the “game of hide and seek is over” and the clarinet presents itself as “rightful owner of the

theme." We move from there to a transformed reprise of the exquisite clarinet melody. DePreist summarizes the process undergone: "First the orchestra listened to the clarinet as a teacher. Then a period of self-examination occurred. Now the orchestra sings the clarinet's tune." The clarinet theme reprise — normally omitted in the cut version — is thus a culmination, a unique contribution which must be heard in order to show the process from doubt to assurance. A final expression of certainty occurs in the build-up from the movement's third theme to a glorious climax played fortissimo by the entire orchestra.

In the *Allegro vivace*, triplet figures of a saltarello dance rush us into "a trance of sweet memories — a gathering of themes from earlier movements." The opening theme is derived from the dance figure of the Scherzo. A sad woodwind march in minor mode recalls the marches of the second movement. During a brief *Adagio* passage, Rachmaninoff nostalgically recalls the turning motto theme of the Largo (movement one). Then we leap back into the triplet dance, and the development begins. Towards its close, a striking sound begins to emerge when Rachmaninoff introduces a descending scale among the triplets. The texture thins out until only a bassoon plays the scale, answered by violas. From there the scales start to multiply, appearing in upper register instruments and in different note values, as the music grows in volume. Rachmaninoff applies every possible rhythmic variant: doubled note

values, augmented rhythms in the brass, syncopation. At the climax, the glockenspiel joins the throng. The effect is of a thousand bell-towers ringing out in celebration of a religious event. The Russian emigré looks longingly to his homeland. "I have an affinity for bells," he said in an interview. "Whenever I hear deep-throated bells I think of Russia."

Rachmaninoff composed the final work on this program, **Vocalise**, for the famous Moscow soprano Antonina Nezhdanova. He completed it in 1915 and dedicated it to her. **Vocalise** was the last in a cycle of fourteen songs (op. 34). On January 24, 1916 Nezhdanova sang **Vocalise** at a Moscow concert with the composer accompanying. The song was so warmly received that Rachmaninoff's best friend Nikolai Struve encouraged him to orchestrate it for a later concert. Rachmaninoff obliged by arranging **Vocalise** for soprano and orchestra in 1916 and for orchestra alone in 1919. The orchestral arrangement, heard on this recording, had its premiere in New York City in April, 1920 on an all- Rachmaninoff program which Walter Damrosch conducted for the New York Music Festival. In 1929, Rachmaninoff conducted the Philadelphia Orchestra in a recording of the work. Thus this lovely song first became known to Americans in its orchestral version. **Vocalise** opens with a quotation of the "Dies irae" theme. In the final ten bars the violins, carrying the melody, soar up expressively in counterpoint with the clarinet which plays the tune in its original form.

— Nancy Perloff

## ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

"One of the finest conductors this nation has produced" (*Chicago Tribune*), **James DePreist** has been Music Director of the Oregon Symphony since 1980. He is also Music Director of the Monte-Carlo Philharmonic. Much in demand as a guest conductor, DePreist pursues a distinguished career in America and abroad, regularly performing with the major American orchestras, including the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Chicago Symphony, the San Francisco Symphony, the New York Philharmonic and the Boston Symphony. He led the Monte-Carlo Philharmonic on a second United States tour in the spring of 1998; recent appearances abroad include Amsterdam, Helsinki, Vienna, England, France, Australia, New Zealand, the Czech Republic and the Far East.

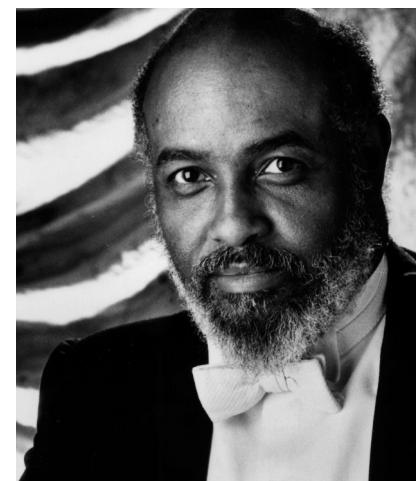
Born in Philadelphia in 1936, DePreist studied composition with Vincent Persichetti at the Philadelphia Conservatory and obtained Bachelor of Science and Master of Arts degrees from the University of Pennsylvania. In 1962, while on a State Department tour in Bangkok, he contracted polio but recovered sufficiently to win a first prize in the 1964 Dimitri Mitropoulos International Conducting Competition. He was selected by Leonard Bernstein to be an assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic for the 1965-66 season.

DePreist made his highly acclaimed European debut with the Rotterdam Philharmonic in 1969. In 1971 Antal Dorati chose DePreist to become his Associate Conductor with the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, DC. From 1976 to 1983 DePreist was Music Director of the Quebec Symphony.

James DePreist has been awarded 15 honorary doctorates and is the author of two books of poetry. He is an elected fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Royal Swedish Academy of Music and is a recipient of the Insignia of Commander of the Order of the Lion of Finland. DePreist is the nephew of the legendary contralto Marian Anderson.

**The Oregon Symphony** is the oldest orchestra in the west and the sixth oldest major orchestra in the United States. Founded as the Portland Symphony in 1896, and renamed the Oregon Symphony in 1967, it has grown to be one of the finest major orchestras in the nation. *Ovation* critic Paul Turok wrote of *Bravura*, the Oregon Symphony's first recording under James DePreist: "In less than a decade, James DePreist has built an orchestra of regional significance into one worthy of national, and perhaps even international, attention..." In press commentary on *Bravura* and subsequent recordings, the Symphony has been ranked "first-class" by *Gramophone* and "a virtuoso ensemble" by *The Washington Post*.

The Oregon Symphony has the highest per capita subscription attendance of any major orchestra in the United States, and serves its entire region with an innovative touring program. In 1996 it used the touring model to launch a local series of free neighborhood parks concerts and educational outreach events funded through the Regional Arts and Culture Council by the city of Portland. In May of 1997 the orchestra was featured on PBS' *Newshour* with Jim Lehrer; a 90-minute television special produced by CBS affiliate KOIN Channel 6 in honor of the Symphony's Centennial featured a performance of Rachmaninoff's Symphony No. 2 and was awarded a Northwest Regional Emmy in June of 1997.



James DePreist

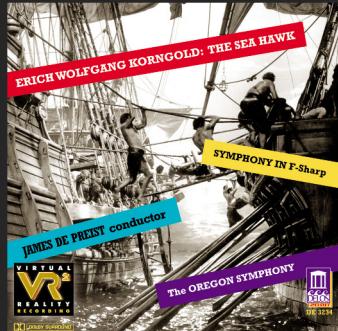
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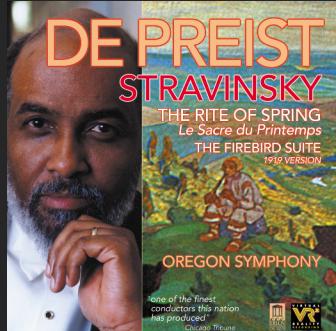
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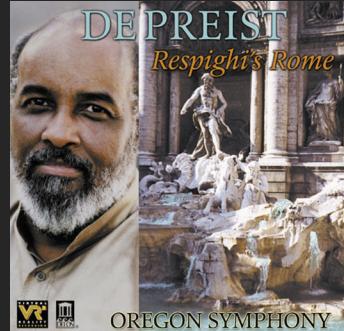
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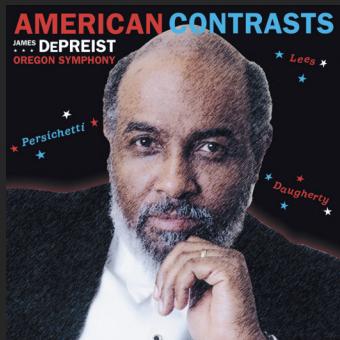
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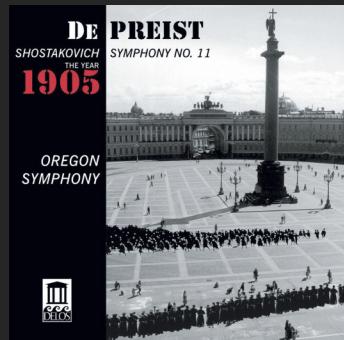
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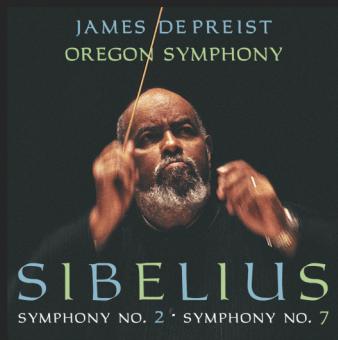
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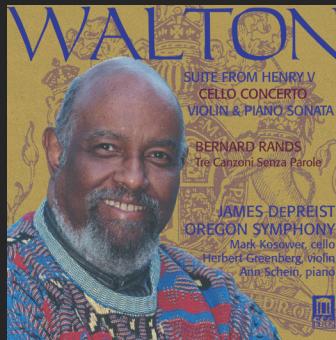
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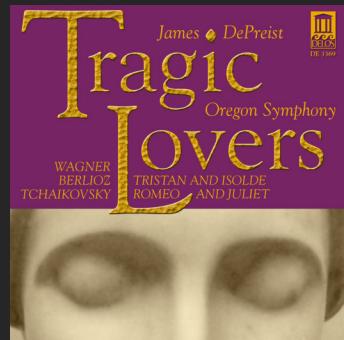
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