

ANTON RUBINSTEIN

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Anton Grigorevich Rubinstein was one of the most important composers in history and yet is almost forgotten, yet another injustice in the world of music. His parents were Jewish. His father opened a pencil factory in Moscow. His mother was a competent musician and gave Anton his first lessons at the age of five until Alexander Villoing heard him play and took him on as a pupil.

Rubinstein was born in the village of Vikhvatinet in Podolski on the 20 November 1829. The village was on the Dniester River. At the age of five, his father's father persuaded all members of the Rubinstein family to convert from Judaism, to Russian Orthodox. In later life, Rubinstein became an atheist, or so he said.

It was at the age of nine that Anton made his first public appearance and this was at a charity concert. In the same year, accompanied by Villoing, he went to Paris with the intention to enrol in the Paris Conservatory but he was refused. One wonders why, since he was a child prodigy.

Nonetheless, they stayed in Paris for a year and, in December 1840, Anton played at a Salle Erard Concert and the audience included Chopin and Liszt. Chopin was somewhat jealous and difficult as usual and was severely anti-Semitic but invited Anton to his studio so that Chopin could show off his own pianistic skills. Liszt was far more helpful and told Villoing to take the young man to Berlin to study. Villoing felt aggrieved at this and took Anton on a lengthy tour of both Europe and Russia returning to Moscow in 1843 where Anton and his younger brother Nikolay were sent to the St Petersburg to perform for the Tsar in the Winter Palace.

A trip to Berlin 1844 with his mother, brother and sister Luba resulted in Anton having noble support from Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer. Nikolay had lessons with Kullak and both boys had composition and theory classes with Siegfried Dehn. The serious illness of Rubinstein's father in 1846 caused the family to return to Russia. Anton's studies continued and he sought tuition from Liszt in Vienna but that help was not forthcoming. Anton lived in poverty, although he made approaches to other hopeful patrons. He did have a concert tour of Hungary but returned to Russia partly due to the Revolution of 1848.

The next five years were spent in St Petersburg and the Grand Duchess Elena Pavlova became his patroness. She was a sister of Tsar Nicholas 1.

This spurred him on. His first opera Dmitry Donskoy was written but only the overture survives today. Despite trouble with the censors it was premiered at the Bolshoi Theatre in 1852.

Rubinstein never really found success in Russia. His music was said to be Germanic, not Russian. Consequently, he went abroad and, from 1854, had a four year European tour. He was rightly acclaimed as a virtuoso. He also conducted and performed his own Symphony no 2 with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra on 16 November 1854 to mixed reviews.

In the winter of 1856-1857 he spent time with the Imperial family and discussions with Elena Pavlova which led to the founding of the Russia Music Society in 1859 which developed into the St Petersburg Conservatory around 1862. Many Russians considered that the Conservatory may not be Russian enough and Rubinstein Germanic style was a factor.



Mily Balakirev did raise the standard at the Conservatory but his ideas were quite different from those of Rubinstein's and there was regular friction between them. Most of Rubinstein's problems stemmed from the anti-Semitism shown towards him as it was to Meyerbeer and while Wagner was anti-Semitic, Chopin was, by far, the worst offender.

Almost everyone was staggered by Rubinstein's playing and Rachmaninov was bowled over by it. Moscheles said that Rubinstein looked like Beethoven with his untidy hair and dramatic power at the keyboard.

Rubinstein experienced success with his Piano Concerto no 4 and his opera *The Demon*, in 1864 and 1871 respectively.

Balakirev did premiere Rubinstein's opera *Ivan IV Grosznyi*. Borodin commented on its worth but said that no one would believe that it was written by Rubinstein.

By the mid 1860s, there was continuous tension among the staff at the Conservatory. Rubenstein resigned and toured throughout Europe now playing works by composers other than himself. Steinway and Sons invited him to America where he gave 200 concerts during the 1872-1873 season. He was rightly acclaimed but his enjoyment at being a virtuoso and his excessive work load tired him and he became miserable. He returned to Russia and purchased a home for his family and himself at Peterhof near St Petersburg. He still continued to tour as a concert pianist and returned to the Conservatory in 1887 to improve the standards there. He sacked many inferior teachers and removed inadequate students giving personal coaching to those who were worthy. In 1891, he resigned as he was leaving Russia and objected the use of racial quotas and the bad treatment of Jewish students.

He settled in Dresden giving charity concerts in both Germany and Austria. Among his students was Josef Hofmann who became a legend in his lifetime.

Rubinstein visited friends and family in Russia from time to time and gave his final recital in St Petersburg on 14 January 1894 and, that summer, moved back to Peterhof. Heart disease was now taking him over and he died at his home on 30 November 1894. He was just 65.

As to his work, I set out some brief details of his symphonies and piano concertos.

The *Symphony no 1 in F Op 40* lasts for about 36 minutes and was dedicated to Julius Rietz and published by C F Kahat of Leipzig in 1859. It was unfairly said to be Mendelssohnian. It is in four movements, the first being marked *allegro con fuoco* and it is instantly attractive and appealing. There are some exquisite woodwind solos and clearly defined themes. It maintains a generally consistent tempo and, in 66 pages of score, there are no key changes. The second movement is a real scherzo and it is playful and very well orchestrated, It is marked *allegro* and in 3/8 time. There is a trio in B flat in 9/8 time. The third movement is marked *moderato* and has a central section in C. It is often quite profound and sensitive but keeps moving. It is coherent and emotive but never slushy or sentimental. There is a terrific climax but perhaps this movement is slightly too long. The finale an *allegro* in F with a brief *andante* passage in D flat and is somewhat rustic and has a gentle and memorable theme. The coda is marked *presto*. The music is never excessive or over the top.

This is followed by the *Symphony no 2 in C Op 42* known as *The Ocean*. The original version of 1851 is in four movements, dedicated to Liszt and published by Bartholf Senff, Leipzig. The first movement, *allegro maestoso* has a fine flute solo taken up by the oboe and clarinet. The rhythm is full of dotted notes and triplets. The theme is well-developed and the music is simple yet never banal. There is a gorgeous second theme introduced by the clarinet and the music is faithful to C major throughout. The second movement, *adagio non tanto*, remains in the key of G as does the third movement which is an *allegro* in 2/4 time. The finale starts in E flat as an *adagio* before developing into *moderato assai*, a favourite tempo of this composer. This music proves that broad themes can be impressive although this is not the case with some composers.

In 1863, Rubinstein added two new large movements and, 17 years later, a scherzo and this met with much disapproval. A symphony in seven movements was unheard of and one wonders why Rubinstein did this. Someone has said that the seven movements represent the seven seas.

Schubert of Leipzig published the Symphony no 3 in A Op 56 and it is dedicated to L A Zellner. It is also an attractive well-written piece which has in its second movement a glowing and gorgeous theme. The third movement is somewhat trite and lightweight as are parts of the finale although the last four minutes or so are stunning.

Dramatic is the title of the Symphony no 4 in F Op 95 dedicated to Otto Dessoff and published by Bartholf Senff in Leipzig. It is a huge work lasting about 65 minutes. The first movement has a lento introduction before becoming an allegro con fuoco. It is a very active movement with some fine woodwind solos. At page 84 of the score we travel into D major in a meno mosso section and, later, we are back in D minor. The second movement is marked presto and is in 3/4. It has some vigour and broad themes and perhaps a hint of the scherzo from Beethoven's Symphony no 7. There is a brief section marked moderato assai. The third movement is in D and is an allegro non troppo. The fourth movement, adagio, is in 6/8 time. The fifth movement begins with a largo introduction before setting off as another allegro con fuoco. There is an interlude marked moderato assai and then the allegro is repeated, as is the moderato assai, although we are now playing with three sharps. The allegro returns and the coda finds itself in the key of D major.

There is much to admire in this symphony but one can be forgiven for thinking it is a little too long.

The Symphony no 5 in G minor Op 107 is dedicated to the memory of the Grand Duchess Helene Pavlova and was published by Bartholf Senff. It is 264 pages of score of attractive music with four movements Moderato assai, Allegro non troppo, Andante, set in E flat, and an Allegro vivace beginning in G minor but ending in the major.

His final symphony is the Symphony no 6 in A minor Op 111 dedicated to the Gewandhaus Society Concerts and published by Bartholf Senff. It is a work of tremendous rhythmic vitality with the second movement marked moderato assai and set in the key of E, followed by an allegro vivace in C with an excursion into E flat. The finale begins moderato assai before becoming allegro and briefly returning to the first tempo. There are many key changes A minor, F, C, A, F, A, A minor and A. However, this does not hamper the work. It is a successful piece.

There are five piano concertos, all quality works. The first is in E minor and is Op 25 published by C F Peters in Leipzig and dedicated to Alexander Villoing. It dates from 1850.

The Piano Concerto no 2 in F Op 35 dates from 1851 and was published in Vienna by C A Spine. It is dedicated to my friend Charles Lowry. As with the first concerto, it is in three movements. The opening movement is allegro vivace assai risultato con fuoco and relies on a repeated four note theme and is very acceptable music. The adagio non troppo is a sensitive and rewarding movement with a terrific climax at 25 minutes 30. But this movement does not want to end. The finale, moderato, is frivolous and lightweight with unfortunate hints of Chopin. It is silly and pretty music whereas one would wish for a robust finale.

This is not the case with the Piano Concerto no 3 in G Op 35 written around 1853. It has a warmth and an amazing brilliance. At times it sounds like Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto no 2, also in G, but the Tchaikovsky work was written in 1880, 27 years later. I could write at length about this masterpiece but hearing it for yourself is the most obvious thing to do. Bote and Bock published it and the work is dedicated to Ignace Moscheles.

His most admired work is probably the Piano Concerto no 4 in D minor Op 70 dedicated to Ferdinand David and published by Bartholf Senff in 1872. The outer movements are very fine; the central middle movement loses its way somewhat.

While I am certainly not decrying the piano concertos of both Schumann and Grieg this Rubinstein concerto is vastly superior to both of them. So why is that it is seldom played? It does not make sense. Of course, the Rubinstein is technically far more difficult, but there are many pianists, including young pianists, playing such challenging works as Prokofiev 3 and Rachmaninov 3.

People who think that they know about music write the most inane and inaccurate things. I have heard it said that Elgar was a great composer and wrote wonderfully for the piano; a famous BBC newsreader wrote a 'major' work about Brahms and did not mention the Violin Concerto, one of his important and superior works; and people have written that Rubinstein's Piano Concerto no 4 was 'stolen' from Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto no 3. The Rachmaninov was written 37 years later.

The trouble is that some people believe these false statements.

The Piano Concerto no 5 in E flat is a lengthy work but, to my mind, is made up of many piano clichés and gymnastics which becomes wearisome. There are some very fine moments but the work is inconsistent.

There is a Concertstuck for piano and orchestra Op 113 and the Russian Caprice for piano and orchestra Op 102. He also composed a Violin Concerto Op 46 and two Cello Concertos Op 65 and 96.

Rubinstein wrote a great deal of piano music but seems only to be known for his famous melody in F op 3 no.1. There are four piano sonatas, a set of pieces called Kamenny-Ostrov Op 10, two sets of pieces called Acrostychon Op 37 and Op 114, Theme and Variations Op 88, caprices, serenades and etudes. The piano features in several chamber works such as the six piano trios Op 15 numbers one and two, 52, 70, 85 and 108, the piano quartets Op 66 and 99, the violin sonatas Op 13 and 19, the cello sonatas Op 18 and 39 and the impressive Viola Sonata Op 49, the quintet for piano and wind Op 55.

Almost everyone who heard Rubinstein play admired his amazing technique, skill, memory and amazing musicality. Sadly, there are always some idiots who deny both fact and sense and Chopin and Clara Schumann were the miscreants with evil and incorrect criticisms.

This fine Russian composer wrote operas and, despite his claim to be an atheist, these include sacred operas namely Sulamith 1883, Das verforene Paradies Op 54, The Tower of Babel, Op 80, Moses Op 112, Christus Op 117 and Cain which was unfinished. His secular operas are

Dmitry Donskoy 1850 (only the overture remains)
Siberian Hunters 1852
Fomka the fool
Children of the Steppes 1861?
Feremors 1862
The Demon 1871
Die Maccabeer 1874
Neron 1876
Merchant Kalashnika 1879
Unter Rauben 1883
The Parakeet 1884
The Sorrowful Ones 1888
There is also a ballet, The Grapevine of 1881.

There are four groups of string quartets namely three in Op 17, three in Op 80 and two in Op 90 and two in Op 106 making ten in all. There are groups of Lieder.

His impressive orchestration is shown in his tone poems such as Ivan the Terrible Op 69, Don Quixote Op 87 and the Eroica Fantasy Op 110.

There is far too much rubbish spoken and written about some composers. Very poor composers are said to be great composers and really great composers are ignored.

Like many composers, Rubinstein wrote too much and the quality varies. But there are some very fine works and more than handful of obvious masterpieces.

List of works by Anton Rubinstein

Works with Opus Number

- Op.1 Ondine, Etude
- Op.2 2 Fantaisies sur des chansons populaires Russes
- Op.3 2 Mélodies for Piano
- Op.4 Mazurka-Fantasia
- Op.5 3 Piano Pieces
- Op.6 Tarantelle
- Op.7 Impromptu-caprice
- Op.8 3 Interieures for Piano
- Op.8 also 6 Songs ?
- Op.9 Octet for Piano, Strings & Winds
- Op.10 Kamenniy-Ostrov, 24 Piano Sketches[
- Op.11 9 Salon Pieces
 - Nos.1-3 for Violin & Piano
 - Nos.4-6 for Cello & Piano
 - Nos.7-9 for Viola & Piano
- Op.12 Piano Sonata No.1 in E minor
- Op.13 Violin Sonata No.1 in G major
- Op.14 Le Bal for Piano
- Op.15 2 Piano Trios
 - Piano Trio No.1 in F major
 - Piano Trio No.2 in G minor
- Op.16 3 Morceaux
- Op.17 3 Quartets
 - String Quartet No.1 in G Major
 - String Quartet No.2 in C minor
 - String Quartet No.3 in F Major
- Op.18 Cello Sonata No.1
- Op.19 Violin Sonata No.2 in A minor
- Op.20 Piano Sonata No.2 in C minor
- Op.21 3 Caprices for Piano
- Op.22 3 Serenades for Piano
- Op.23 6 Etudes for Piano
- Op.24 6 Preludes for Piano
- Op.25 Piano Concerto No.1 in E minor
- Op.26 2 Morceaux for Piano
- Op.27 Lieder
- Op.28 2 Morceaux for Piano
 - No.1. Nocturne in G? major
 - No.2. Caprice in E? major
- Op.29 2 Trauermärche for Piano
- Op.30 2 Morceaux for Piano
- Op.31 Russian Songs
- Op.32 6 Lieder from Heine for Voice and Piano

- Op.33 6 German Songs
- Op.34 12 persische Lieder
- Op.35 Piano Concerto No.2 in F Major
- Op.36 12 Russian Folksongs
- Op.37 Acrostychon No.1 for Piano
- Op.38 Suite in zehn Sätzen for Piano
- Op.39 Cello Sonata No.2 in G Major
- Op.40 Symphony No.1 in F Major (completed 1849)
- Op.41 Piano Sonata No.3 in F major
- Op.42 Symphony No.2 in C Major, Ocean
- Op.43 Triumphal Overture
- Op.44 6 Soirees a St. Petersburg for Piano
- Op.45 Piano Concerto No.3 in G Major
- Op.45b Barcarolle for Piano No. 2 in A minor
- Op.46 Violin Concerto
- Op.47 3 Quartets
 - No.1 in E minor
 - No.2 in B-flat Major
 - No.3 in D minor
- Op.48 12 Lieder nach russischen Texten
- Op.49 Viola Sonata in F minor
- Op.50 6 Character Pieces for Piano Four-Hands
- Op.51 6 Morceaux for Piano
- Op.52 Piano Trio No.3 in Bb Major
- Op.53 6 Fugues (En Style Libre) Introduites de Préludes pour Piano
- Op.54 Paradise Lost, Oratorio (1855)
- Op.55 Quintet for Piano and Winds in F Major
- Op.56 Symphony No.3 in A Major
- Op.57 6 German Songs
- Op.58 Scena ed Aria E dunque ver? – Ist es denn wahr? for Soprano with the Accompaniment of Orchestra or Piano
- Op.59 Quintet for Strings in F Major (also arranged as a Piano Quartet)
- Op.60 Overture de Concert for Orchestra
- Op.61 3 Lieder
- Op.62 3 Lieder
- Op.63 Die Nixe, for Womens' Chorus and Alto Solo, with Accompaniment of a Piano or Orchestra
- Op.64 Fables
- Op.65 Cello Concerto No.1 in A minor
- Op.66 Quartet for Piano and Strings in C Major
- Op.67 6 Lieder nach deutschen Texten
- Op.68 Faust, Tone Poem for Orchestra
- Op.69 5 Morceaux for Piano
- Op.70 Piano Concerto No.4 in D minor
- Op.71 3 Morceaux for Piano
- Op.72 6 German Songs
- Op.73 Fantasie in F minor for 2 Pianos
- Op.74 Morgen, Cantata
- Op.75 Album de Peterhof, 12 Morceaux for Piano
- Op.76 6 German Songs
- Op.77 Fantasy in E minor for Piano
- Op.78 12 Russian Folksongs
- Op.79 Ivan the Terrible for Orchestra
- Op.80 Der Thurm zu Babel, Opera/Oratorio
- Op.81 5 Etudes for Piano

- Op.82 7 Danses Nationales for Piano
- Op.83 10 Lieder
- Op.84 Fantasy for Piano With or Without Orchestra in C Major
- Op.85 Piano Trio No.4 in A Major
- Op.86 Romance et caprice for Violin and Orchestra
- Op.87 Don Quixote for Orchestra
- Op.88 Theme & Variations for Piano
- Op.89 Sonata for Piano Four-Hands
- Op.90 2 Quartets
 - No.1 in G minor
 - No.2 in E minor
- Op.91 Lied und Requiem an Mignon for Chorus
- Op.92 2 Songs for Chorus and Orchestra (Hecuba and Hage in der Wüste)
- Op.93 Verschiedene Stücke for Piano (includes Barcarolle No.5. Pub.1873)
- Op.94 Piano Concerto No.5 in E? Major
- Op.95 Symphony No.4 in D minor, Dramatic
- Op.96 Cello Concerto No.2 in D minor
- Op.97 Sextet for Strings in D Major
- Op.98 Violin Sonata No.3 in B minor
- Op.99 Quintet for Piano and Strings in G minor
- Op.100 Piano Sonata No.4 in A minor
- Op.101 12 Lieder nach Tolstoi
- Op.102 Caprice russe for Piano and Orchestra
- Op.103 Bal Costume, Suite de Morceaux Caracteristiques pour Piano 4H
- Op.104 6 Morceaux for Piano
- Op.105 10 Lieder nach serbischen Melodien
- Op.106 String Quartets Nos.9-10
 - No.1 in Ab Major
 - No.2 in F minor
- Op.107 Symphony No.5 in G minor
- Op.108 Piano Trio No.5 in C minor
- Op.109 Soirees Musicales, 17 Pieces for Piano
- Op.110 Eroica for Orchestra
- Op.111 Symphony No.6 in A minor
- Op.112 Moses, Oratorio
- Op.113 Konzertstück in Ab Major
- Op.114 Acrostychon No.2 for Piano
- Op.115 10 German Songs
- Op.116 Antonius und Kleopatra for Orchestra
- Op.117 Christus, Oratorio
- Op.118 Souvenir de Dresden for Piano
- Op.119 Suite for Orchestra

Works Without Opus Number

- Ballad (1891)
- Barcarolle No.4 for Piano in G major) (pub. 1862, Bote & Bock)
- Barcarolle No.5 – see Op.93
- Barcarolle No.6 in C minor (pub.1884)
- Cadenzas for Beethoven's Piano Concerto No.1
- Cadenza for Beethoven's Piano Concerto No.2 (First Movement)
- Cadenza for Beethoven's Piano Concerto No.3 (First Movement)
- Cadenzas to Beethoven's Piano Concerto No.4
- Etude on False-Notes for Piano in C major
- Fantaisie sur des Melodies Hongroises
- Impromptu

Mélancolie
3 Mélodies caractéristiques
Romance for Violin and Piano
Transcriptions for Piano
 Valse-Caprice in E-flat major (1870)
Operas
 The Demon (ДЕМОН, 1871)
 Dmitri Donskoi (ДМИТРИЙ ДОНСКОЙ) (only overture still exists) (1852)
 Die Rache
 Feramors
 Fomka, der Dummkopf
 Gorjuscha
 The Merchant Kalashnikov (Kalaschnikow der Kaufmann, Купец Калашников)
 Die Kinder der Heide (1861)
 Die Maccabäer
 Nero
 Der Papagei
 Sibirischen Jäger (1 act; premiered under Franz Liszt's direction in Weimar November 9, 1854)
 Unter Räubern
Ballet
 Die Rebe (The Grapevine)

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