

Sergei **Rachmaninov**

# **All-Night Vigil** · Opus 37

**Copenhagen Oratorio Choir**

Conductor **Torsten Mariegaard**

On a basis of deep, deep bass voices, the monumental work of a cappella choir moves through a Russian church night, from sunset to sunrise.

Along the way, you will encounter moving choral music in all tones, from meditative simplicity to magnificent 11-voice harmony.

## Rachmaninoff's All-Night Vigil

Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) composed the music in 1915, dedicating it to Stepan Smolensky, the leader from 1886 to 1901 of a school in Moscow where Orthodox liturgical singing was taught. Smolensky urged composers to write new church music in keeping with the tradition, and apparently had a strong influence on Rachmaninoff.

Rachmaninoff's connection with liturgical music was not a matter of course. He did attend church regularly, but his musical roots were in Russian Romanticism – Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov. Therefore the main element in his church music is a rendering of the atmosphere and mood of the mass. His musical emphasis of the text is extremely well-considered and thorough, but his interpretation of the content is very subjective. This gave rise to, on the one hand a critical attitude among established musicians affiliated with the Orthodox Church, on the other a fresh impulse towards more emotionally charged and individually coloured church music.

There is a tradition in the Russian Orthodox Church of combining the masses of Saturday evening and Sunday morning in one long mass Saturday evening and night – an All-

Night Vigil. It consists of various sections such as contemplation, thanks-giving and glorification. Since the Middle Ages certain hymns have been connected with these sections as important elements of the mass. It was in this material that Rachmaninoff found the texts and the inspiration for his All-Night Vigil.

The music of the evening mass often has a meditative character which contributes to the quiet atmosphere of a dimly lit church. In contrast, the music of the morning mass celebrates the light of the new day. Hence the Orthodox Vigil contains both types of music – an evening section, then a morning section – thus providing a richness of contrasts. All the singing is naturally a cappella, as the Orthodox tradition allows no use of instruments in church, only the praise of the unalloyed human voice.

Rachmaninoff's All-Night Vigil consists of twelve movements which are always sung together. In addition, there are two short movements, numbers 13 and 14, which strictly speaking should alternate from week to week; here they are sung in succession. The work closes with number 15, a glorification of the Virgin Mary.

## All-Night Virgil – The Movements

### 1. Priidíte, pokloňimsia

Come, Let Us Worship

### 2. Blagosloví, dushé moyá, Ghóspoda

Bless the Lord, O My Soul

### 3. Blazhén muzh

Blessed Is the Man

### 4. Svéte tíhiy

Gladsome Light

### 5. Níňe otpushcháyesĥi

Lord, Now Lettest Thou

### 6. Bogoróditse Dévo

Rejoice, O Virgin

### 7. Sláva v víhñih Bógu

The Six Psalms

### 8. Hvalíte ímia Ghospódñe

Praise the Name of the Lord

### 9. Blagosloveén yesí, Ghóspodi

Blessed Art Thou, O Lord

### 10. Voskreséñiye Hristóvo vídevsĥe

Having Beheld the Resurrection

### 11. Velíchit dushá Moyá Ghóspoda

My Soul Magnifies the Lord

### 12. Sláva v víshñih Bogú

The Great Doxology

### 13. Dñes spaséñiye

Today Salvation Has Come

### 14. Voskrés iz gróba

Thou Didst Rise From the Tomb

### 15. Vzbránnoy voyevóde

To Thee, the Victorious Leader

**Copenhagen Oratorio Choir** is the result of years of collaboration between the two chamber choirs Pegasus and Terpsichore, both conducted by Torsten Mariegaard. Through many seasons, the two choirs have given separate concerts with advanced repertoires, chosen from among the works of the most outstanding choral composers such as Bach, Brahms, Britten, Debussy, Grieg, Kodály, Messiaen, Poulenc, Reger, Schütz, and Verdi. A few joint oratorio projects were sufficient to show that together the two choirs could successfully perform large choral works.

Thus the idea arose of a series of concerts in Danish cathedrals performing Rachmaninoff's *All-Night Vigil*, as a kind of even-song at the close of the second millennium. The natural rounding-off of this presentation of the All-Night Vigil to large audiences in Denmark was – as the first in Denmark – recording this masterpiece on Classico Records in 1999.

Every year in December, COC holds the tradition of performing Händel's *The Messiah* in Helligåndskirken at the main pedestrian street, Strøget, in Copenhagen.

In 2017, COC gave an a cappella concert singing a mixed program with the title *I Himmelen* (In Heaven). The concert was organized around Grieg's *4 Psalms* as the centerpiece with additional composers

like Whitaker (*Alleluia*) and Samuel Barber (*Agnus Dei*). This was a new approach for the choir. The concert was a great success among both singers and audience.

**Torsten Mariegaard** graduated from the Royal Danish Academy of Music in 1990. After a bachelor's degree in guitar, Torsten Mariegaard decided to focus his master studies on conducting with the professors Jorma Panula (orchestra) and Dan-Oluf Stenlund (choir). Later, he studied with highly esteemed Danish organists such as Søren Christian Vestergaard and Jens E. Christensen and added an organist degree to his curriculum. Since 2002, Torsten holds a position as organist at Birkholm Kirkesal, Herlev.

Over the years, Torsten Mariegaard has founded and conducted several choirs covering a comprehensive repertoire. He has a main interest in great and well-known a cappella works, though he has also conducted large standard works with orchestra, choir, and soloists, such as Bach's *St. John's Passion*, Händel's *Messiah*, Haydn's *The Creation*, Mendelssohn's oratorios *Elijah* and *Paulus*, and the Requiems by Brahms, Duruflé, Fauré, Mozart, and Verdi.

Torsten Mariegaard is active both as a conductor, as a teacher, as an instructor at choir competitions, and as a member of the artistic leadership of e.g. the Copenhagen Choir Festival.