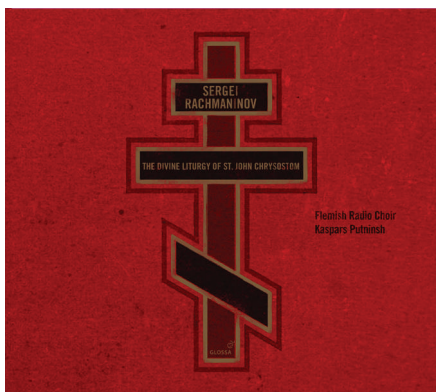


GCDSA 922203  
 New release information  
 August 2006

# Sergei Rachmaninov

## Liturgy of St John Chrysostom



Serge Rachmaninov  
 The Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom

Flemish Radio Choir  
 Kaspars Putninsh, director

Glossa GCDSA 922203  
 Hybrid SACD / Digipak

### Programme

1-19  
 The Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom,  
 opus 31

The Great Litany Bless the Lord, O my Soul  
 Glory be to the Father In Thy Kingdom Come,  
 let us Worship O, Lord The Augmented and  
 Subsequent Litanies The Cherubic Hymn The  
 Litany of Supplication The Creed A Mercy of  
 Peace To Thee We Sing It is Truly Meet The  
 Lord's Prayer: Our Father The Communion  
 Hymn: Praise the Lord of the Heavens Blessed  
 is He – We Have Seen the True Light May our  
 Mouths be Filled Blessed be the Name of the  
 Lord Glory to the Father

### Production details

Playing time: 65'18

Recorded at Jezuietenkerk, Heverlee, Belgium,  
 in March 2006

Engineered, produced and mastered by  
 Manuel Mohino

Assistant engineer: Grégory Beaufays  
 Executive producer: Carlos Céster

Design: oficina tresminutos 00:03:00

Essay: Javier Palacio and Jan Vandenheede  
 English Français Nederlands Español Deutsch

SACD Surround 5.0 – SACD Stereo – CD Stereo



### NOTES (ENG)

Throughout the history of music, few composers have had such (almost systematic) recourse to feelings as Rachmaninov and used them as the main sustenance for their works. Generally, even the most identifiably Romantic authors occasionally hide or disguise their feelings behind more abstract concepts, which can be summarised by terms such as "thematic construction", "motif material" and "expressive power". Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943), however, was not afraid to make eloquent, unambiguous and direct references to the feelings that pervade his pieces in a mixture of agitation and urgency, turning them into moving radiographs of his innermost artistic and human sentiments. Neither does he hesitate to assert the eminently nationalist nature of his output. His *Liturgy of St John Chrysostom* was composed in 1910 when, at the age of 37, Rachmaninov had just returned from his first American tour, having given a series of recitals in which his *Concerto N° 3 for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 30* had been enthusiastically received.

Rachmaninov had always been fascinated by the melodic legacy of the Orthodox Church, a repertoire that he encountered, for example, near Novgorod, one of the main religious centres in the country. He managed to capture the depth of the liturgical text, translating it perfectly into a set of melodies whose simplicity increases their capacity to echo in the listener's mind. With the *Liturgy of St John Chrysostom* we penetrate the very heart of the spiritual world of Orthodox Russia, where its greatest desires and hopes for eternal life gleam.

### NOTAS (ESP)

A lo largo de la historia musical pocos compositores han apelado de manera casi programática a los sentimientos y recurrido a ellos como principal combustible de sus obras; por lo común, incluso los autores más nitidamente adscritos al ámbito romántico suelen en ocasiones esconderlos o disimularlos tras conceptos más abstractos, que podrían resumirse en términos del tipo «construcción temática», «material motivico» o «potencia expresiva». Por su parte, Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943) no teme referirse con elocuencia, de manera diáfana y directa, a los sentimientos que recorren, en una amalgama de aleteo y urgencia, unas piezas convertidas de este modo en conmovedoras radiografías de sus interioridades artísticas y humanas. Al mismo tiempo no duda tampoco en afirmar el carácter excepcionalmente nacionalista de su producción. Su *Liturgia de San Juan Crisóstomo* fue compuesta en 1910, cuando acababa de regresar de su primera gira americana, una serie de recitales en los que su *Concierto n° 3 para piano y orquesta op. 30* fuera recibido con enorme entusiasmo.

Rachmaninov había estado siempre fascinado por el legado melódico de la Iglesia Ortodoxa, un repertorio con el que se encontró, por ejemplo, en las cercanías de Novgorod, uno de los máximos centros religiosos del país. Supo captar con hondura el texto de la liturgia, encontrando su perfecta traducción en unas melodías cuya sencillez incrementa su capacidad para reverberar en el ánimo del oyente. Con la *Liturgia de San Juan Crisóstomo* accedemos al corazón del universo espiritual de la Rusia ortodoxa, allí donde resplandecen sus máximos anhelos y esperanzas de vida eterna.

### NOTES (FRA)

Rares sont les compositeurs qui, tout au long de l'histoire de la musique, ont eu recours aux sentiments d'une manière presque systématique et qui les ont utilisés comme le support principal de leurs œuvres. Le plus souvent, même les auteurs qui se réclament du romantisme les masquent ou les dissimulent parfois derrière des concepts plus abstraits, que l'on pourrait résumer en des termes tels que « construction thématique », « matériau motivique » ou « puissance expressive ». Serge Rachmaninov (1873-1943), pour sa part, ne craint pas de se référer avec éloquence, d'une manière transparente et directe, aux sentiments qui parcourent, en mêlant fièvre et urgence, des pièces ainsi transformées en d'émouvantes radiographies de ses états d'âme d'artiste et d'homme. Il n'hésite pas non plus à affirmer le caractère exceptionnellement nationaliste de sa production. Le moment où le compositeur écrit la *Liturgie*, en 1910, est sans aucun doute décisif dans sa trajectoire. Rachmaninov, qui avait à l'époque trente-sept ans, venait de rentrer de sa première tournée américaine, une série de récitals durant lesquels son *Concerto pour piano et orchestre n° 3 op. 30* fut reçu avec un énorme enthousiasme.

Rachmaninov a toujours été fasciné par le patrimoine mélodique de l'Église orthodoxe, un répertoire avec lequel il allait entrer en contact, par exemple, durant son séjour chez sa grand-mère, près de Novgorod, l'un des plus grands centres religieux de son pays. Rachmaninov a su capter en profondeur le texte de la liturgie, et trouver sa traduction parfaite dans des mélodies dont la simplicité augmente leur capacité à trouver un écho dans l'âme de l'auditeur. Avec la *Liturgie de saint Jean Chrysostome* nous accédons au cœur de l'univers spirituel de la Russie orthodoxe, là où resplendissent ses plus hautes aspirations et espérances de vie éternelle.

### NOTIZEN (DEU)

In der Musikgeschichte haben wenige Komponisten auf diese fast programmatische Weise auf Gefühle hingewiesen und sich ihrer als hauptsächlichliche Quelle ihrer Werke bedient; im Allgemeinen, und dies gilt auch für die am deutlichsten dem romantischen Einflussbereich zuzurechnenden Komponisten, versteckt man die Gefühle, oder man versucht sie zu verheimlichen hinter abstrakteren Konzepten wie »thematische Konstruktion«, »motivisches Material« oder »expressive Potenz«. Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943) schreckt jedoch nicht davor zurück, sich beredt, klar und direkt auf die Gefühle zu beziehen, die in einem Gemisch von zitterndem Flügelschlag und Dringlichkeit Stücke durchziehen, die so zu ergreifenden Abbildungen seines künstlerischen wie menschlichen Innenlebens werden. Gleichzeitig zögert er auch nicht, auf den außerordentlich nationalen Charakter seines Werkes zu verweisen. Der Zeitpunkt der Komposition der *Liturgie*, 1910, ist auf dem Schaffensweg des Komponisten zweifelsohne von großer Bedeutung. Gerade war der Siebenunddreißigjährige zurückgekehrt von seiner ersten Amerikareise mit einer Reihe von Aufführungen, bei denen sein *Konzert Nr. 3 für Klavier und Orchester Opus 30* mit riesiger Begeisterung aufgenommen wurde.

Rachmaninov war stets fasziniert vom melodischen Erbe der orthodoxen Kirche, ein Repertoire mit dem er etwa während der Zeit im Hause seiner Großmutter, in der Nähe von Novgorod, eines der wichtigsten religiösen Zentren seines Landes, in Kontakt kam. Er verstand es, den Text der Liturgie tiefgründig zu erfassen, und fand seine vollkommene Entsprechung in Melodien, deren Einfachheit die Rückwirkung auf den Zuhörer noch erhöht. Mit der *Liturgie des Johannes Chrysostomos* dringen wir vor bis zum spirituellen Herzen des orthodoxen Russland, dorthin, wo seine größten Sehnsüchte und Hoffnungen auf ewiges Leben erstrahlen.

## Flemish Radio Choir

### A portrait



Kaspars Putninsh

In the world of choral music the increasingly higher standards reached in recent years by a number of chamber-sized choirs has been a hugely encouraging development. With every intention and capacity to join such an elite group is Glossa's recent signing, the Vlaams Radio Koor from Belgium – the Flemish Radio Choir. Although the choir has been in existence for 70 years it is only in the last decade or so that it has been able to move itself from being an all-purpose studio-based operation for broadcasting purposes and raise its standards. Such is its success at home that it now acts as a catalyst for amateur choirs in the Flanders region in areas such as repertoire and performance. Additionally it is organizing projects which will be involving students from various Flemish music conservatories.

The choir joined Glossa earlier this year, presenting a challenging programme of music by Zoltán Kodály. The Hungarian composer's *Missa Brevis* (and a selection of some of his lesser-known choral works) was conducted with masterly skill by the choir's Principal Conductor Johan Duijck (a pupil of the naturalized Briton László Heltay, who had himself been a pupil of that moving spirit of Hungarian musical nationalism, Kodály). Duijck, in charge since 1996, has been credited with giving the choir a new self-confidence, capable of teaching the choir the most complex music, especially in contemporary music.

For its second SACD release on Glossa, the Choir has now turned its attention to another technically and interpretively demanding masterpiece in Sergei Rachmaninov's *Liturgy of St John Chrysostom*, asking one of its regular guest conductors, the Latvian-born Kaspars Putninsh, to direct. Putninsh has, in fact, been involved with the Choir since 2001, including performing Rachmaninov's *All-night Vigil*, the Vespers in six concerts with them in 2003.

The best way to find out what makes today's Flemish Radio Choir (FRC) tick is by talking to Alain De Ley, the Choir's Manager, who is both steeped in the ensemble's history while excited by its present and future prospects.

"If I were to try and think of similar existing choirs, I would tend to think of the Netherlands Chamber Choir and/or the RIAS Kammerchor – although the sound of our choir, while always recognizable, is surprisingly flexible, due to the vast quantity of repertoire the choir has performed. Furthermore, the choir has recently recruited a large number of young professional singers, so the sound, although massive when necessary, is fresh, clear and transparent and above all homogeneous. This homogeneity is achieved by each singer adding the colour of his/her voice to the whole with the consciousness that each singer is a part of one voice. This can only be done if the singers listen to each other carefully at all times. Since the FRC consists of a fixed group of singers – currently 24 in permanent employment – we have had the opportunity to work on the sound with the same singers with very satisfying results."

The FRC retains an impressive capacity to range over choral repertoire from around 1650 to the present day. De Ley comments that, "Throughout its history the FRC has performed a lot of Flemish and contemporary music, and will continue to do so in the future. In early repertoire, the FRC wants to present an alternative to the authentic early performance style. Without wishing to get into the argument about which performance style is the 'correct' way to perform music such as by Bach, we would like to present a performance style that, taking into account everything we've learned since the seventies about historical performance style and on how the music (probably) sounded when it was originally composed, places the music into a 21st century context. This means that we will not necessarily use authentic instruments, and that we will use a wider dynamic range in performing the music. At some point we will also combine the music with 21st century media such as video. We will also commission new works based on works by composers from the baroque (we have just commissioned a work from Sven-David Sandström based on Bach's motet *Fürchte dich nicht*). Although an authentic performance style is useful, and even necessary, I am convinced this is not the only way to approach that repertoire. On the other hand we don't want to go back to the very romantic way the music was performed in the 19th and early 20th century."

Kaspars Putninsh, who is conducting this recording of Rachmaninov's *Liturgy of St John Chrysostom* is drawn to music from across the musical spectrum but especially with contemporary music from composers from his native Latvia such as Peteris Vasks or Maija Einfelde, adjoining Estonia (Toivo Tulev and Mirjam Tally) or indeed from other parts of the European map such as Giacinto Scelsi, Gavin Bryars, Kaija Saariaho or Jonathan Harvey. De Ley comments that, "Having grown up in the Slavonic traditions we felt that Kaspars was able to provide a special dimension to

music of Rachmaninov, one that a Western conductor might not be able to achieve.

Of the Rachmaninov work Putninsh comments, "We know from history of creation of his Vespers and the *Liturgy of St John Chrysostom* that Rachmaninov's knowledge about the Divine service, even the structure, was far from perfect. He was not a regular churchgoer himself. Many of the clerics of Russian Orthodox church approached both works with a big deal of suspicion, the music was too emotional, too sophisticated and, I guess, just too breathtakingly beautiful for the need of the church. Nevertheless, these magnificent choral works that speak of divine wonder of existence are witness of the deepest spirituality of a composer who in the bottom of his heart through all his life carried the memories of the sound of choir and bells, the smell of incense and images of icons and candlelight from the church in the Novgorod countryside where his grandmother often took him to attend church services while he was a small child.

"I think that a conductor attempting to perform the *Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom* faces the problem of how Rachmaninov has structured the work. He has set in music all the words generally assigned to the choir in the liturgical service books of his time. This makes it possible to perform it in the context of Orthodox service but mounting of the concert performance or the record of the work requires considerations since not all of the portions of the Divine Liturgy are of equal musical interest; besides various elements of the Liturgy, some of the litanies for example completely lose their sense if performed out of the context of Divine service. On the other hand, reconstruction of the ritual on stage is not acceptable to Orthodox Christians. This is why there is no common way to structure the work.

"I have followed the advice given by Dr Vladimir Morosan, editor of the performing edition of Rachmaninov's *Divine Liturgy* published by Musica Russica, excerpt that I have included the *Invitation to Communion* (last section of *A Mercy of Peace*) in this record thus offending the compromise – a practise omitting from concert performances the elements that pertain directly to the Eucharist itself. My feelings are that the Invitation to Communion form the heart of the Divine Liturgy, a quiet culmination Rachmaninov has been aware of structuring the whole work."

Article by Mark Wiggins  
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