NISO Closes 30th Anniversary Season with “Rocky! An All-Rachmaninoff Concert”

by Shelbi Gesch

Be sure to mark your calendars for 7:00 pm (note time change) on April 11, an earlier than usual start for NISO’s spring event. You won’t want to miss the final concert of NISO’s 30th anniversary season, “Rocky! An all-Rachmaninoff Concert,” featuring guest conductor and founding director of NISO, Dr. Henry Duitman, and internationally-known guest pianist Sean Botkin from the University of Northern Iowa.

The program includes three Rachmaninoff pieces: the haunting “Vocalise, op. 34. no. 14,” the dramatic “Piano Concerto no. 2 in C Minor, op. 18,” and “Symphonic Dances, op. 14,” from Rachmaninoff’s final work, written just months before his death. These three pieces are representative of the wide musical landscape, power, and various moods of Rachmaninoff’s compositions.

Sergei Rachmaninoff, born in Russia in 1873, was musically trained in his home country of Russia, graduating from Moscow Conservatory in 1892. After the Russian Revolution, Rachmaninoff left Russia and spent his later years between America and Switzerland in political exile. He is considered to be among the last of the Russian Romantic era composers, in the tradition of Peter Tchaikovsky and Modest Mussorgsky.

Rachmaninoff’s dramatic and powerful compositions reflect his often-turbulent personality. Following a disappointing performance of his first symphony, Rachmaninoff fell into a deep depression, complicated by a failed love affair. Eventually, Rachmaninoff came under the care of psychologist Nikolay Dahl, who helped restore Rachmaninoff’s confidence and inspired him to return to composing and performing music again. His “comeback” piece after three years of writing nothing at all, Symphony no. 2, was received to critical acclaim. Rachmaninoff dedicated Symphony no. 2 to Dahl.

Come celebrate with us the final concert of NISO’s 30th anniversary celebration season, and enjoy the power and emotion of Rachmaninoff. For ticket information, visit the NISO website at niso.dordt.edu, or call the office at 712-722-6230.
Celebrating NISO Leadership, Past and Present: Dr. Henry Duitman and Dr. Christopher Stanichar
by Shelbi Gesch

The Northwest Iowa Symphony Orchestra welcomes back Dr. Henry Duitman to conduct its spring concert on April 11. Dr. Duitman, founding music director and conductor of NISO, is currently music professor and conductor at Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Michigan. Duitman was instrumental in getting NISO established and organized, helping set up its board of directors and “Friends of the Symphony,” the volunteer and fundraising support arm of the NISO organization now known as “Friends of NISO.” During Duitman’s twenty-two years as NISO’s conductor and music director, the Orchestra expanded from two concerts per year to its current four, developed its annual “Concert for Children,” and recorded a companion album to the book Orchestranimals by Vlasta Van Kampen and Irene Eugen. Duitman became NISO’s first conductor in 1986 and continued in that role until the 2008 season.

In NISO’s 2011 season, Dr. Christopher Stanichar took up the NISO baton. In addition to conducting NISO, Dr. Stanichar is an active composer and educator. Last fall, he also became conductor of the Northwest Iowa Symphony Youth Orchestra. Stanichar, who founded the South Dakota Symphony Youth Orchestra in 2008, was its conductor until 2015. He also conducts the Worthington Symphony Orchestra in Worthington, Minnesota.

Stanichar’s compositions include choral works and pieces for string ensemble and orchestra. His “Trisagion” was featured in Ric Burns’ 2006 PBS documentary on Andy Warhol. His “Hans Christian Andersen Suite” was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in 2015.

Stanichar is known as an enthusiastic, energetic, joyful conductor with a gift for connecting the orchestra and audience. In a review of an April 2011 NISO concert, Peter Wagner of the N’West Iowa Review praised Stanichar’s “obvious energy, great joy directing, and obvious enthusiasm.”

Come celebrate 30 years of musical excellence with guest conductor Dr. Henry Duitman and current principal conductor Dr. Christopher Stanichar during the final concert of the NISO 2016/17 season on April 11. Tickets and information are available through our website at niso.dordt.edu or by calling the NISO office at 712-722-6230.