

Byron Janis (born 1928) became one of the most brilliant of his generation of American pianists before his career was cut short by illness. At the age of 7 he was taken to New York, becoming a pupil of Adele Marcus, then of Joseph and Rosina Lhévinne. In 1943 he made his professional debut playing Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No. 2 with the NBC Symphony Orchestra in New York, with Frank Black conducting. In 1944 he repeated the same concerto in Pittsburgh with 13-year-old Lorin Maazel conducting the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. Vladimir Horowitz was in the audience, and subsequently invited Janis to study with him. Then Janis embarked on a successful career as a concert pianist, including a 1948 tour to South America, and a 1952 tour of Europe.

In 1960 Janis was chosen as the first American artist to be sent to the Soviet Union, opening a newly formed Cultural Exchange between the USSR and the United States. The result was a brilliant Mercury Living Presence LP that is an all-time classic, pairing the Rachmaninov First and Prokofiev Third concertos. Aided by exemplary sound recording, the Prokofiev in particular is still regarded by many connoisseurs as the work's finest recorded interpretation. In 1995 the CD version won the Cannes Award for Best Reissue. He interrupted his career in the late '60s at the onset of an illness, and temporarily resumed it in 1972. Soon however, his concert appearances became more rare.

Meanwhile, in 1967 he had discovered the manuscripts of two previously unknown Chopin waltzes in Paris, and in 1973, two variations of them, also in Chopin's hand, at the Yale Library. This led to a 1978 French television documentary, *Frédéric Chopin: A Voyage* with Byron Janis, in which he detailed the difficulties in determining the authentic versions of Chopin's music.

In 1985 he was invited to perform at the White House. On that occasion he publicly disclosed the nature of the illness that had hampered him for nearly 20 years: psoriatic arthritis affecting his wrists and hands. The ailment had not prevented him from continuing to play piano well, but it often made it impossible to play to his former high standard.

In the meantime, he devoted much of his energy to teaching, composing, and humanitarian concerns. He became Ambassador of the Arts for the Arthritis Foundation, often playing in fund-raising concerts. He is Chairman of the Global Forum Arts and Culture Committee. He composed the musical theme for the Global Forum on Human Survival in Oxford, England, held April, 1988. With lyrics by Sammy Cahn, it became the song *The One World*. Janis's music is primarily in the Pop style, and includes a musical version of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. In 1989 he composed the score for Turner Network Television's 1989 major documentary on Gary Cooper. He is on the faculty of Manhattan School of Music, and works on the Board and Music Advisory Committee for Pro Musicus, an international organization devoted to helping young artists.

Fritz Reiner was one of the most acclaimed conductors of the 20th century -- noted for the vast range of his repertoire, which included both symphonic and operatic pieces spanning from the traditional canon to contemporary material, he was also an influential educator who counted among his pupils Leonard Bernstein. Reiner was born in Budapest, Hungary, on December 19, 1888; despite earning a law degree from the University of Bucharest, he pursued a career in music, and at age 21 was named chorusmaster of the Budapest Opera. A stint as conductor with the Budapest Volksoper followed before Reiner was chosen in 1914 to serve as principal conductor of the Royal Opera in Dresden, where he collaborated with Richard Strauss on productions of several of the composer's early operas.

In 1922 Reiner left Europe to relocate to America, settling in Cincinnati, OH, and signing on as conductor with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra; a decade later he was tapped to head the orchestral and opera departments at Philadelphia's Curtis Institute of Music, where his students included Bernstein. After next serving as the music director of the Pittsburgh Symphony between 1938 and 1948, he served five years with the Metropolitan Opera. While Reiner's frequent migration might have been attributed largely to a restless creativity, he was also a notoriously difficult personality who frequently alienated those around him -- many of the musicians under his command openly loathed him, although he inevitably inspired the best work of their careers.

Reiner's own best work was undoubtedly his tenure with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, which he elevated into one of the most celebrated ensembles in the world. Moving over to the CSO in 1953, he not only established the orchestra as a top-flight live attraction but also as a popular recording entity -- the countless albums they made for RCA's Living Stereo series during Reiner's decade-long tenure were much acclaimed by collectors for both the power of the performances and the unusually high fidelity of the recordings themselves. Releases like *Fritz Reiner Conducts Richard Strauss* and *Fritz Reiner Conducts Bartók* in particular remain definitive interpretations of the composers in question. Health problems forced Reiner to resign his position in 1962, and he died in New York City on November 15 of the following year.



Rachmaninov

Piano Concerto No. 1

Byron Janis, piano
Fritz Reiner
Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Isle Of The Dead, Op. 29

Fritz Reiner
Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Rachmaninov composed the Piano Concerto No. 1, his Opus 1, at the age of 18, while he was still a student at the Moscow Conservatory. In 1917, more than two decades and two piano concerti later, he revised the score thoroughly, shaping the work into the form in which it is known today. This revised, "authoritative" version of the work is a tightly organized distillation of youthful passion and ardor, with the added influence of the turmoil that would soon force the composer to leave his native Russia for good.

The Concerto opens with a portentous declaration from the horns and a cascade of piano chords that recall the pealing of the composer's beloved Russian bells. The main theme is lyric and melancholy, the second sprightly by contrast. The first movement's huge solo cadenza, propelled by powerful chords -- highly suggestive, again, of bells -- and fiery expression, is the real heart of the work. The Andante second movement provides respite before the Allegro vivace finale, which is marked by a wild main subject in shifting rhythms and a fleet, virtuosic second theme. Rapid-fire chordal passagework from the keyboard brings this most melodramatic of Rachmaninov's concerti to a thrilling conclusion.

Described by Stravinsky as "six feet two inches of Russian gloom," Rachmaninov was attracted by the Dies irae theme, a melody used in the Roman Catholic Mass for the Dead, or Requiem Mass. He very frequently quoted or alluded to this theme in his compositions, including the *The Isle of the Dead*, regarded as the quintessential expression of the composer's melancholy. This work was inspired by the painting by Swiss artist Arnold Böcklin. Böcklin's haunting painting depicts an island, in front of which stands a barricade of stones. Further out from it, jutting high out of the sea, is a huge rock, within which are large chambers for the dead. A boat can be seen on the waters operated by a black-clad helmsman, whose white-robed passenger stands ghost-like. Rachmaninov's composition begins with rhythmic motif played by muted cellos and harp, suggesting the movement of the dark waters near the barricade surrounding the lifeless isle. A somber second theme, presented by French horn, reinforces the despondent mood. Soon there are hints of the Dies irae theme, after which the opening motif returns. The music then becomes restless and intense, the tempo increasing, orchestral colors appearing. A climax is reached and the material from the opening reappears, now fuller and agitated. Finally the music subsides, but afterwards there are more allusions to the Dies irae melody. A new theme appears, on strings and reeds, and rises to an impassioned climax, the music yearning, struggling, it seems, to offer some consolation or hoping to escape this strange world. A further climactic episode ensues, after which the fragment of the Dies irae once more dominates this grim musical landscape. Afterward the music fades, and the dark material of the opening returns. Just before the ending there comes a nearly full statement of the Dies irae melody.

Rachmaninov

Piano Concerto No. 1

Byron Janis, piano

Fritz Reiner Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Isle Of The Dead, Op. 29

Fritz Reiner Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Concerto For Piano And Orchestra No. 1

1 Vivace 12:14

2 Andante 5:41

3 Allegro Vivace 7:29

4 Isle of the Dead 20:09

Total Time 45:33

Transferred from a 15ips 2-track tape

Engineer - Lewis Layton Producer - Richard Mohr

Piano Concerto No. 1 - Recorded by RCA Released 1957

Isle of the Dead - Recorded by RCA Released 1958

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