

Ashkenazy was born in Gorky, Soviet Union (now Nizhny Novgorod, Russia), to the pianist and composer David Ashkenazi and to the actress Yevstolia Grigorievna, born Plotnova. His father was Jewish and his mother was the daughter of a family of Russian Orthodox peasants.

He began playing piano at the age of six. He was accepted to the Central Music School at age eight studying with Anaida Sumbatyan. Ashkenazy attended the Moscow Conservatory where he studied with Lev Oborin and Boris Zemliansky. He won second prize in the International Chopin Piano Competition in Warsaw in 1955 and the first prize in the Queen Elisabeth Music Competition in Brussels in 1956. He shared the first prize in the 1962 International Tchaikovsky Competition with British pianist John Ogdon. As a student, like many in that period, he was harassed by the KGB to become an "informer". He did not really cooperate, despite pressures from the authorities. In 1961 he married the Iceland-born Þórunn Jóhannsdóttir, who studied piano at the Moscow Conservatoire. To marry Ashkenazy, Þórunn was forced to give up her Icelandic citizenship and declare that she wanted to live in the USSR.

After numerous bureaucratic procedures, the Soviet authorities several times agreed to the Ashkenazys going to the West for musical performances and for visits to his parents-in-law with their first grandson. In his memoirs, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev recalls that Ashkenazy had married an Englishwoman [sic] and on a visit to London refused to go back to the Soviet Union. Khrushchev mentions that Ashkenazy then went to the Soviet Embassy in London and asked what to do, who in turn referred the matter to Moscow. Khrushchev claims to have been of the opinion that to require Ashkenazy to return to the USSR would have made him an 'Anti-Soviet'. He further claims that this was a good example of an artist being able to come and go in and out of the USSR freely, which Ashkenazy himself said was a gross "distortion of the truth". In 1963 Ashkenazy decided to leave the USSR permanently, establishing residence in London where his wife's parents lived.

The couple moved to Iceland in 1968 where, in 1972, Ashkenazy became an Icelandic citizen. In 1970 he helped to found the Reykjavik Arts Festival, of which he remains Honorary President. In 1978 the couple and their five children (Vladimir Stefan, Nadia Liza, Dimitri Thor, Sonia Edda, and Alexandra Inga) moved to Meggen, Switzerland, however he is currently residing in the small village of Pura in the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland. His eldest son Vladimir, nicknamed 'Vovka', is a pianist and his second son Dimitri is a clarinetist.

In public performances, Ashkenazy was known for rejecting a tie and button shirt in favor of a white turtleneck; and for running (not walking) onstage and offstage to the piano. He has also performed and recorded chamber music.

Midway through his pianistic career, Ashkenazy branched into conducting. In Europe, Ashkenazy was principal conductor of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra from 1987 to 1994, and of the Czech Philharmonic from 1998 to 2003. Ashkenazy is also conductor laureate of the Philharmonia Orchestra, conductor laureate of the Iceland Symphony Orchestra, and music director of the European Union Youth Orchestra. In July 2013 he became director of the Accademia Pianistica Internazionale di Imola, succeeding its founder and director Franco Scala.[9] His recordings as a conductor include complete cycles of the symphonies of Sibelius and of Rachmaninoff, as well as orchestral works of Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Scriabin, Richard Strauss, Stravinsky, Beethoven, and Tchaikovsky.

Outside of Europe, Ashkenazy served as music director of the NHK Symphony Orchestra from 2004 to 2007. He was chief conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra from 2009 through 2013.

In other media, Ashkenazy has also appeared in several films on music by Christopher Nupen. He has also made his own orchestration of Modest Mussorgsky's piano suite Pictures at an Exhibition (1982). There has been a CD produced of his works named 'The Art of Ashkenazy', and a biography of Ashkenazy, 'Beyond Frontiers', has been published.

In 2015 he visited The Purcell School of music and was interviewed by the head of Percussion, Wind and Brass, he then gave a masterclass in which three students played.



Piano Concerto No. 1 in B-flat Minor, Op. 23, concerto for piano and orchestra by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. The work is particularly famed for the sequence of pounding chords with which the soloist's part launches the first movement. The piece premiered in Boston, Massachusetts, on October 25, 1875.

Possessing limited piano skills, Tchaikovsky wrote the concerto intending to persuade a colleague to give the premiere performance. He first approached Nikolay Rubinstein, a pianist and the director of the Moscow Conservatory at which Tchaikovsky taught. Rubinstein condemned the work as badly written and refused to play it unless substantial changes were made. Tchaikovsky declined to revise the piece and offered it instead to the German virtuoso Hans von Bülow, who, finding more to admire than had Rubinstein, agreed to perform it. The premiere, given during an American tour, was an immediate success, and the piece soon became equally popular in Europe. In the face of the new concerto's undeniable success, Rubinstein withdrew his earlier criticism. He agreed to conduct the Moscow premiere and even made the concerto part of his own repertory.

The first movement opens with a bold horn call heralding a series of powerful chords from the soloist. The strings introduce an expansive theme, which is then taken up by the piano. The second movement, by contrast, is languid, with lighter use of the orchestral instruments. For the finale, Tchaikovsky offers a rondo with various alternating melodies, some of which are heard more than once, and ends by returning to the powerful driven energy of the opening.

The Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor, Op. 18, is a concerto for piano and orchestra composed by Sergei Rachmaninoff between the autumn of 1900 and April 1901. The second and third movements were first performed with the composer as soloist on 2 December 1900. The complete work was premiered, again with the composer as soloist, on 9 November 1901, with his cousin Alexander Siloti conducting.

This piece is one of Rachmaninoff's most enduringly popular pieces, and established his fame as a concerto composer.

At its 1897 premiere, Rachmaninoff's first symphony, though now considered a significant achievement, was derided by contemporary critics. Compounded by problems in his personal life, Rachmaninoff fell into a depression that lasted for several years. His second piano concerto confirmed his recovery from clinical depression and writer's block, cured only by a course of hypnotherapy. The concerto was dedicated to Nikolai Dahl, a physician who had done much to restore Rachmaninoff's self-confidence.

Moderato: C minor

Main theme first played by the two violin sections, viola section and first clarinet. The opening movement begins with a series of bell-like tollings on the piano that build tension, eventually climaxing in the introduction of the main theme. In this first section, the orchestra carries the Russian-character melody while the piano makes an accompaniment made of rapid oscillating arpeggios. After the statement of the long first theme, a quicker transition follows until the lyrical second theme, in E flat major, is presented. The agitated and unstable development borrows motives from both themes changing keys very often and giving the melody to different instruments while a new musical idea is slowly formed. The music builds in a gradual climax as if the first bars were to be

# Tchaikovsky: Piano Concerto No.1 Rachmaninov: Piano Concerto No.2

Vladimir Ashkenazy, piano

Maazel conducts the London Symphony Orchestra

Kondrashin conducts the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra

## Tchaikovsky: Piano Concerto No. 1

Allegro non troppo e molto maestoso - Allegro con spirito  
Andantino semplice - Prestissimo - Tempo I Allegro con fuoco

## Rachmaninov: Piano Concerto No.2

Moderato  
Adagio sostenuto  
Allegro scherzando

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