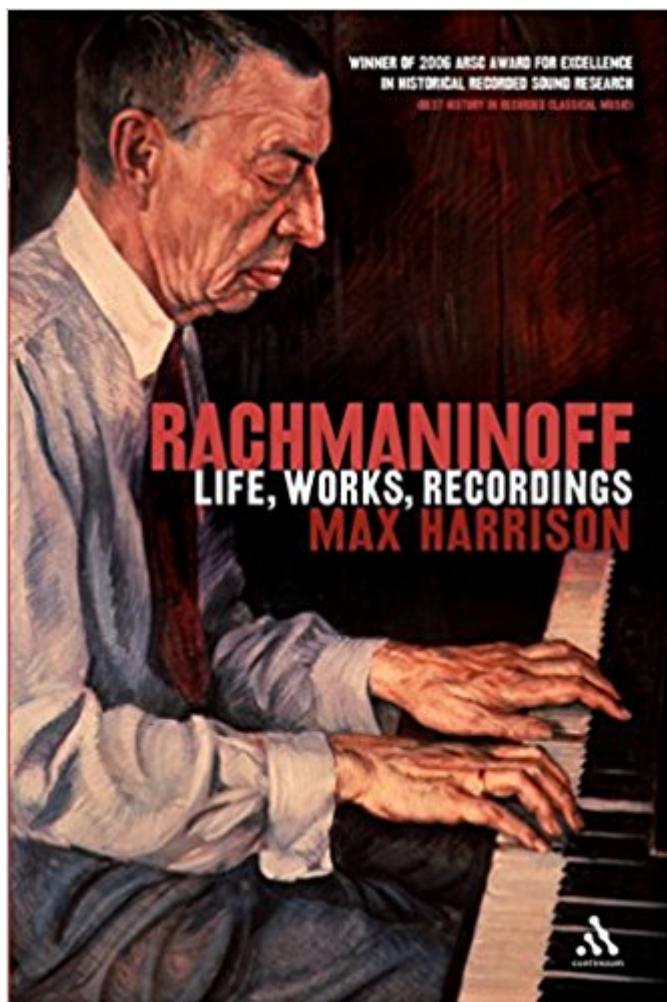


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# Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings



## Synopsis

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) is now widely regarded as one of the greatest 20th-century composers and pianists. In this illuminating and accessible biography, Max Harrison covers the span of Rachmaninoff's life, taking in his career as composer, pianist and conductor, offering full analyses of his scores and a uniquely detailed treatment of his 1919-1942 recordings. A fascinating account of the man, his life and work, this book sheds much new light on its subject and the ways that Rachmaninoff was viewed during his own time and beyond.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

'This new study of Rachmaninoff by Max Harrison betokens a lifetime's study of this great composer and pianist, and is extended beyond the customary life and works framework to embrace Rachmaninoff's extensive recorded legacy, which, as time goes by, should become an essential part of any discussions of the life and works of those composers who have made recordings of their own music. The result is a welcome addition to the growing appreciation of Rachmaninoff's genius. Max Harrison wears his scholarship lightly, producing an eminently readable text which unveils the story of Rachmaninoff clearly and interestingly. His comments on the music and especially on Rachmaninoff's extensive recordings are particularly insightful, and add much to our understanding of them...very well-researched book...This excellently-produced book is much to be commended, and is most reasonably priced.' (Musical Opinion)'Not only sculpts a crystal clear figure of Rachmaninoff the man, but also refines the transcript of his working life...we should, therefore, be

indebted to Harrison for directing us to what is now a full colour portrait of an artist drawn through the visions of his creative self.' (David Sonin *Ham and High*)'A useful addition to the literature on someone who has finally become one of the most respected, if retrospective, 20th-Century composers.' (Fergus Johnston *The Irish Times*)'Harrison's work is admirable... his research is exhaustive and wide-ranging... Harrison is a man with a mission to make us take Rachmaninoff's music more seriously... a book to be treasured by all... it is impossible to read it without reflecting that its subject has been comprehensively misunderstood; Harrison's work takes a major step to putting that situation right and doing justice to the composer and his music.' (Max Harrison *International Piano Magazine*)'...an honest, enormously detailed and very interesting book on a fascinating subject.' (Bahman Barekat *Rachmaninoff Society Newsletter*)'It is so satisfying to have another important book about this great composer - it is comprehensive and well researched. Max Harrison writes with passion and intelligence - highly recommended'. Vladimir Ashkenazy, President of the Rachmaninoff Society'Max Harrison slices through a century's worth of wrongheaded critical bluster and rediscovers the music of a major composer. Essential reading' - Terry Teachout transcends the already considerable available scholarship on Rachmaninoff with this perspicuous work which allows the reader not only to understand how the political and practical realities of the musician's circumstances helped direct the course of his life and livelihood, but how his creative existence evolved. By avoiding overly technical discussions when analyzing Rachmaninoff's compositions, the author is able to communicate his ideas to a broad musical audience."

Ã¢â€”â€œCHOICE, July 2006'his knowledge both of the repertoire and of other painters are impressive...he covers everything, and enthusiastically defends the originality of Rachmaninov's later works...Three stars...for diligence.'~ David Nice, BBC Music Magazine (David Nice)"[A] compelling narrative...'A composer's music...should be the sum total of a composer's experience.'

Rachmaninov once claimed. After reading this biography you should be left in no doubt as to that statement's veracity." (Julian Haylock, *Classic FM Magazine*)"an impressive achievement, the result of meticulous research and a long, deep association with its subject...Its tone is crisp, energetic and omniscient...no one who is interested in any aspect of this great musician's legacy can afford to miss Harrison's engaging, scholarly and, yes, inspiring biography." (Jeremy Nicholas, *Gramophone*)For readers of this journal, Rachmaninoff's own recordings will be a central interest. Harrison discusses each one in more detail than is usual. Particularly valuable is his discussion of the duplication of repertoire. He compares both the published recordings with the series of the piano rolls that Rachmaninoff recorded for Ampico during the twenties." (Association for Recorded Sound Collections Journal (ARSC Journal))"Anyone deeply interested in the music of Rachmaninov who

would like to really know about the Russian master's composition process will find Rachmaninov:Life, Works, Recordings to be of great interest." "there's no doubt that Harrison knows Rachmaninov's music in detail" "An intense and in-depth read, this is a book for real Rachmaninov aficionados." Pianist, No. 37, August-September 2007 (Pianist)Nominated as a finalist for the Association for Recorded Sound Collections, Classical shortlist. (Finalists for the 2006 ARSC Awards for Excellence)"The general excellence of this 'life and works' is greatly enhanced by generous coverage of Rachmaninov's parallel careers as pianist and conductor. Compared to other notable biographers, Harrison provides a more comprehensive portrait of Rachmaninov the all round musician" (Classical Music, Philip Borg - Wheeler)"Sergei Rachmaninov's three-dimensional career as pianist, conductor, and composer receives the most comprehensive scholarly analysis to date in this work by Mark Harrison. Harrison's own trisection of Rachmaninov—life, works, and recordings—address and surpasses the common themes of biographers and, via remarkable descriptions of compositions and performances preserved on sound recordings, transports the reader to concert halls and recording studios where Rachmaninov performed."—Lois Alexander, University of Michigan-Flint, Slavic and East European Journal, 51.4, Winter 2007 (Lois Alexander)"A widely published musical journalist, Max Harrison writes in a cultivated and comfortable British English... pleasingly free from jargon""Harrison seems to have set himself the task of not only presenting the chronology and circumstances of Rachmaninoff's life and works with scrupulous clarity and care but also to refute the denigration of Rachmaninoff's original works that became fashionable when the composer settled in the U.S. after feeling the Bolshevik Revolution" Dennis D. Rooney, ARSC Journal, Spring 2007"[Michael] Scott's (founder, London Opera Society; The Great Caruso) book on pianist-composer Sergey Rachmaninoff [Rachmaninoff] is almost entirely biographical, unlike Barrie Martyn's Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor and Max Harrison's Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings, which combine biography with musical analysis (both have musical examples, but Scott's book does not)...Martyn and Harrison offer superior examinations of Rachmaninoff's music...Martyn's and Harrison's books also have illustrations...For a general treatment of Rachmaninoff's life and music, Harrison's book is the best."—Bruce R. Schueneman, Library Journal, February 1, 2009

Max Harrison is a musicologist who reviewed for The Times and The Gramophone from 1967-90, has written widely on jazz, and contributed to the 1980 edition of The New Grove Dictionary of Music and other reference works.

Harrison's book is brilliant. Since my first exposure to Rachmaninoff's music, I have been a collector of recordings of his music, the scores, and the composer's own recordings. Having read just about everything written about the composer, including the biographies written by Bertensson and Leyda, Bazhanov, Haylock, Lyle, Martyn et al, I came away from Harrison's book with a fresh image of the composer. It was one of those books that one reads looking forward to each page and almost dreading that the book, as did the composer's life, would end too soon. Harrison clearly knows the music and all of the recordings. While he obviously places great value in the music, he is not unconditional in his appreciation. He provides a highly informed contemporary critical perspective and places the music within the context of the composer's life. It is the sort of writing that can be appreciated by an informed musician and musicologist, while also being understood and valued by the informed listener. As I read the book I found myself returning to the Rachmaninoff operas, works which I had not really valued as much until reading Harrison's discussions. I came away from my reading with a renewed appreciation for the music and recordings of this man who gave us all so much with his creative expression.

Over the last century, much has been written on the great Russian composer/pianist Sergei Rachmaninoff. However, if there is one book that encompasses mass detail of the life and work of Rachmaninoff, it would have to be "Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings" written by Max Harrison. Harrison's massive research in writing this book definitely pays off as it includes detailed annotations of Rachmaninoff's music works as well as his personal life and career as a recording artist. When it comes to the latter topic, this book may be the only one that goes greatly in depth to the making of Rachmaninoff's recordings. If you own the Rachmaninoff "Complete Recordings" box set, this book goes hand in hand with the CD set and shines greater light on what's being heard. In addition to the lengthy and informative essay, the book also includes several musical examples as well as a complete list of the composer's works and a discography of his complete recordings (which lists both the issued and rejected takes alongside the years and places of recording as well as what type of recording it is - piano roll, acoustical or electrical). As mentioned above, this is an essential book on Rachmaninoff. This book pretty much has it all when it comes to all the key areas of his life and career as a composer, a recording artist and an individual. This is definitely a book that no Rachmaninoff fan should be without.

Max Harrison's expertise as a top-notch musicologist is used to full advantage in this masterfully-researched and written biography of Rachmaninov. Like other reviewers, I found

Harrison's very detailed assessments of each of Rachmaninov's published works to be incredibly informative. Take, for example, his view that Rachmaninov was, despite popular wisdom to the contrary, an excellent composer of large-scale symphonies. That the shoddy treatment given his first symphony reflected far more the narrow-mindedness and incompetence of the conductor, orchestra, and critics than any real shortcomings in this grand and beautiful work by a young and very talented composer.

Sergei Rachmaninoff was one of the 20th. century finest composers and one of the three best pianists of the 20th. century. I bought this passionately and eruditely written biography of Rachmaninoff for my husband because he is a devotee of the music of the Russian composer. Especially interesting in the book are the lists of Rachmaninoff's compositions and his recordings. it is interesting to also read that Rachmaninoff performed his gorgeous 2nd. piano concerto no fewer than 83 times.

very technical , I like it

Rachmaninoff has never had the authoritative biography that he deserves as one of the greatest composers and pianists of the last two centuries. Nor is this that definitive book. However, it is the most recent, and in many ways it supersedes all previous biographies, although there is still value in the Bertensson-Leyda and (to a lesser extent) the Martyn and Walker books. It has some great strengths. First, it covers Rachmaninoff's life and career in some (not exhaustive) detail. Second, it discusses his entire compositional career more thoroughly and accurately than any previous book. Third, unlike some other biographies, it unashamedly defends Rachmaninoff's music and style from the foolish and ignorant criticisms that were common for much of the 20th century. Record collectors and piano aficionados will also find it valuable for its thorough discussion of Rachmaninoff's recordings as both pianist and conductor. The book's major weakness, as with most previous biographies, lies in its analyses. Harrison offers many insights into Rachmaninoff's works, but he also repeats some of the stale and superficial clichÃ©s of Rachmaninoff criticism. For example, he finds quotations of the Dies Irae chant in dozens of pieces, when in fact Rachmaninoff only quoted the Dies Irae in four: Isle of the Dead, Paganini Rhapsody, Third Symphony, and Symphonic Dances. Themes in other works, such as the First Symphony, may resemble Dies Irae, but analysis shows clearly that they are different and are treated differently. And because Harrison clings to this shallow and inaccurate "insight," he misses some of the real strengths of Rachmaninoff's music--for

instance, that the entire First Symphony is obsessively based on just two themes and one melodic turn. To be fair, no previous Rachmaninoff book has been strong in analysis. And despite these weaknesses, this is still the best that has yet appeared.

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