

**TORONTO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**

Gustavo Gimeno, Music Director

# Bruce Liu Plays Rachmaninoff 2

**Gustavo Gimeno**, conductor

**Bruce Liu**, piano (2025/26 TSO Spotlight Artist)

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**Kelly-Marie Murphy**

*Curiosity, Genius, and the Search for  
Petula Clark*

(TSO Commission)

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**Sergei Rachmaninoff**

Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, Op. 18

I. Moderato

II. Adagio sostenuto

III. Allegro scherzando

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## Intermission

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**Sergei Prokofiev**

Symphony No. 5 in B-flat Major, Op. 100

I. Andante

II. Allegro marcato

III. Adagio

IV. Allegro giocoso

*Program 3*

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Thursday,  
January 22, 2026  
7:30pm

Friday,  
January 23, 2026  
7:30pm

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*The TSO Spotlight Artists  
are generously supported by  
Zenovia Zmijewsky.*

 **AIR CANADA**

*The January 22 performance  
is generously supported by  
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*The January 23 performance  
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*Gustavo Gimeno's  
appearances in Spain are  
made possible through  
the generous support of  
Marianne Oundjian.*

Kelly-Marie Murphy (b. 1964)

## **Curiosity, Genius, and the Search for Petula Clark**

TSO Commission  
Composed 2017

10 min

**FROM THE COMPOSER:** This piece was commissioned by the Toronto Symphony Orchestra with the support of the Government of Canada and the Glenn Gould Foundation. It is a single-movement work for orchestra written to celebrate Glenn Gould's 85th birthday and the 70th anniversary of his debut performance with the TSO. Glenn Gould was a prodigiously talented pianist who had already made his mark on the concert stage by the age of 30. He retired from the stage in 1964 and turned his energies toward recording, broadcasting, and communication. He had a staggering intellect and was interested in everything. He read many newspapers each day, and at least four hardcover books each week. One wonders when he found the time to practise?

For this piece, I wanted to explore the difference between the public perception of Glenn Gould (quirky, odd, ingenious, obsessive) and how Glenn perceived himself (a regular guy with many interests, possibly wearing a cheap suit). He did a fascinating series of radio documentaries, the first of which was called *The Search for Petula Clark*. Essentially, Glenn was intrigued by chasing radio relay stations on a drive up to Northern Ontario. At certain intervals, he could hear Petula Clark's current hit, "Who Am I?" By the end of the drive, Glenn was quite an expert on the piece, and the distance between relay stations. Another thing you need to know about Glenn was that he loved games, especially guessing games. You can imagine him driving so as not to miss any of the relayed broadcasts of Petula Clark on his way up north! He speaks about this pop song

with the same focus, attention, and intellect as he would use on Bach. It is both funny and charming. I tried to weave these elements through the piece—energy, curiosity, reflection, and satisfaction.

I am very grateful for the support of the Glenn Gould Foundation, and to Lorne Tulk—Gould's longtime friend and recording engineer. It was a wonderful experience getting to know more about what made Glenn Gould an extraordinary person.

**COMPOSER BIO:** Kelly-Marie Murphy's voice is well known on the Canadian music scene. She has created a number of memorable works for some of Canada's leading performers and ensembles, including the Toronto, Winnipeg, and Vancouver Symphony Orchestras, the Gryphon Trio, and more. Dr. Murphy's music has been performed around the world by outstanding soloists and ensembles, and has had radio broadcasts in over 22 countries. Kelly-Marie Murphy was born on a NATO base in Sardegna, Italy, and grew up on Canadian Armed Forces bases all across Canada. She began her studies in composition at the University of Calgary with William Jordan and Allan Bell, and later received a PhD in composition from the University of Leeds, England, where she studied with Philip Wilby. After living and working for many years in the Washington, DC, area where she was designated "an alien of extraordinary ability" by the US Immigration and Naturalization Service, she is now based in Ottawa.



Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943)

## Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, Op. 18

Composed 1900–1901

32 min

**IN MARCH 1897**, Rachmaninoff suffered the most traumatic blow of his career, when his First Symphony was dismissed by critics in vitriolic terms (e.g., “modernist trash”). The rejection plunged him into despair; not yet 24, he considered giving up composing altogether. It was “the most difficult and critical period of my life, when I thought all was lost,” he later said. “A paralyzing apathy possessed me.... I did not live; I vegetated, idle and hopeless.” For the next three years, he composed nothing of consequence, and his depression and self-doubt grew.

In the spring of 1899, family members persuaded him to seek the help of Nikolai Dahl, a respected doctor who had devoted his career to therapeutic hypnosis. Daily treatments of talk and hypnosis in early 1900 restored Rachmaninoff’s spirits, and by the beginning of the summer, he later recalled, “new musical ideas began to stir within me.” His first project was the Second Piano Concerto, which he had promised to London and on which he had worked fitfully over the past year. He completed the piece, premièred it on October 27, 1901, and, in gratitude for the recovery of his creative powers, dedicated it to Dr. Dahl.

From its very first performance, the Second Piano Concerto was a hit; within a few years it was being played throughout Europe and America, and a century later it remains Rachmaninoff’s most popular work. His later piano-orchestra works are perhaps more sophisticated, original, and modern, but the Second, with its broad, surging melodies and unmistakably Russian character, remains a quintessential specimen of the Rachmaninoff style. Indebted to models like Tchaikovsky’s First Piano Concerto, it is nonetheless a deeply

personal work. The music is highly dramatic and appeals directly to the emotions but is never maudlin, and though founded on conventional forms, it is subtle and ingenious in structure, perfectly proportioned, and never laboured.

The Russian character of the concerto is established unforgettably by the piano alone in the opening bars: massive chords alternate with low bass notes, suggesting the slow tolling of a church bell, and setting in motion the broad swinging rhythm that propels the first movement. From the first notes of the throaty, sinuous main theme, a soulful lyricism pervades the music; indeed, all of the principal themes of the concerto, with the exception of the march-like first theme of the finale, are passionately lyrical. Even in the finale, it is the second theme—a long, darkly expressive melody—that is the real heart of the movement, and the grandiose statement of that theme in the coda, moments before the end, is the goal to which the movement aspires.

The three movements are bound closely together. The second and third both begin with an introduction that effects a transition from the key and mood of the previous movement, and there are some unmistakable resemblances among melodic and rhythmic motifs from movement to movement. The slow movement is a beautiful mood-piece, but also an impressive structure that unfolds organically, based entirely on a tender theme, the two parts of which are introduced by a flute and a clarinet over piano figuration. As the theme is extended by both piano and orchestra, the music grows increasingly animated, agitated, and rhapsodic, culminating in a passionate piano cadenza. After this climax, the theme, in its original form, quietly returns in the orchestra, and the movement ends with a short coda that must count among Rachmaninoff’s most exquisitely scored pages.

—Program note by Kevin Bazzana

Sergei Prokofiev (1891–1953)

## Symphony No. 5 in B-flat Major, Op. 100

Composed 1944

46 min

**IN JUNE 1941**, after Nazi Germany's invasion of Russia, Prokofiev began devoting his talents to the war effort, composing patriotic songs and marches, and the opera *War and Peace*. During the summer and fall of 1944, with the war now turning in the Allies' favour, he felt especially inspired, and rapidly produced his Fifth Symphony. Its première—by which time the Red Army was on its victory march into Germany—was his greatest popular and critical triumph since his return to Russia from Paris in 1936. Alas, soon afterward he fell and suffered a concussion, and was never truly healthy again; by the time he died, he was physically and creatively broken.

Prokofiev's first symphony since 1930, the Fifth was a breakthrough—"the culmination of a long period in my work." It asserted his faith in the human spirit, and was the first symphony in which he captured the epic and heroic quality of his major vocal and dramatic works. Finally, he felt, he had expressed symphonically ideas at once deeply personal and universal, and had captured "Soviet reality" in music that was not mere propaganda. He considered this his finest work.

The four movements fall into an unusual slow-fast-slow-fast configuration; the deeply expressive, rather gloomy slow movements contrast strikingly with the high-spirited, ironic fast movements. The work makes a powerful impression and is structurally cohesive, its overall emotional and dramatic trajectory complex but convincing. The first movement is intensely dramatic, its many episodes ranging widely: the opening theme is expansive and noble, the coda grim, severe, terrifying—war music. The second

movement shows us Prokofiev the master parodist, though when the opening scherzo returns after a contrasting middle section, the music is darker, wilder, more grotesque, even sinister. The lyrical first theme of the slow movement is beautifully scored, but also dark, laced with bitter dissonance; it unfolds with mounting intensity to become a profoundly eloquent utterance. The middle section of the movement suggests a funeral procession, after which the first theme returns as relief, and the coda is strange, haunting, ultimately ethereal. The finale, which includes references to the first movement's main theme, is variously playful, pastoral, lyrical, argumentative, propulsive—though, despite its ironic edge, it reaches a genuinely heroic conclusion.

—Program note by Kevin Bazzana



↑  
Sergei Prokofiev as drawn by Henri Matisse on April 25, 1921.

For a biography of Gustavo Gimeno, please turn to page 8.



**Bruce Liu, piano** (2025/26 TSO Spotlight Artist)

Bruce Liu made his TSO début in September 2022.

First Prize winner of the XVIII International Chopin Piano Competition held in Warsaw in 2021, Bruce Liu has emerged as one of the most compelling pianists of his generation—a musician praised not only for his dazzling technique, but also for his curiosity and artistry that combines “nimble versatility” (*The New York Times*) and “playing of breathtaking beauty” (*BBC Music Magazine*).

In high demand as a soloist, he has recently performed with many of the world’s finest ensembles including the Boston Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, Bavarian Radio Symphony, and Wiener Symphoniker, and with conductors including Manfred Honeck, Paavo Järvi, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Sir Antonio Pappano, Lahav Shani, and Dalia Stasevska.

In summer 2025, Liu made his anticipated BBC Proms début with the Philharmonia Orchestra and Santtu-Matias Rouvali; performed with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Marin Alsop at Ravinia; and went on European tours with the NCPA Orchestra and Myung-Whun Chung, and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and Vasily Petrenko.

Highlights of Liu’s 2025/26 season include several major international tours including Japan with the Bavarian State Orchestra and Vladimir Jurowski; China with the Staatskapelle Dresden and Daniele Gatti; and Germany, Austria, Belgium, and France with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and Kazuki Yamada. As a Spotlight Artist with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Liu appears multiple times in the season to collaborate with Franz Welser-Möst and Gustavo Gimeno.

A distinguished recitalist, Liu has performed at major concert halls such as the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, Carnegie Hall, and Philharmonie de Paris. In 2025/26, he gives recital débuts at the Berliner Philharmonie and Lyon Opera House, and returns to Carnegie Hall, the Wiener Musikverein, and major venues in Italy and Japan. He appears at various international festivals, including the Edinburgh, Verbier, Roque-d’Anthéron, Rheingau, Aspen, and Tanglewood Music Festivals, and Klavier-Festival Ruhr.

An exclusive recording artist with Deutsche Grammophon, Liu was awarded OPUS KLASSIK’s Young Talent of the Year prize in 2024 for his début studio album, *Waves*. His second studio album, featuring Tchaikovsky’s *The Seasons*, was released in November 2024 and received rave reviews and praise for its “fresh music-making unadorned by superficial virtuosity” (*Gramophone*).

Born in Paris and raised in Montreal, Liu exhibits an artistry that reflects his multicultural heritage, blending European refinement, North American dynamism, and the long tradition of Chinese culture. He studied with Richard Raymond and Dang Thai Son.