

Vocalise, Op. 34, No. 14

Sergei Rachmaninoff/Verdehr Trio

Of Rachmaninoff's short compositions, the songs (more than one hundred separate lyrics were set to music) are his most distinguished writing in smaller forms. They are beautifully written for both voice and piano and are interesting from a musical and an expressive standpoint. The composer was more concerned with coloring than pure melody. Constantly fluctuating rhythms and ambiguous harmonies eloquently underscore his lyrical gift. This *Vocalise* was arranged for clarinet, violin, and piano by the Verdehr Trio.

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943) was a Russian pianist, composer, and conductor whose works are among the most popular in the classical repertoire. He is regarded as one of the major composers of the twentieth century.

After an exhausting and extremely successful tour of America in 1909, where he premiered his *Piano Concerto No. 3*, Rachmaninoff returned to Russia in February of 1910. He had turned down offers of return engagements and even the position as conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra to conduct the Philharmonic Concerts in Moscow. His summers were spent in Ivanovka where he found the necessary relaxation to compose *Thirteen Preludes, Op. 32*, a setting of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, the *Etudes-tableaux, Fourteen Songs, Op. 34* (written in June of 1912), and the *Piano Sonata, No. 2*.

Inspired by the poet Marietta Shaginian, Opus 34 consists of poems by principal representatives of Russian Romantics—Pushkin, Tyntchev, Polonsky, etc.—and was tailored to the individual talents of certain Russian singers: Feodor Shalyapin, Leopold Sobinov, and Felia Litvinne. Best known of the set is the wordless *Vocalise, No. 14* that was especially written for the transparent coloratura soprano voice of Antonia Nezhdanova. Its nostalgic and melancholic mood expresses Rachmaninoff's intense love of Russia as remembered from his childhood.