



MOZART & RACHMANINOFF

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2024 | 7:30 PM

CENTURY II CONCERT HALL

Daniel Hege

Music Director & Conductor

Stewart Goodyear

Piano

PROGRAM NOTES

QUINN MASON

Born in 1996

Inspiration! Festive Overture (about 7')

This is the first performance of the work by the Wichita Symphony, but the Overture was performed by our Youth Symphony, conducted by Mark Laycock, on November 11, 2023.

Encountering a new piece of music by the young Dallas-based composer Quinn Mason is like bumping into an old friend. The music sounds familiar, rooted in classical music traditions, but comes across as new and original by a composer whose compositional voice is still emerging for someone born in 1996. His website lists over twenty-three works for orchestra, including five numbered symphonies, and works for concert band and wind ensemble, chamber music ensembles, solo instruments, and voice.

Mason is one of the most frequently performed composers of his generation. His orchestral music has been commissioned and performed by over 160 professional, regional, community, and youth orchestras in the United States and Europe. His website lists twenty-three scheduled performances of various works between September and December this year. *The Inspiration Overture*, in only a year and a half since its premiere, has already been performed by eighteen different orchestras, including the Annapolis, Charlotte, Hartford, and Toledo Symphony Orchestras, as well as by our own Wichita Youth Symphony.

Underlining the importance of concerts for children, Mason was introduced to classical music and the orchestra when he was ten and visited the Dallas Symphony for a Young People's Concert.

Quinn studied composition at the SMU Meadows School of the Arts, with Dr. Winston Stone at the University of Texas-Dallas, and has also worked closely with renowned composers David Maslanka, Jake Heggie, Libby Larsen, David Dzubay, and Robert X. Rodriguez.

Mason's compositions have won multiple prizes, and in 2022 – 2023, he served as Artist in Residence for the Hartford Symphony. Mason is also developing a career as a sought-after conductor when he is not busy composing.

The structure of the Overture is A-B-A, or fast – slower – fast. The melodic leaps in Mason's music remind one of Copland and Sibelius. The orchestration is what one would expect from a mid-20th-century symphonist. The warmth of Mason's orchestrations creates what Mason describes as the "nostalgic sound" of his music. Experienced listeners may even catch a direct reference, intentional or not, in the second fast section to the finale's main theme from Sibelius' Fifth Symphony.

Mason provides the following note in the preface to his score:

Inspiration! is dedicated to the power of inspiration, and the will to inspire. The composition begins with a flourish – much like the spark of an idea – and erupts into joyous interplay from all orchestra sections. The middle section is more of a reflection of the first section, soulful and profound in nature. The rest of the piece is in high spirits, inspired by that which came before it.

Inspiration! Festive Overture (about 7')

continued

The orchestration for *Inspiration* consists of two flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, a tuba, and strings. Mason employs timpani and two percussionists playing crash and suspended cymbals, a triangle, and a bass drum.

Learn more about Quinn Mason and explore his music on his website: <https://www.masonianmusic.com>.

Mason links to a performance of *Inspiration* by the UT Arlington Symphony Orchestra on his website. It's not a particularly good performance, and the strings are under-mic'd, but it will have to do until something better comes along.

<https://youtu.be/R6BZkGZEFz8?si=v8SINzHtb3jVizzZ>

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Born January 27, 1756 in Salzburg, Austria

Died December 5, 1791 in Vienna, Austria

Symphony No. 40 in G minor, K. 550

1. Molto Allegro
2. Andante
3. Menuetto: Allegretto
4. Allegro assai

Last performed by the Wichita Symphony on February 18 and 19, 2012, with Daniel Hege conducting.

The genesis of Mozart's 40th Symphony in G Minor is an oft-told story of creative genius. Over two months between June and August 1788, Mozart completed three symphonies. The Fortieth was entered in his self-kept catalog on July 25, 1788, a month after completing the 39th and three weeks before entering the 41st, which subsequently became known as "The Jupiter."

For someone who was only thirty-two, completing three more symphonies in a list of forty-one¹ would appear insignificant, but these weren't just any three symphonies. They are Mozart's last three symphonies, but he couldn't have known that then. Except for the symphony (#38) Mozart composed two years earlier for concerts in Prague, these were longer, more substantial works than any other symphony Mozart had written. History places them at the pinnacle of Mozart's symphonic output, three masterpieces that were a summation of the classical style in music at that time. Remarkably, Mozart wrote them out in short order without the aid of any known sketches.

The summer of 1788 found Mozart in difficult straits. Despite the success of the Viennese production of his opera *Don Giovanni* on May 7, Mozart's extravagant spending habits and poor financial management forced him to move the family to less spacious accommodations and ask friends for loans. Times were tough. In support of an alliance with Catherine the Great of Russia, the Hapsburg Emperor Joseph became embroiled in a war with the Ottoman Empire (Turkey) on his southern border. This led to an economic recession and inflation. Patronage of the arts waned, and demand for subscription concerts dried up. There seemed to be little interest in hearing Mozart play concertos. Adding to Mozart's troubles, his wife was ill, and at the end of June, their six-month-old daughter died. With no immediate concerts or commissions to fulfill, Mozart had time on his hands during the summer.

Mozart was familiar with the symphonies his friend Joseph Haydn composed for Paris audiences two years earlier. Both men had spent most of their creative lives writing works for music rooms in private, aristocratic homes where orchestral forces were limited to about two dozen musicians. For Paris, Haydn had an orchestra of more than forty musicians at his disposal, and the public concerts occurring in a larger hall allowed Haydn to expand the dimensions of his writing. Mozart realized the possibilities of such an opportunity and likely conceived his trilogy of symphonies with a mind to future performances in a larger venue, if not in Vienna, then perhaps elsewhere if the money was right.

[1] In 1907, it was determined that Mozart's 37th Symphony was actually by Michael Haydn, for which Mozart added an introduction and made a few tweaks to prepare it for performance. Rather than re-number the entire lot, historians let stand the original numbering of the forty-one extant symphonies, especially given the fame and reputations of the final three. The history of music is complicated enough!

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continued

Mozart's 40th Symphony likely received a performance towards the end of 1788, possibly in a concert sponsored by Baron Gottfried van Swieten, one of Mozart's essential benefactors. After this, Mozart re-visited the orchestration of his symphony and added two clarinets for a likely performance in February 1791 conducted by Antonio Salieri. The clarinet version of the symphony is the one usually heard today. The orchestration includes one flute, two oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns, and strings. Interestingly, there are no trumpets or timpani.

Haydn and Mozart influenced each other, and one more thing that Mozart may have taken away from his study of Haydn's Paris Symphonies was the compression of musical ideas and the development of long orchestral works from small musical ingredients called "motives." The so-called "classical style" in music that reached its high point in the later works of Haydn and Mozart, in turn, passed on to Beethoven, was partly a search to bring logic and sense to music without having it fall into chaos or a run-on sequence of unconnected ideas. Mozart solved the problem brilliantly in his 40th Symphony.

The **first movement** begins with an accompaniment pattern in the violas. Above them, the violins enter with the main theme. The tempo is *molto allegro* (very fast). There is no slow introduction as was common in many 19th-century symphonies. In another unusual aspect, the work starts softly. Two crucial elements of this theme will govern the movement. The first is a melodic motion of a downward half-step. We'll call it a "sigh." These two notes expand across three notes in an answering phrase. Mozart adopts this obsession with a sigh from operatic works, where the sigh often has connotations with grief and suffering. The second element is a repeated rhythm consisting of two short notes followed by a longer one (short-short-long). In poetry, we call this an anapest rhythmic mode. A familiar example of that from literature is cited in Wikipedia:

*Tw*as the **night** before **Christmas** and **all** through the **house**.

The first theme conveys anguish in its driving rhythm. A cadence and a pause occur, and the second theme appears. It's a slight elongation of the three-note sigh. Because the passage is highly chromatic (again, the half-step motion), we don't get a true sense of a relaxing contrast. Harmonically, Mozart has taken us briefly into the relative major key of B-flat, but he won't linger long on any one harmony. The exposition finishes with a surge of energy. Note the importance of the woodwinds, at times reinforcing the strings in a forte and elsewhere acting independently with the sighing motive. Since the movement is a sonata form, Mozart repeats the exposition, and we get a second chance to grasp the compositional ingredients.

The development section begins with abrupt chords and a chromatic descent in the woodwinds. Then, we recognize the appearance of the opening theme. Only now, instead of the primary key of G minor, we are in a remote key of F-sharp minor. Mozart will take us through a series of keys, and knowing which ones are not as important as feeling the unsettled turbulence of the music. Mozart biographer Jan Swafford writes, "As a portrait of anguish, nothing by others in Mozart's time equals this movement. One would need to go back to Bach and Handel, both composers whose music Mozart knew, to find an equivalent passage."

Eventually, the music reaches a relatively static and quiet moment where the "sigh" motive repeats, reduced to its prime half-step motion. Beethoven would learn from this technique and employ it in the first movement development section of his Fifth Symphony.

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continued

The recapitulation slips into the texture even before the development reaches its cadence. We're back home again in G minor.

The **second movement** offers some relaxation in the key of E-flat major. Note the beautifully layered opening as the strings introduce the theme in staggered entries. The "sigh" motive becomes a delicate countermelody to the main theme. Listen to the interplay between the woodwinds and strings. The harmonies create shadows. The music becomes almost nocturnal, reminiscent of the night scenes in *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*. The chromaticism and sighing motion of the melody contribute more of an unsettled atmosphere than a comfortable nighttime dreamscape.

The **third movement** is a conventional Menuetto, the 18th-century dance of choice for symphonic third movements. This is not the elegant, powdered wig scenario of the 18th-century court dance. The music is brusque, maintaining the dark overtones of the entire piece. Again, listen to the duet effect between treble and bass instruments. The Trio section in G major offers perhaps the one true respite in the entire symphony.

The **fourth movement** launches with the upward sweep of a G minor arpeggio, an almost orchestral cliché popularized by the 18th-century symphonists working at the court of Mannheim. Thus, it became known to scholars as "the Mannheim Rocket."² As a child and an adult, Mozart visited Mannheim numerous times and was familiar with the music written for arguably one of the best orchestras in Europe during the 1770s and 1780s.

The "rockets" generate energy that releases a torrent of eighth notes. The tempo is *allegro assai* (very fast). Mozart brings back the two-note sighing half-step as a prominent motivic device that unifies the entire piece. A second theme relaxes the rhythmic energy. The movement is not a lightweight rondo but an intense sonata-allegro form. After the exposition repeats, Mozart announces the development section with his rocket theme, followed by chords characterized by dramatic silences between them.

The development section focuses on the opening rocket theme, taking it through a remarkable series of chord progressions that make it easy to see why Jan Swafford calls this movement "a declaration of rage." There are several elements to listen to. First, listen to the colors of the solo woodwinds as they interact with the strings in the reiteration of the rocket, then how the winds unite as an entire body when the development reaches its greatest intensity. Note the momentum generated by the overlapping of the rocket in contrapuntal statements in the strings and how they accentuate the contrasts between treble and bass. Finally, not to get too technical, Mozart arrests his development, landing on a diminished seventh chord, in Mozart's musical language, the ultimate harmonic dissonance, followed by a silence. The recapitulation of the primary themes in G minor follows, and the music drives us home to a dramatic ending.

[2] Beethoven begins his First Piano Sonata, Op. 2, No. 1, with the same rocket arpeggio, except in F minor. The other Mannheim device that gained fame was a melodic line that ascended in a crescendo, often gathering instruments as it gained "steam" over a constant bass, and thus became known as the "Mannheim Steamroller." Composer and record producer Chip Davis was paying attention that day in music school when the Mannheim School of 18th-century composers was taught. Consequently, the Mannheim Steamroller lives on, although in a completely different guise.

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In preparation before the concert, if you wish to renew your acquaintance or become familiar with Mozart's Symphony No. 40, there are any number of recordings on YouTube or Spotify, but here's a performance conducted by Leonard Bernstein with the Boston Symphony.

<https://youtu.be/R6BZkGZEFz8?si=v8SINzHtb3jVizzZ>

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

Born April 1, 1873 in Novgorod, Russia

Died March 28, 1973 in Beverly Hills, California

Piano Concerto No. 3 in D minor, Op. 30

1. Allegro ma non tanto (18')
2. Intermezzo: Adagio (11')
3. Finale: Alla breve - Scherzando - Tempo 1 (15')

Last performed by the Wichita Symphony on February 17, 2019, with pianist Lise de la Salle and conductor Daniel Hege. It was part of a weekend when we heard all four Rachmaninoff Piano Concertos and the Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini.

The beauty is in the simplicity. Against a hushed orchestral accompaniment, the piano melody emerges. Both hands play the tune an octave apart, making it easy enough for a piano student with limited experience. Staying within a narrow range of pitches, the phrasing seems almost organic, assimilating the style of an old Russian folk tune or an Orthodox chant. Rachmaninoff claimed the tune came from neither source but that "it simply wrote itself." He wrote that he "wanted the melody to sing on the piano, as a singer would sing it." Therein lies the challenge that a master pianist turns into magic as the melody takes shape.

While discrediting any melodic linkage to external sources, Rachmaninoff's compositional process, by his admission, relied on extramusical inspiration. He said on one occasion, "When composing, I find it of great help to have in mind a book just read, or a beautiful picture, or a poem. Sometimes a definite story is kept in mind, which I try to convert into tones without disclosing the source of my inspiration."

Indeed, the entire Third Concerto feels like a reflection of the 19th century. It takes up the spirit of Tchaikovsky and avoids the modernisms that were taking wing during the first decade of the 20th century in the music of composers like Debussy, Scriabin, and Stravinsky. Instead, Rachmaninoff was already becoming the musical voice of a bygone era, a symbol for the old nationalistic identity of Russia that was fraying in a society torn by the brief Revolution of 1905, a mere "dress rehearsal" for the eventual Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. In his *History of Russian Music*, Francis Maes writes, "Rachmaninoff's music gave expression to the sentiments and musical values of the lower strata of the aristocracy: the world of salon romances and the romantic character piece, combined with a display of virtuosity on the concert platform."

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Like many composers who spent the concert season performing as conductors or soloists, Rachmaninoff reserved his summers for composition and relaxation. The summer of 1909 found him with his family at their country estate at Ivanovka, about 250 miles south of Moscow. Here, he began work on his Third Piano Concerto, which he intended to take on tour to the United States in the fall. However, his frustration levels were high as planning for the tour was not going well, and the snail's pace of mail exchange between Russia and America caused him to doubt the tour would ever take place. The anxiety over the new concerto and traveling led Rachmaninoff to write to a friend, "My hands tremble. You could not possibly understand what tortures I live through when I realize that this question must be decided by me and me alone."

In the middle of the negotiations, his American impresario died, and the man's widow took over the rest of the tour's planning. Eventually, the contractual details were resolved, the concerto completed, and Rachmaninoff set

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continued

sail for the States. In the rush to complete the arrangements and finish the concerto, Rachmaninoff didn't leave himself enough time to practice the difficult piano part. He solved the problem by taking a silent dummy keyboard to practice during the long days at sea.

Upon arriving in the States, Rachmaninoff's first stop was at Smith College in Massachusetts, where he played a recital. This event was followed by an appearance with the Philadelphia Orchestra, where he conducted the American premiere of his Second Symphony (a work performed by the Wichita Symphony last November). Following that concert, he toured with the Boston Symphony as the soloist in his Second Piano Concerto to Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New York City.

Finally, the day of the Third Piano Concerto's world premiere arrived on November 28, 1909. Walter Damrosch and the New York Symphony Society, with Rachmaninoff at the piano, had the honors. The reviews were complimentary but one appearing in the *New York Herald* noted that the Concerto was long and arduous and unlikely to be undertaken by anyone but "pianists of exceptional technical powers."

Several additional performances of the Concerto took place. For Rachmaninoff, the best occurred in January with the New York Philharmonic conducted by Gustav Mahler. Rachmaninoff lauded Mahler for his care in mastering the orchestral accompaniment in rehearsal.

Despite offers for additional work, Rachmaninoff was eager to return to Russia when the contractual obligations ended. Life in America didn't suit him as he found the pace too fast and Americans all too eager to conduct business all the time. He was, however, satisfied with the fees he earned as they were enough to purchase a car in Russia. Eventually, he would return to America as an émigré following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.

As for the Third Concerto, it didn't immediately gain the popularity of the Second Concerto, and for several decades, Rachmaninoff was the sole performer of the work. Even the dedicatee of the Concerto, Josef Hofmann, avoided the work, declaring it was "not right for him," which annoyed Rachmaninoff. (Hofmann's hands may have been too small to grasp the large expanse of some passages.) It wasn't until Vladimir Horowitz began to perform the Concerto regularly in the 1930s that the work began to gain the beloved status it enjoys today. In 1958, Van Cliburn's performance of the Concerto won the Gold Medal at the First International Tchaikovsky Competition, and the subsequent recording that found its way into many American households thoroughly established the Concerto in American consciousness. Since then, the Concerto entered the repertoire of many young pianists, became known as a favorite competition piece to gain juried votes, and rarely failed to trigger standing ovations. In the 1996 movie *Shine* about the Australian pianist David Helfgott, the Third Concerto played a significant thematic role as "Rach 3." The stress of learning the piece was partly blamed for Helfgott's nervous breakdown.

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The Music

After the solo piano's opening presentation of the first theme in **the first movement**, the horns and violas take up the melody while the pianist accompanies. As the music unfolds, the piano writing becomes more complex and thicker until the energy is released in a brief cadenza that encompasses most of the keyboard.

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continued

Following a brief orchestral interlude, the strings take up a rhythmic motive with a somewhat martial element. A “conversational” exchange between the piano and strings, with the woodwinds adding their “two cents” to this rhythmic element, concludes with the piano introducing a new lyrical and expansive theme based on the motive we just heard.

Again, the piano texture thickens until we hear the first of many climaxes in this piece marked by loud block-like chords hammered out by the pianist.

The music relaxes, and we find ourselves back in familiar territory as the opening music reappears. This is the beginning of the development section, and Rachmaninoff shows us how the melody can change through a series of chord changes that slide downward. The development focuses on fragmenting previously heard melodies and expanding upon them with devilishly difficult writing for the pianist.

The development culminates with a massive cadenza for the pianist. Rachmaninoff wrote two cadenzas. One is somewhat shorter and “easier.” The other is longer, more difficult, and features a blistering fistful of chords. One can see the difference between the two cadenzas by looking at the printed score, where the longer one appears above the shorter and is indicated by the word “*ossia*,” indicating an alternative passage. Eventually, the two cadenzas merge for a climactic explosion of more difficult chordal writing.

It’s uncertain why Rachmaninoff wrote two versions of the cadenza. He was known to play the shorter version, which one writer suggested would fit easier on a 78-RPM record. In his gold-medal-winning performance at the 1958 Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, Van Cliburn performed the longer cadenza. Since then, the more extended version seems to be favored by most pianists and is the one that Stewart Goodyear plays at this concert.

The excitement of the cadenza relaxes. Over a soft, rolling, arpeggiated passage in the piano, the solo winds take turns reiterating the main theme’s opening phrase. Following this passage, the pianist continues the solo cadenza with a reprise of the second theme.

The solo ends with a filigree passage, quiet chords, and then the opening of the concerto movement reappears. This would seem to be the movement’s recapitulation, but Rachmaninoff doesn’t overstay the music. After repeating the “simple” melody as we originally heard, he ends the movement with bits of the fanfare-like motive that dissolve into silence. It is not a flashy ending. Rachmaninoff will save that for the finale.

The **second movement** is titled “Intermezzo,” a term that has various meanings in music depending on the context, but here simply means a “smaller” movement between two larger ones. An orchestral introduction sets the mood in an *adagio* (slow) tempo, the falling intervals related to a portion of the first movement’s main theme. The piano enters with a chromatic embellishment that establishes tension before resolving into D-flat major, perhaps Rachmaninoff’s favorite key for nostalgic and romantic melodies.

A contrasting middle section picks up the tempo, and the music suggests a swirling, intoxicating “old world” waltz, with the clarinet introducing the tune. The articulated piano part dances around the melody.

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continued

The *adagio* theme returns, and as the movement seems to reach its end, a new mood interrupts. A blazing passage of octaves in the piano, an exhilarating plunging scale from the heights with an arpeggio sweeping back up, and two chords in the orchestra and piano lead us without pause into the **third movement**.

The Finale is a tour de force for the pianist. The descriptive "alla breve" is less information for the listener and more of an instruction to the performers that the movement opens in "cut time," where the half note gets the beat, not the quarter note. It's a way of linking the tempo and meter to what came before and helps to keep the music under control with a slower pulse than with frantic quarter notes.

It's easiest to just sit back and enjoy the ride and musical fireworks. Note how Rachmaninoff contrasts themes characterized by driving rhythm and those with lyrical qualities. Thematic elements from the first movement reappear, leading to an apotheosis characteristic of Rachmaninoff. (Some think he was modeling his climaxes after Grieg's Piano Concerto, which he adored. Come back to the Wichita Symphony in November to hear Joyce Yang perform the Grieg and see if you hear a connection.)

The movement accelerates to the final bars, finishing off with a virtuosic tumble of octaves on the piano and the familiar rhythmic tattoo, long-short-short-long, that listeners equate with Rachmaninoff's rhythmic signature of his name.

All of this leaves the question, is this the most challenging piano concerto ever written? If we weigh that answer by the number of notes for the pianist, probably yes. Rach 3, as it's known, is one of the longest concertos in the standard repertoire, right up there with Brahms Second. It is taxing to perform and requires more than just the ability to strike all of the notes. The pianist must discern from among the thick and florid textures which notes need to be brought out as melody and which recede as accompaniment or background. Pianists will argue and offer up other difficult concertos by Prokofiev and Bartok. Others, like Busoni's, are obscure. Even Beethoven and Mozart have their unique challenges in different ways. Given the Rach 3's reputation as a winning competition piece and audience favorite, it is undoubtedly a concerto with a Himalayan reputation.

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As mentioned in notes for last season's performance of Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto, Wichita audiences enjoyed two recital performances by Rachmaninoff, one on January 30, 1933, and the second on January 15, 1940. Both occurred at the New Arcadia Theater, a 1,900-seat venue and part of the Expo/Forum building on South Water Street where Century II now sits. Large crowds, including many of Wichita's music students, filled the Hall to see and hear the famous pianist described by an Eagle writer as "a strange figure, tall, slender, long-armed and long-legged." At his first recital, Rachmaninoff regaled the audience with virtuosic showpieces by Beethoven, Chopin, Liszt, and his original compositions. He finished with five encores before greeting the audience and signing autographs onstage. The recital was declared "one of the really striking musical events in Wichita's history."

An *Eagle* reviewer, identified by the initials F. P., wrote of the 1940 recital, "The outstanding impression which Rachmaninoff leaves on even the most casual concertgoer is one of utter economy and ease of movement. So effortless, yet masterful, in every motion of the maestro at the keyboard, the perfect result seems almost unbelievable."

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There are many performances of Rachmaninoff's Third Concerto on the internet, and nearly all have merit. Before attending the Wichita Symphony concert on October 5, review or introduce yourself to Rachmaninoff's Concerto in this 2022 video from the Finals of the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. The remarkable young South Korean pianist Yunchan Lim was nineteen then and the youngest to win the Gold Medal at the Cliburn. Marin Alsop conducts the Fort Worth Symphony.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DPJL488cfRw>

For an older performance by the great Vladimir Horowitz, check out this 1978 video featuring him and the New York Philharmonic under the baton of Zubin Mehta.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D5mxU_7BTRA

Or turn the clock back to the 1958 Tchaikovsky Competition with this somewhat hazy video of Van Cliburn in Moscow with Kirill Kondrashin conducting the Moscow Philharmonic.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QZNfCilVok>