

**Tuesday, July 13, 2010**  
Schneider House  
Notable Dinner 1: Scott Yoo & Timothy Fain

*Trio élégiaque No. 2 in D minor*, op. 9 (1893)  
Moderato  
Quasi variazione  
Allegro risoluto

Serge Rachmaninoff (1873–1943)

**Serge Rachmaninoff (1873–1943)—*Trio élégiaque No. 2 in D minor*, op. 9 (1893)**

The twenty-year-old Serge Rachmaninoff must have felt on top of the world: he had been named to the Moscow Conservatory's Roll of Honor *and* had been awarded the Great Gold Medal (being only the third student to receive that prize); he had already signed a publishing contract; and new music was almost pouring out of him. In late September, he attended a gathering in Moscow with other musicians to get a “sneak preview” of Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony, the famous *Pathétique*, which was to have its public premiere in St. Petersburg the next month. Before the evening ended, Rachmaninoff was able to present a keyboard version of his own new tone poem, *The Rock*—and he was enormously flattered by Tchaikovsky's reaction: the older composer asked if he might include *The Rock* on an upcoming concert tour.

Scarcely a month later, Rachmaninoff got shocking news: just days after the *Pathétique*'s premiere, Tchaikovsky had succumbed to a cholera epidemic. Rachmaninoff had missed the premiere because he had been conducting his new opera *Aleko* in Kiev—an opera that had already enjoyed a prestigious Bolshoi performance, thanks in part to Tchaikovsky's support. Almost beside himself with grief, Rachmaninoff sat down that very evening and started work on a memorial piece—the *Trio élégiaque No. 2*.

Tchaikovsky cast his shadow over the trio in several ways. Scarcely a decade earlier, Tchaikovsky had written a memorial trio himself (for Nicolai Rubinstein). His second movement was a set of variations, and Rachmaninoff followed that same approach. Moreover, both works carried the same dedication: “To the Memory of a Great Man.” Nevertheless, the later trio is very much a product of Rachmaninoff, with its demandingly virtuosic piano part and its harsh, powerful outpouring of grief. It took Rachmaninoff almost two months to complete the score, and he told a friend, “While working on it, all my thoughts, feelings, powers belonged to it, to this threnody . . . I trembled for every phrase, [and] sometimes crossed out everything and started over again to think, to think.” The premiere took place the following February, and the trio clearly had lasting importance to Rachmaninoff, for he revised it in 1907 and yet again in 1917.