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Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection

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Encore presentations of the entire *Discoveries* series every Wednesday at 7:00 p.m. on WRTI-HD2

Saturday, July 4, 2009, 5:00-6:00 p.m.

[Anton Rubinstein](#) (1829-1894). *Nero*, Festival March (1875). Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra Bratislava, Michael Halász. Marco Polo 8.220451. Tr 9. 5:40.

Rubinstein. *The Demon*, operatic excerpts (1871). Slovak Philharmonic, Halász. 8.220451. Tr 5-6. 15:05.

Rubinstein. *Feramors*, operatic excerpts (1862). Slovak Philharmonic, Halász. 8.220451. Tr 1-4. 19:11.

It is fascinating to see how the musical language of a nation asserts itself. In America around 1850, William Henry Fry and George Frederick Bristow were declaring independence for an American art by supporting native composers and by writing works often inspired by national themes. The same thing was happening in Russia at exactly the same time, and among those taking up the cause in Russia was Anton Rubinstein. His work as educator, pianist, and composer would declare musical independence for his country forever.

He was a child prodigy at the piano, which opened doors for him all the way to the royal family. He may have been the only pianist referred to as at least the equal of Franz Liszt. The thundering power, subtlety, and beautiful tone of his playing astonished everyone, including a young Rachmaninoff who would marvel to the end of his life at Rubinstein's greatness. On his 1872-73 American tour, Rubinstein played 215 concerts in 239 days—sometimes three concerts in three cities in one day—and never tired. That he looked (and wore his hair) almost exactly like Beethoven added to his star-power.

In 1859, he created the Russian Musical Society, then in 1862, the great St. Petersburg Conservatory (where one of his students was Tchaikovsky). As if that were not enough, in 1866 he co-founded the Moscow Conservatory with his brother Nicolai. The purpose of all of this was to create a culture of music by Russians, for Russians. For the first time, a Russian student didn't have to learn music theory in German.

Rubinstein established high standards, but his opinions sometimes ruffled feathers. He decried musical amateurism and railed against homegrown ditties, offending Russian nationalists who appropriated folk themes for their own pieces. Attacks against him became anti-Semitic in some quarters, as Rubinstein's ancestors were Jewish, even though they had converted to Russian Orthodoxy. In spite of animosity from Balakirev, though, one of Rubinstein's biggest recital hits was Balakirev's *Islamey*.

All the while he wrote prodigious amounts of music. While the quality varies, his operatic music is particularly worthy of notice. *The Demon*, in fact, was the most-produced Russian opera of its time, save for Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar*. Tchaikovsky admired his music, and even the nationalists Balakirev and Borodin admitted that his compositions had real merit. His music is in the spirit of Mendelssohn and Schumann, but speaks in a voice that is only Anton Rubinstein's. He changed the face of Russia with an educational system that continues to produce generations of musicians, and his playing and his compositions awoke Europe to the presence of a spirit, an independent country, a Russia, in the forefront of the classical music world.

Hosted by [Kile Smith](#), Curator of the Fleisher Collection, and [Jack Moore](#), Program Director of [WRTI](#). In *Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection* we uncover the unknown, rediscover the little-known, and take a fresh look at some of the remarkable treasures housed in the Fleisher Collection of Orchestral Music, at the Parkway Central Library of the [Free Library of Philadelphia](#). The Fleisher Collection is the largest lending library of orchestral performance material in the world. For recording details, please go to our [web page](#). For a detailed list of all our shows, please visit our [archives](#).