



# Crossing Rachmaninoff

*A documentary feature film (79.03 mins)*

[www.crossingrachmaninoff.com](http://www.crossingrachmaninoff.com)

## Press kit

### Key contact

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An aspiring pianist preparing Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2 for the biggest night of his career must reconcile with his past, overcome conventional thinking and battle personal demons.

### ***Crossing Rachmaninoff* - a feature documentary film**

*Crossing Rachmaninoff* is the story of pianist Flavio Villani and his preparation of Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2 for his first ever performance with an orchestra.

Filmed in Auckland, New Zealand, and southern Italy, it follows Flavio's journey as he grapples with the challenging work, and later returns to Italy to meet the family who once discouraged him from following a career in music. And it is with him as he takes to the stage with the Orchestra Filarmonica della Calabria for his big night.

A compelling and uplifting personal odyssey, *Crossing Rachmaninoff* also raises bigger questions about the value of artistic endeavour, the importance of self-belief and the fundamental desire to be accepted for who we are.

### **Festivals:**

World premiere: 2015 New Zealand International Film Festival

Semi-finalist: 2015 Guangzhou International Documentary Film Festival, China

Official competition: 2016 Festival International des Programmes Audiovisuels, France

Official selection: 2016 Mendocino Film Festival, USA

Official selection: 2016 New Zealand Film Festival in China

## ***Crossing Rachmaninoff* - synopsis**

*Crossing Rachmaninoff* is the story of an Italian-born pianist's journey with Rachmaninoff's famous Piano Concerto No. 2 as he embarks on a journey to redemption: a performance that will confirm his arrival as a concert pianist and vindicate his decision to follow his passion for the piano.

This film follows Flavio's preparation as he grapples daily with Rachmaninoff's technically challenging work by practising, learning and mentally preparing himself for up to eight hours a day. It explores the single-minded commitment necessary to become a professional pianist and reveals the emotional journey that Flavio takes through this dramatic piece of music.

Alongside the preparation, Flavio must continue teaching his music students who reveal more about Flavio's connection with music as well as the place of music in their lives. In turn, Flavio is taught by his mentor and former teacher Matteo Napoli, who provides background on what it takes to become a professional musician. Commentary on Flavio's musicianship and the challenges of this particular piano concerto are provided through interview with various musical experts including Auckland University Head of Piano, Dr Rae de Lisle and New Zealand-born, LA-based violinist Dr Mark Menzies.

The film then travels to Italy with Flavio to meet the family who once discouraged their son from fulfilling his aspiration. It asks if they are ready to concede their son has found his rightful place, and whether they regret their earlier urging to follow a more conventional path. And it is with Flavio as he rehearses the piece with the Orchestra Filarmonica della Calabria – his first experience of playing with an orchestra.

Finally the night of the all-important performance arrives. Will Flavio be a success? Will he defeat his own self-doubts to pull off the performance? Will he gain the acceptance he craves, not just from his audience but from the most important people in his life – his family and especially his father?

*Crossing Rachmaninoff* is a story of many parts. More than a personal odyssey, with all the elements of drama and catharsis that Rachmaninoff himself depicts so splendidly in the concerto, it celebrates the bravery of those who bring music to us and explores the fundamental human desire to be who we want to be and accepted for who we are.

## **About Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto No. 2**

Rachmaninoff's Concerto for Piano No. 2 is one of the great classics of twentieth century music. The Russian composer completed it in 1901 as he emerged from depression following the disappointing reception of his first symphony, and its uplifting yet deeply moving qualities capture in perfect measure both darkness and hope. The concerto redeemed Rachmaninoff's reputation as a composer and brought him the affirmation he desperately sought.



## Flavio Villani - biography

A native of the region of Campania, in Southern Italy, Flavio Villani showed musical talent at an early age. His family discouraged him from pursuing a career in the arts so he studied computer science. Music, however, remained his first love. Despite not having a piano at home until he was 16, Flavio continued to study piano on top of his university studies, completing a Bachelor of Piano Performance at the Conservatory "G.Martucci" in Salerno in 2007.

Soon after Flavio came out he left home and began a career in IT. But in 2009 he was invited by his former piano teacher to take up a teaching position in New Zealand, where he later gained permanent residency (in 2015 Flavio expects to gain citizenship). Here he was invited by Creative New Zealand to attend the 2011 Venice Biennale to play the piano carved by Michael Parekowhai. For the first time the idea of a life in music became possible.

In 2012 he completed a Master in Piano Performance at the University of Auckland with first class honours under the guidance of Stephen De Pledge. Intent on a career as a pianist, Flavio has supported himself throughout his studies by establishing a community-based music school, teaching, and working as an accompanist and composer. His performance career has begun with solo recitals and duos both in New Zealand and overseas, but the concerto in Italy – his first performance with an orchestra, was his biggest career engagement. He went on to perform the Rachmaninoff concerto with the Orchestra of CalArts in Los Angeles in January 2015.

This year Flavio is collaborating with other internationally renowned musicians in New Zealand and overseas (Uwe Grodd and Mark Menzies amongst others). He is member and founder of the Villani Piano Quartet which will have its debut in Auckland in late 2015.



### *Crossing Rachmaninoff* - filming locations

#### **Italy**

Rome, Anzio - Lazio

Nocera Superiore - Campania

Nocera Terinese, Lamezia Terme - Calabria

#### **New Zealand**

Auckland

#### **United States**

Los Angeles

## **Rebecca Tansley - Producer / Director**

Rebecca is a freelance writer/director/content producer whose work spans print, moving image and online media, and both words and pictures. Her 2009 short film, *eden*, was selected for the NZIFF and other international festivals and her television drama, *The Waiting Game*, aired on Maori Television in 2008 as part of the series *Table Plays*.

Rebecca has written two internationally published non-fiction books. She has a Master of Arts (Hons) in Italian from the University of Auckland and two postgraduate diplomas, in media production and in law. Her career to date has included held senior communications positions in television, publishing and the tertiary sector and extensive experience in communications, video/film production, print journalism and copywriting.

## **Lyn Collie – Co-producer**

Lyn is an award-winning filmmaker, digital media producer and communicator with ten years' experience in independent film and television. Her first documentary feature, *There Once was an Island: Te Henua e Noho* took more than ten international prizes, enjoyed theatrical release in New Zealand and has broadcast in every territory including on PBS, Arte and Al Jazeera. Documentaries she has advised on have screened and won awards internationally. Lyn currently produces and directs educational video and multimedia at the University of Auckland. She has a Master of Creative and Performing Arts (Hons) from the University of Auckland and a Honours degree in Social Anthropology.

## **Simon Raby - Director of Photography**

Simon is an award-winning director of photography with an extensive background in drama as well as short film and documentary. Simon's camera credits include the feature films *Predicament*, *Elysium*, *Orphans & Kingdoms*, *Giselle*, *District 9*, *50 Ways of Saying Fabulous* and *Lord of the Rings*, and the documentary *Elgar's Enigma*.

## **Mike Westgate – Location Sound Mixer**

With more than four decades in the industry Mike is one of New Zealand's most experienced production sound mixers. He has worked on numerous features films including *Mr Pip*, *The World's Fastest Indian* and *The Last Samurai*, as well as short films, television series and 65 documentaries including twelve international expeditions with the Cousteau Society. Mike recorded all the music for *Crossing Rachmaninoff* on his Soundfield microphone.

## **Thomas Gleeson – Editor**

Thomas Gleeson is an editor and filmmaker from Auckland. His long-form, factual editing work has included projects for National Geographic, Discovery US, BBC and Al Rayann Qatar. Thomas's own award-winning, first short film *Home* played festivals around the world including Hot Docs, Palm Springs Shortfest, MIFF and NZIFF.