

INTERNATIONAL EDITION

November 22, 2011 LAST UPDATED: 2:26:PM EST

<http://artinfo.com/news/story/750574/victory-lap-how-i-ran-33-miles-with-performa-artist-guido-van-der-werve-and-lived-to-tell-about-it>

Victory Lap: How I Ran 33 Miles With Performa Artist Guido Van Der Werve and Lived to Tell About It



by Reid Singer

Published: November 16, 2011

After leaving Russia in 1917, as fraught a moment as any in the country's history, **Sergei Rachmaninoff** became one of many

Russian Romantics who shouldered a deep ambivalence toward their native land. Living in the United States, he was frequently homesick, and put off becoming an American citizen until 1941. Even after the Communist party officially banned his work, the virtuoso musician continued to donate proceeds from his concerts to the Russian army. He longed to be buried at Villa Senar, the estate he built in Switzerland to resemble his childhood home in northwestern Russia, the outbreak of World War II made that impossible. Instead, when he died of melanoma in Beverly Hills in 1943 he was buried at Kensico Cemetery in Valhalla, New York, an arbitrary plot of land about 30 miles north of Manhattan that was chosen only because it was near the home of a distant relative.

This past Saturday, as part of **Performa 11**, the Dutch artist **Guido van der Werve** led a group on a run from **Luhring Augustine Gallery** in Chelsea to Rachmaninoff's gravesite. A sprightly red-haired man in his mid-30s, Guido could play Rachmaninoff's "Piano Concerto No. 3" as a preteen and was trained at a conservatory as a young man before deciding to study art instead (while learning Russian on the side). An experienced athlete — and a veteran of demanding endurance-art feats, such as standing stock-still at the geographic North Pole for 24 hours — he approached the group pilgrimage with characteristic seriousness. He stretched carefully, wore knee-high socks to prevent shin splints, and took frequent breaks for water and Gatorade that was carried by a crew of gallery staff

who followed the runners' path upstate in a cozy SUV.

"Prolonged and intense running releases endorphins, or brain chemicals that produce a sense of elation," he told the participants, noting that Rachmaninoff dedicated his "Piano Concerto No. 2" to **Dr. Nikolai Dahl**, the autosuggestive therapist who helped him through his most intense bout of depression and writer's block. Proposing that the pilgrimage to Valhalla be an homage not only to Rachmaninoff but to the victims of mental illness — of which the great pianist was a sufferer — van der Werve instructed each runner to carry in his hand a small bouquet of chamomile (an herbal remedy for anxiety) to place at the gravesite.

Having a few marathons under my belt, I thought van der Werve's art run would suit me just fine. I joined the group with expectations of quiet, hilly backroads and a chance to see parts of the Hudson Valley where the leaves were changing colors. While parts of the trip did turn out that way, we also had to weather long stretches of strip malls, darting through places where car culture had precluded a sidewalk or even a shoulder to provide a running path. While the other runners' bouquets started to fall apart, I took pride in the grip I held on mine. Gently passed from hand to hand, the bunch remained intact the entire trip, except for a few stray white buds.

Our group left Chelsea at 10 a.m., and by the time we passed through the cemetery gates dusk was falling. My legs were very

sore and I felt lightheaded, and Rachmaninoff's grave is at the top of a very steep hill. We probably would have meandered and gotten lost if a funeral attendant, a middle-aged woman in a yellow jumper and tinted glasses, hadn't been there waiting to guide us to the spot. Everyone took pictures as we placed the flowers at the gravesite, and I was grateful that time permitted me a few minutes to stand at the gravestone and listen to the "Piano Concerto No. 3" on my iPod.

Though garrulous and friendly, Guido talked very little about art or music as we made our way upstate. He remained so on the trip back to New York. Last year, [he'd done this all alone, he said, starting at the PS1 branch of MoMA in Queens](#). Maybe we'll still be doing this 10 years from now with 80 people trailing behind us, chatting along the way about whatever was on our minds.