

JANINA FIALKOWSKA PLAYS CHOPIN PROGRAM NOTES

Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)
Piano Concerto No.1 in E minor, Op.11

"While you are away, may your heart remain ever with us."

--Text of a farewell cantata performed on the day of Chopin's departure from Poland

Although he lived the last half of his short life in France, Chopin's heart was always in his native Poland. And it still is. At the composer's request, his heart was preserved in alcohol at his death and returned to his home town of Warsaw where it remains to this day, entombed in a church column, although his body rests in Paris. This is undoubtedly the closest he came to being a pillar of the Church; as for being pickled in cognac, what may seem like an enviable fate to some probably would have been a matter of indifference to him. He was a man to whom excess of any kind was abhorrent.

Having a French father and a Polish mother, it seems natural that Chopin would have divided his life between these countries; but in fact, politics and the artistic environment were responsible. With an opera house and an active concert calendar Warsaw was no hick town, but it lacked the social network and sheer numbers of musical patrons that in Paris provided Chopin a living—and where in addition to composing and performing he could charge exorbitantly for teaching the children of the wealthy. But Chopin's emigration was more chance than choice. He was concertizing in Vienna when the doomed Polish revolution of 1831 broke out. Politically suspect, unwilling to return home to Russian repression and unable to rekindle the excitement exhibited earlier by the fickle Viennese, he wandered through southern Germany before arriving in the French capital in September 1831. There his arrestingly original technique, which effectively transferred the highly ornamented melody of *bel canto* opera to the piano—along with the exotic appeal of his Polish dance compositions and his unfailing social graces—made him a fixture at the fashionable salons.

Chopin's two piano concertos were the creative culmination of his Warsaw years when, after returning from a resounding success in Vienna in 1829, a career as a piano soloist seemed inevitable if not desirable. When the F minor concerto was premiered in March 1830, he was already writing another in E minor, which would be the highlight of his farewell concert in October. Thus the E minor Concerto, while published as his First, is actually the later of the two. This order of publication in turn reflects Chopin's priorities: the E minor Concerto, larger and more heavily orchestrated than its predecessor, was the vehicle the composer invariably chose to present himself publicly, evidently

believing it the more effective in spite of its somewhat mixed reception over the years.

Unfortunately the original manuscripts of both concertos have disappeared, making it impossible to know how much revision separates what was played in Warsaw from what Chopin published in Paris. The E minor is the less traditional of the two in matters of form, although neither work conforms to the academic 'rules'; unusually its first movement retains the keynote of E until strikingly moving to C to begin the development. Unlike his contemporaries Mendelssohn, Schumann and Liszt, Chopin retained the old-fashioned extended orchestral introduction of the previous generation. If the influence of composer-pianists such as Hummel and Field may be discerned, the harmonic imagination and emotional thrust of the concertos are Chopin's own, which is why his works have survived and theirs, for all their superficial glitter, have not.

Chopin's orchestration has frequently been termed inept. This is rather harsh, although it must be said that no orchestral musician looks forward to a Chopin accompaniment—for they are desperately, *desperately* dull to play! In fact, Chopin rarely performed the E minor with full orchestra; a reduced accompaniment for string quintet was printed and is thought to have been used at the Paris premiere in February 1832. He is also known to have performed it as a piano solo. But if nobody comes to hear a Chopin concerto for the accompaniments—mostly a rug of strings underneath the piano—it is kind of fun to keep half an ear cocked to hear how almost every instrument gets its moment in the shade.

That 1832 Paris performance launched Chopin: publishers lined up and the Pleyel piano firm made him a sponsor. Three years later, however, his full-orchestra rendition of the First at a Parisian benefit for Polish refugees was coolly received, leading Chopin to abandon public concerts completely in favour of salon recitals. But other pianists, notably Liszt and Clara Schumann, soon took the concerto up, although usually with cuts to the introduction and often with 'improved' orchestrations. The Romance and Rondo (the last derived from the Polish dance *krakowiak*) were often given separately, as indeed the composer himself had done.

A few years ago a request to have DNA from Chopin's heart analysed to determine the exact cause of his death was turned down by the Polish government; thus a theory that cystic fibrosis, a disease unrecognized in the 19th century, may have killed him rather than presumed tuberculosis ('consumption') remains speculative.

Louise Farrenc (1804-1875)
Symphony No.2 in D major

In recent years works composed by women have increasingly found their place on orchestral programs as the movement toward diversity of representation in all aspects of Western society has flourished. But if the presence of women composers in the field of art music has steadily increased in the past century, and more particularly since World War II, their compositions have generally been classified as 'modern' or 'contemporary'—and before that, even 'contemptible'—and shelved, frequently before the composers themselves have passed on. However, efforts to address the previous neglect of women in our music histories and concert halls have intensified in the past 30 years, and have shed light on the achievements of some remarkable and under-appreciated musicians.

One of these is the 19th-century French composer Louise Farrenc (Far-renk'). She was born Louise Dumont, into a distinguished family of painters and sculptors long associated with the royal court, which facilitated her pursuit of an artistic career even though she was the first of them to take up music. Her great talent was evident from the age of six, and later was nurtured by the most prominent teachers in Paris—the virtuosi Moscheles and Hummel in piano, and Antoine Reicha in composition, counterpoint and orchestration, among whose pupils were Berlioz, Liszt and later César Franck. At 17 Louise was ready to undertake concert tours with her new husband, Aristide Farrenc. Here again she was fortunate: Farrenc was more than a professional flautist, he was a burgeoning music publisher who in addition to issuing editions of Beethoven and Hummel could—and would!—print the compositions of his gifted wife. Thereby Louise became known as a pianist and composer not only in Paris but abroad, garnering approval from no less a figure than Robert Schumann.

But she was not satisfied to restrict herself to writing variations and rondos for the piano, and in 1834 she produced two concert Overtures for full orchestra, her remarkable first ventures in orchestral composition. The second, given by the Paris Conservatoire orchestra in 1840, was favourably reviewed by Berlioz, but both remained in manuscript, awaiting rediscovery in a later age.

However, they were preparation for Farrenc's entry into the rarefied genre of the symphony, terra incognita for most French composers of the day, never mind a woman (in France composers wrote symphonies, if at all, as graduation exercises prior to pursuing success in the opera house). The first of her three symphonies was completed in 1841, the year before she joined the Conservatoire as its first female professor of piano—a position she held for

the next 30 years. It was only given a hearing in April 1845 by the Conservatoire orchestra, but that doubtless spurred the composition of her Symphony No.2, the manuscript of which is dated December of that year.

Farrenc's Second Symphony in D—her only one in a major key—is in four movements, the second one slow and the third dance-like, with a modest instrumentation of double winds, strings and timpani, all quite in the tradition of the late Classical period.. In these respects it is like Beethoven's Second, as well as in having an opening slow introduction; certain melodic and harmonic details are also similar. All that ends with the Andante, where Farrenc's individuality asserts itself in a sweet melody alternating in charming variations with a gruffer and more militaristic section; her skill in scoring for woodwinds is particularly on display here.

The scherzo, in D minor, is full of surprises, starting with irregular phrases, and continuing with unexpected pauses and sudden changes of key and volume. French-Canadian conductor Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Music Director of the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Metropolitan Opera, has described it as 'experimental'—even suggestive of the early Bruckner symphonies of the 1860s! The central section, in its switch from triple to duple time and in its repetitive little woodwind scale, may remind some of the trio in Beethoven's 9th Symphony scherzo; here as there it also provides a short coda.

The finale expands the wide range of moods traversed in this symphony with a stately and noble introduction that unfolds in the horns and basses the beginning of the light and joyous Allegro theme that follows. Several melodic fragments, ever-increasing in energy, are then strung together until the theme turns into a fugue, climaxing in—silence! The winds' tranquil transformation of the theme then leads to the recapitulation and a conclusion that proves that musical wit did not die with Haydn.

Louise Farrenc did more than show that women could write symphonies: her chamber music was published and widely performed; and not only was she the sole female professor at the Conservatoire in the entire 19th century—where her '30 Etudes in All the Major and Minor Keys' were in continuous use as teaching material for decades—but from 1850 she was paid on equal terms with her male colleagues. With her husband—and after his death— she spearheaded the publication of 23 volumes of 17th and 18th century keyboard works, for which her treatise on Baroque ornamentation was an important reference for many years. The recognition denied her for over a century is now justifiably becoming hers.