

FRYDERYK CHOPIN

(1810 – 1849)

CONCERTO NO. 2 IN F MINOR, OP. 21 (33:09)

- | | | | |
|---|------|----------------|---------|
| 1 | I. | MAESTOSO | (14:22) |
| 2 | II. | LARGHETTO | (9:59) |
| 3 | III. | ALLEGRO VIVACE | (8:33) |

CONCERTO NO. 1 IN E MINOR, OP. 11 (41:45)

- | | | | |
|---|------|---------------------|---------|
| 4 | I. | ALLEGRO MAESTOSO | (19:56) |
| 5 | II. | ROMANZE (LARGHETTO) | (11:01) |
| 6 | III. | RONDO (VIVACE) | (10:33) |

VASSILY PRIMAKOV, PIANO
ODENSE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
PAUL MANN, CONDUCTOR

CHOPIN: PIANO CONCERTOS 1 & 2

Like the numbering of Beethoven's first two piano concertos, that of Fryderyk Chopin's only two reflects their order of publication, not composition, for the work we know as Piano Concerto No. 2 was in fact written first. Moreover, they are both comparatively early works, written before the age of 21 and pre-dating the bulk of his characteristic output of Etudes, Nocturnes, Preludes, Mazurkas and Polonaises for which Chopin is most celebrated. He virtually eschewed the writing of works with an orchestral component after them, in order to concentrate intensively on the piano. But they are powerful evidence of his wish to be far more than a miniaturist or genre composer, and to write works on a large scale with the thorough formal integration of sonata style – something he would subsequently achieve, without orchestral accompaniment, in his series of piano sonatas, ballades and scherzos. Chopin's two concertos were likely inspired by the virtuoso concertos of such contemporary composer-performers as John Field, Henri Herz, Frédéric Kalkbrenner, Ignaz Moscheles and, perhaps most important of all, Mozart's pupil Johann Nepomuk Hummel, generally considered to be the finest piano composer of his day. Chopin considered studying with Kalkbrenner, but drew back at the last moment; nevertheless he remained on good terms with him. Chopin was introduced to Hummel in his mid-teens by his piano teacher at the Warsaw Conservatoire, Josef Elsner; and when he was eighteen Hummel, on an extended visit to Warsaw, became a firm friend.

Both concertos, as one might expect, are brilliantly written for the piano, though their pianism is less individual than the style displayed in some of Chopin's solo pieces from an even earlier date. No doubt he had

practicality in mind, not wanting to test the soloist's stamina by an intensely romantic aphoristic style spun out to major length, and at the same time wishing to etch the crucial structural turning-points clearly on the minds of his listeners. Altogether they represent a transitional phase in Chopin's development, an attempt to display a revolutionary piano technique within the broad framework of a large-scale classical form.

As to their orchestral component, Chopin was a relative novice in orchestral writing and the results have been considered undistinguished by generations of critics familiar with the formidable orchestral skills of Beethoven, Mozart or Liszt. (Berlioz called Chopin's scoring 'frigid and practically superfluous'.) As a result, a number of highly distinguished composers – among them Karl Klindworth, Carl Tausig, Mily Balakirev and André Messager: Chopin-enthusiasts to a man – attempted during the 19th and early 20th centuries to revise the scoring of the Piano Concertos, to provide greater colour and effectiveness. Balakirev, for example, re-orchestrated the E minor Concerto in 1910 for the celebration of the centenary of Chopin's birth, and he also (in 1905) made a highly effective solo-piano version of that concerto's slow movement, the *Romance*. But in fact Chopin's original scoring was efficient enough for his purposes, and not without some happy touches, such as his solos for horn and bassoon. It is nowadays generally allowed to stand up in the concert hall in its own right, and was used on these recordings.

Sir Donald Tovey commented of Klindworth's edition that Klindworth thought Chopin's orchestration –

'thin, and so it is... But Klindworth seems to infer that the only alternative to thin is thick. At all events he re-orchestrated the F minor Concerto really very cleverly, in the style of a full-swell organ, with a beautiful balance of tone. In order to penetrate this, even the tidied-up solo part had to be rewritten in a heavier style. Klindworth duly points this out, and remarks that those purists who wish to confine themselves to Chopin's original pianoforte part must accordingly abstain from using the improved orchestration. In other words, Chopin's orchestration ... is an unpretentious and correct accompaniment to his pianoforte-writing. We may be grateful to Klindworth for taking so much trouble to demonstrate this.'

Another consideration is the fact that Chopin often performed the concertos as solo works, or with a reduced accompaniment of a few instruments, or strings only: both of them saw the light of day first in domestic try-outs before their public premieres. A large orchestra with indispensable instrumental parts would have been a stumbling-block to such easy and casual programming.

The **Piano Concerto in F minor, Op. 21** was composed between the autumn of 1829 and February 1830, although Chopin revised it for publication in 1836, when it appeared as his Second Piano Concerto. The first movement opens *Maestoso* with an orchestral tutti that contrasts lyrical and forceful ideas in effective sonata-form fashion. Both of them feature dotted rhythms, but the second is gentler, marked *dolce, legato* and moves the tonality to A flat major. The orchestra introduces exposition, development

and recapitulation, making the sonata form very easy to follow, and also creating a marked contrast between its rather plain handling of the themes and the brilliance and floridity of the piano treatments that ensue. This is not a concerto where soloist and orchestra are in competition: they alternate, and the soloist dominates proceedings whenever he or she plays. Moreover, it is an essential part of Chopin's scheme that the material the orchestra introduces should always sound more brilliant and effective in the pianist's hands.

The piano figuration, though in general character not much different from that of Hummel or Kalkbrenner, nevertheless displays a charm and elegance of its own. (Tovey called the piano style in this work 'the perfection of decoration'.) Though the exposition and development of the movement are fairly conventional in their layout, the shortened recapitulation, with the piano passing directly from the first subject into the second, is a more original stroke. Chopin does not bother to include a cadenza (though one written by Liszt's pupil Richard Burmeister, not always acknowledged, used to be inserted in many performances), perhaps because he felt the bravura character of the solo writing made one superfluous.

The central *Larghetto*, in the style of a Nocturne, reflects Chopin's undeclared love for the attractive young singer Konstancia Gladkowska. (He admitted this in a letter of 3 October 1829, calling her 'my ideal, whom I've served faithfully for six months without saying a word to her'.) The pianist is directed to play 'with the greatest delicacy' and is essentially a lyrical outpouring of melody, over a steady left-hand bass, which is embellished in a *bel canto* style that seeks to rival the vocal decorations of the operas of Chopin's friend Bellini. The ornamentation reaches its most elaborate form in the concluding part of the movement, after a dramatic, agitated central episode.

Here the piano propounds a recitative-like idea over *tremolando* strings with pizzicato double-basses, which might be regarded as the composer's wordless appeal to his 'ideal'. This is a moment of pure Romanticism, and apparently the movement as a whole was one that Chopin, according to Liszt, especially liked to play in private as a piano solo: in fact Chopin wrote an alternative version of the recitative passage to be played in the absence of an orchestra. This movement also rather resembles the slow movement of the Piano Concerto No. 3 in G minor by Moscheles, a work that Chopin was known to admire and which had been published in 1825.

The *Allegro vivace* finale, in F major, which Chopin ('for reasons unknown to history', said Tovey) called a Rondo, is based on two main ideas and a couple of subsidiary ones. The first is dance-like, while the second, marked *scherzando*, is more identifiably a specific dance, namely a mazurka. Chopin directs that it be accompanied by the strings playing *col legno*, with the wood of the bow: a tapping sound that seems a strangely original effect for a composer said to be no orchestrator, though almost certainly he had found it in Hummel. The movement modulates widely and entertainingly; once the main key has been regained the final blaze of F major is signalled by a horn-call (Chopin marked it *cor de signal*) that is a variation of the second tune, introducing the final bout of brilliant piano writing.

Chopin tried out the F minor Concerto at his Warsaw home on 3 March 1830, just after this twentieth birthday, with an ad hoc orchestra conducted by Karol Kurpiński; he then took the solo role in the F minor Concerto's public premiere at the National Theatre in Warsaw on 17 March, and the whole concert was such a success that it had to be repeated by popular demand a few days later. On 26 February 1832 he performed it in Paris – at

his first public concert in the French capital. It was doubtless the immediate success of the F minor which encouraged Chopin to begin work on another concerto immediately after its Warsaw debut. The **Piano Concerto in E minor, Op. 11** followed, composed between April and September 1830, and was published in 1833, three years ahead of the F minor, with a dedication to Kalkbrenner, one of the leading virtuosi of the previous generation. It was first heard in a private performance in Warsaw on 22 September: on that occasion Chopin, who was to play the solo part, confessed it was making him feel 'like a novice', because it was 'too original'. He introduced the work to the general public at his farewell concert in Warsaw in October 1830, shortly before he set out on his travels to Vienna and Paris. He would never return to Poland.

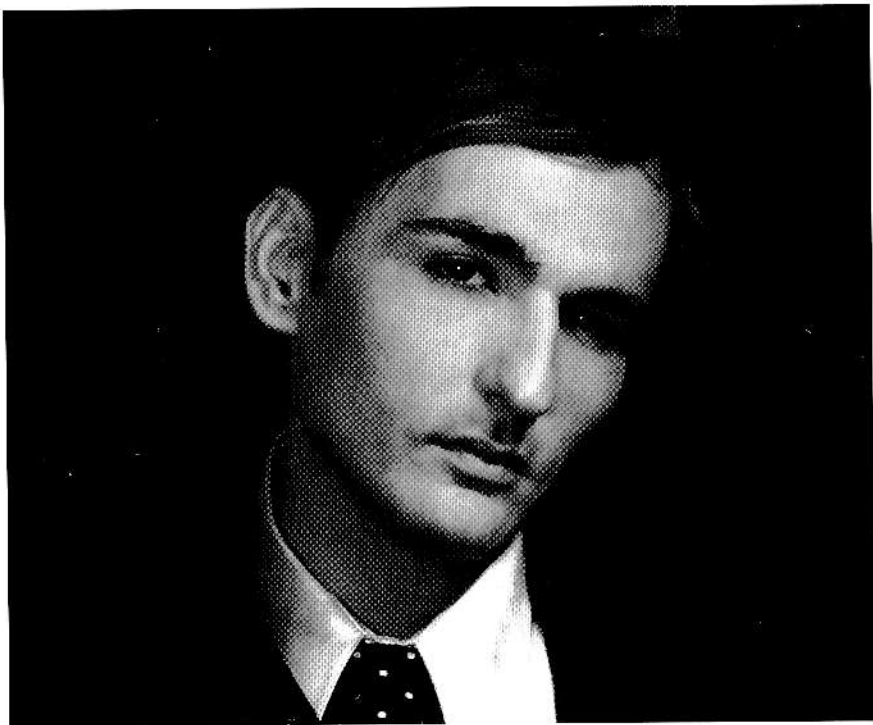
The orchestral exposition of first movement is on a larger scale than in the F minor, and altogether this concerto is a bigger-boned work. Though it has the customary two principal subjects – a stern *risoluto* for the opening, sometimes likened to a march of Polish character, and a gentler *cantabile* idea that moves the key-centre to E major (where it tends to stay), the first subject has a gentler second strain that aspires to independence and sometimes appears on its own. This has caused some commentators to speak of it as a 'third subject'. All of these characterful and promising ideas the orchestra explores at length. The piano's eventual entry is with a variant of the *risoluto*, and such melodic variants continue to occur. Indeed the interest is more centred on melodic detail than on changes or contrasts of tonality, for apart from a diversion into C major during the development, Chopin is strangely reluctant to abandon his initial tonal centre of E. Brilliant semiquaver passage-work leads up to a foreshortened recapitulation: once again, Chopin deems a solo cadenza unnecessary. In the coda the movement is in danger of ending in C major until the orchestra manages to force a

conclusion in E minor.

The *Larghetto*, which Chopin entitled 'Romance', remains centred on E, but in the major mode. This is another tribute to Konstancia Gladkowska. Chopin himself (in a rare instance of poetic commentary on his own music) described it as 'calm and melancholy, giving the impression of someone looking gently towards a spot that calls to mind a thousand happy memories. It is a kind of reverie in the moonlight on a beautiful spring evening'. A notable feature is that the strings are muted throughout, while the piano embellishes the main lyrical theme in almost improvisatory style, modulating for a short while to A flat before returning to E.

The lively finale begins in E major's relative minor (C sharp minor) but the first piano entry, marked *scherzando*, returns us to that persistent key. The movement is a rondo in quick 2/4 time based on two themes, and strikes a nationalist tone. The first theme is in the style of a *Krakowiak*, the Southern Polish dance, while the second is a more reflective idea in piano octaves. Dancing piano triplets are a recurring feature of this finale. While the first two movements have clung limpet-like to E major, Chopin now quits it in a modulatory passage to wander through key after key; reaching remote regions when the main rondo theme is heard *dolcissimo* in E flat before swerving back into the tonic. Chopin re-works the modulatory passage in order to arrive at the E major coda, which is marked *brillante* for the soloist and based on an entirely new rhythmic figure.

– Notes by Malcolm MacDonald



The young Moscow-born pianist **Vassily Primakov** has enriched the current concert scene with blazing and deeply personal playing, excelling in repertoire that often lies far afield of the Russian norm. At

his New York concerto debut the *New York Times* reported that Primakov "gave a fiery performance of Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto, with bold, expressive phrasing and dramatic commitment that brought the audience to its feet." Indeed, cheering audiences have become a hallmark of Primakov's appearances. As a prizewinner of the Cleveland International Piano Competition, Primakov was cited by the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* for his mastery: "Primakov once again played Chopin's Sonata No.3, showing why the jury awarded him the Chopin Prize. How many pianists can make a line sing as the 19-year-old Moscow native did on this occasion? The slow movement overflowed with dreamy lyricism shaped with a patient and colorful hand. Every poignant phrase took ethereal wing. Elsewhere the music soared with all of the turbulence and poetic vibrancy it possesses. We will be hearing much from this remarkable musician."

Vassily Primakov was born in Moscow in 1979. He entered Moscow's legendary Central Special Music School at the age of eleven as a pupil of the brilliantly unorthodox pedagogue Vera Gornostaeva. At seventeen, after a summer at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, he came to New York to pursue studies at the Juilliard School with another pedagogue who emphasizes a personal approach to the keyboard, the noted pianist Jerome Lowenthal, himself a student of Alfred Cortot and Willam Kapell. At Juilliard Mr. Primakov won the prestigious William Petschek Piano Recital Award, which presented his debut recital at Alice Tully Hall.

Vassily Primakov began his American career after winning First Prize in the 2002 Young Concert Artists (YCA) International Auditions.

A brilliant recitalist and orchestral guest soloist, Mr. Primakov performed under YCA's auspices throughout the U.S., making solo appearances with the San Diego Symphony, Maryland Symphony, Utah Symphony, Westchester Philharmonic and, Toledo Symphony.

Prior to coming to the United States, Mr. Primakov won First Prize in the Rachmaninoff International Young Pianist Competition and First Prize in the Tchaikovsky Young Artist Competition. While a student at Juilliard, aided by a Susan W. Rose Career Grant, he placed among the top two laureates of the Cleveland International Piano Competition (1999) and won both the Silver Medal and the Audience Prize in the 2002 Gina Bachauer International Artists Piano Competition.

His recordings for Bridge Records include Beethoven Sonatas (BRIDGE 9251) and a newly recorded disc of Tchaikovsky (BRIDGE 9283).

Paul Mann has made a name as one of the most talented of the younger generation of British conductors. Mr. Mann trained in England as a pianist and conductor, and in 1998 won the Donatella Flick Conducting Competition, which enabled him to conduct many of the leading orchestras in England, the USA, Europe, Japan, Australia, and South America. In 2005 he was appointed as the Odense Symphony Orchestra's Chief Conductor. Maestro Mann has had extensive engagements conducting the London Symphony Orchestra, the Halle Orchestra, the Royal Philharmonic, Orchestra Internazionale d'Italia, the New Japan Philharmonic, the Norwegian Opera, the Norwegian Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Fresno Philharmonic, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and others.



He also appears frequently as a guest conductor with the New York City Ballet. He has recorded with the English Chamber Orchestra and the London Symphony Orchestra for Decca and Warner Classics. His recordings for Bridge Records include music of Poul Ruders (BRIDGE 9237), Stephen Jaffe (BRIDGE 9255), and "American Orchestral Song" (BRIDGE 9254).



The Odense Symphony Orchestra was formally established in 1946, but its roots go back to 1800. The orchestra gives approximately 100 concerts per season, most of them in the acoustically superb Carl Nielsen Hall—the hall where the present recording was made. The Odense Symphony Orchestra frequently tours abroad, including tours to the USA, China, Austria, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Holland, the Baltic countries, Russia, Spain and Sweden. The Odense Symphony records prolifically for labels including Unicorn-Kanchana, Kontrapunkt, DaCapo (Marco Polo), and Classico. The orchestra's recordings for Bridge Records include music of Carl Nielsen (BRIDGE 9100), Poul Ruders (BRIDGE 9122, BRIDGE 9237), Villa-Lobos (BRIDGE 9129), Ginastera (BRIDGE 9130), Stephen Jaffe (BRIDGE 9141, BRIDGE 9255), Elliott Carter (BRIDGE 9177), "American Orchestral Song" (BRIDGE 9254), George Crumb (BRIDGE 9253), Paul Chihara (BRIDGE 9267), and the Grammy-nominated "Best Classical Recording of 2006", and winner of the "Gramophone/WQXR American Music Award", Music of Peter Lieberon (BRIDGE 9178).

PRODUCER: DAVID STAROBIN
ENGINEER: VIGGO MANGOR
ASSOCIATE ENGINEER: CLAUS BYRITH
EDITOR: CHARLIE POST
MASTERING ENGINEER: ADAM ABESHOUSE
PIANO: STEINWAY D. HAMBURG
PIANO TECHNICIAN: HENRIK CLEMENT
ANNOTATOR: MALCOLM McDONALD
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: BECKY STAROBIN
GRAPHIC DESIGN: BROOK ELLIS

PHOTOGRAPHS OF VASSILY PRIMAKOV: KONSTANTIN SOUKHOVETSKY
PHOTOGRAPHS OF ODENSE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA: KIRSTINE MENGE

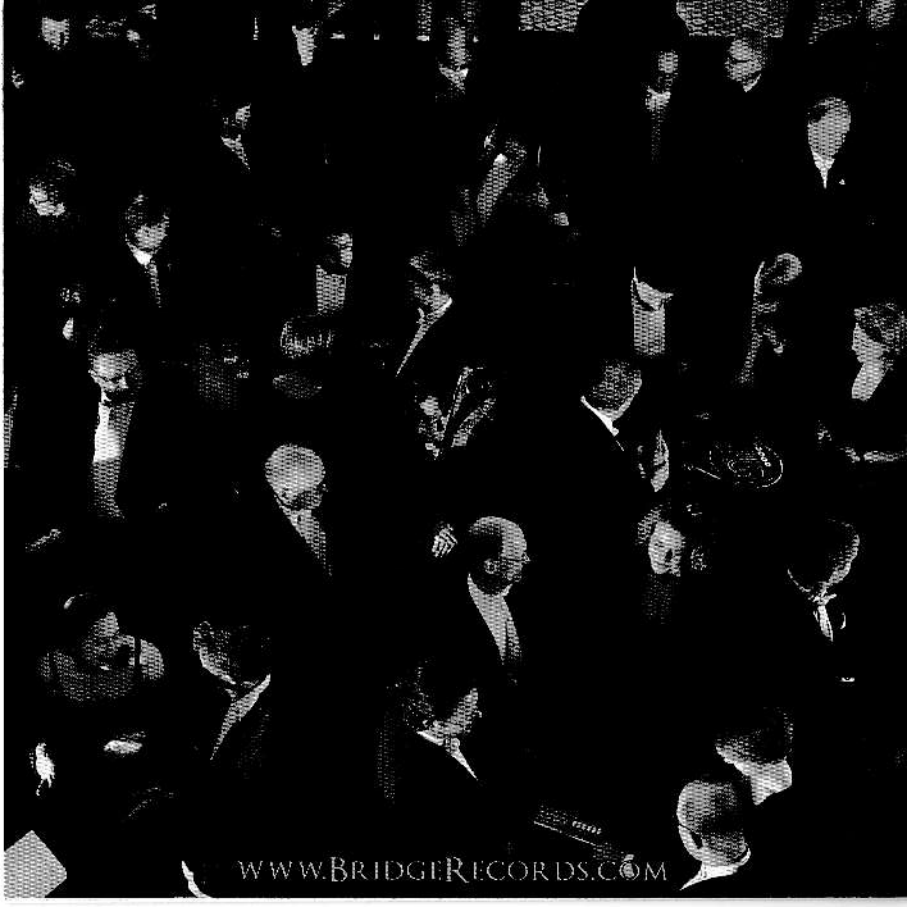
RECORDED: MAY 13-16, 2008. CARL NIELSEN HALL, ODENSE KONCERTHUS,
ODENSE, DENMARK

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