

Chopin wrote, during the composition of the Larghetto (E major/C sharp minor) homage to Bellini, "I am using muted strings -- I wonder how they will sound?" He described it as having "a romantic, calm, and rather melancholy character...a kind of moonlight reverie on a beautiful spring night." There is no pause before --

The main theme of the Rondo: Vivace in E major has been called both a polka and a Krakowiac; beginning in E major, Chopin modulates to A major for the episode. Before a dash- ing conclusion, he ventures into E flat, then B major in the episode's return.

The concerto is altogether a prize although its orchestration is neither artful nor brilliant; nonetheless this compares favorably with Schumann's or Hummel's in a well-conducted perfor- mance, and the piano writing is nonpareil.

Rubinstein Chopin Concerto No. 1

Stanislaw Skrowaczewski / The New Symphony Orchestra Of London



Chopin, the son of a French father and a Polish mother, was born the same year as Schumann (one later than Mendelssohn, one before Liszt). Before consumption killed him in his 40th year, he had developed both an elegantly sensual pianism and a keyboard oeuvre without expressive parallel. His twin gods were Bach and Mozart (as if Haydn, Beethoven, and Schubert never existed); in turn he influenced keyboard composers for nearly a century after -- Schumann, Liszt, Brahms, Dvorák, Debussy, Scriabin, Rachmaninov, and Ravel.

Although we cannot ignore developments in piano manufacture, especially by Pleyel of Paris, it was Chopin's artistry that prompted Schumann to write in 1830, "Hats off, gentlemen! A genius!" Parisian critics, who were then Europe's most cosmopolitan, dubbed him "the Ariel of the piano," although in his lifetime he played in public only 50 times, just once a solo recital, and for audiences usually no larger than 100 listeners.

Before his emigration to Paris in 1831 he had composed six

works for piano and orchestra (but nothing orchestral after those), including two concertos published in reverse order. The E minor was issued in 1833, the F minor "Second" in 1836 although Chopin composed it in 1829, when he was 19. Both reflect his infatuation with Vincenzo Bellini's operas, especially *Norma*, whose ornamentation he adapted and personalized, to the extent of basing his theme-and-variations slow movement in Concerto No. 1 on embellishments.

In the classical style that Mozart bequeathed to Beethoven, principal themes of the Allegro maestoso are introduced by the orchestra, at uncommon length which adds admirably to the suspense. Once the piano enters, it dominates. Although the opening subject is marked *maestoso*, subsequent ones are glowingly lyrical and gorgeously ornamented, even before their development in E minor/major. There is a coda but no *cadenza per se* (although the entire solo part may be likened to a *cadenza*).

Chopin Concerto No. 1

Arthur Rubinstein

Stanislaw Skrowaczewski / The New Symphony Orchestra Of London

1 Allegro Maestoso 19:41

2 Romance 10:45

3 Rondo 10:05

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