

It would be safe to say that Chopin disliked composing for the orchestra. The two piano concertos written during his youth (before leaving Poland) exist only because pianists of the time were expected to write their own showpieces. Mozart and Beethoven eagerly and easily maintained the tradition, leaving the world with over thirty masterpieces. Others, though perfectly competent at the keyboard, were completely inept at composing for the orchestra. Unfortunately, Chopin falls into the latter category. If he hadn't been such an influential pianist, his concertos would probably only rarely be heard. There is ample evidence that Chopin left such matters as orchestration and even form to well meaning but not very skilled friends. The use of only a single trombone and the curious fact that the third and fourth horns have absolutely nothing to play in the final two movements of the E minor concerto is unique in the history of orchestration.

The Piano Concerto in F minor, commonly referred to as Concerto No. 2, was written a year before the Concerto in E minor, op. 11, but published later. For that reason, it is perhaps better to refer to them only by their key designations. Chopin was only twenty when he composed the Concerto in E minor. Letters to friends suggest that it was not an easy task. In March 1830, he wrote, "[The last movement] is not yet finished because the right inspired mood has kept eluding me." In September, he wrote to his closest friend that he had finished the concerto. He added that "I feel like a novice, just like I felt before I knew anything of the keyboard. It's far too original, and I probably won't be able to learn it." On October 11, 1830, he played the premiere at the Warsaw National Theater. He told his friend, "The concert was a great big success!" When listening to the work, it is perhaps best to revel in the glittering technique of the piano part and pay scant attention to the formal structure or accompaniment. It is a concerto with little of traditional dramatic exchange between soloist and orchestra, but with great quantities of beautiful writing for the piano.

Frédéric Chopin

Piano Concerto No. 1

Maurizio Pollini



Paul Kletzki / Philharmonia Orchestra



A marquee name among classical pianists since the 1970s, Maurizio Pollini has been noted for performances of some of the most monumental of contemporary music, and for pairing such works with standard repertory of the 19th century. Pollini's decades-long relationship as a recording artist with the Deutsche Grammophon label has been among the most stable in years. Pollini was born January 5, 1942, in Milan. His father was modernist architect and educator Gino Pollini. In 1957, in Milan, he performed a concert of Chopin Etudes that drew wide attention. Pollini attended the Milan Conservatory and won several major prizes as he completed his formal education, including the International Chopin Piano Competition in Warsaw in 1960. Arthur Rubinstein, one of the judges, is said to have remarked that the boy "can play the piano better than any of us." Pollini's concert and recording careers were launched, and he made his recording debut on the EMI label with the Philharmonia Orchestra, playing Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 1 in E minor, Op. 11. In the early and mid-'60s, however, Pollini hesitated, withdrawing from the scene for further study with Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli. Michelangeli's precise and graceful style exerted a formative influence on Pollini, who returned to the scene amidst the student unrest in the late '60s and together with conductor Claudio Abbado, performed concerts for students and workers. He made a major reappearance with his Carnegie Hall debut in New York in 1968, and for the next 50 years he would be an almost uninterrupted presence in the world's top concert halls. He has played contemporary works, including some, such as Luigi Nono's ... sofferite onde serene ... that were composed for him, and he has often paired the likes of Nono, Pierre Boulez (whose profoundly difficult Piano Sonata No. 2 is one of his specialties), and Karlheinz Stockhausen with Beethoven, Schubert, and Schumann, as if to emphasize the continuity of the classical tradition. In 1987 he rejoined Abbado, with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, in New York for performances of all five

of Beethoven's piano concertos. Later in his career he conducted piano concertos from the keyboard, and has sometimes led performances of opera. Beginning in 2000 he has presented concert series under the name "Pollini Project" (or Progetto Pollini) that have paired 19th century and contemporary works. Pollini made his first recording for the Deutsche Grammophon label in 1971, featuring works by Stravinsky and Prokofiev. In 2019 he released a recording on Deutsche Grammophon of works by Chopin, who has always remained at the center of his repertory. Although sometimes sidelined by illness, he has remained active in the concert hall and recording studio well into old age. Among his many awards is a 2007 Grammy for Best Solo Instrumental Performance, again for a Deutsche Grammophon recording of Chopin.

Composed 1830. First performance: October 11, 1830, Warsaw. Frédéric Chopin, piano.

Frédéric Chopin was in many ways an enigma. Although born and educated in Poland, he lived his adult life in self-imposed exile as a resident of Paris. He was in many ways the absolute archetype of the suffering 19th-century romantic. Unlike the typical romantic, however, Chopin virtually ignored the orchestra and voice as mediums and concentrated all his energy in the direction of solo piano music. With rare exceptions, his output is universally even in quality. Few composers from the period subjected their works to such careful scrutiny, and virtually all of Chopin's works were in the standard repertoire only ten years after his untimely death. He was influenced by only a few—Beethoven, Field, and Hummel—but has himself influenced almost all piano music written since his time. It can be said that modern piano technique begins with Chopin.

Frédéric Chopin Piano Concerto No. 1

Maurizio Pollini

Paul Kletzki / Philharmonia Orchestra

I. Allegro maestoso 19:06

II. Romance. Larghetto 10:17

III. Rondo. Vivace 9:32

Recorded by HMV 20–21 April 1960

Engineer - Douglas Larter

Producer - Victor Olof



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