Ingrid Fliter

Frédéric Chopin
Piano Concertos

Jun Märkl conductor
Scottish Chamber Orchestra

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Piano Concerto No. 1 in E minor, Opus 11

1. Allegro maestoso 20:02
2. Romanze: Larghetto 9:33
3. Rondo: Vivace 10:11

Piano Concerto No. 2 in F minor, Opus 21

4. Maestoso 15:05
5. Larghetto 9:25
6. Allegro vivace 8:52

Total Time: 73:21

Recorded at Usher Hall, Edinburgh, UK from 7 – 9 June 2013. Produced by John Fraser.
Recorded by Philip Hobbs. Assistant engineering by Robert Cammidge. Post-production by Julia Thomas.
Design by Red Empire. Colour photographs of Ingrid by Anton Dressler.

Chopin: Piano Concertos

'Hats off, gentlemen, a genius!'

Robert Schumann's celebrated appraisal of the seventeen-year-old Frédéric Chopin in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* of 7 December 1831 thrust the young Polish wunderkind into the European limelight in no uncertain terms. For Schumann, as for many others, the success of the *Variations on Là ci darem la mano* from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* raised considerable expectations for what was to follow, expectations that would, with almost unseemly abruptness, be left unrealised.

Composed for piano and orchestra, the *Variations* had been only the second piece by the teenage prodigy to be published in 1827 (the first, the precocious Rondo in C minor, composed two years earlier when he was just fifteen, a markedly less ambitious piece for solo piano). It was also Chopin's first work for a pairing that was to become both touchstone and trial for composers eager to make their mark in the middle of the nineteenth century but one that was soon to lose its allure for Chopin himself. Over the course of the next four years he would write three other concertante pieces for the coupling and two piano concertos before abandoning the form altogether. (A mooted third concerto for two pianos never got further than the completion of a first movement which was published in 1841, as the *Allegro de Concert* for solo piano.)

Indeed, the direction that Chopin was to take in the years of his fast-approaching maturity – a journey into the interior of the heart through the increasingly atomized landscape of the solo piano – could not have been guessed at by the success of the work that had prompted Schumann's adulation and brought him wider fame. Yet the *Variations* serve to point to the centrality of two early influences on Chopin – Mozart and opera – that would continue to inform his approach to and ambition for music that became increasingly confined to, and concentrated on, the keyboard.

With the earliest known performance in Warsaw dating back to 1628, opera was already long and well established by the time of Chopin's youth when it occupied the centre of creative gravity in the city. Its attractions would be felt in other ways too, not least under the guidance of the Silesian-born

composer Józef Elsner, Chopin's piano teacher from 1823 – 29. A respected composer of thirty-eight operas, Elsner was also Music Director of the newly reopened National Theatre from 1799 – 1824 when the repertory was dominated by Polish, French and Italian opera. His pioneering incorporation of traditional Polish folk themes into his own music would also exert a telling influence on his impressionable and nationalistically inclined young pupil.

It's a matter of idle conjecture, of course, to speculate about what an opera composed by Chopin might have sounded like. Despite his love of the genre he never wrote for the theatre and conspicuously turned his back on the large-scale orchestral form almost as soon as he had begun to entertain and explore it. Yet, one of the most tantalising responses to the piano concertos offers a possible answer to an improbable question: What might an opera without singers sound like? Chopin's piano concertos, surely, hint at one solution.

Unapologetically romantic in intent, boldly dramatic in execution and shot through with a vividly intense sense of poetry – one that went far beyond the conventional strictures and contemporary expectations of the concerto form at the time of their writing – above all else, Chopin's piano concertos seem to be driven by a compelling sense of the theatrical, the urge to communicate directly rather than vicariously, and a mercurial desire to imbue the solo instrument with all the technical agility and emotional articulacy of the voice. If the piano was to later adopt a *sotto voce* tone in Chopin's exquisitely delicate and intimate nocturnes, in the robustly poetic piano concertos it can be heard singing out with operatic gusto.

Both concertos were composed shortly before Chopin left his native Poland, never to set foot on Polish soil again. Although its later publication earned it the designation of the Piano Concerto No. 2, the F minor work was the first to be completed in 1830. Within a year he had finished the E minor Concerto, its early appearance in print seeing it numbered as Piano Concerto No. 1.

Both concertos speak of Chopin's deep, spiritual connection with his Polish roots and a life he was soon to leave behind. The 'Larghetto' of the Second Concerto is haunted by memories of unrequited love for a fellow pupil at the Warsaw Conservatory whilst the rhapsodic orchestral introduction of the First, together with the dreamy melancholy of the second movement's 'Romanze', are ripe with twilit nostalgia for *'a beloved landscape that calls up in one's soul a thousand happy memories'*. The finales of both are solidly built on a foundation of national dance rhythms with a *krakowiak* in the E minor and a *mazurka* in the F minor.

By the time of their first performances in Warsaw in 1830 – the Second on 17 March; the First on 11 October – with Chopin himself as soloist on both occasions, he was already a celebrated veteran of the concert hall having first played to a public audience at the age of seven. The concertos had a double purpose beyond any musicological or programmatic considerations Chopin might have entertained. They were intended as both a leave-taking of Poland and a launch pad for his ambitions (albeit soon to be abandoned) as a concert soloist on the wider European stage.

He was nineteen when he began writing the F minor Concerto in the autumn of 1829 (completing it early the following year) and had only recently turned twenty when he began composing the E minor Concerto in April 1830, completing it in August the same year. Both works hint at his fervently held, *'perhaps overbold but at least not ignoble desire to create a new world for myself'*, most strikingly – if controversially – in the relationship between the solo instrument and the orchestra.

As with all youthful creations, Chopin's concertos easily betray their influences. Undoubtedly, the concertos of Johann Nepomuk Hummel, caught on the cusp between the Classical and Romantic eras, were key in shaping how Chopin conceived his own concertos. But other voices can also be heard, not least those of the Austrian pianist, composer, teacher and piano manufacturer Friedrich Kalkbrenner (to whom Chopin dedicated his First Concerto) and the Irish-born John Field, whose trailblazing nocturnes for solo piano were to prove far more important in Chopin's later development.

But no less significant, if better disguised, is the influence of Mozart – a veritable god (along with Bach) in Chopin's private pantheon. (Asked once how he would like to be remembered, he replied: *'Play Mozart in memory of me'*.) Although the ringing immediacy of the bold *stile brillante* and liquid loquacity of the *bel canto* style that characterises Hummel's concertos (and those of Carl Maria von Weber) is recognisably there on the virtuosic surface of Chopin's concertos, the bedrock of what lies beneath is surely Mozartian. Not least in their adroitly locked-in facility for balancing contrast and continuity and, in what Chopin scholar Jim Samson recognises as *'Mozart's delicate*

equilibrium (and at times creative tension) between the ritornello principle and symphonic thought, and between an almost operatic drama of moods and personae and a concern for structural strength'.

Mozart's influence had been noted earlier by Schumann – a devoted follower of what Liszt would later describe as *'not so much the school of Chopin as the church of Chopin'* – when he observed: *'We may be sure that a genius like Mozart, were he born today, would write concertos like Chopin and not like Mozart'*.

After the successful experiment of the *Don Giovanni Variations*, contained within the relative safety of Mozart's tried-and-tested original, the concertos found Chopin striking out for something more substantial in scale and ambition. That they were composed so close together suggests that Chopin was willing (albeit within his own conservatively-accented strictures) to extend his interrogation of and experimentation with the piano-and-orchestra form, and this time without the safety net provided by the underpinning of the *Variations*.

The E minor First Concerto was scored for woodwind in pairs, four horns, two trumpets, tenor trombone, timpani and strings with the piano squarely at its centre. Drenched in nationalistic sentiment – its composition and performance were set against a backdrop of a swelling desire for Polish independence from its Russian masters – it owes a debt to the structural first-movement conceits of Mozart and to the cadenza-free double exposition favoured by Beethoven and Hummel.

By any standards, the opening 'Allegro maestoso' movement is a heroic clarion call to action of operatic proportions; the orchestra's rhapsodic introduction laced with romantic fervour and violins foregrounding a statement of elegantly defiant dignity. The arrival of the piano underlines the nobility of intent, although what is to follow is deliberately at odds with the notion (brought to eloquent perfection by Beethoven) of the piano concerto as a contested dialogue between the solo instrument and orchestra. Whatever the opening statement might imply, the subsequent role of Chopin's orchestra is to be subservient to the primacy of the piano.

From the off, the First Piano Concerto pays more than mere lip service to Hummel's famous tutorial of 1828, *Ausführliche theoretisch-praktische Anweisung zum Pianofortespiel* ('Detailed theoretical and practical instruction for piano playing') which promulgated the notion of *gesang stellen* ('singing places') for the solo instrument. If anything, it takes the notion enthusiastically to heart, imbuing the piano with all the weight and worth of a principal voice in opera as a prime interlocutor between the composer and his audience. Evidence of such is surely to be found in the piano's foray into what David Ewen has described as its treatment of the opening theme to *'intriguing arabesques and arpeggios'* and its subsequent and brilliant elaborations of the same.

If there were any doubts about the focus of this concerto, they are dispelled by the middle movement, in which muted strings lend diaphanous, jewel-accented support to a sumptuously lyrical melody (whose tone and temperament points to the later nocturnes) voiced by the piano. Chopin's

description of it as a romance – one described in a letter dated 15 May 1830 to his friend Titus Woyciechowski as *'a kind of reverie in the moonlight on a beautiful spring evening'* – echoes, possibly unknowingly, Mozart's titling of the middle movement of his Piano Concerto No. 20 in D minor. It's here, too, that we hear Chopin quietly exalting in the kind of keyboard coloratura effects more commonly associated with flights of soprano ecstasy in opera.

The finale takes the form of an energetic rondo. The spirited opening theme is introduced by strings and answered by soft woodwinds before the piano assumes the guise of the *krakowiak* dance form drawn from the peasant music of Poland's ancient Kraków region. It is almost immediately taken up by the orchestra much like an opera chorus might enlarge upon a vocal aria.

But if the orchestra is subordinated to the fresh vitality of the piano in this movement, it acquits itself nonetheless with selfless regard for the agile acrobatics of the solo instrument, ebbing where it flows, flowing when it ebbs. The result is a satisfying coherent shifting and pulling of focus that moves seamlessly through a sequence of vigorous but effortlessly supple scale passages towards a commandingly dramatic denouement.

The piano and orchestra in the F minor Second Concerto is arguably less integrated than in the First Concerto, which more explicitly embraced the *stile brillante* championed by Hummel and Weber. Here, the piano is even more unabashedly the point and purpose of proceedings with everything designed to place it firmly centre stage in a manner that calls to mind an opera orchestra's spotlighting of a leading tenor or soprano.

Certainly the piano carries itself with all the élan of the *bel canto* style found in the operas of Chopin's contemporaries Rossini and Bellini (another of his idols). The result is a solo part that is allowed to sing with loquacious eloquence in passages of high-flying rhapsody and long, loose-limbed lyricism.

The first movement opens with the sort of double exposition shared by piano and orchestra – the initial theme heralded by strings, a second introduced by solo oboe and echoed by first violins – typical of Hummel. (More characteristic of Chopin himself is the dotted rhythm figure that introduces the Concerto, a device that was to become a signature element in much of his later work.) But it's those twin themes in the orchestral passage that the piano lights upon with an almost gleefully inventive rhetorical relish. What follows is a dazzling display of pianistic coloratura noticeably richer and more resonant than the comparably understated middle movement of the E minor Concerto.

As with that work, the middle movement of the Second Concerto is a *'larghetto'*. Immediately obvious is the influence of Italian opera in an extended nocturne in which the highly wrought *arioso*-like writing for the piano encourages it to sing with a lachrymose intensity worthy of its lovelorn and seemingly unobtainable inspiration, Chopin's fellow Warsaw Conservatory student, the soprano Konstancja Gładkowska.

'Six months have elapsed,' he wrote tremulously to a friend in 1829, *'and I have not yet exchanged a syllable with her of whom I dream about every night. While my thoughts were with her, I composed the Adagio for my concerto.'*

The intensity of that unrealised love is underlined by the greater role given to the orchestra (most strikingly in the intimate counterpointed commentary of the bassoons towards the end) and by the opulent lyricism of the piano writing throughout, distinguished by supple melodies, sensual ornamentations, radiant sonorities and a central section that carries itself with all the ardent passion of an operatic recitative.

In effect an extended rondo, the infectious finale returns us to a more solid and rewarding love, that of Chopin's for his native Poland, the energy and brilliance of its mazurka-like theme in the opening piano passage echoed by a second subject that also has dance-like vivacity. The late flourish of *col legno* strings and subsequent dramatic shift from minor to major key heralded by solo horn notwithstanding, the piano dictates here, returning with due theatrical appropriateness to assume centre stage again as it races towards and through a virtuosic coda. A dramatic orchestral flourish brings the curtain down on a work that seems to rousingly answer the earlier query: this is what an opera without singers might sound like.

Photography by John McBride

Ingrid Fliter PIANO

Born in Buenos Aires in 1973, Ingrid Fliter began her piano studies in Argentina with Elizabeth Westerkamp. In 1992 she moved to Europe where she continued her studies with Vitaly Margulis at the Musickhochschule in Freiburg, in Rome with Carlo Bruno and in Imola, at the Academy 'Incontri col Maestro' with Franco Scala and Boris Petrushansky. She also received advice from Zoltan Kocsis, Louis Lortie, Alexander Lonquich and Alfred Brendel.

Fliter has established a reputation as one of the preeminent interpreters of Chopin; her two all-Chopin albums on EMI Classics are testament to this. Her recording of *Chopin: Complete Waltzes* received five-star reviews and was named the Daily Telegraph's 'CD of the Week'. It was also named 'Choice' recording in both Gramophone and Classic FM magazines. Gramophone commented: *'Ingrid Fliter sets a new benchmark for the complete waltzes. From beginning to end, this is among the finest Chopin recordings of recent years.'*

In 2000 Fliter received the Silver Metal at the International Chopin Piano Competition in Warsaw. Winner of the 2006 Gilmore Artist Award, one of only a handful of pianists to have received this honour, Fliter now divides her time between Europe and the USA, where she works with orchestras such as the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Minnesota Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra,

San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, Seattle Symphony Orchestra, St. Louis Symphony Orchestra and Toronto Symphony Orchestra.

Her engagements in Europe include the Philharmonia Orchestra, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, Rotterdam Philharmonic, Bergen Philharmonic, Sydney Symphony, West Australian Symphony, Monte Carlo Philharmonic Orchestra, Netherland Philharmonic Orchestra, Danish Royal Symphony Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Deutsche Radio Philharmonie, Hungarian National Philharmonic, Brussels Philharmonic and the Royal Flemish Philharmonic.

In recital, Fliter has performed in many of the great halls across the world: the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, Museé d'Orsay, Tokyo's Suntory Hall, Cologne Philharmonie, Salzburg Festspielhaus, Conservatorio Giuseppe Verdi, Milan and at London's Wigmore Hall and Southbank Centre. In North America she has appeared at Carnegie Hall, the Metropolitan Museum, in Fort Worth for the Van Cliburn Foundation and in Chicago, San Francisco, Vancouver, Montreal and Santa Barbara. Festival highlights include La Roque D'Antheron, Prague Autumn, Valdemossa Chopin Festival, Cheltenham Festival, City of London Festival and the World Pianist Series in Tokyo. She has also appeared at the Tivoli, Mostly Mozart, Grant Park, Aspen and Blossom festivals.

Photography by John McBride

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Jun Märkl Conductor

Jun Märkl has long been known as a highly respected interpreter of the core Germanic repertoire from both the symphonic and operatic traditions, and more recently for his refined and idiomatic Debussy, Ravel and Messiaen. His long-standing relationships with the state operas of Vienna, Berlin, Munich and Semperoper Dresden are complemented by his Music Directorships of the Orchestre National de Lyon (2005 – 11) and MDR Symphony Orchestra Leipzig (2012). He appears as a guest conductor with the world's leading orchestras, including: Cleveland Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, NHK Symphony Orchestra, Czech Philharmonic, Munich Philharmonic, Oslo Philharmonic and Tonhalle Orchester Zürich.

Märkl is an accomplished recording artist, having recorded Mahler and the complete Schumann Symphonies live with the NHK Symphony, Dvořák on Telarc, Mendelssohn with MDR and a highly acclaimed nine-disc Debussy set with ONL on Naxos. In recognition of his tenure in Lyon and his hugely successful recordings of French music, he was honoured by the French Ministry of Culture with the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres.

Scottish Chamber Orchestra

The Scottish Chamber Orchestra is one of Scotland's five National Performing Arts Companies. Formed in 1974 with a commitment to serve the Scottish community, the Orchestra performs throughout Scotland and appears regularly at music festivals such as the Edinburgh International Festival and the BBC Proms. The Orchestra has toured throughout Europe, East Asia, India and the USA.

Robin Ticciati was appointed to the post of Principal Conductor in 2009 and he has committed to the Orchestra until 2018. Ticciati and the Orchestra have appeared together at the Edinburgh International Festival, have toured to Italy, Germany and Spain and undertook a pan-European tour in 2012. They have released three recordings together on Linn: Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*, Berlioz's *Les nuits d'été & La mort de Cléopâtre* and Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll*.

The Orchestra's long-standing relationship with its Conductor Laureate, the late Charles Mackerras, resulted in many exceptional performances and recordings, including two multi award-winning albums of Mozart Symphonies (Linn).

Current SCO Associate Artists include conductor/keyboardist Richard Egarr, director/violinist Alexander Janiczek and mezzo-soprano Karen Cargill. All perform regularly with the Orchestra during its concert season, in the recording studio, on tour and in festival appearances. The SCO has strong relationships

with many eminent guest conductors including Conductor Emeritus Joseph Swensen; regular soloists/directors include Christian Zacharias and Piotr Anderszewski.

The Orchestra enjoys close relationships with many leading composers and has commissioned more than 100 new works, including pieces by Composer Laureate Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, James MacMillan, Judith Weir, Sally Beamish, Karin Rehnqvist, Lyell Cresswell, Mark-Anthony Turnage, Hafliði Hallgrímsson, Einojuhani Rautavaara and Martin Suckling, who is now SCO Associate Composer.

The SCO has led the way in music education with a unique programme of projects. SCO Connect provides workshops for children and adults across Scotland and has attracted invitations from overseas.

The Orchestra broadcasts regularly and has a discography now exceeding 150 recordings.

The Scottish Chamber Orchestra receives funding from the Scottish Government.

Scottish Chamber Orchestra

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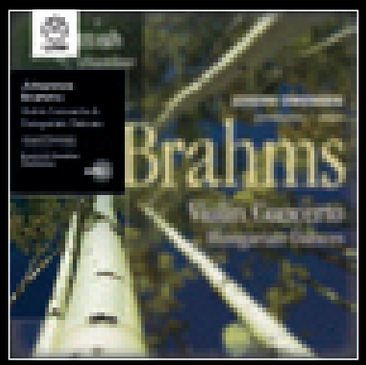

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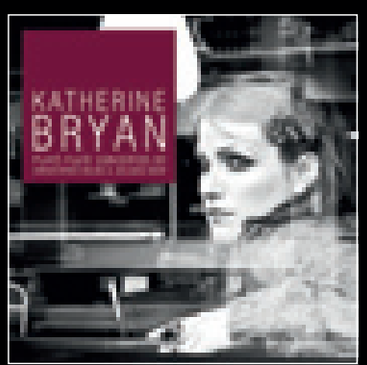

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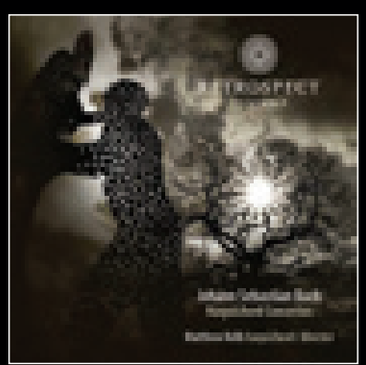

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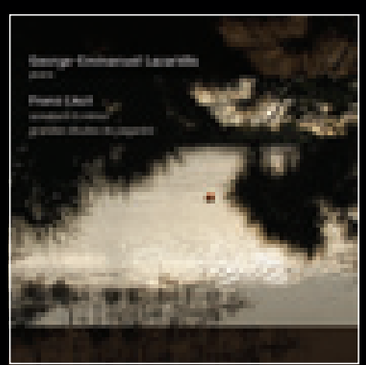

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