



Frédéric CHOPIN

Piano Concerto No. 1

Frédéric François Chopin (1 March 1810 – 17 October 1849) was a Polish composer and virtuoso pianist. Born in Warsaw, Chopin was identified as a child prodigy early on, as he began giving public concerts at 7, a year into his formal piano lessons. He completed his musical education at the Warsaw Lyceum and Warsaw Conservatory, and composed his early works in Poland before leaving at the age of 20, shortly before the November 1830 Uprising against Russia. At 21, he settled in Paris, but never considered himself to be French, despite his father's French origins. Once in Paris, Chopin gave public performances much less frequently (in fact — in the last 18 years of his life — about 30 of them), preferring to perform at small salons, or in his apartment for friends. He supported himself by selling his compositions and by giving piano lessons, for which he was in high demand. On his way back to Paris in 1835, after meeting with Mendelssohn in Germany and his parents in Czech Republic, he ran into the Wodzińskis, and began a relationship with the daughter, Maria. After a failed engagement to Maria from 1836 to 1837, he maintained an often troubled relationship with the French writer Amantine Dupin (known by her pen name, George Sand). The two visited Majorca (an island in Spain) in the winter of 1838, but the trip turned sour when the Catholic people of Majorca found out that the two were not married and denied them lodging. They were forced to stay in a monastery with little shelter from the cold weather, and Chopin's health drastically declined. Despite the conditions, this period would prove one of Chopin's productive in terms of composition, but Sand was determined to get them off the island in fear of Chopin's health. In his final years, he was supported financially by his admirer Jane Stirling, who also arranged for him to visit Scotland in 1848. Chopin gave his last public performance at London's Guildhall on 16 November 1848 when he played at a benefit for Polish refugees, despite weighing under 99 pounds due to chronic tuberculosis. He died in Paris shortly after in 1849. As requested by Chopin, his sister, Ludwika, took his heart (removed by a doctor and preserved in an alcohol-filled vase) back to Poland in 1850. One of the purist composer-pianists of his time, Chopin never wrote a piece that did not contain the piano.

Piano Concerto No. 1 in E minor, Op. 11 (1830) was written by Chopin when he was 20. It was the first of Chopin's two piano concertos to be published, and was therefore called Piano Concerto "No. 1" at the time of publication, even though it was actually written immediately after the premiere of what would become his Piano Concerto No. 2. While the piece is dedicated to the pianist Friedrich Kalkbrenner, the piece is more directly influenced by his attraction to fellow student Konstancja Gładkowska, as he indicated in letters that the slow movement (*Larghetto*) is secretly dedicated to her – "It should be like dreaming in beautiful springtime – by moonlight."

The first movement (*Allegro maestoso*) opens with an orchestral introduction which outlines the movement's main themes, demonstrating Chopin's knowledge of the form developed by his predecessors. However, when the piano enters, indulging the opening theme once again, the voice of Chopin becomes clear. The soloist presents the orchestra's material and embellishes it with the roulades common in Chopin's solo piano compositions. While Chopin observes the rules of sonata allegro form in terms of structure, he also breaks away from some of the conventions by using the development section to alternate between E minor and E major, rather than modulating to the mediant, G major (which he delays until the ending of the movement).

The second movement (*Larghetto*) is marked *Romanze*, and uses muted strings to convey its hushed, delicate tone. In a letter to his friend Tytus Woyciechowski, Chopin wrote that the movement is "of a romantic, calm, and melancholic character. It is intended to convey the impression one receives when the eye rests on a beloved landscape that calls up in one's soul beautiful memories – for instance, on a fine, moonlit spring night."

The third movement (*Vivace*), marked *Rondo*, takes the form of a Krakowiak, a high-energy Polish two-step performed in quick dotted rhythms. Chopin uses numerous tempo changes to alter the mood from foot-stamping intensity to tender lyricism. Even without the use of a cadenza throughout the entire piece, Chopin finds a way through his virtuosic and expansive piano scoring to let the soloist shine from beginning to end.