



CHOPIN

PIANO CONCERTO No.1

Olga Kern

Warsaw Philharmonic
ANTONI WIT

PRODUCTION **USA**

Acknowledgments

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1117 Chestnut Street, Burbank, California 91506

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FRÉDÉRIC
CHOPIN (1810–1849)

Piano Concerto No. 1 in E minor, Op. 11 **40:12**

- | | | | |
|----------|-----|--|--------------|
| 1 | I | Allegro maestoso | 20:03 |
| 2 | II | Romanze: Larghetto | 9:56 |
| 3 | III | Rondo: Vivace | 10:11 |
| 4 | | Fantaisie in F minor, Op. 49 | 14:03 |
| 5 | | Bolero, Op. 19 | 7:15 |
| 6 | | Fantaisie-Impromptu, Op. 66 | 5:21 |
| 7 | | Polonaise in A-flat major, Op. 53 | 6:51 |

OLGA KERN *piano*
Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra, dir. Antoni Wit (1–3)

CHOPIN

Piano Concerto No. 1 and other works

IN HIS ART at its finest, Chopin represents the marriage of public and private, a reconciliation of extrovert and introspective. Often, in both solo compositions and concerted works, contemplative pages balance and bank the fires of virtuosity, and this potent amalgam helped make the composer into society's darling and a favored pianist of the Parisian *tout le monde*. With a gift to not just create stylistic polarities but effortlessly to meld them – technical extravaganzas can have moments of pathos, and inward-looking works are rarely lacking in panache – he was not merely poet or showman, but both of these at once.

Chopin's breakthrough work, his passport from the provinces to Paris, was the **Piano Concerto No. 1**, in E minor (1828). Its idyllic slow movement shines with lyrical ardor, with sentiments to be later explored in the Nocturnes and other miniatures, and its finale is a rousing *krakowiak*, but the first movement pushes boundaries. Opening with an assertive orchestral introduction of symphonic sweep, it forsakes conventional sonata form with its customary expectations for a more idiosyncratic scenario that reveals itself gradually, incrementally, over time.

If the movement's plan was in some ways experimental (for more, see *Chopin*, Jim Samson, p. 49, Oxford University Press, 1996), Tovey, ever astute, called it "suicidal" (Donald Francis Tovey, *Essays in Musical Criticism*, vol. 3, p. 103, Oxford University Press, London, 1936), and though his observation has merit, we are struck less by the movement's blemishes than by "the beauties of (its) individual moments... for particular felicities of melody, harmony, and texture which we identify retrospectively as Chopinesque..." (*Chopin*, Samson, p. 50).

Among the compositions for solo piano, Chopin's **Fantasy**, Opus 49 (1841), is perhaps the most freighted with feelings. It's full of character, but full of characters as well, and commentators from the first sensed that the work masks a hidden agenda. Schumann, for instance, speculated that "We can merely guess what images were before Chopin's eyes when he wrote it. They could not have been joyous" (in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*). And James Huneker, the composer's first American biographer, believed he knew the story, which allegedly had been passed down from Chopin to Liszt to

virtuoso pianist Vladimir de Pachmann to Huneker himself, though his scenario seems implausible (see *Chopin, The Man and His Music*, James Huneker, p. 216, Dover Publications, New York, 1966).

Yet Huneker's basic estimation is correct: "Chopin has never before maintained so artistically... such a level of strong passion, mental power and exalted euphony. (The Fantasy) is his largest canvas, and though there are no long-breathed periods such as in the B-flat-minor Scherzo, the phraseology is amply broad, without padding or paragraphs. The rapt interest is not relaxed until the final bar. This transcendental work more nearly approaches Beethoven in its unity, its formal rectitude and its brave economy of thematic material" (Huneker, op. cit., p. 217).

Richly distinctive, this material evokes a *dramatis personae*, some bold, others mild: there's the deliberate theme at the onset, where two measures of quiet questioning, built on arpeggiation, are followed by two measures of legato response (mm. 1–4); the impetuous downward-sweeping theme which is interrupted by fluttering figuration (m. 93); the insistent march with its memorable 'snap' at the start of the third bar (m. 127ff); the *lento sostenuto*, the work's emotional heart (m. 199), in B major, the remotest of keys from the tonic F minor, but effortlessly reached through enharmonic modulation.

To navigate among themes, Chopin has two favorite paths: he alters direction with seemingly improvised arpeggios (m. 43ff, m. 179ff) and he pivots dramatically with unison octaves (m. 52f, 153f, 197f, 233f). This latter gesture, which is often experienced with thunderbolt force, recalls similar strokes in the first movement of Beethoven's 'Emperor' Concerto (mm. 166 and 424), where repeated intervals, tumbling through three octaves, effect quick and dramatic changes of texture and tone.

Two of the works heard here have entered the pantheon of Chopin's best-loved compositions: the Fantasy-Impromptu, Opus 66 (1835) and the Polonaise, Opus 53 (1842). Works of verve and elegance, they should not be disparaged for their popularity.

The **Fantasy-Impromptu** has grown so familiar that we take for granted its impeccable craftsmanship. (It forever will be known as the melodic source for "I'm Always Chasing Rainbows" by pop tunesmith Harry Carroll.) Notice, for

instance, how the initial texture is rhythmically roiled; stability is sabotaged by the juxtaposition of three notes against four (mm. 5–12) and by phrases that spring to life on the second sixteenth note of the bar (m. 5ff). The texture, however, soon is clarified (m. 13), when a sustained E-major melody is sounded by accented notes that fall squarely on the beat.

Notice, too, the artful presentation of the *moderato cantabile* theme. A lesser composer might have constructed the two halves of this phrase (mm. 43–50) in parallel fashion, with the B-flat that starts the second half sounding on the downbeat of measure 47. Chopin, however, anticipates this expected entrance by a half-measure (m. 46) and in so doing creates an off-balance, appealing phrase.

If the dreamy *moderato cantabile* of the Fantasy-Impromptu suggests a composer lost in reverie, the A-flat-major **Polonaise** is emblematic of an energized Chopin. As a dance form meant to reflect national pride and national pain, the Polonaise enjoyed a "perceived status as a kind of pianistic expression of Polish history" (Samson, p. 150), and Chopin here is at his most patriotic.

After sixteen measures of dominant preparation, the theme arrives with pomp and swagger. Punctuated by three knuckle-busting runs in octaves (mm. 30, 46, 78), it's developed until measure 81, when the work takes a picaresque turn. Its gestures suggest the battlefield, complete with echoes of the "booming cannons and reverberating overtones" that Huneker heard in the Opus 44 Polonaise (Huneker, op. cit., p. 187). Over a left-hand fusillade of sixteenth notes in octaves, the work whips up a fine patriotic fury. When the polonaise theme returns, triumphantly fortissimo (m. 155), the battle, we assume, has been won.

Altogether lighter is Chopin's unique, and irresistible, **Bolero**, Opus 19 (1833). Octave Gs grab our ear at the start, and the figuration for the next 30 measures prepares a delicate wisp of a waltz, fragile in both tonality and phraseology. The bolero itself begins in the minor mode and ends in the major – it's in A, though it makes a notable enharmonic excursion to A-flat – and despite being slight of substance, it exemplifies how entertainment and a higher art can, wonderfully, be one and the same.

– GEORGE GELLES



Olga Kern piano

Since being named Gold Medalist at the Eleventh Van Cliburn International Piano Competition in 2001, **Olga Kern** has performed as soloist and with many of today's major conductors and orchestras, including an extensive 2004 tour of the United States with the Warsaw Philharmonic, led by Antoni Wit. Appearing on all 5 continents, she has captivated fans and critics alike with her passionate artistry and magnetic stage presence. Immediately following her acclaimed New York recital début at Carnegie Hall's new Zankel Hall on May 1st, 2004 – *"A Pianist on her way up"* (The New York Times) – she was invited back to play a return engagement in Carnegie Hall's main Stern Auditorium only eleven days later; the evening was a triumph.

Ms. Kern's busy 2005/2006 schedule includes a number of débuts, among them a performance with the Taipei Symphony Orchestra in Taiwan and a recital at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall. The 2005/2006 season will also feature her return to the Casals Festival in Puerto Rico where she will be heard in Rachmaninov's Piano Concertos No. 2 and 4, and the Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini – all in one night. Olga Kern records exclusively for **harmonia mundi usa**.

"Her playing is brilliant, glassy, supremely aggressive and dazzlingly virtuosic in the Horowitz manner"

– THE WASHINGTON POST



Antoni Wit general & artistic director

Antoni Wit, the General and Artistic Director of the Warsaw Philharmonic, is one of the most highly regarded Polish conductors. A 1971 prize-winner of Berlin's Herbert von Karajan International Conducting Competition, Maestro Wit studied conducting with Henryk Czyz and composition with Krzysztof Penderecki at the Academy of Music in Cracow; he subsequently continued his studies in Paris with Nadia Boulanger.

Maestro Wit has led many first performances of new works by his compatriots Penderecki, Lutosławski and Wojciech Kilar, to name a few, and has appeared in the major capitals of Europe, the Americas, and in the Near and Far East.

His discography exceeds 100 recordings, many of which have garnered prestigious international awards. Maestro Wit is a professor at the F. Chopin Academy of Music in Warsaw.

Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra

The National Orchestra of Poland

The Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra played its inaugural concert on November 5, 1901 in the newly-opened Philharmonic Hall. Led by its first artistic director and principal conductor Emil Młynarski, the performance featured the world-renowned pianist and composer Ignace Jan Paderewski as soloist.

The orchestra quickly became the main centre of musical activity in Poland in the years preceding and following World War I. Nearly all the leading conductors and soloists of the day appeared with the orchestra, including Grieg, Honegger, Klemperer, Prokofiev, Rachmaninov, Ravel, Richard Strauss, Stravinsky, Horowitz, Rubinstein, and Sarasate.

The outbreak of World War II temporarily halted the activities of the Philharmonic; its auditorium was destroyed. In the first post-war years, the Philharmonic was led by Straszynski and Panufnik who were superseded in January 1950 by Witold Rowicki as its director and principal conductor. Despite difficult working conditions, the orchestra was reorganised and began touring abroad. On February 21, 1955 the rebuilt Philharmonic Hall was re-opened and the orchestra received the status of the National Orchestra of Poland.

In January 2002 Maestro **Antoni Wit** assumed the post of General and Artistic Director of the Warsaw Philharmonic – The National Orchestra and Choir of Poland.

Today both the Orchestra and Choir have wide-reaching popularity and acclaim. Both ensembles have completed over one hundred tours on five continents and appear in major musical venues worldwide. Each season the Philharmonic presents over 80 symphony concerts. The orchestra has made numerous recordings which have garnered multiple awards and distinctions.

Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra

Antoni Wit general & artistic director

Violin I

Ewa Marczyk, concertmaster
Piotr Cegielski
Joanna Jakobs
Andrzej Kacperczyk
Marian Kowalski
Andrzej Kurek
Marcin Lewandowski
Jan Lewtak
Justyna Malik
Marcin Mazurek
Grzegorz Osinski
Krzysztof Ploch
Paweł Rybkowski
Bogdan Sniezawski
Piotr Tadzik
Krystyna Wilczynska

Violin II

Zofia Muszynska
Dariusz Dega
Anna Bednarczyk
Marek Bojarski
Barbara Czopek-Branicka
Grzegorz Groblewski
Krystyna Hazuka
Krystyna Jasionowska
Bozena Michalska
Piotr Sekowski
Kalina Statkiewicz
Danuta Sułkowska-Koslacz
Krzysztof Trzcionkowski
Izabela Witezak

Viola

Marek Marczyk
Marek Iwanski
Katarzyna Borzucka
Magdalena Brzozowska
Barabara Duda-Szproch
Wiesława Duszak
Bartosz Henrych
Maciej Kucharek
Maria Paciorkiewicz
Krzysztof Szczepanski
Jacek Toczyski

Cello

Kazimierz Koslacz,
concertmaster
Andrzej Wiltos
Kazimierz Gruszczynski
Alina Kwiatkowska
Piotr Sapilak
Maria Sarap
Bogusław Tomków
Mariusz Tondera
Angelica Wais
Jerzy Wołochowicz

Double-Bass

Jerzy Cembrzynski
Andrzej Jekielek
Bernard Chmielarz
Zygmunt Cyb
Janusz Długokecki
Tomasz Januchta
Marcin Wilinski
Artur Zasepa

Flute

Urszula Krzemionka
Krzysztof Malicki

Oboe

Aleksandra Rojek
Filip Wozniakowski

Clarinet

Mirosław Pokrzywinski
Adrian Janda

Bassoon

Leszek Wachnik
Andrzej Budejko

Horn

Feliks Gmitruk
Krzysztof Specjał
Aleksander Szebesczyk
Maciej Kostrzewa

Trumpet

Krzysztof Bednarczyk
Mariusz Niepiekło

Trombone

Andrzej Sienkiewicz

Timpani

Piotr Domanski

Orchestra inspector

Tadeusz Boniecki