

Chopin, Piano Concerto #1 in E minor Opus 11

Submitted by Jim Waddelow

Chopin began work on his E minor concerto the same month as the successful Warsaw premiere of his F minor concerto. Curiously, the E minor concerto was published first, and to this day it is referred to as Concerto No. 1. The premiere was seven months later on October 11, 1830 with the 20 year old Chopin himself as the soloist at the National Theater in Warsaw. The orchestration is slightly larger than his earlier concerto with an instrumentation of winds in pairs, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, trombone, timpani, and strings. The work was dedicated to pianist and composer Frédéric Kalkbrenner. The opening melody of the Allegro maestoso is in the traditional double exposition form as the orchestra introduces the motives first with the soloist taking them second. Tonal centers move through several surprising major keys and the technical virtuosity is balanced with expected Chopin lyricism. The singing second movement is a romance that is the centerpiece of the concerto. Muted strings seem to whisper under the operatic melody that is connected by fluid asymmetrical groupings notes that come in waves. Chopin vividly described it in a letter to a friend. "It is rather calm and melancholy, giving the impression of someone gently looking towards a spot that calls to mind thousand happy memories. It is a kind of reverie in the moonlight on a beautiful spring evening." The Rondo finale is a duple meter polka dance based on a Krakow folk song. The reception from Polish audiences was not as warm as the earlier concerto, and 1830 would prove to be Chopin's last year in Poland. After embarking on a concert tour political unrest broke in Poland, and the composer moved to France. This concerto was performed on his first concert in front of Paris audiences that included Liszt and Mendelssohn. It quickly established his reputation and established what would be his new home.

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