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DECEMBER 2019

Prelude



MASTERWORKS #3:

CHOPIN AND FRANCK DECEMBER 6 - 8, 2019

Although Chopin gave less than 30 public performances in his lifetime, his works for piano remains unmatched to this day. Virtually every young pianist has studied his compositions, even if studies began with an "easy piano" version of the original.



Frédéric Chopin

Born in 1810, and dead at 39 in 1849, Frédéric Chopin is still considered Poland's greatest composer.ⁱ At age seven, he'd already written and published *Polonaise in G Minor*, along with various marches and mazurkas.ⁱⁱ At age eight, Frédéric was composing and performing in the most elegant salons.ⁱⁱⁱ Three years later, he performed for the Russian tsar, Alexander I, when he visited Warsaw.^{iv}

Frédéric's father, Nicholas, fled his homeland to escape the French revolution.^v In Poland, Nicholas taught French at the Warsaw Lyceum and worked as a tutor for aristocratic families in Warsaw.^{vi} As an infant, Frédéric was surrounded by the music valued by his French father and Polish mother. When their six-year old began to create new tunes and to easily reproduce whatever music he heard, Frédéric's parents hired a teacher for their son. But he quickly surpassed his teacher in both technique and imagination.^{vii}

After a few years of study at the Warsaw Conservatory, Frédéric realized that Poland had limited opportunities for a professional musician. His devoted parents raised enough money to send their talented 19-year old son to Vienna, where Chopin made his performance debut in 1829, and then set out on a tour of Austria, Germany and France.^{viii} By the time Chopin returned to Warsaw, the Polish nationalist movement that sought

independence from Russia had plunged the country into unrest and turmoil.^{ix} In November of 1830, Chopin left his home again, carrying a handful of native soil in a silver cup.^x Within a month, Polish army troops rebelled and were brutally crushed by the Russian army.^{xi} Return to Poland was no longer an option. At the age of 20, Chopin had become a political refugee.^{xii}

Chopin ultimately settled in Paris in 1832.^{xiii} To introduce himself to Paris, Chopin organized his own debut concert in February of 1832.^{xiv} While the hall was barely one-third full, critics declared the performance "unforgettable."^{xv} But rather than schedule his next performance, Chopin retreated from the public. He suffered bouts of "bronchitis" that left him coughing and weak, often too sick to perform.^{xvi}

Unable to concertize, Chopin's primary source of income was from sales of his compositions and giving piano lessons. Unlike other composers, Chopin focused almost exclusively on writing music for the piano.^{xvii}

As a teacher in great demand, the 22-year old Frédéric did manage to earn a living.^{xviii} He developed relationships with well-known artists, including Franz Liszt, and Felix Mendelssohn and enjoyed a close friendship with the artist Eugène Delacroix.^{xix} In Paris, he socialized with the other great artists of his day which included the composer Hector Berlioz, the novelist Victor Hugo and the writer Honoré de Balzac.^{xx}



A portrait of Chopin and Sands, by the artist Delacroix

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George Sand

In 1836, Chopin's marriage proposal to Maria Wodzinska, the daughter of a family friend, was rejected by Maria's mother.^{xxi} Chopin was heartbroken. He tied up all of Maria's letters with a ribbon and wrote "Moja bieda" or "my sorrow" across the envelope.^{xxii} To lift his friend's spirits, Franz Liszt introduced Frédéric to Aurore Lucille Dupin, the writer better known as George Sand.^{xxiii} Sand, famous for her pro-feminist novels, was quite an outrageous figure who smoked cigars and wore men's clothing.^{xxiv} Although he initially disliked Sand, when Frédéric re-met her several months later, their mutual attraction ignited a passionate affair.^{xxv} One of Sand's former lovers, suddenly cast aside, stalked Chopin with a pistol. Sand and Chopin opted to leave Paris with her two children, and, in the autumn of 1838, they rented a villa for all of them on the island of Majorca.^{xxvi}

The conservative citizens of Majorca did not accept the unusual unmarried couple. The autumn rains made the villa damp and uncomfortable, and Chopin's "bronchitis" (which was actually tuberculosis) flared dangerously when he began to cough up blood.^{xxvii} When rumors of tuberculosis reached the landlord, he evicted them, leaving Chopin, Sand and her children with the only shelter they could find – an unheated, dark and dank abandoned monastery.^{xxviii} The winter conditions were brutal, and Chopin became so ill that he could not walk. To save his life, Sand found passage back to France on a boat filled with squealing pigs.^{xxix} A skilled physician and three months of bed rest in Marseilles finally allowed Chopin to recover sufficiently to permit his return to Paris.^{xxx} For the next nine years, the couple spent winters in adjoining apartments in Paris, and summers at Nohant, Sand's country estate.^{xxxi} The summers at Nohant were considered the most productive of Chopin's career, and, during the initial years, Sand was devoted to caring for Chopin. But

her devotion wore thin, and her discontent was expressed in her novel, *Lucrezia Floriani*, in which the saintly and beautiful Lucrezia (a/k/a Sand) casts off her insanely jealous lover, who was easily recognizable as Chopin.^{xxxii} But Chopin did not or could not read between the lines. Their relationship finally ended when Sand sent Chopin's grand piano from Nohant back to the manufacturer.^{xxxiii}

Chopin tried to tour England in 1848, but his deteriorating health was an impediment. However, on November 16, 1848, in a final patriotic gesture, he played for the benefit of Polish refugees.^{xxxiv} He returned to Paris and died the following year. At the request of his older sister, Ludwika, an autopsy was performed, and while Chopin's remains were buried in the famed Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris, his heart was interred in a pillar of the Church of the Holy Cross in Warsaw.^{xxxv}



Chopin Monument in Poland

The tragic irony is inescapable: Chopin's father took refuge in Poland from his native France, and from the age of 20, Frédéric was a refugee from Poland who lived in Paris.

Join us!

Please join the Hartford Symphony Orchestra for **Chopin and Franck, Dec 6 - 8, 2019**, and hear Chopin's magnificent Piano Concerto No. 2, one of the most brilliant works for piano, that is part of Chopin's treasured legacy to all of us.



WONDERING HOW THE MUSIC WILL SOUND?

Try HSO'S Listening Guide, with links to the pieces you'll hear on our concert stage – and more!

Instead of just listening to *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* by Paul Dukas, watch the iconic clip from Disney's *Fantasia*, starring Mickey Mouse:

<https://video.disney.com/watch/sorcerer-s-apprentice-fantasia-4ea9ebc01a74ea59a5867853>

Chopin's Piano Concerto No 2 in F minor performed by Lang Lang:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cb9g2_b4yG8

Franck's Symphony in D minor performed by the New York Philharmonic, conducted by Kurt Masur:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOW3fqfr2CY>

Fantasia was just one of many animations that used a classical music soundtrack. Here are a few others:

"The Band Concert" features the William Tell overture by Rossini:

<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2q00rr>

"The Rabbit of Seville" includes the overture from the Barber of Seville by Rossini:

<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x301k1t>

"What's Opera, Doc?" features themes from *The Flying Dutchman*, *Siegfried* and *Die Valkyrie*:

<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x35sg3h>



Fantasia Impromptu



Chopin's grave at Père Lachaise



Nocturne No. 2

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Casey's
Classics

Want the best recordings of the pieces you'll experience on the concert program? Coleman Casey, HSO's dear friend, Director Emeritus and beloved in-house audiophile, offers his recording recommendations of selections featured in our upcoming Masterworks Concert.

Paul Dukas's insistently memorable *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* develops an atmospheric and overwhelming intensity with James Levine and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, yoked with an equally idiomatic performance of Saint-Saens's Organ Symphony (DG).

There is no one better to deliver Chopin's delectable Piano Concerto No. 2 than the inimitable Arthur Rubinstein, with Alfred Wallenstein conducting the Symphony of the Air (RCA/SONY).

Once a mainstay of concert programming, the now rarely heard in concert Franck Symphony in D Minor literally leaps from the speakers in Pierre Monteux's riveting performance with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (RCA/SONY).



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