

FRYDERYK FRANCISZEK CHOPIN Piano Concerto No. 2 in F minor, Op. 21 (1829)

BORN: March 1, 1810, in Żelazowa Wola, near Warsaw, Poland

DIED: October 17, 1849, in Paris, France

WORK COMPOSED: 1829

WORLD PREMIERE: March 17, 1830, in Warsaw; Chopin, soloist and conductor

When we think of Chopin the image conjured up most often is that of the hyper-sensitive superstar who was in a turbulent relationship with the novelist George Sand (Amantine-Lucile-Aurore Dupin). The young Fryderyk began playing the piano at age four and was dubbed “the second Mozart” before he was ten. He began writing music for the piano by age six and because he was mostly self-taught, his early compositions show a striking originality. After receiving a formal music education, Chopin continued redefining and extending the harmonic and expressive potentials of the piano. During this period Chopin began writing his F minor piano concerto. This was actually the first concerto he wrote – it was designated ‘No. 2, Op. 21’ because his other concerto, No. 1 in E minor, Op. 11 was the first one to be published.

Chopin made his Vienna debut in August 1829 after completing his formal studies (his first venture outside his native Poland). The Viennese audiences were impressed with this young pianist and his brilliant abilities. Many of Chopin’s early works show a strong influence from Polish folk music and this was definitely a novelty in Vienna. After returning to Warsaw, Chopin began a very productive year with successful concerts, falling in love, solidifying his radical ideas about piano technique and composing two piano concertos.

Typical of the period, Chopin’s F minor concerto has three movements: *Maestoso* (F minor), *Larghetto* (A-flat major), and *Allegro vivace* (F minor). The indescribably beautiful second movement has become associated with a young singer named Konstancja Gładkowska (1810-1889), of whom Chopin wrote, “I already have my perfect one whom I have, without saying a word, served faithfully for a year now, of whom I dream, in whose memory the adagio of my concerto has been put up.” Although they became friends it was an unrequited love. Only after Moritz Karasowski’s biography of Chopin, published in 1880, was read to her (she became blind in 1845) did she have any sense of the love he had for her during that time.

Influences of Polish folk music abound in the finale. Noticeable are the off-beat rhythms of the *mazurka* (a lively Polish folk dance in triple meter, like a waltz, but with accents placed on the second or third beat) and its slower cousin, the *kujawiak*.

The premiere on March 17, 1830, was a great success and a repeat performance was given five days later with Chopin playing on a better piano. The premiere of his E minor concerto on October 11 was greeted with slightly less enthusiasm but he would continue to play both concertos regularly during his short career.

The success he enjoyed as a composer and performer encouraged Chopin to venture to Western Europe with one of his friends on November 2, 1830. His plans were to travel again to Austria and from there to Italy. The November 1830 Uprising (an armed rebellion against the Russian Empire) broke out on the 29th of that month and his friend returned to Warsaw to fight. Instead of continuing on to Italy, Chopin left Vienna for Paris in July 1831, arriving there two months later. At this time, because of the rebellion, there was a great emigration of Poles to France and to blend in more with the French citizens, Chopin used the French version of his name, Frédéric François. In 1835 he became a French citizen and never returned to Poland. Chopin died on October 17, 1849. He feared that he would be buried alive and he requested that his heart be removed and returned to Warsaw, where it rests at the Church of the Holy Cross. His body was interred in Paris.

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Frédéric Chopin – Piano Concerto No. 2. There have been only three previous DSSO performances of this concerto: on November 20, 1942 (with Duluth pianist Elsa Anneke); October 22, 1954 (with soloist Eugene

Istomin); and on October 20, 1972 (with Garrick Ohlsson).

Tonight's soloist Alexander Korsantia has appeared with the Orchestra twice before: in Rachmaninoff's Third Concerto (on April 28, 2012) and Prokofiev's Third Concerto (on September 12, 2015).

Instrumentation: Two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, bass trombone, timpani, and strings.