

*The Chopin piano concertos are simply beautiful to hear, whether from a seat in the audience or from a seat on the stage. I especially love the second movement of the Piano Concerto No. 2 and always wish I could see the performer's hands!*

ERIK DYKE, NCS DOUBLE BASS

## Piano Concerto No. 2 in F Minor, Op. 21

### **FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN**

BORN March 1, 1810, in Zelazowa Wola, Poland; died October 17, 1849, in Paris

PREMIERE Composed 1829-1830; first performance March 17, 1830, Warsaw, with the composer as soloist

### **OVERVIEW**

Chopin's chosen medium was the piano as a solo instrument. In his late teens, he tried to combine the piano with the orchestra, creating in addition to the two piano concertos the Variations Op. 2, Fantasia Op. 13, Concert Rondo Op. 14, and the Grand Polonaise Op. 22. But he was uncomfortable with the medium, and after age 20, he never again wrote for a large ensemble. In all these works, the orchestral scoring is so light that during the 19th century, it was fashionable to re-orchestrate and "improve" it. Be that as it may, Chopin probably intended the orchestra to serve as a delicate background for the soloist, especially since he himself was known to have had a rather light touch; heavy orchestration would have drowned him out.

The F-Minor Concerto, although listed as No. 2, was the first composed but the second to be published. As was so often the case with composers in the Romantic era, the inspiration for the concerto came as a response to unrequited love. The object of his ardor was a voice student at the Warsaw Conservatory. But by the time the concerto

was published six years later, he had long forgotten her and dedicated it instead to his pupil, Countess Delphine Potocka, a gifted singer and close friend.

The concerto was received enthusiastically at the premiere, but Chopin had his doubts as to whether the audience actually understood it: “The first Allegro... received, indeed, the reward of a ‘Bravo,’ but I believe this was given because the public wished to show that it understands and knows how to appreciate serious music. There are people enough in all countries who like to assume the air of connoisseurs!”

### **WHAT TO LISTEN FOR**

Chopin was gifted and innovative in his use of harmony and phrase structure. The concerto capitalizes on all the qualities that were to catapult him to fame in Paris. It opens in a gruff mood, followed by a more lyrical second theme introduced by the solo oboe. When the piano enters in a standard double exposition, it inserts its own second theme before taking up the oboe theme. In a major departure from true development as understood by Beethoven, Chopin’s music never argues; rather, his development could be described as a commentary on the themes and on what had gone on before. His customary tendency is to embellish and decorate the piano line.

The slow movement is intense and lyrical, with the ornamentation of the main theme gradually becoming an integral part of it. With its seemingly endless, fluid lines, elaborate ornamentation, and recitative-type passages, this movement has led scholars to compare Chopin with the contemporaneous Italian bel canto style of opera composer Vincenzo Bellini, whom Chopin greatly admired.

The finale is a rondo in which the third episode is in the rhythm of a mazurka. The mazurka became one of Chopin’s signature rhythms, an expression of his nationalistic feeling. It originated as a Polish folk dance in triple meter from the Mazovia district near Warsaw.

## **INSTRUMENTATION**

*Solo piano, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, bass trombone, timpani, strings*

## **Symphony No. 35 in D Major, K. 385, “Haffner”**

### **WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART**

BORN January 27, 1756, in Salzburg; died December 5, 1791, in Vienna

PREMIERE Composed 1782; first performance March 23, 1783 at the Vienna Burgtheater, conducted by the composer

### **OVERVIEW**

In 1771, Mozart was hired by the orchestra of the new Archbishop of Salzburg, Hieronymus Colloredo, beginning a running war between the two that lasted nearly a decade. Colloredo valued the exceptional talents of the Mozarts — both father and son — but was domineering and controlling. Wolfgang bridled under Colloredo’s rigid rule, escaping Salzburg whenever he could to tour Europe — openly, but unsuccessfully, seeking a better job.

In 1776, Mozart received a commission from the family of Salzburg’s former mayor, Sigmund Haffner, for a large serenade to be played at his daughter’s wedding (known today as the Haffner Serenade, K. 250). The family was pleased, and in the summer of 1782, a year after Mozart finally moved to Vienna to seek his fortune as one of Europe’s first freelance musicians, they commissioned a similar work to celebrate Haffner’s elevation to the aristocracy. Busy with his own wedding and the staging of his opera *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, Mozart dragged his feet but finally — after his father’s constant nagging — sent the Haffners a new work.

Half a year later, while planning for a series of concerts in Vienna, Mozart asked his father to return the manuscript. He removed the opening and closing marches and the repeat of the first movement's exposition, rewrote the minuet, and added flutes and clarinets to the outer movements, repackaging it as Symphony No. 35. Destined to become a perennial favorite, the symphony was likewise a great success at the sold-out concert of its premiere; even the emperor applauded heartily, giving the young composer a gift of 25 ducats — although Mozart, ever in a financial pinch, had hoped for more.

### **WHAT TO LISTEN FOR**

One of the attractions of this symphony is its sheer beauty of melody and lucidity of construction. The opening movement dispenses with the customary slow introduction, launching right into a “statement – response” theme; the first phrase is brash and angular, the second is subdued. The famous “Haffner” theme reappears in ingenious transformations. It dominates the entire movement despite the brief appearance of the contrasting second theme and a closing theme.

The Andante is in the typical ternary (ABA) form that reigned for slow movements — although with variations — from the Baroque through the 19th century. Mozart creates a particularly long, multi-sectioned theme, and provides an only mildly contrasting middle (B) section. His repeat of the A section contains no variation, probably because he felt that the melodic grace and complexity of the theme did not call for “gilding the lily.”

One of the distinctions between Mozart and Haydn is that the former nearly always wrote elegant, courtly minuets, while the latter made his sound like country dances. In this symphony, however, Mozart musters the full orchestra for a heavy minuet. The trio, for strings alone, is more graceful.

In the brief finale, a hybrid rondo-sonata form complete with two contrasting themes, Mozart pulls a few surprises with some asymmetrical phrasing, unusual key

modulations, and a coda that takes off sounding as if it might be a new development. With the exception of the Andante, the symphony capitalizes on contrasting dynamics, which, with its Haydnesque minuet, strongly suggests the influence of the older composer.

### **INSTRUMENTATION**

*Two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, strings*

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