



Program Notes
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By Chris Morrison

Sir Andrzej Panufnik (1914-1991)
Hommage à Chopin

One of the most distinguished Polish composers of the twentieth century, Sir Andrzej Panufnik started writing music at age nine. He graduated from the Warsaw Conservatory, then continued his studies, mainly in composing and conducting, in Vienna, Paris and London. At the beginning of World War II, he returned to Warsaw, where he endured the pain and deprivation of the war years, including the deaths of many family members and friends, and the destruction of all his compositions to that point. Public concerts were banned during that time, so Panufnik played piano in cafés with Witold Lutoslawski (another of Poland's great composers), while surreptitiously organizing private concerts and writing songs for the resistance. After the war he served briefly as chief conductor of the Kraków and Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestras, but due to ongoing repression by the totalitarian government, he left Poland in 1954 (only returning when democracy was restored in 1990). He settled in England and became a full-time composer, winning British citizenship in 1961 and receiving a knighthood in the year of his death. He gradually won great fame for his compositions, which include ten symphonies as well as concertos written for Yehudi Menuhin and Mstislav Rostropovich. Panufnik's daughter Roxana has also recently received considerable attention as a composer in her own right.

Many of Panufnik's early compositions tended to the avant-garde, but due to the imposition of Socialist Realism in Poland, he was forced to moderate his style. One valuable outlet Panufnik discovered was the study and restoration of ancient Polish music in works like *Old Polish Music – Divertimento after Janiewicz* (1947) and *Old Polish Suite* (1950). Another work from those years was the *Vocalises* (also titled *Suita Polska*) for soprano and piano, commissioned by UNESCO (where Panufnik served as Vice Chairman of the Music Council) for the centenary of the death of Frédéric Chopin in 1949. In 1966 Panufnik recast the *Vocalises* for flute and strings, creating the *Hommage à Chopin*, which had its first performance on September 24, 1966 in London, with flutist Douglas Whittaker and the English Chamber Orchestra conducted by the composer.

Unlike his restorations of old Polish music, in the *Hommage* Panufnik doesn't actually quote any of the works of his great compatriot. He wrote, "I had an idea to pay my tribute to Chopin not by making use of his themes or his style of piano writing, but rather to attempt to go deep into his roots, drawing on his love of the rustic melodies and rhythms which inspired him throughout his life. Thus I made use of folk music from Masovia [or Mazowsze], the central part of Poland where Chopin was born." The five movements of the *Hommage* are laid out symmetrically, with the hymn-like opening and closing movements framing a triple meter Allegretto (with its almost Celtic-flavored main theme), the gentle nocturne of the Andantino, and a sprightly, rustic Vivo.

Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)
Piano Concerto No. 2 in F minor, Op. 21

Frédéric Chopin wrote some of the world's most beloved piano music. He wrote mostly in shorter forms, like ballade, nocturne, and waltz; some of his works employ Polish national dance forms like the mazurka and polonaise. Chopin's piano music combines virtuosity and athleticism with grace and expressivity – his own playing was said to be quite subtle, never too loud, and his expressive use of rubato, or slight tempo modulations, brought the music to life.

He was a prodigy, performing private salon concerts and composing his first works by the age of seven. Later he studied piano and composition at the Warsaw Lyceum and the University of Warsaw. Soon after completing his studies he moved to Vienna and later settled in Paris, pursuing his career through recitals all over Germany, Austria and France – the twenty-one year old Chopin was the subject of Robert Schumann's famous remark "Hats off, gentlemen! A genius!" Composition and teaching took precedence over performing later in his life. His turbulent and much-publicized affair with the French novelist George Sand extended over a decade. Chopin contracted tuberculosis in the late 1830s, and it plagued him in his last years.

Chopin's two piano concertos both date from his teens. The Piano Concerto No. 2 in F minor is actually the earlier of the works, begun in 1828, Chopin's last year as a Conservatory student, and completed early in 1830. It was given its first performance at Chopin's public debut in Warsaw, on March 17, 1830, with Karol Kurpinski conducting. (The Concerto No. 1 in E minor was begun in 1829 and completed in September 1830; the numbering of the works got switched because Chopin managed to misplace the orchestral parts for the F minor Concerto, and by the time they could be recovered the E minor Concerto was already in print.)

Chopin rarely wrote for orchestra – in fact, not at all after the age of twenty-one – and his skills with the orchestra are often demeaned. There is a famous comment by Hector Berlioz, a master of the orchestra, in which he complains that when in these concertos Chopin calls on the orchestra to play all at once, "they cannot be heard, and one is tempted to say to them: why don't you play for heaven's sake! And when they accompany the piano, they only interfere with it, so that the listener wants to cry out to them: be quiet, you bunglers, you are in the way!" It is certainly true that Chopin intends for the piano to take the lead, contrary to the more equal and adversarial relationship between soloist and orchestra found, for instance, in some of Ludwig van Beethoven's concertos. On the other hand, Chopin's orchestration is not without some wonderful details – take note in the third movement of the Concerto No. 2, for instance, of the use of *col legno* (where the string players hit the string with the wood, rather than the string side, of their bows), or the call of the French horns that introduces that movement's coda.

The first movement opens with two themes: a dark, imperious idea for the strings, and a gentler, wind-dominated second subject. The strings briefly take over again before the piano enters, elaborating on and embellishing both themes. Chopin biographer Frederick Niecks writes that when the piano takes up the first melody, "It is as if we were transported into another world and breathed a purer atmosphere. First there are some questions and expostulations, then the

composer unfolds a tale full of sweet melancholy in a strain of lovely, tenderly entwined melody ... In the second subject he seems to protest the devotion of his hear, and concludes with a passage, half upbraiding, half beseeching, which is quite captivating – nay more, even bewitching in its eloquent persuasiveness.” The piano’s rhapsody, supported for the most part by gentle string chords, is interrupted only occasionally by outbursts of the orchestra.

The time-stopping beauty of the second movement – described by the famous pianist-composer Franz Liszt, a friend of Chopin’s, as “of a perfection almost ideal, its expression, now radiant with light, now full of tender pathos” – seems to have been inspired by one of the first of many loves in Chopin’s life: Konstancja Gładkowska, a singer and fellow student at the Warsaw Conservatory. In a slew of letters to friends, Chopin described in some detail which passages were influenced by his dreams of her. And they were just dreams: when Chopin left Warsaw not long after this concerto was written, he and Konstancja exchanged friendship rings. But she considered their relationship simply a fond friendship, and she married someone else the following year. Not until decades later, long after Chopin’s death, did she find out about the important place she had in his heart – by reading of it in a biography of the composer!

The final movement is lively and graceful, with a hint of the traditional mazurka rhythm that so fascinated Chopin. He is quite rhythmically playful in this movement, in fact, moving easily from duple to triple meter and back. The piano part, once again replete with decorative arpeggios and intricate passagework, is propelled forward by brief orchestral passages colored by the details mentioned above.

Georges Bizet (1838-1875) **Symphony in C major**

Georges Bizet was born in Paris into a musical family, and took to music quickly, entering the Paris Conservatoire at age nine. He won a number of prizes, including the prestigious Prix de Rome in 1857, which allowed him to spend a couple of years in Italy. After his return to Paris, his compositions had a hard time winning favor with the public, and his belief in himself waned. Only with the success of the incidental music for *L’arlèsienne* in 1872 did he regain confidence enough to take on the rather controversial subject matter of what became the opera *Carmen*. Although it won praise from the likes of Brahms, Tchaikovsky, and Debussy, the opera initially received just a few performances, and Bizet died in Bougival, France of a heart attack at age 37 believing that it was a failure. Only in subsequent years did it catch on, and it has since become one of the most performed operas in the world.

Growing up, Bizet’s favorite composer was Charles Gounod (1818-1893), who is remembered today largely for his opera *Faust*. It was Gounod’s opera *Sappho*, though, which captured Bizet’s attention when he was twelve. “You were the beginning of my life as an artist,” Bizet wrote at one point to his mentor. Bizet soon made piano duet arrangements of another of Gounod’s operas as well as his Symphony No. 1 in D major, which became the model for Bizet’s own Symphony in C major, which he composed in about a month in late 1855, just weeks after his seventeenth birthday.

Still a student at the Paris Conservatoire, Bizet apparently wrote the Symphony as an exercise, but he was so conscious of the similarities between his symphony and Gounod's that he quickly suppressed the work. He never mentioned it in his letters, and it remained entirely unknown until 1933, when it was rediscovered in the library of the Conservatoire by Bizet biographer D.C. Parker. Parker showed the score to conductor Felix Weingartner, who led the premiere of the Symphony in Basle on February 26, 1935. The work quickly proved very popular, and it reached an even wider audience when George Balanchine turned it into a ballet, simply titled *Symphony in C*, in 1947.

The first movement opens with a lively tune suffused by a unifying three-note motive; this theme and a lyrical melody for oboe become the basis of the entire brilliant movement. Throughout the mood is lively, the rhythms exciting, and the colors brilliant. After a short introduction, an exotic, vaguely Oriental-sounding melody in the oboe, unfurled over pizzicato strings, becomes the first main subject of the second movement. The strings then answer with a lyric theme of their own that sounds like it emerged from an Italian opera. A brief contrapuntal episode using part of the introduction leads to a reprise of the oboe's song.

Many regard the third movement as the Symphony's best. Initially it sounds as though we've moved north, the first theme resembling a jig from the Scottish highlands. By contrast, the second subject is a broad, flowing melody for the strings. In the central trio, we're back to Scotland for a variant of the opening theme, this time even accompanied by a bagpipe-like drone. The exciting concluding movement opens with a *moto perpetuo* in the violins, leading into a march for the woodwinds and brass, and a third, more lyric subject for the violins. The momentum slows only briefly, as Bizet ends his youthful symphony in a breathless blaze of color.