

Mieczyslaw Karłowicz

Polish composer and conductor

born: December 11, 1876, Wiszniewo, Lithuania

died: February 8, 1909, Tatra Mountains

***Symphonic Prologue to "Bianca de Molena"***

**"The White Dove"**

*Allegro non troppo; Lento; Andante*

These are the first performances of this work on the Classics series; duration 11 minutes

Born in Lithuania, Mieczyslaw Karłowicz began his musical life with violin lessons at age seven. His formative education initiated in Germany, and concluded at the Gorki School in Warsaw. Karłowicz then returned to Germany where he pursued advanced instruction at the University of Berlin, studying violin with Florian Zajic and composition with Heinrich Urban. During that time Karłowicz developed an affinity for the fables and legends in the operas of Richard Wagner, and for the symbolic tone poems of Tchaikovsky and Richard Strauss. At Karłowicz' tragic death from an accident on a hiking trip, his orchestral catalog featured a set of six evocative tone poems, including *The White Dove*, composed in 1900 at age 24.

Inspired by a play by Jozafat Nowinski, Karłowicz composed a rhapsodic canvas in symphonic timbres. On the manuscript score, the composer provided a summary of the storyline, which also serves as a guide to the music. Set in Poland in the Middle Ages, the narrative has been translated for these performances by BPO hornist Daniel Kerdelewicz.

"Carlo Carraro, a knight-errant wandering around the world under an alias of Jan du Lieu, arrives in the city of Molena in order to fight for his right to the throne. At the entrance of the city he hears a charming song coming from the castle gardens. Paying no attention to danger, he jumps over the fence to search for the woman who is singing. He finds her, and the charm of her grace arouses great passion in him. He does not know however that this is Princess Bianca. The moment he discovers this, an abyss between them is revealed; as years ago Carraro had killed her brother in a duel and now he has arrived to fight Bianca's father. His love for Bianca triumphs. He enlists in the prince's army and in the war Carraro himself initiates, effectively fights himself.

"Due to his bravery the battle is won but when the old prince discovers that his savior is also the man who killed his son, the prince curses and rejects Carraro. Bianca can not bear to be separated from her beloved knight and is overwhelmed to know he was the one who killed her brother. She dies of a broken heart. Carraro declines his right to the throne, and gives his fortune away to the indigent. He gives orders to erect a marble monument of Bianca with Christ holding a white dove above her."

Karłowicz opens the curtain in a grand, tonal-poetic manner. And while the initial scene painting looks briefly to Wagner, the nature of the music reveals a kinship to the picturesque modes of story ballet from the late, 19th-century. The curtain rises with an orchestral flourish, conjuring the lofty aspirations of Carlo Carraro. In turn, emotive phrases from the woodwinds and strings suggest an evolving love motif, made urgent by resounding brass. But in deft and subtle turns, the score reveals the emerging heartache of Princess Bianca and her father. Deeply cast timbres leave no doubt as to the coming denouement. For the closing vignette, celestial shimmers in the woodwinds and strings, and lamenting colors in the horns convey the hovering white dove in pristine A major.

As an aside about the nature and style of Karłowicz's settings, a brief digression is worthy: The artistic heritage of Eastern Europe has two distinct and very opposite sides - one marked by sheer joy and exalted beauty, the other replete with regret and sorrow, even remorse. The dichotomy can be found everywhere - in legends, painting, literature, theater, ballet and opera. On the lighter side, there are many national legends and folk tales that are full of zest and bright

energy. But sometimes the darker side gets prime time. For example, composer Franz Liszt described the inscrutable *Żal* of the Polish spirit, where even the happiest and most lovely moments are tempered by a sense of 'the inevitable.'

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Krzysztof Penderecki

Polish composer and conductor

born: November 23, 1933, Debica, Poland

### ***Horn Concerto "Winterreise"***

These are the first performances of this work on the Classics series; duration 18 minutes

Krzysztof Penderecki is one of the most renowned composers of our time. He arrived on the scene just as the avant-garde began its exciting and controversial trek through the wild and woolly 1960s. Few composers were so agile as Penderecki to appropriate modern modes, manners and techniques into a personal 'signature style' in the ever-expanding universe of new music. Over three or four decades, his scores eventually found an identity in the domain known as *Neo-Romanticism*.

With regard to formal training, Penderecki's advanced studies on the violin and composition were completed at the renowned Krakow Academy, where his primary teachers in composition were Artur Malawski and Stanislaw Wiechowicz. Penderecki later became the director of the Academy, a position he held for fifteen years. He also served on the faculty of Yale University in the mid-1970s. The composer's catalog includes more than 30 large, choral settings on biblical themes and text from the Latin liturgy, as well as about 50 works for orchestra, including diverse concertos for violin, viola, cello, piano, flute and horn. The latter, featured on this BPO program, was completed in 2008.

Your devoted annotator had the good fortune to meet maestro Penderecki some years ago at the Warsaw Autumn Festival. He was altogether gracious and deeply serious about the greater mission of music as a means of personal expression in our vastly complicated world. For local reference, the Buffalo Philharmonic was the first major orchestra to record Penderecki's music with the 1968 Nonesuch release of *De Natura Sonoris* and *Capriccio*, conducted by Lukas Foss.

Penderecki's *Horn Concerto* carries a cryptic caption: "*Winterreise*" (Winter Journey), the very famous title of the great song cycle by Franz Schubert. Given the immense celebrity of Schubert's masterwork, Penderecki surely knew that such a title would require an explanation. But like Brahms, Mahler and many others, he declines to acknowledge the doubtless connection. In any case, the answer derives from the music itself, scored as a flowing, rhapsodic narrative. Indeed, an itinerary is at hand, marked *Passacaglia* (an ancient Spanish dance from the Baroque Age, followed by variations). We note that Penderecki's use of the ancient term is unusual here, in that a particular, main theme is not possible to define in the conventional sense. It seems that, serving as metaphor, the term *Passacaglia* reflects a continuing evolution rather than specific variations.

The tour begins with hazy, distant timbres from the orchestra. Natural, open intervals in the horns convey a primitive ambiance before the solo horn enters in the 'Helden horn' style (heroic horn calls, made famous by Wagner and Richard Strauss). The nuance of the music may remind some listeners of another well-known travelog from Wagner's Ring cycle, i.e. the 'Rhine Journey' which recalls both the soaring Valkyries on high and Sigfried's horn signals on terra firma.

Apart from those reference points, Penderecki offers an adventurous journey for the solo horn, with brief show-case cadenzas along the way. The concerto is 'through-composed' in one continuous movement.

Our soloist is the BPO's principal hornist, Jacek Muzyk, who remarks:

"Penderecki's *Horn Concerto* is written to highlight virtually every possible character and technique of the French horn. In addition to many lyrical moments, he also features three or four brief cadenzas. One of them calls for the technique known as "multiphonics," in which a player produces one note while 'singing' or vocalizing another pitch at the same time. The acoustics of the horn react in such a way that the two tones mix and generate additional tones, known as 'combination tones'. The result is a remarkable chord of several notes, all harmonically related and all sounded at once."

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Frederic Chopin

Polish-French composer and pianist

born: March 1, 1810, near Warsaw; died: October 17, 1849, Paris

***Concerto No. 1 in E Minor, Op. 11***

*Allegro maestoso*

*Romance: Larghetto*

*Rondo: Vivace*

First Classics performance: December 13, 1938, with pianist Rosina Lhevinne, conducted by Franco Autori; most recent performance: October 5, 2003, with pianist Horacio Guti rrez, conducted by JoAnn Falletta; duration 35 minutes

Born near Warsaw of a Polish mother and a French father, Chopin's exceptional gift was spotted very early on. However, his family and teachers decided that the young genius would not be exploited in the manner of the child Mozart, to whom he was often compared. Yet all of Warsaw understood that its enfant cherie would one day depart for the artistic capitols of Europe. Frederic also knew it would not be enough to reach out as a keyboard virtuoso - he would also be expected to present new music by his own hand, like Mozart and Beethoven before him. Thus he scored and premiered two piano concertos during 1829-30, his final year at home. Written at the age of nineteen, they would be the only concertos to emerge from his lyrical pen. (A curious detail, as in the case of Beethoven's first two piano concertos: the numbering of the concertos was inverted because they were published in reverse order.)

But with regard to the real purpose behind the new concertos, *cherchez la femme*: Chopin had fallen hopelessly in love with a beautiful and gifted young soprano, Constantia Gladowska, a fellow student at the Warsaw Conservatory. In letters to his friends the composer admitted that the concertos were scored as secret valentines for his desiderata - as he had yet to find the courage to present himself to her in person. He wrote:

"Perhaps to my own misfortune I have already found my ideal, whom I worship faithfully and sincerely. Six months have elapsed, and I haven't yet exchanged a syllable with her of whom I dream every night - she who was doubly in mind when I composed the second movement."

Despite all this most historians infer that Chopin never returned to the concerto form because he found his preferred style in works for solo piano - the Nocturnes, Ballades, Mazurkas, Waltzes, etc. But given the composer's Byronic disposition, Chopin most likely never returned to the concerto form just as he never returned to his beloved Poland - and as he could never return to his beloved Constantia. The pair eventually became friends, although, with her feet on the ground, the young debutante married a Warsaw businessman not long after. But until his untimely death, Frederic kept her letters hidden among his personal effects. Bundled in a small packet, they were found neatly tied with a ribbon, in his own hand titled - 'My Sorrow.'

Although Opus 11 begins with an upper-case Romantic theme, its harmonic and rhythmic structures are essentially classical. A long orchestral introduction offers a traditional scheme until the solo piano enters and begins to cast a mystic spell - the wordless poetry of Frederick Chopin.

After completing the work, Frederick wrote to a friend: "My concerto is finished and I feel like a novice, just as I felt before I knew anything of the keyboard. It is far too original, and I shall end up by not being able to learn it myself."

About the central *Romance*, the composer added:

"In a calm and melancholy manner, the music reflects the impression one receives when the eye rests on a beloved landscape that calls up in one's soul beautiful memories - for instance on a fine moonlit spring night. I have written for violins with mutes as an accompaniment to it. I wonder if that will have a good effect. Well, time will show."

Given the lyricism of this music and Chopin's own commentary, it is impossible to avoid reference to the elegant *Nocturnes*, composed in his Paris years under the inspired gaze of another yet another woman, the French authoress George Sand.

Marked *Vivace*, the final *Rondo* is charged with the energy of a spirited dance, and fanciful virtuosity is required from the soloist at every turn. It should also be noted that Chopin's own keyboard style was often reviewed to be exceedingly refined and light in touch, accounting in part for the feather-weight ambiance which pervades the orchestral writing.

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program notes by Edward Yadzinski

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