

VERIZON HALL

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 24

8 PM

GREAT ORCHESTRAS ON TOUR SUPPORTED BY 10 RITTENHOUSE SQUARE

Vienna Philharmonic

Zubin Mehta, conductor

Lang Lang, piano

WAGNER

Overture to *Rienzi*

CHOPIN

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

Maestoso

Larghetto

Allegro vivace

Lang Lang, piano

—Intermission—

SCHUBERT

Symphony No. 9 in C Major, D. 944, “The Great”

Andante—Allegro ma non troppo

Andante con moto

Scherzo: Allegro vivace

Allegro vivace

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RICHARD WAGNER

(b. Leipzig, 1813; d. Venice, 1883)

Overture to *Rienzi*

Rienzi, Wagner's third opera, was the work that propelled him from struggling to established composer. His interest in the subject, apparently suggested by his friend Theodor Apel, intensified in the summer of 1837 as he read a German translation of Edward Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Rienzi, the last of the Roman Tribunes*. Wagner sketched an outline of the scenario before taking up a conducting post in Riga, and the following summer he completed the libretto.

In April 1839 he drafted the music for the first two acts, but then embarked on a hazardous trip to Paris, hoping—futilely as it happened—to have the work performed there. Heavily in debt, he and his wife Minna had to travel clandestinely, without passports, to avoid creditors. Clambering through ditches at night, escaping detection by Cossack guards, being smuggled aboard a London-bound ship, and surviving near shipwrecks finally brought them in August to Boulogne—where Wagner finished the orchestral scoring of Act II—then in September to Paris.

Wagner was unable to continue work on *Rienzi* for a time, being forced to earn money writing hack operatic arrangements. Meanwhile he also began sketching *Der fliegende Holländer*, inspired in part by his harrowing maritime adventures. He returned to *Rienzi* in February 1840 and by October 23 had drafted Acts III–V and, last of all, the Overture. With the orchestration completed in November—and *Holländer* completed the following year—Wagner decided to leave his miserable Paris existence for Germany, because *Rienzi* had been accepted for performance by the Dresden Court Theater.

Despite the more than six-hour duration of the premiere on October 20, 1842, *Rienzi* was a resounding success. The opera remained one of Wagner's most popular through the turn of the 19th century, though the composer in his late years was embarrassed by its French-Grand-Opera style, which he had already begun to abandon in *Holländer*.

The story concerns Rienzi, the medieval populist hero, who, supported by the Church, tries to resolve the conflict between two noble families and to raise the power of the citizens of Rome. Also at stake is the love between his sister Irene and Adriano Colonna, son of one of the feuding noble families. Eventually, scheming and conspiracies turn nobles, citizens, the Church, and Adriano against Rienzi. Only his

sister stands by him. The two retreat to the Capitol, from which Adriano tries to carry her away by force, but all three perish as the building collapses from a fire set by the citizens.

Today the opera is seldom performed, despite cuts made by Wagner himself, but its brilliant Overture has remained a popular offering on concert programs. The majestic introduction begins by suggesting the opening of Bulwer-Lytton's novel: “Suddenly there was heard the sound of a single trumpet. It swelled—it gathered on the ear.” Wagner then introduces the solemn music of “Rienzi's Prayer” from Act V, culminating in further fanfares symbolizing Rienzi's heroism. The faster main section draws on a theme of the people (Act I finale), the battle theme (Act III), a lighter version of the prayer music (a procedure prophetic of his *Meistersinger* Prelude), and the march from the Act II finale, the whole concluding in heroic splendor.

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN

(b. Żelazowa Wola, near Warsaw, 1810; d. Paris, 1849)

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

Chopin began his F minor Piano Concerto in 1829 when he was only 19 years of age, but it has always been listed as No. 2 because it was published after his later Concerto in E minor. The delay owed partly to the fact that he lost the original orchestra parts on his way from Warsaw to Vienna to Paris in 1830–31.

Chopin's musical education took place in Warsaw, where the music he heard was mostly Italian opera. His study of keyboard works included Bach's *Well-tempered Clavier* and Mozart's sonatas, but his concerto models were of a more flashy, popular style such as those by Hummel, Kalkbrenner, and Herz. The F minor Concerto, in fact, follows the form of a concerto by Hummel.

The slow movement was composed first, inspired by Chopin's infatuation with a beautiful young soprano, Konstantia Gladkovska, at the Warsaw Conservatory. He appears to have worshiped her from afar and there is no evidence to suggest she even knew of his love for her. Though the movement is actually labeled Larghetto, in a letter to his close friend Titus Woyciechowski, Chopin calls it “Adagio,” a customary casual term for any slow movement:

I have—perhaps to my own misfortune—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 in

my mind when I composed the Adagio of my Concerto.

The opening and closing “*coloratura*” (elaborate improvisational embellishment in 18th- and 19th-century singing) passages and the central recitative reflect Italian opera, but transformed by Chopin’s delicacy and chromaticism. In the end the Concerto was dedicated to Chopin’s later friend and supporter in Paris, another singer, Countess Delphine Polotska.

Chopin’s opening movement begins, according to Classical tradition, with a substantial orchestral exposition. Once the piano enters, the orchestra is relegated to the background. Much has been made of Chopin’s inadequacies as an orchestrator, and attempts have been made over the years to redo his accompaniment, without really improving upon it. There is even some doubt as to whether the first published orchestration was Chopin’s or Auguste Franck’s adaptation of Chopin. The furor seems to have abated, however, and modern audiences are content to let the piano take center stage. The rich passagework in this movement often lends itself to contrapuntal suggestion, not surprising in light of the composer’s reverence for Bach.

The most Polish tendencies are exhibited by the finale, a rondo that employs the rhythm of the mazurka (a Polish folk dance in triple meter), particularly in its all important second theme. Chopin’s writing for the piano in this movement is at its most brilliant; little wonder that the audience broke into “bravos” afterward when Chopin first performed it on March 17, 1830. The closing rhythmic drive displays not so much Chopin the dreamy poet-composer but Chopin the heroic master of the brilliant etude or grand polonaise.

FRANZ SCHUBERT

(b. Vienna, 1797; d. Vienna, 1828)
**Symphony No. 9 in C Major, D. 944,
 “The Great”**

Schumann’s enthusiasm upon discovering Schubert’s neglected *Great C* major Symphony inspired one of the most famous reports in the history of music. In the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* he described being shown numerous manuscripts on his visit to Schubert’s brother Ferdinand on New Year’s Day, 1839:

The sight of this hoard of riches thrilled me with joy! . . . Among other things he directed my attention to the scores of several symphonies, many of which have never as yet been heard. . . . Who knows how long the symphony of which we are speaking might have

lain buried in dust and darkness, had I not at once arranged with Ferdinand Schubert to send it to the directorate of the Gewandhaus Concerts in Leipzig, or rather to the conducting artist himself [Mendelssohn].

Schumann thus instigated the first performance of the Symphony, conducted by Mendelssohn with the Gewandhaus orchestra on March 21, 1839. Despite Schumann’s famous positive description of its “heavenly length” and Mendelssohn’s enthusiasm, the work had to be given in a heavily cut version because the orchestra musicians rebelled against its difficulties. These included the seemingly endless repetition of tiny motives in a fast tempo as part of a grand scheme—incomprehensible to those accustomed to traditional orchestral practice.

The success of the Leipzig performance proved no gateway to instant acceptance of the Symphony: projected performances in Paris and London were aborted because again the players refused to master the Symphony’s challenges of technique and stamina. (No records exist, incidentally, of the supposed first performance by the private orchestra of Prince Albert at Windsor.) Resistance to the work, now considered one of the few great symphonies of the first half of the 19th century, continued into the 20th century—a writer in the 1920s was still complaining of its “dreary passagework.” Its acceptance and finally “enshrining” as perhaps Schubert’s greatest work, then, is relatively recent, though it has had its supporters ever since Schumann and Mendelssohn recognized its merits—Berlioz, Bruckner, and Dvořák, for example, all wrote in superlatives about the work.

Research by John Reed, Otto Biba, and Robert Winter in the 1970s and 1980s cleared up several of the nagging problems in regard to the history of the *Great* Symphony. Supposed to have been composed in 1828 and long considered Schubert’s last symphony, the *Great* was actually begun in 1825 and completed in 1826; furthermore the supposedly lost “Gmunden-Gastein” symphony of 1825 was shown to be none other than the *Great*. In regard to the oft-mentioned lack of sketches for the work, Schubert scholar Brian Newbould has boldly hypothesized that Schubert may not have made any preliminary sketches before composing the Ninth (*Great*) in full score.

Letters had been passing among Schubert’s circle during the summer of 1825 about his work on a symphony while on holiday in Gmunden and Gastein in upper Austria. The work seems to have been well advanced by

August 1825, judging from a reply by Moritz von Schwind to Schubert about the composer’s hopes for having it performed. Nothing came of this, and in October 1826 Schubert dedicated the work to the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde hoping for a performance. Though he received 100 guilders and the orchestral parts were copied, a performance never materialized. According to undocumented tradition it was put aside “because of its length and difficulty,” though it has been argued that an official public performance was never planned by the Gesellschaft.

As to the glorious music itself, one of the most salient features is the main theme of the Andante introduction, announced by unison horns at the outset. This theme is ingeniously reworked in the exposition and returns to make the climax at the end of the Allegro. The Andante does serve as an introduction to the main Allegro of the sonata form, but the extent to which it permeates the entire movement *redesigns* the entire concept of the form—Schubert takes Beethoven a step further. Furthermore, the Andante provides the basis for many of the key relationships and juxtapositions of unequal phrase lengths in the whole work. The manuscript shows that Schubert apparently made certain large-scale structural revisions in the first movement as “afterthoughts.” Addition and subtraction of bars in the coda, for example, resulted in a net gain of approximately 40 bars, augmenting the dramatic strength of the movement’s conclusion.

The Andante con moto, one of Schubert’s most memorable slow movements, projects a fatalistic atmosphere with its steady march rhythm that eventually works up to a shattering climax, a dramatic pause, and tragic reflection. Schumann refrained from describing the Symphony in detail but could not help from commenting on the passage leading to the recapitulation in which “a horn, as though calling from afar, seems to come from another world. The instruments stop to listen, a heavenly spirit is passing through the orchestra.”

The Scherzo shows inexhaustible rhythmic inventiveness. Its quintessentially Viennese trio seems to have cost Schubert more trouble than its relaxed lilt lets on: the manuscript shows that after the entire Symphony was drafted Schubert apparently recomposed almost the entire second section of the trio.

The Finale is particularly remarkable for its thematic development and its driving momentum. The pervasive triplet figure is already present in the main theme. Not only does it provide propulsion as the accompaniment to

the second theme, but it also accompanies the famous four repeated “warning” notes that come to dominate the movement. The Finale also possesses one of the great codas of all time, fulfilling the listener’s hope for some of Schubert’s notorious tonal excursions.

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