Program

Rondo in A Minor, K. 511 [10:51]
Rondo Alla Turca ("*Turkish March*"), K. 331 [3:10]

— *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*

Ballade No. 4 in F Minor, Opus 52 [11:51]

— *Frédéric François Chopin*

Images, I

Reflets dans l'eau [5:56]
Hommage à Rameau [6:48]
Mouvement [3:39]

La plus que lente [5:15]

— *Claude Debussy*

Sonata in B-Flat Minor (*World Premier Recording*)

Allegro [10:10]
Adagio [9:02]
Allegro assai [9:09]

— *Paul Aurandt*

Robert Hamilton, pianist

Credits

Producer: Robert Hamilton
Recording Engineer: Clarke Rigsby, Tempest Studios
Mastering: David Shirk, Sonorous Mastering
Cover Art/packaging: Dan Traynor
Photography: Jonathon Balinkie & Jason Grubb of CameraWerks

The Mystery of Inspiration

Musicologists caution that we are not to surmise the contents of Mozart's mood based on the contents of Mozart's music. Indeed, upon hearing the two decidedly *un*menacing opera arias he wrote at his Viennese lodgings March 10, 1786, one would never imagine that only a few blocks away — well within earshot — one of the most hideously brutal, unconscionably protracted, and noisily publicized executions in that city's history was being carried out before a mob of thirty thousand screaming, vomiting spectators. Art for the artist, we are told, is essentially a matter of solving the artistic problems of the moment. Particularly in so-called absolute music of the so-called classical era. And yet — there is Mozart's melancholy **Rondo in A Minor**, K. 511, positively Chopinesque in its poignancy, written at a time in the composer's life which sounds in the retelling very much like the music itself.

January 30, 1787, August Clemens Hatzfeld died. He was a master violinist. He was also Mozart's best friend. Within days Mozart learned that his own father's health was failing. And within a few days more he had completed the Rondo in A Minor. It is irresistible, then, to associate what we hear with what Mozart lived, if only this once.

Vogue

Mozart's **Rondo Alla Turca**, however — coincidentally in the key of A minor — was written with one hand on the cash register.

Third movement of the Sonata in A Major, K. 331, the "Turkish March" quickly bounded beyond the confines of its birthplace, as things Turkish were all the rage in Vienna at the time. Accordingly, pianos and harpsichords of the day were often rigged with cymbal-and-drum attachments to enhance the Turkishness of a piece. Yet there is a quizzical elegance in the Rondo Alla Turca which transcends the mere pretense of a janizary band, and which has caused it to remain among Mozart's most popular works.

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Visions of Nohant

Chopin's haunting **Ballade in F Minor** owes its life to a writer, an author of romantic novels named Aurore Dupin, whom we better remember by her pen name, George Sand.

Chopin and Sand became lovers in 1838. It took Sand two years to talk him into it. And even as their affair began, and the couple traveled to the seclusion of Majorca, Chopin, ever socially circumspect, spread a rumor that he was going there for his health. Yet such is poetic justice — within weeks the composer was coughing up blood.

George summoned a doctor who told Chopin he was near death. Two more doctors confirmed the prognosis. But George would hear none of it. And promptly she packed their belongings and took Chopin to her home in the countryside near La Châtre, about one hundred eighty miles south of Paris, a bucolic little estate named *Nohant.*

More than likely the relocation to this sunny clime added a decade to Chopin's life. Indeed, he would spend the next eight summers there, amid warm friends and rambling rose gardens and the sunset songs of nightingales. Those were the happiest and most productive times of the composer's life. For at Nohant, he wrote his best and profoundest music. Including the Opus 52 Ballade.

Some have attempted to denigrate the role of George Sand in the life of Frédéric Chopin, to characterize her as "devil incarnate," the praying-mantis who "devoured" the composer's genius and dispatched him to an early grave.

Yet in truth, the woman who risked her own life simply to love a man infected with what we now call tuberculosis — she, George Sand, gave Chopin his happiest years, and thereby gave the world the music it now adores. Joyous music. The music of a man in love. Music through which the rest of us see rambling rose gardens and hear nightingales at twilight — visions of Nohant — and of the love on whose wings Chopin soared to greater heights than any other composer of his time.

Mixed Emotions

The **Images** (*Set One*) are aptly named. Yet while they are ostensibly reflections in the water, a tribute to eighteenth century French composer Jean-Philippe Rameau, and a hymn to

motion itself, one cannot help listening for the echoes of that turbulent and conflicted season during which Debussy created them.

Bastille Day 1904 he ran off with a cultured and charming woman named Emma Bardac. Which would have been fine, except the composer was still married to Lily. A guileless, utterly unpretentious dressmaker, Lily had endeavored only to make her husband happy. Yet now, faced by the terrible realization that he would never again be hers, she bought a pistol, took one practice shot at their apartment wall, and never having held a gun before in her life, turned the muzzle to her own heart and pulled the trigger. Fortunately inept in the ways of violence, she missed. It was Debussy himself who discovered her, still conscious, and rushed her to the hospital. In a waiting room corner he sat quietly through hours of surgery. And when the surgeon emerged to announce, "Your wife will live," the once and future creator of so much ineffable beauty rose, nodded coldly, and walked out of Lily's life forever.

By midsummer 1905 both Claude and Emma, now pregnant, were officially, individually divorced — that's right, she had been married too — and the couple celebrated with a trip to Eastbourne.

It was in the wake of that emotional tsunami that Debussy composed his first triptych of Images.

Ah, could that be newly liberated love we hear in the tenderness of *Reflets dans l'eau*, or the excitement of anticipation in the swirling patterns of *Mouvement*?

And in *Hommage à Rameau* is that Lily we see, standing desolate, staring into a mocking mirror, a revolver poised at her breast?

Or is art, for the artist, essentially a matter of solving the artistic problems of the moment?

A Little Tea Music

One need not forgive Debussy his apparent sociopathies to appreciate his music, fortunately for him. May you hoping for the karmic sword to fall be consoled by the news that the year 1910 was his worst for some time. His finances were flagging. His father was dying. The illness that would finish him was only starting. And, oh yes — he composed a yearning little waltz fit for a gypsy café violinist and entitled **La plus que lente**.

— continued —

In his own words the piece was written "for the countless *five o'clock* tea parties frequented by beautiful listeners whom I remembered." He was referring to the solace of a pleasant and popular afternoon concert series organized by the newspaper *Le Figaro* some years earlier.

Waking the Dragon

They called it *the dragon*, audiences and colleagues of the composer, because the ground trembled when it walked — because it roared and snarled and breathed fire and generally sounded eager to devour whatever or whoever lay in its path. But the dragon dreamed, too. And then it slumbered unconscious.

For twenty-one years.

The musical monster to which we refer is Aurandt's **Sonata in B-Flat Minor**, brought to life a little over a quarter century ago by a pianist in search of the ultimate program-closer.

He began as a composer, did Aurandt. Then edged toward a performing career early in his teens. Primarily a recitalist, he nonetheless had Rachmaninoff's Third Concerto under his fingers at the age of seventeen. The supremely challenging "unplayable" literature. That's what intrigued him. Including one Horowitz transcription with which he was delighted to startle Horowitz himself.

And eventually including Aurandt's own Sonata.

Then in 1976, little more than a year after its copyright was secured, its composer and only champion unceremoniously withdrew from the concert stage.

He had performed in public a mere dozen years.

Over the seasons subsequent he would compose a yet unproduced opera and an undetermined number of lesser works. But the persistent myth that only the giant hands of its composer could ever subdue the B-Flat Minor Sonata was dispelled in 1997, when Robert Hamilton began performing it. He presents it here, in its first commercial recording anywhere.

So the dragon is awake.

Beware.

The Performance in Your Hands

Audiences, critics, and serious musicians the world over have known and highly regarded pianist Robert Hamilton through four decades now. For in an era of paint-by-the-numbers musicianship — a generation during which most of the true pianistic marvels have either died or disappeared from public life — Hamilton has upheld the virtues and equaled the standards of the times of the great pianists. Never affected, and yet always exploring the outland of a work's potential, he brings to everything he plays at least some wonderful, genius thing the hearer has never heard before.

One may speak of the musical intentions of Messrs. Mozart and Chopin and Debussy through pedagogical conjecture at best. But this writer is privileged to have heard the Sonata in B-Flat Minor performed by the composer in New York in 1975. And while that indelible memory confirms occasional, often substantial differences between his approach and that of Mr. Hamilton, the latter has discovered new fires for the old dragon to breathe which would surely warm the composer's heart. One suspects Robert Hamilton has done no less for all the composers whose work he has honored.

So it is a treasure, the performance in your hands. One of the most remarkable piano recordings in twenty-five years, in the deft balance of its programming, in the superb finesse of its execution, in the uniquenesses blossoming from gardens you only thought you knew.

PAUL HARVEY, JR.
JULY 2000

Robert Hamilton

"...brought a new poetic freshness and life to the Chopin Third Sonata..."
- *The New York Times*

"...a vibrancy that few of today's pianists can equal..."
- *Salzburger Nachrichten,* Salzburg

"...astonished us with his brilliance and excitement..."
- *Munchner Merkur,* Munich

"...the calibur of his artistry and remarkable acuity of his insight are unique in my experiences with this music [piano works of Carl Nielsen]..."
- *Fanfare*

When he performed at the Moscow Conservatory, that most discerning of concert audiences gave him a ten-minute standing ovation. But one might anticipate such a response to the artistry of American pianist Robert Hamilton, whose Chicago orchestral debut earned him the headline: "A Major Talent" (Donal J. Henahan, *Chicago Daily News*).

Early in his career, competition prizes from the Busoni, the Casella, the Montevideo, and the Rudolph Ganz brought him appearances with the Chicago, the St. Louis, the National, the Milwaukee, and the S.O.D.R.E. symphony orchestras.

Mr. Hamilton has recorded for Philips Records, the BBC in London, the DRS in Zurich, ABC in the United States, and has been widely heard over NPR, Voice of America, and Radio Warsaw. A January 1994 appearance in St. Petersburg was televised nationally in Russia.