Frederic Chopin: Piano Concerto No.1 in E Minor op.11 (1955)

1 Allegro maestoso 19:20 2 Romance. Larghetto 9:34 3 Rondo. Vivace 9:40
Halina Czerny-Stefanska - piano Tschechische Philharmonie Vaclav Smetacek – conductor

"The question raises itself," wrote Adam Rieger in the Poradnik Muzyczny (Musical Guide) periodical, "What style of expression has been established as the ideal for the contemporary Polish piano school? Let us attempt to describe it... It's characterised by the pursuit of a noble simplicity... a return to a 'pure' Chopin, unadulterated by the 'improvements' of a number of publishers and virtuosos of the 19th century. But not only pure, but 'full'. We know how many idiosyncracies Chopin embodied... A heartfelt lyricism, dramatic nerve, full-bodied technique entirely subordinate to musical expression, a romantic, emotional load, captured within the classical straits of formal discipline - all of this (and much more) comes together to compose the full, true Chopin".

The full and true Chopin, as Rieger puts it, was who the aforementioned artists presented to the world for over half a century. Pianists outside the country made reference to the canon of performance worked out by the Poles in their performances of Chopin. It's worth mentioning Halina Czerny-Stefańska, who inspired hundreds of imitators. In Poland, these very pianists made the deepest impression on future generations, on such musicians as Piotr Paleczny, Janusz Olejniczak, Krystian Zimerman, Wojciech Świtała, Ewa Pobłocka and Rafał Blechacz.
---Stanisław Dybowski, culture.pl

Back in the swinging ’60s, EMI released what purported to be a previously unknown

performance of Chopin's E minor concerto, with soloist Dinu Lipatti. It received favorable reviews, including an enthusiastic endorsement from Harris Goldsmith in High Fidelity magazine. Years later an astute collector discovered the recording actually was Halina Czerny-Stefanska's from 1955 with the Czech Philharmonic under Václav Smetácek's baton. When an authentic Lipatti live Chopin E minor finally did surface, everyone forgot about Czerny-Stefanska. A pity, for (sssh!) I actually prefer her recording to Lipatti's.

Those familiar with Horszowski's Vox Chopin E minor of similar vintage will find Czerny-Stefanska's version quite similar in its delicacy and grace. She shapes Chopin's embellishments with the precision of a Swiss watchmaker, replete with pearly runs and gossamer trills. It's a bit small-scaled compared to Rubinstein's virile projection and effervescent passagework, but no less masterful and authoritative. The same can be said for the Andante Spianato and Grande Polonaise, which shows the Czech Philharmonic on more focused form than in the concerto (especially the woodwinds).

Similar roundness and refinement informs a group of six mazurkas, but with telling stresses and accentuations that play up the music's rustic roots (the trios of the A minor Op. 17 No. 2 and C-sharp minor Op. 63 No. 3). Vehement contrasts characterize the C major Op. 68 No. 1, while Czerny-Stefanska discovers unusual lingering points within the A minor Op. 68 No. 2's trio. Fascinating bounty, in sum, for Chopin lovers and piano connoisseurs. ---Jed Distler, classicstoday.com

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