



Robert DeGaetano

DeGAETANO CONCERTO NO. 1 CHOPIN CONCERTO NO. 1



MORAVIAN PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA | JOHN YAFFÉ CONDUCTOR
ROBERT DeGAETANO PIANO

Piano Concerto No. 1 (op. 3, no.1) | ROBERT DeGAETANO

1 I. Moderato misterioso.....	12:46
2 II. Allegro giocoso.....	4:31
3 III. Adagio.....	8:52
4 IV. Danse exotique.....	8:41

Piano Concerto No. 1 in E minor (op. 11) | FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN

5 I. Allegro maestoso.....	20:47
6 II. Romanza.....	10:25
7 III. Rondo.....	10:45



The Saga of Piano Concerto No. 1

BY ROBERT DeGAETANO

My first piano concerto began many years ago. I heard a theme that I knew was mine. At the time I had just begun composing seriously and I was instantly aware that this theme was for a major work, either a concerto or symphony. It was grand in design and had a monumental quality. This was not a melody to be used in a shorter work. I remember jotting it down and storing it with my manuscript paper.

In 1986 I gave a concert in New York and premiered my first piano Sonata dedicated to my maternal grandmother, Celia. She had introduced me to the piano at age 4. I actually didn't begin lessons until I was eight and a half.

"The music came very quickly. I felt like I was a conduit and it poured right through me."

The premier of the Sonata took place at Lincoln Center. There was a gentleman in the audience very taken with my music who came backstage with a proposition. He wanted to commission me to write a piano concerto and premier it for his brother's tenth anniversary with the Jackson Symphony Orchestra in Jackson MI. Having thought about writing a major work and having already heard one of its themes, I thought this was divine intervention and I heartily accepted the offer.

Because of my lack of experience as a composer I didn't realize how much was involved in such an undertaking or what the costs would be.

I quickly started writing away. The music came very quickly. I felt like I was a conduit and it poured right through me.

A performance date and rehearsal was arranged with Stephen Osmond, conductor of the Jackson Symphony and we were off and running. I mean literally running! I believe I had less than three months from the date of the commission to the actual premier. Fortunately I had a little cabin in the northern Catskills of NY where I was able to concentrate freely.

After completing the piano part and a general sketch of the orchestration, I set forth on the orchestration. I also had to deal with getting the work copied legibly from the original score. In 1986 new music was still copied and distributed by hand. Computer programs were very primitive. In fact I hired a computer specialist who promised me a perfect copy. After I saw a few autographs I realized it had to be done by hand.

My friend and colleague Jean Browne who had extensive experience in copy work jumped in during her spare time, usually at night and after work. Also my piano student Rory Cullen joined the team. It began to look like an assembly line. As soon as I had a part composed I would hand it over to them and they would copy it for the orchestra. We were still working a few weeks before the premier.

I also had a very daunting job to complete, learning the piece! Quite often the layman does not realize that a performing

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composer must learn his own works just as he would another composer's work. The job of learning a classical piece properly and thoroughly is so time consuming and intensive that it truly separates amateur pianists from professionals. I went to work furiously to learn and prepare the concerto for performance.

Once we were pretty sure that everything was in order and basically ready for the orchestra, I went to Jackson to work with the conductor. This first read-through was a scary experience because I did not hear what I thought I had written. But we had very little time to do anything major to the piece before its impending premier. After several discussions and some rehearsal we finally gave the premier. I had a very favorable response, both from the audience and the critics. Unfortunately I was not happy with the result and because I did not have an opportunity to do it again at that time, I put the score away and it remained there until 2010.

In 2009 I gave a recital at the home of Wil and Julie Kidd in New York City. Ms. Kidd was taken with my music and set up a meeting. At the meeting she asked me what I thought was the next most important step I needed to take in my career. I spoke about the concerto and my opera Moneta, two works that had a propitious start but that I never felt were done to my satisfaction.

Julie said that they would give me a grant to have the concerto copied by computer to today's standards and then we would take it from there. I hired John Yaffé, the conductor and copyist to start the process. After about seven months John told me he knew of a recording company that could be interested in recording the work. Proposals from PARMA Recordings were sent to the foundation that Julie Kidd runs and they agreed to

record the concerto as well as film the entire process. John and I continued to work on the score to prepare for recording. At this point I hired Nick Bruckman, a brilliant young filmmaker to handle the video. He began coming to my apartment in New York City with his crew to start the visual process.

Our next step was to organize what repertoire I would use for the album that would compliment my concerto. At first it was decided I would record some of my solo piano music. After careful consideration and advice I decided to record Chopin's first Concerto with my first Concerto. In my opinion I thought musically this combination would make a dynamite album.

After making a decision on the repertoire I was advised by John Yaffé that he was not happy with any of the orchestrations used for the Chopin E Minor and he would like to create his own on former templates.

Initially I agreed. It was only at rehearsals at the recording session that I realized I should have studied his new orchestration more carefully. I was used to performing the piece with traditional orchestrations. I was a little thrown by some of the new changes. I've come to realize they are all for the better. After working intensively on mixing and editing I was able to appreciate the work he had done with this new version.

We finally had everyone on board and off we went to Europe to do the recording. The audio crew, the film crew, John Yaffé (the conductor), Jean Browne (my musical advisor) and yours truly made up the party in the Czech Republic. We all traveled separately because we each had other commitments before we gathered in Olomouc.

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The sessions were another big surprise for me. I was used to recording with all the levels prepared for a concert sound. PARMA Recordings uses many tracks and later does the mixing and editing. I found this disconcerting. Eventually I relied on the producer, Bob Lord and the recording Director, Vit to guide me. John Yaffé was also miffed by this method because he was used to balancing the orchestra for a performance.

The experience in Olomouc with the Moravian Philharmonic was endearing. I found the musicians very supportive. They played really beautifully which helped my mood and made me want to do my best. And I think they got my music. Many of them were very complimentary.

When we returned to the United States, the really hard work began on the editing and mixing. In the beginning Bob Lord of PARMA Recordings and his team of editors began to send me materials to listen to. Jean Browne and I became very involved in mixing and editing. After I took a trip to New Hampshire to work with Andy Happel on more mixing and editing, I took over the job of listening myself and little by little we came up with the final master. As I alluded to earlier, I was not used to working like this. But in the end I was pleased that what I wanted in the recording was possible with their system of recording. We were finally ready to package all the materials into a CD and DVD set ready to launch.

The album release will take place on September 12, 2013 at Steinway and Sons in New York City. The creation of this Piano Concerto has basically had two lives. The earlier one left me unhappy. This last one could not have made me happier.

The long road taken to create a work of this magnitude and to be satisfied with the result has not only been a learning experience but a great gift from all those that have contributed to its birth. I will be forever grateful for having fulfilled this dream.

Personal feelings about the music:

Movement 1

This music reflects the universe breathing and living where everything starts from that premise. Later it brings in landing on planet earth and demonstrates all the romance and vitality here. It ends by celebrating the riches of earthly endeavors.

Movement 2

From its opening this movement is a reflection of New York life. The rhythms, the playfulness of diverse interaction, the speed and genuine fun of it all, and its jazz and pizzazz!

Movement 3

Coming from a deeply internal, reflective state, this movement represents our intuitive nature and our quest for why we were born and our striving to understand the divine.

Movement 4

Dance has always been a very important part of my upbringing and my life. When I was a child it was very common to go to weddings, bar mitzvahs, and parties, all of which people celebrated by dancing. Most of these dances came from European cultures that made their way to America through the immigrants from the last century. My family came from Italy as well. I learned many of these dances when I was young including American dances from my parent's generation, from the Dixie, Jazz, and Big Band

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era. My parents were great ballroom dancers. The Tarantella, Halvah Na Gila, and many other dances influenced my writing of this movement. My dance has a strange rhythm having to do with the possibility that people different than us could be dancing! Of course, one could imagine other beings in the universe with more than two legs!

In some way, just as Chopin advanced piano technique, I feel I have introduced a new sound and resonance from the piano with my music. When I first began writing for the piano, I was craving an instrument with more overtones and resonance, an almost super-acoustic richness. I dreamed of a new piano with maybe five strings for each key instead of three that would project an overwhelming, almost electronic vibration, but always pure and acoustic. My music calls for this type of instrument and maybe one day it will be invented. In the meantime, I get the effect I want with resonances accumulating with the pedal and brilliant muscular technique to sustain the endurance. This also applies to orchestral writing. I believe each instrument has something personal to say. The old style of orchestra writing allows instruments to be subservient to one another creating a harmonic atmosphere. Many of the instrumental parts in my concerto have musical information that needs to be heard. I believe we live in a world where there are countless things going on simultaneously. As human beings we've become accustomed to co-existing democratically with one another more and more. My music reflects this sentiment.

Often my music will sound atonal. That is only because there are many tonal passages being played together, each offering their own information. It's these varied resonances that interest me because they correspond to our contemporary world.



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Chopin's Concerto No. 1 in E Minor

BY ROBERT DEGAETANO

Since as early as I can remember Chopin has been a guiding inspiration in my musical life. When I was a child there were two movies about his life. One was *The Eddie Duchin Story* using his *Nocturne in E Flat* as the theme and the other was *Song Without End* bringing us the *Heroic Polonaise in A Flat*.

My first Chopin assignment was the *B minor Waltz*, and then came the *E Minor*. From then on it was a love affair with his music. Chopin wrote for the piano like no other composer. His understanding of the harmonic and melodic capabilities of the instrument was unparalleled.

My first encounter with the *E Minor Concerto* was when I was going to Juilliard and studying with Rosina Lhevinne. Mme. Lhevinne was so well known that she had three assistants! She would only listen to you if your piece was memorized. During my first year with her she would assign me a new piece every week. I had no choice but to memorize it. She would challenge me to the fullest extent! When she assigned the *E Minor Concerto* she expected all three movements to be memorized before she would listen or off to an assistant. That was one of my first feats with that kind of learning. It was really very powerful and helped me a great deal in my professional career when I needed to learn a work for performance really fast. Years later I remember learning the Rachmaninoff *Piano Concerto No.2* in ten days to fill in for someone with the San Antonio Symphony.

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Chopin wrote the *E Minor Concerto* when he was only eighteen years old and premiered it at nineteen. I strongly relate to having learned it at approximately the same age. Imagine though, he wrote it at that age! I remember that initial captivation. I was so moved by its power and beauty.

Pairing this concerto for my new album with my first piano concerto has a lot of parallels.

They mostly relate to the emotional content and initial inspiration. Chopin was very connected to his homeland and family from Warsaw, Poland as I am connected to my family in New York, United States. Many of the themes of the Chopin come from Polish folk songs and dances. Many of the themes of my concerto come from my Italian family background. Growing up in New York City was an inspiring experience as well. Chopin was famous for changing and advancing piano technique.

In the early 1800's the piano was becoming the most important instrument of the day. The keyboard instruments in most of the earlier centuries were glorified string instruments. The Harpsichord and Clavierchord were made of wood, catgut and felt and had a very small volume. Quills plucked the strings when the keys were depressed. Bartolomeo Cristofori invented the piano around 1710. The idea was to have a string instrument that was struck by a hammer. It was called Pianoforte because you could strike the key with a soft touch for piano (soft) or a firm touch for forte (loud). The instrument caught on in the late 1700's with composers like Haydn and Mozart. They wrote many works for these early pianos. By the time Beethoven was composing in the early to mid 1800's the piano had morphed into an instrument with much greater sonic capabilities. Manufacturers

were making the frames stronger. Iron and metals replaced catgut and by mid-century an iron-cast frame took the place of its wooden predecessor. By 1850 we had a piano very similar to the standard piano today with minor changes taking place in the 20th century.

Chopin and Liszt were the pianistic titans of this period. They took advantage of this new instrument by writing works that required tremendous virtuosity. The piano could now take the power of a person's total physical presence because the strings were attached to an iron frame. The sound became enormous and monumental compared to the earlier keyboard instruments. The new sound from these pianos could easily fill a large concert hall.

The work I do as a concert pianist requires that I understand the historical significance of the instrument and its varied composers. I've read many biographies of Chopin's life. I learned about how he functioned in society, how he dressed, what foods he liked, what were his favorite colors and how and why he ultimately composed a particular work. For example when he wrote his first and second piano concerti he was planning to have an international career as a concert pianist. He premiered both works in Poland before he went abroad forever. Unfortunately his constitution was too weak to sustain a concert career. He became a well-known teacher and composer.

These works show the extraordinarily virtuosity required to be a concert pianist. The world's greatest pianists have recorded them countless times. I hope my interpretation will bring a 21st century expression of the heart and soul of this work.

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Chopin: The New Edition

BY JOHN YAFFÉ - JUNE 2013, NEW YORK CITY

Ever since the premiere of Chopin's *Concerto in E minor* in 1830, soloists, conductors, scholars, and critics have bemoaned the substandard craftsmanship of the orchestration, the lack of understanding of instrumental ranges and timbres it exhibits, its lack of creativity in the interplay between the solo part and the orchestra, and its ignorance of the concerto accompaniment writing idiomatic of other composers at the time of its composition. Chopin's contemporary (and supporter) Hector Berlioz once referred to the orchestral part as "...merely a cold, almost superfluous accompaniment." To this day, the matter generates debate among performers and scholars.

Chopin was a mere 19 years old at the time he composed the concerto, and we know that in spite of demonstrating an interest in orchestral instruments, he had relatively little training and experience in the craft of orchestral writing. For all this lack of acquired skill, he was, on the other hand, already writing strikingly original piano works of remarkable beauty and uncommon virtuosity.

The question of whether Chopin laid out the design of the original orchestration to the *Concerto in E minor* himself, or left the task to others, will probably remain unanswered forever. It is worth noting, however, that many of the most serious Chopin scholars now agree, in light of extant documents and knowledge of Chopin's composition schedule at the

time, that there were foreign hands involved (possibly his composition classmates). Assuming this is true, either Chopin's instructions to his assistants lacked the requisite substance, or, in the absence of any direction at all from the composer, those executants were, themselves, lacking in the requisite skills necessary to create a professional-level orchestration.

Thus we have inherited a concerto whose orchestral part is of unknown provenance — since there exists no autograph materials — and which, to this day, has been performed mainly in the spurious Breitkopf und Härtel version (naïvely thought of by many as "the original"). Any conductor having to perform this work is inevitably confronted by the problem of whether to use that questionable (but readily available) published "original" or to engage in the arduous task of upgrading it, so as to assure an artistically more satisfying orchestral partnership with the soloist. Indeed, throughout the decades various conductors, composers, and soloists have tried their hand at it, with mixed results.

For the current recording, soloist Robert DeGaetano and I decided that a revision was in order. After all, if a third party had been allowed, in 1830, to craft a poor orchestration of Chopin's concerto, what should stop another third party, in 2012, from crafting an excellent one? Additionally, the resultant, newly engraved, edition could serve as a publicly available alternative to the conventional edition.

After some research, I decided that the out-of-print 1910 revision by Russian composer Mily Balakirev would serve as the point of departure for my new edition. There was a number of

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reasons for this, mainly: (1) Balakirev was a serious devotee of Chopin's music; (2) he was both an expert pianist and an expert orchestrator; (3) he did not alter Chopin's original instrumentation except for use of an English Horn; (4) his handling of the orchestra is idiomatic for the period except for the use of valve horns and trumpets; and (5) he neither altered the composition structurally, nor engaged in blatant re-harmonization of the material.

In my reworking of the orchestration, I thoroughly examined and completely updated Balakirev's version, correcting certain errors, redirecting his English Horn to other instruments, restoring some of the "original" orchestration — or re-orchestrating — where I felt that Balakirev had taken unnecessary liberties, occasionally strengthening melodies through discreet doubling, and making the notation more performer-friendly.

The score and parts for this edition have now been made available to the public through Ipsilon Music Press (www.ipsilonmusic.com). It is my hope that their availability will not only serve the practical purpose of offering a much-desired alternative to the "original," but also free this beloved concerto from the bonds of its old, and unworthy, orchestration, and unleash its full potential, enabling it to glow in the way so many of us have always known it could.



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ROBERT DeGAETANO

A native of New York City, pianist Robert DeGaetano enjoys a widely esteemed career as both a virtuoso interpreter of the great keyboard repertoire and a composer of striking originality and communicative intensity.

DeGaetano is a graduate of The Juilliard School, where he studied with Adele Marcus and Rosina Lhevinne. He was the first musician ever to be awarded a Rotary International Scholarship, enabling him to live in Paris and continue his studies with Alexis Weissenberg. Upon the recommendation of world-renown musicians David Oistrakh and Sviatoslav Richter, Mr. DeGaetano embarked on an active concert career under the auspices of the legendary Sol Hurok.

Robert DeGaetano made his New York recital debut at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts' Alice Tully Hall and his orchestra debut with the San Antonio Symphony. Since then, his touring schedule has taken him to all fifty states as well as the major music capitals of Europe. In addition to recitals, DeGaetano has been a frequent guest soloist with orchestras across the United States, including those of Dallas, Denver, Indianapolis, New Orleans, Pittsburgh, San Antonio, San Diego, and the Boston Pops.

DeGaetano made his Carnegie Hall recital debut in February, 1999. Also in 1999, as guest soloist with the famed Goldman Memorial Band in a special Memorial Day concert at Brooklyn's historic Green-Wood Cemetery, he played Louis Moreau Gottschalk's *L'Union* and *The Banjo* near the gravesite of the composer.

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Photo by David Harrison



In 1986, DeGaetano emerged as a composer and performed the New York City and domestic and international tour premieres of his own first *Piano Sonata*. As a result of the overwhelming critical praise for this work, he was commissioned by Michigan's Jackson Symphony Orchestra to compose his first Piano Concerto, which he premiered in March of 1989 to equally enthusiastic response.

The Challenger, DeGaetano's suite for solo piano written in tribute to the seven astronauts killed in the 1986 space shuttle tragedy, was commissioned by Miss Alice Tully. The world premiere occurred in the presence of the astronauts' families in November 1987 at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, with the composer at the piano. This performance of DeGaetano's moving musical portraits was filmed live for television and featured on a special segment of "CBS Sunday Morning" with Charles Kurault. Subsequently broadcast on WQXR in New York City and radio stations nationwide, *The Challenger* was played on concert tours across three continents.

DeGaetano is currently represented on CD by nine acclaimed albums - devoted to the music of Chopin, Beethoven, DeGaetano, Gottschalk, Liszt, Rachmaninoff, and 20th century composers - all on the Crystonyx label. His last album is the premiere recording of his *Piano Concerto No. 1* and the Chopin *Piano Concerto No. 1 E Minor* with the Moravian Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra presented on the Navona Label and distributed by Naxos.

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JOHN YAFFÉ

For more than fifteen years, conductor John Yaffé has been a highly regarded member of New York City's musical community. He has conducted at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Symphony Space, and The 92nd Street Y, and has been lauded consistently by the New York Times and Opera News for his ability to inspire performances with "transcendent concentration, exemplary preparation, freedom, and commitment."

In recent seasons, he also led the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra (on their U.S. tour), the Colorado Springs Symphony, Warsaw Philharmonic, San Antonio Symphony, Chattanooga Symphony, Chattanooga Opera, Walla Walla Symphony, the Turkish State Opera, and, at the invitation of the American Embassy in Tirana, Albania, led the first American musical ever produced in that country (*West Side Story*).

During his career, Yaffé was championed by several major figures: the great baritone Tito Gobbi, who invited him as musical assistant for his master classes in Florence, Italy; Julius Rudel, Music Director of New York City Opera, who invited him to join the company as an apprentice conductor; the legendary singer George London, who, after attending one of Yaffé's performances, invited him to join the staff at the Washington (D.C.) National Opera; and Leonard Bernstein, who was Executor of Marc Blitzstein's estate and entrusted Yaffé with revisions to Blitzstein's opera *Regina*. Engagements at the Wolf Trap Festival and with symphony orchestras and opera houses in Maryland, Connecticut, Michigan, California followed.



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Soon after, Yaffé moved to Europe. He spent ten years as Répétiteur and Conductor in the German opera houses of Hagen, Münster, Osnabrück, and Stuttgart. In addition, he served as Music Director of the Stuttgarter Operetten-theater and was a guest conductor with the Städtisches Orchester Remscheid, the Südwestdeutsche Philharmonie, the Symphonie-Orchester Graunke of Munich, the Staatsorchester Stuttgart, the Stuttgarter Philharmoniker, and the Alt-Wiener-Strauss-Ensemble. Joseph Leavitt, former Baltimore Symphony Executive Director, then brought Yaffé back to the USA to lead the burgeoning Florida Philharmonic Orchestra as its Resident Conductor. During his tenure, Yaffé conducted over 175 performances to critical acclaim.

Most recently, John Yaffé has served as Series Producer of the *Sounds of the City* concert series at the New-York Historical Society, Interim Music Director of the Delaware Valley Chamber Orchestra (2010-2012), Interim Music Director of New York Lyric Opera (2009-2011), Music Director of the orchestra of New York City's prestigious 92nd Street Y (1996-2009), Encompass New Opera Theatre (1996-2008), as a principal guest conductor at the Mannes College of Music (1996-2006), and as Co-Director of the Orchestral and Chamber Music Program of the Tanglewood Institute.

As a pianist, he has performed widely in recitals with his wife, soprano Juliana Janes-Yaffé, with whom he has recorded German, Italian, and American art song literature for Südwestfunk Baden-Baden. He is the co-author (with David Daniels) of the acclaimed new book "Arias, Ensembles, & Choruses" (Scarecrow Press, 2012).

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Piano Concerto No. 1 (op. 3, no.1)

ROBERT DEGAETANO

Recorded September 20-21, 2012
at Reduta Hall in Olomouc, Czech Republic
Session Producer **Vít Mužík**
Session Engineer **Richard Mlynar**

Piano Concerto No. 1 in E minor (op. 11)

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN

Recorded September 18-19, 2012
at Reduta Hall in Olomouc, Czech Republic
Session Producer **Vít Mužík**
Session Engineer **Zdeněk Slavotínek**

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