

## National Symphony Orchestra Concert November 1, 2019

Grażyna Bacewicz: Concert Overture  
Fryderyk Chopin: Piano Concerto No. 2 in F minor, Op. 21  
Peter Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 4 in F minor, Op. 36

Krzysztof Urbański, guest conductor  
Lise de la Salle, piano

### **Bacewicz: Concert Overture.**

This is the first time I heard this work, and found it wonderful. Lush orchestration (lots of brass) in the neo-classical vein which Bacewicz picked up from her composition teacher, Nadia Boulanger. It's just a short 6+ minutes, but packs a lot of complexity into its short time span. Written in Warsaw in 1943, at the height of the German occupation, it has moments of bright optimism that seem to look forward to a new golden age after the cease of hostilities – which, unfortunately for Poland, did not happen.

### **Chopin: Piano Concerto No. 2,** Lise de la Salle

I have heard this played so many times, and wondered what novelty could French pianist Lise de la Salle bring to this performance. And yet she did. Although the opening movement was not memorable, the Larghetto was done wonderfully, with a wide range of dynamic accents, from exquisite delicacy in the *pianos* to exuberant force in the *fortes*. One of the most memorable performances of this movement that I have ever heard, either live or on record. The third movement was done with pianistic virtuosity, but there was one glitch – the French horn player bobbed the horn call that introduces the final section.

### **Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 4**

This is one of my favorite warhorses of the repertoire, and no recording can match the excitement of a live performance. The brass flourishes are most amazing, and it becomes a visual as well as an aural experience as you watch the various horns, trumpets, trombones and tubas alternate in blaring forth the fanfares. The horn section was enlarged to four (from the concerto's two), and did not include the errant player from that piece. They performed flawlessly. After the exuberance of the first movement, the Andantino provides a restful interlude, and then the Scherzo, played pizzicato by all the strings. That is truly a unique sound in the symphonic canon. The final movement enters with a big bang – no, a HUGE bang from bass drum, cymbals and brass, and proceeds at breakneck speed with lots of percussion, but with some softer delicate sections interspersed. Of particular note is the reprise, late in the movement, of the brassy "Fate" motif that opens the first movement, which neatly ties the whole work together. It ends with a rousing climax with the orchestra at full-bore volume.

Krzysztof Urbański, a native of Poland but making his career in western Europe and the US (Indianapolis Symphony), has a minimalist conducting style – although in full control of the orchestra, his gestures are, for the most part, restrained. He conducted without score throughout, which was especially impressive given the complex orchestration of the Tchaikovsky. Apart from the horn bobble in the Chopin (probably not his fault), he elicited a great performance from the ensemble, especially the large brass section in the symphony. You can hear him on a recording of the Chopin works for piano and orchestra (excluding concertos) with Polish-Canadian pianist Jan Lisiecki for Deutsche Grammophon.