

May 8, 2002: Heard Maurizio Pollini at the Kennedy Center on Wed. 5/8. He was in great form. The centerpiece of the program were all 24 of Chopin's Preludes, Op. 28. Great job, overall – although the center section of “Raindrop” (no. 15, D-flat major) was perhaps not quite stormy enough. But the other major ones – especially no. 20 in C minor (the funereal one) and 24 in D minor (“cannons in flowers” Schumann called it) were tops. The second half consisted of 12 Debussy Preludes, Book 2. I'm not overly fond of Impressionistic music, and 30+ straight minutes of Debussy borders on too much. But Irena liked them a lot.

As a throw-away encore piece, he played Chopin's Ballade No. 1! Now THAT was an experience – perfection equal to the greatest Chopinists of the our time: Rubinstein, Harasiewicz, Ohlsson, and yes, Pollini.

Strange note on the acoustics – in the first half, from Row W left, the sound seemed muddy and lacked definition, as if the hall was dead, the piano mistuned, or he was overpedalling. In the Debussy, who can tell, it's not supposed to have definition anyway. For the Chopin encore, we stood at the back of the hall, and the sound there was super-crisp. Could it be that the recent remodeling of the Concert Hall turned it into a bummer? They're redoing the Opera House at Kennedy Center this fall – I hope they do better.