



Ferdinand
RIES

Piano Concerto, Op. 55
Swedish National Airs with Variations
Introduction and Polonaise

Christopher Hinterhuber, Piano
Gävle Symphony Orchestra • Uwe Grodd



Ferdinand Ries (1784–1838)

Piano Concertos, Volume 2

As one of the greatest pianists in Europe of his time and a composer of exceptional ability, it is surprising that the name Ferdinand Ries is not better known today. Indeed, the neglect of most of his major works is even more inexplicable given his long association with Beethoven. In most other circumstances this would have prompted an exhaustive study of his music but in Ries's case this has not happened. One of the reasons for this may lie in his publication of an important book of reminiscences about Beethoven that has proved to be of such enduring interest that scholarship has concentrated on this rather than his music. Of Ries's own career comparatively little has been written. Over the years there have been sporadic performances and recordings of some of Ries's chamber works and, more recently, of his very impressive symphonies. The concertos, however, have until now remained curiously unexplored.

Ries published nine concertos, the first for violin (which survives only in a later arrangement for piano and violin) and the remaining eight works for the piano. The concertos were numbered sequentially in order of publication and, as a consequence, the numbers themselves are not only misleading since the sequence of piano concertos starts with *Concerto No. 2*, but the publication dates themselves bear little relation to the actual dates of composition. Ries's 'Third' Concerto – the *Concerto in C sharp minor* – is in fact his fifth since it was preceded by the *Violin Concerto* (No. 1), the *C major Concerto* (No. 6), the *Concerto in E flat* (No. 2) and the *C minor Concerto* (No. 4). *Concerto No. 2* was published in 1812 with a dedication to Archduke Rudolph and may have been composed around the time Ries visited Vienna in 1808. Although its composition date is uncertain, the work undoubtedly precedes the *Concerto in C sharp minor*, Op. 55.

Ries's extensive European tour which began in 1809 took him to Russia in 1811 where he remained until the dramatic events of 1812 persuaded him that it might be prudent to leave. His outward journey had been eventful enough. In a memoir published in the *Harmonicon* in

1824 he recalled that his journey to Russia 'was marked by that fatality which seems to have attended him whenever he came into the neighbourhood of belligerents, for the vessel in which he crossed from Sweden, was taken by the English, who detained their prisoners for eight days on a small rock.'

Our knowledge of Ries's activities in Russia is scant. We know that he met up with his old teacher Bernhard Romberg in St Petersburg and in his company travelled to Kiev, Riga, Revel and other towns in all of which he gave highly successful concerts. He was preparing to go to Moscow when, in the words of the *Harmonicon* memoir, 'his old friends, the French, again interfered'.

From letters written to his friend, the Stockholm publisher Ulric Emmanuel Mannerhjerta, it is evident that Ries was keen to become a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Music, an institution which had numbered Haydn among its honorary members. Under the terms of admission, applicants were required to submit a work for full orchestra for consideration by the directors of the Academy. Ries, who was made aware of this condition in September 1812 by Mannerhjerter, was disappointed that his concertos would not be deemed acceptable, a circumstance that suggests that he had no suitable work with him. With Russia in the grip of the French invasion and the prospect of concerts in Moscow gone, Ries may have advanced his plans to visit the Swedish capital and with them his immediate composition plans.

While he was in Russia Ries began work on a new piano concerto. The autograph score of the work, the *Concerto in C sharp minor*, is dated 'Petersburg 1812' but the incomplete state of the manuscript suggests that it was either written in extreme haste, possibly as the composer fled the country, or that its composition was interrupted by other projects. There are several possible contenders, among them the brilliant *Swedish National Airs with Variations*, Op. 52, which had its première on 14th March together with the new concerto, an overture

and the *Sorgmarsch and Finale*. The *Symphony in D, Op. 23*, was performed at Ries's first concert in Stockholm on 4th March 1813 and secured his election as an honorary member of the Swedish Academy of Music.

The autograph deteriorates sharply in quality from early in the second movement where the notation of the solo part becomes more and more sketchy. The left hand is excluded much of the time and a good deal of the right hand part consists of note heads and stems without specified durations. As these passages often involve elaborate ornamentation, Ries's intentions are difficult to unravel. Towards the end of the *Finale*, the autograph breaks off without warning and the orchestral accompaniment only is written into the score in the hand of an unknown copyist. The physical appearance of the autograph suggests that Ries began composing the work in St Petersburg in 1812 – and perhaps even dated the head of the manuscript at this time – and had reached the early part of the second movement around the time that the dramatic events of 1812 forced him to rethink his plans. It is possible that he broke off work entirely at this point and did not return to the concerto until he reached Sweden in the early part of 1813. Given the brevity of his stay there (he remained in Sweden for six weeks) he had little time to complete the work and even less time at his disposal if he were engaged in the composition of other works for his concerts. Circumstances such as these might account for the unusually poor quality of the autograph score.

The *C sharp minor Concerto* is an impressive work. The shadow of Beethoven can be detected at times in Ries's bold handling of the orchestra and, of course, in its general musical structure, but the style of the solo writing is recognizably Ries's own. It is certainly virtuosic – there are numerous bravura passages in the outer movements and complex, florid decorations of the melodic lines in the central *Larghetto* – but more remarkable is the intensely lyrical quality of the writing, the rhythmic subtlety of the accompaniments and the manner in which Ries exploits the colours of the instrument. The work also contains moments of great simplicity. In the central solo section of the first

movement, for example, the piano introduces an exquisite new theme in octaves which is accompanied by tremolo strings. The slow harmonic rhythm and the hesitant piano theme lend the section an eerie, timeless quality as if to allow one a moment's repose before the battle between the soloist and orchestra is rejoined. There is nothing in the Beethoven concertos quite like this and the first review of the work (which was printed in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*) emphasized the dissimilarity between Ries's concerto and Beethoven's *C minor Concerto, Op. 37*.

Nor is there a great deal of Beethoven to be heard in either the *Swedish National Airs with Variations* or the *Introduction and Polonaise*. Perhaps because his career as a public performer ended relatively early in his life, Beethoven did not cultivate these newer, fashionable genres although he did compose many sets of variations for piano solo. The '*Swedish*' *Variations* takes the form of a powerful, rhapsodic introduction followed by a loose series of variations based on three traditional melodies; *Waggavisa* (a cradle song), *Skansk Bond Dans* (a Spanish peasant dance) and *Quarndansen* (the Miller's Dance). The melodies are contrasted in key, tempo and metre and their individual variations also include changes in metre and tempo. The multi-thematic basis of the variations enables Ries to create a fluid and dynamic musical structure which affords him opportunities for both brilliant technical display and extended periods of highly expressive writing for the soloist. The orchestra is used very skilfully, not only in the accompaniment of the solo instrument but more impressively in the tutti sections which link or divide the variations.

The *Introduction and Polonaise, Op. 174*, is a late work, composed in 1833 while Ries was visiting Rome. The autograph score, which is preserved in the Library of Congress in Washington, is headed: '*Rondo Polacca for the Pianoforte with accom. of the Full Orchestra Composed by Ferd. Ries Rom 1833*'. Ries's use of English for the title is interesting given that it was nearly ten years since he had returned from England to live in Germany. It may indicate his intention to publish the work in London although in the event it was issued by

Dunst in Frankfurt who also printed an arrangement for piano duet which has not survived. Unusually for Ries, no further editions of the work appeared, a sign perhaps that his popularity was beginning to wane.

The change of title was presumably sanctioned by the composer himself and it certainly reflects more accurately the structure of the work. The *Introduction*, although not overly long, contains the typically Riesian juxtaposition of rugged grandeur and delicate sensitivity. The link to the *Rondo Polacca* – the original title is retained for the main body of the work – is deftly handled and the gravity of the work's opening is immediately forgotten as the soloist launches into the

sprightly rondo theme. While the work dates from Ries's last years it is not dissimilar stylistically to earlier works like the *Swedish National Airs with Variations* composed some twenty years earlier. Rather than seeing this as evidence of stylistic stagnation on Ries's part, one might argue more generously that it highlights the progressive qualities of his earlier compositions. Moreover, their strong formal and stylistic kinship reveal a composer comfortable with the voice he has created for himself.

Allan Badley

Christopher Hinterhuber

Christopher Hinterhuber was born in Austria and studied with Rudolf Kehrer, Lazar Berman, Avo Kouyoumdjian and Heinz Medjimorec, with further artistic input from Oleg Maisenberg and Vladimir Ashkenazy, among others. He went on to win numerous prizes and honours at the international piano competitions in Leipzig, Saarbrücken, Pretoria, Zurich and Vienna among others, and to play at major concert halls, including the Musikverein and Konzerthaus in Vienna, the Philharmonic in Munich, Suntory Hall, Tokyo, the Gewandhaus in Leipzig, the Rudolfinum in Prague, Palau de la Musica Catalana in Barcelona, and as “Rising Star” 2002/3 in the international series at Carnegie Hall, New York, Athens Concert Hall, Palais des Beaux Arts de Bruxelles, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Wigmore Hall in London, Konserthus Stockholm, Festspielhaus Baden-Baden, Symphony Hall Birmingham, the Salzburg Mozarteum and the Cologne Philharmonie. He is a regular guest at the Ruhr Piano Festival, Styriarte Graz, Schubertiade Schwarzenberg, Mondseetage, Mozartwoche Salzburg, Prague Autumn and many more. In the year 2000 his hands and recordings by Schubert, Schönberg and Rachmaninov were featured in the Austrian-French film *La pianiste* by Michael Haneke, which won the Grand Prix of the Jury at the 2001 Cannes Festival. Christopher Hinterhuber has worked with renowned orchestras and conductors, members of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, the Radio Symphony Orchestra Vienna, the Vienna and Zurich Chamber Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, New Japan Philharmonic, Orchestra Philharmonique de Luxembourg, the MDR Orchestra Leipzig, the Mozarteum Orchestra Salzburg, the Slovenian Philharmonic, the Staatskapelle Weimar, the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra under Vladimir Ashkenazy, and with Bertrand de Billy, Bruno Weil, Howard Griffiths, Peter Oundjian, Dennis Russell Davies, among others. In 2005/6 he served as visiting professor at the University for Music and Performing Arts in Vienna.

Gävle Symphony Orchestra

The Gävle Symphony Orchestra is one of the oldest in Sweden, dating back to 1912. The first artistic director of this 25-man orchestra was the composer Ruben Liljefors. It has grown to 52 full-time members during the past ninety or so years. The orchestra is based in the provincial capital of Gävle, but tours regularly both in its home province and elsewhere in Sweden. The Gävle Symphony Orchestra has also toured in The Netherlands, Finland, Norway and the former Yugoslavia. There was a unique collaboration with the symphony orchestra in Dubrovnik during the 1990s when the two orchestras performed Benjamin Britten’s *War Requiem* in support of the suffering people in war-torn Croatia. Since its inception, the Gävle Symphony Orchestra has had a succession of distinguished conductors as Artistic Directors including Stig Westerberg, Rainer Miedel, Göran W. Nilson, Hannu Koivula, Carlos Spierer and Petri Sakari. The orchestra’s current Artistic Director and Principal Conductor is Robin Ticciati, who took up his appointment in January 2006. The Gävle Concert Hall was dedicated in January 1998, marking the completion of a project first proposed in the 1930s. The custom-built hall has allowed the orchestra to record more in-house CDs than were possible previously. In addition to the music of Franz Berwald, the orchestra has recorded works by composers such as Bo Linde, Wilhelm Stenhammar, Hugo Alfvén, Edvard Grieg, Dmitry Shostakovich, Carl Nielsen and Sven-David Sandström.

Uwe Grodd

Uwe Grodd, German conductor and flautist, based in New Zealand, has performed and recorded internationally for over 25 years. He has won considerable success with his recordings and performances of works for piano and orchestra by Ferdinand Ries. A Naxos Recording Artist, he won First Prize, in 2000, for the 'Best 18th Century Orchestral Recording' at the Cannes Classical Awards with his CD of Symphonies by J. B. Vaňhal with the Nicolaus Esterhazy Sinfonia from Hungary (Naxos 8.554341). This was immediately followed by a recording with the Capella Istropolitana from Slovakia with symphonies by Ignaz Pleyel (Naxos 8.554696). In 2002 the CD was one of three finalists in the category 'Best 18th and 19th Century Orchestral Recording' at Cannes. His world première recording of the *Missa Solemnis* by J. N. Hummel (Naxos 8.557193), with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra and Tower Voices New Zealand, was voted 'Editor's Choice' by *The Gramophone* magazine in May 2004. Other recordings include symphonies by Cannabich and Dittersdorf, two Masses by Vaňhal and, as a flautist, flute sonatas by Kuhlau (Naxos 8.555346) and the Vaňhal Flute Quartets (Naxos 8.570234). In 1993 Uwe Grodd was appointed Musical Director of the Manukau City Symphony Orchestra and from 1998 until 2002 he was Artistic Director of the International Music Festival New Zealand. An avid supporter of contemporary music of all genres, he has given many first performances including the première season of the multi-media opera *Galileo*, with music by John Rimmer and libretto by Witi Ihimaera. Uwe Grodd is Associate Professor in Conducting and Flute at the University of Auckland. As a graduate of Mainz University, Germany, he studied with teachers of international repute, including André Jaunet, Manfred Schreier, Robert Aitken and Sergio Celibidache.

The orchestral parts and scores of the following works are available from:

www.artaria.com

Sources

The sources upon which the editions used in this recording have been made are:

Piano Concerto in C# minor, Op. 55

Edited by Allan Badley - Artaria Editions AE416

Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin -
Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Musikabteilung mit Mendelssohn-Archiv:

mus. ms. autogr., F Ries, 78N

Vienna, Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien
(Simrock edition, 1815)

Swedish National Airs with Variations, Op. 52

Edited by Allan Badley - Artaria Editions AE445

Stockholm, Statens musikbibliotek
(Chapell Edition, 1814)

Introduction and Polonaise, Op. 174

Edited by Allan Badley - Artaria Editions AE446

München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek
(Dunst Edition)



As one of the greatest pianists in Europe of his time and a composer of exceptional ability, it is surprising that the name Ferdinand Ries is not better known today. His eight piano concertos stand alongside those of Hummel as the most important works of their kind from the early 19th century. Intensely lyrical and yet displaying at times a rugged Beethovenian power, Ries's concertos are works of impressive musical stature. The *Piano Concerto in C sharp minor*, composed in Russia in 1812, is a striking work full of spirit and boundless invention. Its companion pieces are no less remarkable in their brilliant juxtapositions of dazzling virtuoso display and passages of exceptional lyrical beauty.



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Piano Concertos, Volume 2

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|---|---|-------|
| 1 | Swedish National Airs with Variations, Op. 52 | 15:01 |
| 2 | Introduction and Polonaise, Op. 174 | 15:03 |
| | Piano Concerto in C sharp minor, Op. 55 | 30:23 |
| 3 | Allegro maestoso | 14:38 |
| 4 | Larghetto | 4:51 |
| 5 | Rondo: Allegretto | 10:54 |

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Playing Time
60:27



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