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*to Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger and Jim Samson
with thanks*

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Preface

Chopin's piano concertos have enjoyed enormous popularity ever since their composition in 1829–30, but they have also suffered some of the harshest scholarly criticism inflicted on his works. Intended to launch his career as a composer-pianist, the concertos have typically been regarded in the literature as juvenilia inferior to his mature masterpieces. Nevertheless, when viewed as music to be performed rather than scores to be dissected on paper, they belong to his most successful creations, capable of evoking profound emotion in listener and pianist alike, and representative of an altogether unique, innovative pianism to be fully exploited in the composer's later music.

This handbook attempts to set the record straight, re-evaluating the concertos against the early nineteenth-century traditions that shaped them so that their many outstanding qualities can be better appreciated. After establishing such a background in Chapter 1, I describe the genesis of the two concertos, trace the history of Chopin's first and subsequent performances, and discuss his use of the concertos as teaching pieces in Chapter 2. An extended investigation of the critical, editorial and interpretative reception of the two works follows in Chapter 3, highlighting the contrast between initial reactions and the censure of later writers.

The fourth chapter presents an analysis based on performance-related criteria. For each movement a formal outline is provided, but the principal analytical focus is on the music's temporal shaping and the role of 'musical gesture' in creating the powerful effect alluded to above. In a sense this study provides a rationale for the most commonly criticised elements of the two pieces – which work well in performance, however idiosyncratic they appear in the score. My aim throughout is to redress the anachronistic and tendentious criticisms of past authors, as it were justifying through late twentieth-century analytical description the

Preface

enthusiastic reception of the two works in the first half of the nineteenth century. This same rehabilitation is attempted in the final chapter on the *Allegro de concert* Op. 46, Chopin's enigmatic 'third concerto'.

A few practical comments will assist readers. Sources cited more than once are referred to by short title in the notes; the select bibliography provides full details in such cases. References to the concertos before publication are distinguished by key, whereas opus numbers designate the published works. (As the concertos appeared in reverse chronological order, 'No. 1' and 'No. 2' are avoided to prevent confusion.) Careted numerals represent scale degrees; lower-case Roman numerals denote minor harmonies, upper-case major ones. Pitch classes are indicated by capital letters, whereas the Helmholtz system specifies pitch register when necessary. Readers are advised to consult Jan Ekier's edition of Op. 21 issued by Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne in the Polskie Wydanie Narodowe (Polish National Edition), and Ewald Zimmermann's of Op. 11 published by Henle Verlag. Neither is without problems, nor are they true Urtexts, but at present they are the best available. The forthcoming volume of the concertos in *The Complete Chopin – A New Critical Edition*, published by Peters Edition London, will soon provide an alternative to both.

This book has benefited enormously from the assistance of Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger and Jim Samson, whose outstanding research and generosity of spirit have proved invaluable to me throughout this project and in other pursuits. I should also like to thank David Charlton, Ruth Darton, Katharine Ellis, Christophe Grabowski, Jeffrey Kallberg, Michał Kubicki, Antonina Machowska, Jürgen Neubacher, Stephen O'Hanlon, Lucy Passmore and Hanna Wróblewska-Straus. Finally, I am grateful to the Music Department, Royal Holloway, University of London for financial support, and to Julian Rushton, Penny Souster and the production team at Cambridge University Press for their patience and wisdom.