

Ferdinand
RIES

Piano Concertos

Op. 123 (1806) and Op. 151 (1826)

Christopher Hinterhuber, Piano

New Zealand Symphony Orchestra • Uwe Grodd



Ferdinand Ries (1784–1838)

Piano Concertos, Volume 1: Opp. 123 and 151

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 which has proved to be of such compelling interest to scholars that they have concentrated on it rather than his music. Of his 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. This recording is the first in a projected series of Ries's complete works for piano and orchestra.

Ries's connections with Beethoven began in Bonn where his father Franz, a professional violinist and pianist, taught Beethoven. Ries, too, studied with his father and also received cello lessons from Bernhard Romberg for whom Beethoven later wrote his *Op. 5 Cello Sonatas*. When the electoral court was dissolved in 1794 Ries found himself without the prospect of a secure position and for the next seven years remained at home studying with his father. In 1801 he moved to Munich where he eked out a fairly precarious existence as a copyist while taking lessons with Peter von Winter. In October he left for Vienna where Beethoven, now well-established as a pianist and composer, agreed to take him on as a pupil.

During Ries's three years of study with Beethoven

he acted frequently as his secretary and copyist which, of course, lent great credibility to his later writings. Beethoven did not teach Ries composition – for that he went to Albrechtsberger, Kapellmeister at St Stephen's Cathedral – but his influence on Ries's development as a composer nonetheless was profound. Beethoven also smoothed his introduction into Viennese musical circles first by securing for him a position as pianist to Count Browne in Baden, one of Beethoven's own patrons, and in organizing his début (as Beethoven's pupil) on 1st August 1804 at which he gave a performance of the *C minor Piano Concerto, Op. 37*, with cadenzas of his own composition. With the risk of conscription into the French Army looming, Ries returned to Bonn via Prague, Dresden and Leipzig and later travelled on to Paris having being turned down as unfit for military service. He languished in Paris for two years before returning to Vienna in August 1808 where he stayed for just under a year.

Ries's career seems to have finally taken off in 1809 and during the next four years he toured extensively throughout Europe. He was appointed a member of the Swedish Royal Academy of Music in 1813 and the following year published an impressive set of variations for piano and orchestra based on Swedish national airs. The next eleven years of Ries's life were spent in London where he enjoyed a successful career as a celebrated virtuoso, teacher and composer. His father's former teacher, Johann Peter Salomon, who will forever be remembered as the impresario who brought Haydn to London, introduced Ries to the Philharmonic Concerts where he appeared for the first time on 14th March 1814. Ries's success in London was by no means assured as he was only one of several great virtuosos

based there. Nonetheless, his playing was clearly of a very high order and impressed not only the public but also his fellow professionals. Camille Pleyel, son of the composer and publisher Ignaz Pleyel and himself an outstandingly gifted musician, wrote in a letter to his parents concerning his recent experiences in London:

'Yesterday [17th April 1815] I heard Ries at the same Philharmonic. He played a new quintet of his own composition. In the first part there are some delightful things. I like Ries's playing very much. It is mellow and yet often energetic. Ries played on an excellent Broadwood instrument and although the hall is quite large, I could hear every note of the piaNo.'

Pleyel modified his opinion slightly in a letter written the following month observing that *'as a pianist he [Ries] plays very difficult things but he lacks the clarity of Kalkbrenner and the style of Cramer.'*

During the next ten years Ries featured in the Philharmonic Concerts on a regular basis and gave premières of a number of major works including concertos and works for piano and orchestra. Some of these works have a very strong English association, none more so than the *Grand Variations on the National Air of 'Rule Britannia, Op. 116*, composed at Hastings in 1817.

In 1824 Ries decided to retire and return to his native Rhineland. As a farewell gesture he performed a brilliant new concerto, composed the previous year, which was published in 1824 as *Op. 132* with the title *Abschieds-Concert von England*. Ries, who had married Harriet Mangan in 1814, 'an English lady of great merit and possessing many personal charms', was a popular figure in the London musical scene and in a *Memoir of Ferdinand Ries* printed in the *Harmonicon* around the

time of his departure, it was observed that:

'Mr Ries is justly celebrated as one of the finest piano-performers of the present day. His hand is powerful, and his execution is certain, - often surprising. But his playing is most distinguished from that of all others by its romantic wildness He produces an effect upon those who enter his style, which can only be compared to that arising from the most unexpected combinations and transitions of the Aeolian harp.'

On his return to Germany Ries lived initially in Bad Godesberg, near Bonn, before moving to Frankfurt three years later. Although nominally retired, he took an active part in the Lower Rhine Music Festivals and his works formed a major part of their repertory during the 1830s. He was also appointed head of the town orchestra and the Singakademie of Aachen in 1834. During these last years he collaborated with Fritz Wegeler in the seminal *Biographische Notizen über Ludwig van Beethoven* published in the year of his death.

Ries published nine concertos, the first for violin and the remaining eight works for the piaNo. The works were numbered sequentially in their order of publication which creates some confusion. For example, *Concerto No. 6 in C for the Pianoforte*, published in 1824, is the fifth published piano concerto but one of the earliest – and possibly the earliest – in the series to be composed: the autograph is dated Bonn 1806.

The two works featured on this recording were composed twenty years apart and thus provide a convenient overview of Ries's development as an artist. The *C major Concerto* was composed not long after Ries completed his studies with Beethoven. The same year he wrote a *Piano Sonata in C* which, together with a *Piano Sonata in A minor*, composed two years earlier,

in 1804, he published as his *Op. 1* with a dedication to Beethoven. The *C major Sonata* represents a considerable advance over the earlier work and opens with a theme that has some similarities to that of the first movement of the concerto. Unsurprisingly, the imprint of Beethoven can be heard very strongly in both works with echoes of the *Piano Concerto in C major, Op. 15*, and the *C minor Concerto* which Ries clearly knew well. Nonetheless, the work is very different in some respects none more so than in the quality of the piano writing, which suggests Hummel rather than Beethoven in much of its detail. Ries's handling of large-scale musical structures is confident and although he does not develop thematic material with the rigorous concentration of his teacher, he invests the music with great interest and variety through sensitive reworkings, the frequent introduction of new melodic material and the virtuoso's flair for brilliant decoration. The lovely slow movement has a Mozartian poise and the striking opening with wind alone is a nice touch. The finale opens rather surprisingly with a cadenza before launching off into a cheerful, energetic *Rondo* that owes a good deal to the finale of Beethoven's *First Concerto*.

The *Piano Concerto in A flat, Op. 151*, was composed at Bad Godesberg in 1826 two years after his return from London. Ries subtitled the work *Gruss an den Rhein*, an affectionate tribute to the area in which he grew up, and the broad, gentle sweep of the first movement is clearly intended to depict the River Rhine. Although the movement is still organized along the same structural lines as Beethoven's concertos it inhabits a very different emotional world. The piano writing too is very different, looking forward to that of Chopin rather than back to Beethoven's great middle period masterpieces. The mood of serenity persists in the exquisite *Larghetto*, a movement that possesses an almost Beethovenian sense of gravitas, but it is dispelled at once by the ferocious opening to the finale. As in the earlier work, Ries prefaces a brilliant and ingenious *Rondo* with a dazzling cadenza introduced by the full orchestra. The movement demands not only a high degree of virtuosity and showmanship from the soloist but also an intelligent musicality to bring out all the subtleties and beauties of Ries's writing for the instrument.

Allan Badley

Christopher Hinterhuber

Christopher Hinterhuber was born in Austria and studied with Axel Papenberg, Rudolf Kehrler and Heinz Medjimorec at the University for Music and Performing Arts in Vienna and Lazar Berman at the Accademia Pianistica in Imola. His numerous prizes and awards in international competitions include top prizes at the J. S. Bach Competition in Leipzig, the J. S. Bach Competition in Saarbrücken, the Pretoria Unisa International Piano Competition in South Africa, the Schumann Prize in the Geza Anda Competition in Zurich and the Beethoven Competition in Vienna. In 2002/2003 he performed as “Rising Star” in the international series at the Carnegie Hall, New York, the Athens Concert Hall, Palais des Beaux Arts in Brussels, the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, Wigmore Hall, London, Konserthus Stockholm, the Festspielhaus Baden-Baden, Symphony Hall Birmingham, the Vienna Musikverein, Mozarteum Salzburg, and the Philharmonie in Cologne. Christopher Hinterhuber has appeared as a soloist with distinguished conductors, including Vladimir Ashkenazy, Yakov Kreizberg, Bruno Weil, Howard Griffiths and Dennis Russell-Davies and has given many recitals and chamber music performances in most European countries, New Zealand, the Americas, China and Japan.

www.christopherhinterhuber.com

New Zealand Symphony Orchestra

Once described as a well-kept secret, the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra has over the past few years won international acclaim, not least through its recordings. Within New Zealand it is recognised as the country's leading performing arts organisation. The orchestra gave its first public performance in March 1947, and its first and current Music Director, James Judd, was appointed in 1999. The orchestra numbers ninety players and gives over a hundred performances each year. These include seasons of major symphonic repertoire in seven centres and a wide range of special programmes. It is involved in education programmes, performs family and schools concerts, accompanies opera and ballet productions and records for television, film, including *The Lord of the Rings*, and radio. It commissions and performs New Zealand music and has a long recording history, which has seen it move into the world market and win international awards. The orchestra also administers the NZSO National Youth Orchestra. Tours abroad include appearances at the Seville 1992 Expo, the Sydney Olympic Arts Festival in 2000 and the 2003 Asia Orchestra week in Osaka, as well as a 2005 appearance at the BBC Proms in London, at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam and at the World Expo in Aichi. Among the distinguished musicians who have performed with the orchestra are Igor Stravinsky, William Walton, Vladimir Ashkenazy, James Galway, Yehudi Menuhin, Joan Sutherland, David Oistrakh, Antal Dorati, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Mstislav Rostropovich, Nigel Kennedy, Neville Marriner, André Gavrilov, Eduardo Mata, Andrew Litton, Peter Donohoe, Barry Douglas, Yan Pascal Tortelier, Alexander Lazarev, János Füst, Matthias Bamert, Pascal Rogé, Vadim Repin, Kiri Te Kanawa, Malvina Major, Michael Houstoun, William Southgate, Hilary Hahn, Lang Lang and Jonathan Lemalu.

Uwe Grodd

The flautist and conductor Uwe Grodd has performed and recorded internationally since 1978 and is based in New Zealand. In his native Germany he studied the flute with Werner Peschke and conducting with Manfred Schreier. After graduating from Mainz University the major influences on his career came from the guidance of two of Europe's finest musicians, Sergiu Celibidache and the flautist/composer Robert Aitken. Success in international master classes and competitions, including those in Lugano and Zlin, was followed by a prestigious scholarship for further studies at the Banff Centre, Canada. Uwe Grodd has performed as soloist with most orchestras in New Zealand and toured extensively around the country with several chamber music ensembles as well as throughout North America and Europe. He is currently Associate Professor of Flute and Conducting at the University of Auckland School of Music, and has been Conductor and Musical Director of the Auckland University Orchestra since 1989. He was Artistic Director of the International Music Festival of New Zealand from 1998 to 2002, and, since 1993, has been Musical Director of the Manukau City Symphony Orchestra. He is the founder and Artistic Director of Flute Fest New Zealand. In 2003 he conducted the opening gala concert of the Halle Handel Festival, followed by a successful run of the newly rediscovered Handel opera *Imeneo*. More recently he has given series of concerts with the Thüringen and Mexico Philharmonic Orchestras, and conducted the televised final concerts for the 53rd and 54th Handel Festivals at Halle. Uwe Grodd records for Naxos and in 2000 won the 'Best 18th Century Orchestral Recording' category at the prestigious Cannes Classical Awards for his recording of symphonies by J.B.Vanhal (Naxos 8.554341) with the Nicolaus Esterhazy Sinfonia. This was followed up by a recording of the symphonies of Ignaz Pleyel (Naxos 8.554696) with the Capella Istropolitana, one of three finalists for the category of 'Best 18th and 19th Century Recording'. Other Naxos recordings by Uwe Grodd include releases of symphonies by Cannabich and Dittersdorf, the world première recording of Hummel's *Missa Solemnis* (Naxos 8.557193) and, as a flautist, of flute sonatas by Kuhlau (Naxos 8.555346).

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

ARTARIA EDITIONS LTD
PO Box 9836 Te Aro
Wellington
NEW ZEALAND
<http://www.artaria.com>

Sources

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

**Piano Concerto in A flat major, Op.151,
'Gruss an den Rhein'**

Edited by Allan Badley - Artaria Editions AE417
Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin -
Preußischer Kulturbesitz
Musikabteilung mit Mendelssohn-Archiv:
mus. ms. autogr., F Ries, 83N

Piano Concerto in C major, Op.123

Edited by Allan Badley - Artaria Editions AE420
Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin -
Preußischer Kulturbesitz
Musikabteilung mit Mendelssohn-Archiv:
mus. ms. autogr., F Ries, 81N





8.557638

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Playing Time
60:57© & © 2005 Naxos Rights International Ltd.
Booklet notes in English
Made in Canada
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NAXOS

RIES: Piano Concertos, Volume 1

8.557638

The eight piano concertos of Beethoven's friend and pupil Ferdinand Ries 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. This world première recording features the *Concerto in C major* composed in 1806 shortly after Ries completed his studies in Vienna with Beethoven, and the majestic *Concerto in A flat 'Gruss an den Rhein'*, written twenty years later on his return to the Rhineland, which looks forward to the piano writing of Chopin.



Ferdinand
RIES
(1784–1838)

WORLD PREMIERE
RECORDINGS

Piano Concertos, Volume 1

Piano Concerto in A flat major, Op. 151 (1826) **29:01**
'Gruss an den Rhein'

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|--------------|
| 1 | Allegro con moto | 12:43 |
| 2 | Larghetto con moto | 5:01 |
| 3 | Rondo: Allegro molto | 11:17 |

Piano Concerto in C major, Op. 123 (1806) **31:56**

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|--------------|
| 4 | Allegro con spirito | 15:04 |
| 5 | Larghetto quasi andante | 6:32 |
| 6 | Rondo: Allegro vivace | 10:20 |

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THE SCOTTWOOD SERIES

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Engineer: Paul McGlashan • Booklet Notes: Allan Badley • Publisher: Artaria Editions • Cover Picture: *Near the Aumühle, c. 1830* by Adolf Vollmer (1806-75)
(Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, Germany / Bridgeman Art Library)

NAXOS

RIES: Piano Concertos, Volume 1

8.557638