Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847):  
*Piano Concerto No.1 in G Minor, Opus 25*

Mendelssohn was born a year before Schumann and Chopin; but the path of his life was far too smooth for a romantic biography. He was one of the few celebrated composers who did not have to struggle for a living. His grandfather was a philosopher, but his father was a banker; and it was the banker who made Mendelssohn’s life easy. The piercing intellectual eyes, familiar in Mendelssohn’s portraits, were inherited from the philosopher, and from the banker he acquired the quiet and assured manner of life.

Mendelssohn was born in 1809 in Hamburg and died in 1847 in Leipzig. One scarcely realizes that his life span was only three years longer than that of Mozart. As a youth, this composer had every educational advantage that a city like Berlin could offer. His instruction in music was superlative: he mastered the piano sufficiently to appear in public at the age of nine; he was an accomplished violinist; his early compositions furnished a large part of the musical evening programs at the Mendelssohn home. At the age of seventeen, young Felix composed the Overture to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1826). Between 1827 and 1835, Mendelssohn’s activity took him from city to city on the Continent and in England. In 1829 he conducted the first performance, after Bach’s death, of the great *St. Matthew Passion*. In 1835, Mendelssohn became the conductor of the Gewandhaus Orchestra in Leipzig, and eight years after that he helped to found the Leipzig Conservatory. When Mendelssohn died in 1847, Germany mourned “as if a king had died.” After elaborate services in Leipzig, a special train carried the body to Berlin, stopping all through the night at different towns where sad little groups, singing by torch light, bade farewell to a loved musician.

The 16 manuscript volumes of the Mendelssohn legacy preserved in Berlin include two mature piano concertos, one youthful concerto for piano and strings, two concert pieces for piano and orchestra and two additional concertos for two pianos and orchestra. The best known, and most performed of these is Mendelssohn’s *Concerto No.1 in G Minor, Opus 25*. 
“A thing rapidly thrown off” is how Mendelssohn described this work, which he composed in 1831 at the age of twenty-two. Mendelssohn himself played the solo part at the première in Munich on October 17, 1831. After a performance the following May, with the London Philharmonic, Mendelssohn wrote his father: “I think I never in my life had such a success. The audience went wild with delight and declared it my best work.” Ferdinand Hiller, himself a virtuoso pianist and fine composer, explained that the appeal of this work (and other piano compositions by Mendelssohn) was the flawless piano writing. “Mendelssohn’s playing was to him what flying is to a bird. No one wonders why a lark flies.... In the same way Mendelssohn played the piano because it was his nature. He possessed great skill, certainty, power and rapidity of execution... but these qualities were forgotten while he was playing, and one almost overlooked even those more spiritual gifts which we call fire, invention, soul.... When he sat down at the instrument, music streamed from him with all the fullness of his inborn genius.”

The Concerto No.1 in G Minor is in three movements. The first, marked Molto allegro con fuoco, is developed from two themes: one, stormy and dramatic; the second, more tranquil and lyrical. The second movement (Andante) is a graceful romance, with a beautiful even-flowing melody. A vigorous Presto introduction announces the finale (Molto allegro e vivace) which bursts forth in a dazzling display of pianistic virtuosity.
Henry Charles Litolff (1818-1891):
Scherzo, from Concerto Symphonique No.4 in D Minor, Opus 102

Henry Charles Litolff was born August 7, 1818 in London. His father was an Alsatian dance violinist and his mother was from Scotland. His father was his first music teacher. Family financial problems forced the youngster to become a laborer at the Bond Street piano factory of Collard & Collard. Litolff demonstrated pianos and was so impressive that he came to the attention of the venerable composer and piano teacher, Ignaz Moscheles. Litolff studied with Moscheles until 1835 when he eloped with 16-year-old Elisabeth Etherington. At this time, Litolff began a career of the wandering virtuoso, performing, teaching and conducting in cities throughout Europe. His first marriage fell apart by 1841. By 1844 he was residing with the Bülow family in Germany. Hans von Bülow was his student at this time. After a successful concert tour of Berlin, Litolff returned to England where he was hoping to divorce his wife. He failed in the attempt, and instead incurred a severe fine and a prison sentence. Astonishingly enough, he managed to escape (with the assistance of the jailer’s daughter) to Holland. In 1846 Litolff was in Brunswick where he met the music publisher Gottfried Meyer and his wife Julie. When Meyer died in 1849, Litolff became a citizen of Brunswick. He finally succeeded in his efforts to free himself from his first wife and in 1851 married Julie Meyer. This marriage resulted in Litolff gaining control of the music publishing firm, which he renamed Henry Litolff’s Verlag. During his years in Brunswick, Litolff greatly enhanced the musical life in that city by organizing festivals and inviting some of the great musicians of the day to participate. Anton Rubinstein, Franz Liszt, Hans von Bülow and Hector Berlioz were among the artists who performed there.

In 1858 Litolff divorced his second wife and settled in Paris. He quickly moved to his third marriage in 1860, this time to the daughter of a count. She died in 1873. Litolff’s own health was poor at the time. He was nursed to health by a 17-year-old girl, whom he married in apparent gratitude. Litolff was on his fourth marriage and fifty-eight. The final decade of his life was spent in semi-retirement, occasionally conducting, teaching, and composing. He died, after a blazing and flamboyant career, in relative obscurity in Bois-Colombes on August 5, 1891.

Litolff who was characterized as “one of the most picturesque musical figures of the 19th century” is, a century later, remembered singularly for the Scherzo recorded here. Although he composed 117 piano pieces, 19 songs, 12 stage works, 4 choral pieces, works for violin
and orchestra, five piano concertos, and four overtures, only one composition seems to have survived the test of time. Occasionally, one encounters his Maximilian Robespierre Overture, Opus 55, and through the medium of recordings several of his piano concertos have now been recorded in their entirety. However, no discographic re-assessment of Litolff’s musical contributions has yet taken place.

Biographer Ted M. Blair, asserts that Litolff’s piano concertos are his finest compositions. There are five works in all. The first concerto is unfortunately lost. In his concertos symphoniques Litolff created, in essence, symphonies with virtuosic piano obbligato. The thematic material was generally accorded to the orchestra and the brilliant piano writing was used as a textural device. In particular, the scherzos of each of the concertos show vibrant melodic invention and brilliant passage writing. It is widely believed that Litolff was the first composer to use the triangle and the piccolo in a piano concerto. It is perhaps because of this that Franz Liszt dedicated his Concerto No.1 in E flat Major to Litolff. The celebrated Scherzo, from the Concerto Symphonique No.4 in D Minor, Opus 102 has elfin-like qualities (perhaps Mendelssohn’s shadow was looming somewhere).
Manuel de Falla completed his most famous orchestral work, *Noches en los Jardines de España* (“Nights in the Gardens of Spain”) in 1916. He attached no specific program, but the title of the three movements suggest the Spanish pictures that he sought to evoke. The first movement is called “In the Gardens of the Generalife”; the second, “A Dance Is Heard in the Distance;” the third, “In the Gardens of the Sierra de Cordoba.” “If these ‘symphonic impressions’ have achieved their object,” Falla has written, “the mere enumeration of their titles should be a sufficient guide to the hearer. Although... the composer has followed a definite design, regarding tonal, rhythmical, and thematic material... the end for which it was written is no other than to evoke [images of] places, sensations, and sentiments. The themes employed are based upon the rhythms, modes, cadences, and ornamental figures which distinguish the popular music of Andalusia, though they are rarely used in their original forms; and the orchestration frequently employs certain effects peculiar to the popular instruments used in those parts of Spain. The music has no pretensions to being descriptive; it is merely expressive. But something more than the sounds of festivals and dances have inspired these ‘evocations in sound,’ for melancholy and mystery have their part also.”

This is one of the most deeply poetic of Falla’s works, tone-painting in the most delicate colors. It is, as Joaquin Turina remarks, “really wonderful evocation, although in a sense the most tragic and sorrowful of his works. In the peculiar flavor of the orchestral sonority, one can discern a feeling of bitterness, as if the composer strived to express an intimate and passionate drama.” Jean-Aubry finds that here “Falla is much more than a painter of Spain; he is an invoker of Spanish emotion, often the most hidden, the most reserved. Nothing is less brilliant than these nocturnes; but nothing is more strongly colored by the play of lights and shadows skilfully contrived. The force and the simplicity of the effects are remarkable.”

The first performance of *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* was given in Madrid where Enrique Fernandez Arbos, who had commissioned the work, conducted the Orquesta Sinfonica at the Teatro Real, on April 9, 1916. The soloist was the young pianist from Cadiz, Jose Cubiles. Shortly after this first performance, *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* was heard in San Sebastian on a concert program presented by the Orquesta Sinfonica directed by Arbos. The pianist was Ricardo Viñes, Falla’s dear friend, to whom the composition was dedicated. Another great pianist, Artur Rubinstein, was in the audience. Rubinstein was to play the *Nights* at the Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires during his first musical visit to that
city, and eventually became a life-long champion of the work.

Paris had to wait until January, 1920, to hear *Nights* as played by Joaquin Nin, once again under the baton of Arbos. In London a year later, Falla scored a triumph for his *Nights*, playing it himself at the Queen’s Hall on a program of modern music directed by Edward Clark. Max Eschig published the score in 1922.

Unlike many of his works, *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* has no definite program. Although the movements have definite titles, the course of the music proceeds on a free plan and has no connection with definite pictorial images. *En el Generalife* (In the Generalife) refers to the *jannat al-‘arif*, “the garden of the architect” (or the musician) — on a hillside overlooking the Alhambra, the most beautiful place in the whole of Granada. Suzanne Demarquez asks: “In what garden is the *Danza lejana* (A distant dance) performed? It consists of fragments of dances, shreds of melodies, harmonies, punctuated by guitars and tambourines, that suddenly burst forth and then are gone almost as quickly. It is music carried on the breeze of a balmy night.” Manuel de Falla writes: “The second and third nocturnes are joined without interruption by means of a bridge in which, beneath a tremolo on the violins in the highest register, are sprinkled, like distant echoes, the notes which begin the fundamental theme of the ‘Distant Dance.’ The bridge ends with an ascending passage for the piano, in octaves, which is resolved in a *tutti* with which the third and last nocturne begins.”
En los jardines de la Sierra de Cordoba (In the gardens of the Sierra de Cordoba). We have suddenly been transported to one of those large villas on the hill-side above Cordoba. It is evening when a party is in progress, with a zambra of gypsy musicians: players, singers and dancers, while somewhere under the trees is a long trestle table with a row of dama-juanás (demi-johns) holding two or three firkins of manzanilla apiece. The music and dancing continues till morning, until the feet and limbs of the dancers begin to tire and the fingers and wrists of the guitar players lose their rhythm. It has been a wild night, orgiastic, un-European; and yet the composer has so arranged things that we have it all clearly before us, and our dreams do not outstay their vividness.
Franz Liszt (1811-1886): *Piano Concerto No.2 in A Major* (S125/R456)

In one of his critical essays, Franz Liszt wrote: “The title *Concerto* has always been applied exclusively to pieces intended for public performance and, for this very reason, exacts certain conditions of effect.” A concerto, he continued, should be “clear in sense, brilliant in expression and grand in style.” This is certainly true of his *Concerto No.2 in A Major*. Begun in 1839, it was completed ten years later but revised several times in the ensuing years before its publication in 1863. Liszt called this opus a “symphonic concerto” when he gave its first performance at the Grand Ducal Theatre, Weimar in 1857.

The concerto which is cast in one continuous movement, however, falls into a number of sections in which the main themes constantly reappear in different guises. In essence, this concerto is improvisatory and rhapsodic, something that is evident when one hears the opening clarinet tune, which is by turns mournful, sentimental and martial. Despite the fact that the work as a whole feels like a tone poem, Liszt did not overlook any resource of keyboard virtuosity and as a result provided us with a very effective pianistic showstopper. The concerto is replete with sparkling runs, cadenzas, hurling octave passages, glissandi, thundering chords, whispered sentimentality, affecting harmonies — all of which effortlessly move the composition along. One annotator has stated that Liszt “transforms” his themes rather than developing them in the orthodox way. This is very true in this concerto. Liszt imparts a certain unity to this work by making the same characters appear throughout the play (if one can borrow the terminology from literature) instead of, as in most other concertos, employing new characters in each act. He achieves, as a result, a greater homogeneity and completeness of the music, attained by the metamorphosis of themes and kindred devices. Without a doubt, the *Concerto No.2 in A Major* is a masterpiece, inwardly conceived and lyrical, yet lacking none of the brilliance one would expect for Franz Liszt.

Program Notes by Marina and Victor Ledin, ©1999, Encore Consultants
Dame Moura Lympan

Born in Saltash, Cornwall on August 18, 1916, Mary Gertrude Johnstone came into the world two weeks early as her astrological sign might imply, like a lion. While still a schoolgirl (with two long braids of hair) her name was changed to the more recognizable Moura Lympan, for theatrical effect (as suggested by the well known conductor, Basil Cameron). As a child she revealed remarkable musical gifts. At six, already fluent in French, she was sent to school in Belgium where she attended the Convent des Soeurs de Marie at Tongres in the Province of Limbourg. The years that followed were golden for the curly-haired Moura Lympany, as noted in her autobiography. “I loved practising the piano, it is thanks to the nuns that I got on so well with my music. They realized I had an uncommon gift and did everything to help me. For instance, every evening from five to seven o’clock was study time for the girls, but I was allowed to practise instead. At these times I would take the other girls’ sheet music from the shelf where it was kept, and sight-read everything I could get a hold of.”

In 1929 she auditioned for a scholarship in order to enter England’s Royal Academy of Music. Three years later she won the Challen Gold Medal for the best student of the year and the Hine Prize for composition. That same year she embarked on a concert career with a performance of the Mendelssohn G minor Piano Concerto conducted by Basil Cameron.

At fifteen Ms. Lympany decided to continue her studies, first with Paul Weingarten (1886-1948) in Vienna and then with Mathilde Verne (1868-1936). Ms. Verne studied with none other than the great piano pedagogue, Clara Schumann. Ms. Verne was therefore able to impart a directly distilled “Schumann tradition” to her students.

Tobias Matthay (1858-1945) himself a product of the Royal Academy of Music studied piano under George Macfarren and composition with William Sterndale Bennett and Arthur Sullivan. As noted in Grove’s “he founded his own school as a means of propagating his theories of piano technique and his method of teaching based on them. Those theories were expounded in The Act of Touch (1903), a pioneering work in which he attempted a full-scale analysis of the physical aspects of piano playing, categorizing the various vertical movements into touch-species and laying great stress on muscular relaxation and forearm rotation.” His students include such piano luminaries as: Dame Myra Hess, York Bowen, Harriet Cohen, Irene Scharrer, and Moura Lympany. In an interview given to Clavier
February 1992), Dame Moura comments how as she was initially reluctant to study with Matthay. “Oh no, I don’t want to go to Matthay; he has all those movements, everyone throwing himself around the piano. He’s going to change my whole style. I’m 18; it’s too late to change.” Dame Moura continues later in the same interview “My first lesson was a revelation; I fell in love with him. He was 75 if not older, and we called him Uncle Tobs. He was wonderful…”

In 1938 Dame Moura entered one of the most celebrated international piano competitions in the world, the Ysaïe Piano Competition at Brussels. She was one of the youngest of the seventy-eight contestants emerging a triumphant second only to another great piano legend, Emil Gilels. Incidentally, one of the adjudicators was Artur Rubinstein. He was so impressed with Moura Lympany’s performance that he induced his Parisian manager to take on the young artist. She was thus able to tour Italy, France, Holland, Belgium, and South America.

Two years later Dame Moura would rock the piano world with a première of Khachaturian’s Piano Concerto. Reflecting in her autobiography she writes: “My policy was never to refuse an engagement even if I did not know the work. I relied on my ability to go out and buy the sheet music and learn it quickly. Edward Clark, of the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR, unexpectedly got in touch with me early in 1940 with an unusual
and exciting request. Would I play an unknown concerto by a Russian composer in a concert of Russian music? The conductor was to be the composer Alan Bush, whose own music was extremely popular in Russia. Bush was in demand and Russian music was to be popularized. Relations with the USSR were now vital to the progress of the war.

The concerto in question had first been offered to Clifford Curzon. Curzon at the age of seventeen had been a professor at the Royal Academy of Music, before going to Berlin to study with Schnabel. He was one of the few male pianists Uncle Tobs had taught. Curzon, now aged forty-seven, virtuoso, had so much work he refused the Khachaturian suggesting that I be approached. ‘Moura Lympamy learns so quickly,’ Curzon assured Mr. Clark. She agreed, asking that the work, which was still in manuscript, be given to me as soon as possible, for there was only one month in which to learn it. Clark asked me where he should bring it and I told him I was going to the hairdressers, and would he bring it to me there? He said he would do his best and, as for a fee, I waved him away and said I would leave it to him and his committee to decide. To play the work was terribly important to me in my career.

I was sitting under the hair-drier at the hairdressers when into the salon burst Mr. Clark, carrying a large parcel. It was the manuscript of the Soviet-Armenian composer Khachaturian’s Piano Concerto. ‘You look Russian!’ he exclaimed at my reflection in the salon mirror. I began to study it then and there while my hair was in curlers.

I thought the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR would probably offer me five guineas for this performance, so I was most surprised and grateful to be offered fifteen guineas, three times what I had expected. I learned this concerto for fifteen guineas but it repaid me a thousandfold.

The first performance, conducted by the composer Alan Bush, took place at the Queen’s Hall in the spring of 1940. Miaskovsky’s Sixteenth Symphony and Shostakovich’s Fourth formed the remainder of the programme, but the Khachaturian Concerto created a sensation, eclipsing the other works. Nothing like it had been heard before. It was new, it was modern, it had fantastic pace, it was a thrilling work, and somehow it suited the warlike mood of the nation and the time, challenging and riveting. Uncle Tobs could not come to the Queen’s Hall for the performance; now aged eighty-three he was too old and infirm. But the performance was broadcast and he sent me a telegram the next day which to read simply: BEST CONCERTO SINCE LISZT. The critics were surprised by my performance: ‘Moura Lympamy’s virtuosity was as unexpected, as dazzling, and as agreeable to concert goers in wartime London, as a friendly firework in the black-out.’ ”
With the war at its apex Dame Moura curtailed performing abroad and bunkered down as did all of Great Britain. As noted in her autobiography, “London during the time of the air raids was terrible. The nights were endless with bombs dropping everywhere and crowds wrapped in blankets sleeping in rows along the Underground stations. The night that never ended was 10 May 1940: I had slept under my piano all night. The next morning I was due to attend a rehearsal with orchestra at the Queen’s Hall for César Franck’s *Symphonic Variations*. I had never played this composition before, and it had already come to mean a great deal to me. I felt it was peculiarly mine in a way no other piece of music had been before. César Franck was a Belgian, born in Liège, where I had studied as a schoolgirl.

Off I went through the streets to find, when I reached Langham Place, that the Queen’s Hall had received a direct hit the night before. A stick of bombs had destroyed the whole block, including Augner’s music publishing house. All that met my gaze next to All Souls Church, which had miraculously survived, was a ruin from which rose a thin plume of smoke, for the fire was still smouldering. In dismay I stood there helplessly, to be joined by the members of the orchestra and others. The distinctively semicircular building that had been the Queen’s Hall meant so much to all of us; we had all played there since our student days. Standing crookedly among the ruins was a music-stand bearing sheet music: ‘Loveliest of Trees’ by Muriel Herbert.”

The concert, unrehearsed, took place at 2:30 in Duke’s Hall at the Royal Academy of Music.

Only after the war ended was Dame Moura able to resume her international career. Understandably she took full advantage of the success she had earned and enjoyed with the Khachaturian concerto premièring the work in Brussels, Milan and Paris. It is also of little or no surprise that she would be the first foreign pianist to tour the Soviet Union after the Second World War. In many ways she became a musical ambassadress, representing Great Britain on countless cultural missions.

In 1945 Dame Moura and Sir Adrian Boult became the first British artists to perform in Paris after the liberation, and in 1946 she represented Great Britain at the Prague Music Festival. She gave her first New York recital on November 28, 1948.

On August 10, 1951, Dame Moura married Bennett Korn, a New York radio-advertising executive and they made their home in New York City. When that marriage failed, she moved to London, then the village of Rasiguères in southern France, and today she lives in Monte Carlo.
Credits

Tracks 1 - 3 recorded on April 28, 1964 in London (ADD)
Tracks 4 and 8 recorded on April 29, 1964 in London (ADD)
Tracks 5 - 7 recorded on February 1, 1967 in London (ADD)

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Dame Moura Lympamy

TRIBUTE TO A PIANO LEGEND

Felix MENDELSSOHN: Piano Concerto No.1 in G Minor, Opus 25  19:52*
1  I. Molto allegro con fuoco  7:22
2  II. Andante  5:47
3  III. Presto; Molto allegro e vivace  6:43

Henry LITOLFF: Scherzo
from Concerto Symphonique No.4 in D Minor, Opus 102  7:00*
4  Presto

Manuel de FALLA: Noches en Los Jardines de España
("Nights in the Gardens of Spain")  22:06+
5  En El Generalife (Allegretto Tranquillo e Misterioso)  9:20
6  Danza Lejana (Allegretto Giusto)  4:50
7  En Los Jardines de la Sierra de Córdoba (Tempo Vivo)  7:56

Franz LISZT: Piano Concerto No.2 in A Major (S125/R456)  19:48*
8  Adagio sostenuto assai – Allegro agitato assai – Allegro moderato –
    Allegro deciso – Marziale un poco meno Allegro – Allegro animato

Total Playing Time: 69:04

*Royal Philharmonic Orchestra/Sir Malcolm Sargent
+RCA Victor Symphony/Massimo Freccia

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