

The Phil joined by fantastic pianist

*Zlata Chochieva makes
Midwest debut Nov. 8*

BY WHEAT WILLIAMS

WHATZUP FEATURES WRITER

Zlata Chochieva is a dynamic young pianist on the international scene, having grown up in Russia and established her residence and presence in the European realm.

She's recorded seven albums since 2012. Quite recently she's broken through in the U.S., playing solo piano in recital halls and stretching out with a few concertos with orchestras.

She'll make her debut in Fort Wayne, and for practical purposes the Midwest, when she appears with the Fort Wayne Philharmonic under the direction of Andrew Constantine, performing Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 21 on Saturday, Nov. 8, in Purdue University Fort Wayne's Auer Performance Hall.

Chochieva will open the concert with this delightful, spirited work in front of a scaled-down number of musicians, as befits Mozart's intent.

For the second half, the orchestra will reconfigure with a huge cohort of players for Hector Berlioz' wild and crazy *Symphonie fantastique*, but more on that below.

I spoke with Chochieva via Zoom on a brief stopover in Berlin, where she has resided since 2019.

She was on her way to perform in Switzerland.

"I go to the States systematically, which is, for me, a big joy, always," she said. "I love the country. I love playing for American audiences. This is really very sincere from bottom of my heart.

"My last time was in the beginning of April 2025 when I performed 10 recitals across seven different states, including my Carnegie Hall soldout debut.

"This season I'm going to appear with mostly, I mean also with recitals, but mostly with orchestras, so in Fort Wayne and Knoxville, (Tenn.), and then in Mobile, (Ala.)."

AN EVENING FANTASTIQUE w/ZLATA CHOCHIEVA FORT WAYNE PHILHARMONIC

7:30 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 8
PFW Auer Performance Hall
2101 Coliseum Blvd. E.,
Fort Wayne
\$33-\$88 · fwphil.org



PHOTO BY UWE ARENS

Pianist Zlata Chochieva will join the Fort Wayne Philharmonic for An Evening Fantastique on Saturday, Nov. 8, at PFW's Auer Performance Hall.

PERFORMING MOZART

Mozart premiered his 21st piano concerto in 1785, when he was 29. As the title indicates, he wrote it for the fortepiano, a relatively new instrument at the time that was gaining popularity over the older and less musically expressive harpsichord.

In the centuries since, the grand piano has evolved into a substantially more powerful instrument.

Chochieva is best known for playing works by Russian composers of the Romantic era and the 20th century, such as Rimsky-Korsakov, Prokofiev, and Scriabin, who wrote sometimes-thunderous music for the modern grand piano.

I asked Chochieva how she approaches interpreting Mozart's lighter, more delicate musical language, 250 years later.

"Well, actually with Mozart, I have an even longer story," she said. "I was only 7 years old when I had my ever first orchestral debut with Mozart Concerto No. 17.

"And one of my most memorable performances I did with orchestra was when I

played with Munich Chamber Orchestra in 2006 without conductor." (That is to say, she conducted the orchestra while playing piano, which is how Mozart always did it.)

With regard to solo piano music, "I recorded the CD also with Mozart's works together with Scriabin, which I called *Chiaroscuro* with Naive label. In 2022, it was released."

On that album, with Mozart's *9 Variations on a Minuet by Duport*, her playing is light and breezy while stunningly clean and articulate.

"And so Mozart is a very, very close friend of mine, let's say," she laughed. "I played a lot of his music since I was very small, since I was a child, and it's always super-special for me to play his concerti, especially.

"Of course, I love his sonatas and all the pieces, his *Variations*, which I recorded.

"But this collaboration with orchestra and this dialogue, this storytelling together, it's absolutely marvelous. It's very special feel for me."

"But in general, I totally understand the question. And of course the approach is different. And yes, first of all, the instrument is

different, much different. But I do have some experience of playing on historical instruments of Mozart times, of Beethoven times.

"Not live. I mean, I never performed in concerts, but I know what it is. I played on them. And it gives huge knowledge about sound and approach and language because yeah, we have to keep it in mind that these pieces were composed for certain instruments.

"But at the same time, I'm quite convinced that, generally, masterpieces and genius composers, they're so out of any limits that it's possible to make anything out of it. And it's possible just to, how to say, it flies from century to century, and it always has its voice. It's always genuine.

"But if you understand the world of composer, it's also possible to transform it a little bit or to try how it sounds in our modern times.

"So also on different instruments, because we also have arrangements. Like we also play some orchestral works on piano, or maybe orchestra will also play some piano music. It's still music. And of course the piano should sound appropriate — means without maybe a huge sound like Brahms, for example. So it has to fit the orchestration of Mozart or sound world of Mozart.

"But I'm convinced that Mozart would be fascinated by hearing the sound of modern piano."

'PSYCHEDELIC' PIECE

Berlioz (1803-1869) was French, and his *Symphonie fantastique* premiered in 1830.

I got some background from conductor Andrew Constantine in an earlier interview.

"Berlioz took the orchestra way beyond the already expanded dimensions that Beethoven had created with his 9th Symphony. And you have two tubas and barrage of percussion instruments.

"You know, Berlioz was a guitarist. And he worked everything out on the guitar.

"His own harmonic language was fairly revolutionary as well. And so it was a huge step beyond where Beethoven left us."

In this work, Berlioz introduced a recurring theme, *the idée fixe*, to call to mind a character in the drama. Later, operatic composers such as Wagner adapted the idea as the *Leitmotif*.

Symphonie fantastique is a watershed of a symphonic tone poem, and a fever dream. I'm not stretching things much to call it "psychedelic," as you can see when you read the program notes.

"It tells a very bizarre story of a young man and his unrequited love, and he tells that story through a drug-induced haze," Constantine said.

Through this piece, close to an hour long, Berlioz spins tall tales from what started out as a personal story.

"It is different reflections of the love for this woman who was not interested in Berlioz. He seemed to have quite a few occasions like that," Constantine said.

"Well, it's a crowd-pleaser. There's no doubt about that!"