

Piano Concerto No.1

Wendy Pomroy and I were fellow-students at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music in the 1950s. After pursuing our careers independently, we met again some thirty years later when Wendy visited Brisbane as Principal Pianist with the Australian Ballet. On being told that I had not yet written a concerto for piano, she commissioned one: the brief was for a “big, virtuosic Romantic concerto”.

I decided on a traditional three-movement form, in which the first movement would begin with an evocative introduction, featuring a cantabile melody in octaves for the piano alternating with passages of a more rhetorical kind.

This leads to the first theme of the exposition, an emotionally-charged eight-bar melody in C minor for the soloist that receives, after a brief development, a truncated orchestral restatement. A developmental transition, that ends in brief horn solos, leads directly into an intensely Romantic second theme in E flat major.

The development consists of a series of secondary ideas, each of which vies for the foreground, before a rhetorical upward flourish from the soloist announces the recapitulation. A brief cadenza preceding a terse coda concludes the movement.

The second movement, in expanded ternary-form, begins in the key of A major which, as the raised submediant of the key of the first movement, further emphasises the Romantic style of the work. The tender, *bel canto*-like melody of the opening is taken up by the orchestra before an extended, lyrical development leads to a contrasting theme of greater rhythmic urgency. The drama is resolved when the gentle, opening theme returns but now in D, instead of A, major, and the movement concludes peacefully.

The final movement is an extended rondo in which the energetic, opening theme is heard three times by way of providing structural stability to the movement. Twice this stability is challenged by the contrasting, yet complementary, ideas that separate each statement, before the work is brought to a climax in a brief but pressing coda.

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