

CHOPIN & BEL CANTO CONCERT

JUNE 4TH 2024 - 7:30PM

PIANIST &
SOPRANO

Elena Kokka

**BRITTEN THEATRE
ROYAL COLLEGE OF MUSIC
PRINCE CONSORT ROAD
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CHOPIN AND BEL CANTO CONCERT

175 years After His Last Concert

On November 16th of 1848 Fryderyk Chopin played to great acclaim at Guildhall as part of a "Grand Dress & Fancy Ball" in aid of Polish refugees. It was to be his last-ever performance.

This concert gives us a taste of his last concert in London 175 years later. As usual, Chopin's programme featured a large number of singers and instrumentalists with Chopin playing a few solo pieces, including the first two etudes of Op. 25.

"Bel canto": a model for pianistic declamation and fullness of tone. Chopin's advice as a teacher of piano was that musical declamation should be grounded upon the rules that guided vocalists, and that it should be perfected by hearing good singers. The best way to attain naturalness in performance, in Chopin's view, was to listen frequently to Italian singers. Chopin said, 'The wrist: respiration of the voice' and 'Music ought to be a song' and 'You must sing if you wish to play'. He often made his students take singing lessons.

Chopin's love for bel canto was not only apparent in his pianistic interpretation or method of teaching, it was evident in his piano writing that imitated the vocal composers of his era such as Bellini, Donizetti, and Rossini. Chopin's fascination for bel canto grew in Warsaw where the National Theatre had been completely Italianized under the direction of Kurpiński. Evidence of this is an autograph sketch of an accompaniment to the cavatina of *Casta Diva* from the opera *Norma* by Bellini.



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TUESDAY 4TH OF JUNE 2024 - 7:30 PM

CHOPIN AND BEL CANTO

Programme

CHOPIN

Nocturne No. 20 in C-sharp minor, Op. posth.
Fantaisie-Impromptu in C-sharp minor, Op.66
Four Études: Op. 10, No. 1 & 12 / Op. 25, Nos. 2 & 12
Ballade No. 4 in F minor, Op. 52

Elena Kokka, piano

BELLINI

Norma "Casta diva"
La Sonnambula "Ah! Non credea mirarti"

DONIZETTI

Anna Bolena "Al dolce guidami"

ROSSINI

Il Barbiere di Siviglia "Una voce poco fa"

VERDI

La Forza del Destino "Pace, Mio Dio"

Elena Kokka, soprano
Richard Black, piano accompaniment

BELLINI

Composizioni da Camera

Elena Kokka, soprano & pianist (self-accompanied)

THIS CONCERT IS GIVEN IN LOVING MEMORY
OF PIANIST GWENNETH PRYOR (1941-2023)

ELENA KOKKA

PIANIST & SOPRANO

Elena Kokka, a unique classical artist, is the only pianist and singer on the world stage today who tackles the most demanding repertoire for both piano and voice. Besides presenting unique recitals of solo piano and vocal music, she is also reviving the lost art of the self-accompanied recital.

Elena Kokka was born in Athens, Greece. She moved to London to study piano and singing at the Royal College of Music and since then has appeared both as a singer and pianist in some of London's most prominent venues, including Cadogan Hall, St. John Smith's Square, South Bank Centre, St Martin-in-the Fields, St. James' Piccadilly, as well as at the Clore Studio Theatre at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. She has also appeared in concerts throughout various European cities and in the US in Washington and New York.

An artist of great versatility, she has been recognized by the press from her early years for her "perfection of interpretation" (Fileleftheros), "following in the pathway of great artists" (Nea Faliriki Epikairotis) as well as "blessed with a very deep sense of expression and a strong irresistible cantabile quality" (Music Life). Highlights from her appearances include her debut with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra singing excerpts from Cherubini's Medea, Cleopatra from Handel's Giulio Cesare with the London Chamber Players at their Inaugural Concert and also representing Greece at the International Operatic Gala held in Lisbon in March 2016.

Known mainly as a recitalist, Elena's operatic repertoire ranges from Handel to music by living composers. She has pioneered the work of young composers, particularly from her native Greece, who have often composed works specifically for her voice. She premiered the Kali Dances and Digital Angel song cycles by Othon Mataragas at the Leeds Lieder Plus Festival and at the fiftieth anniversary season of the Park Lane Group. A promoter of Greek culture, she has performed at London's Hellenic Centre in programmes highlighting Greek composers. She also represented Greece in 2003 at the Greece in Britain series during her country's presidency of the European Union, and performed at Cadogan Hall in a programme highlighting the influence of Greece in operatic repertoire (Greece: Its Gods, Myths and Heroes at the Opera). Her performances have been broadcast in the UK as well as on Greek and Cypriot radio and television.

Two artists in one person, Elena initially enjoyed a distinguished career as a concert pianist, winning several international piano awards, including first prize in the Jacques Samuel Piano Competition, the Kendall Taylor Prize for her interpretation of Beethoven, and the Sixth International Konzertheum Piano Competition. She pursued her piano studies at the Royal College of Music where she obtained her dip RCM, ARCM (PG) under the tutelage of the renowned Irina Zaritskaya and later her Master's degree (MMus). After her College years, she enjoyed a long-lasting mentor relationship and deep friendship with pianist Gwenneth Pryor who passed away last December and to whom she dedicates this concert. Currently, she is preparing a ground-breaking recording juxtaposing Chopin's E minor Concerto No 1 with famous Bel Canto arias.

Following her concert at Cadogan Hall, Musical Opinion wrote;

"The exceptionally gifted Elena Kokka- a splendid pianist and possessor of a finely- modulated soprano voice- gave a compelling recital programme at Cadogan Hall on November 13th....Some in the audience were a little surprised at the physical juxtaposition of pianism and singing but within a few bars all were won over. This was the right thing for Ms Kokka to do- and, following with "Porgi amor" she convinced us anew of her manifold talent. Throughout the recital that was very cleverly chosen and attractively planned, Ms Kokka impressed consistently with her wide ranging musicianship, from Chopin's G minor ballade – the final pages particularly well played- and four Rachmaninoff Preludes, which enfolded arias from Verdi, Cilea and Puccini, she held the audience entranced through her finely-moulded soprano voice and her first class artistry as a pianist. A unique and remarkably satisfying evening" (James Palmer, Musical Opinion April- June 2015).