



Chopin
Nocturnes
& Polonaises
Viv McLean



Chopin
Nocturnes & Polonaises
Viv McLean

Chopin

Nocturnes & Polonaises

Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)

- | | | |
|----|---|-------|
| 1 | Prelude in C Sharp Minor Op. 45 | 6'26 |
| 2 | Nocturne in E Minor Op. 72 No. 1 | 5'31 |
| 3 | Polonaise in C Sharp Minor Op. 26 No. 1 | 9'02 |
| 4 | Nocturne in C Minor Op. Post. | 4'06 |
| 5 | Mazurka in A Minor Op. 17 No. 4 | 5'30 |
| 6 | Nocturne in C Sharp Minor Op. Post. | 5'47 |
| 7 | Ballade No. 3 in A Flat Op. 47 | 7'28 |
| 8 | Nocturne in G Minor Op. 37 No. 1 | 8'12 |
| 9 | Nocturne in E Flat Op. 9 No. 2 | 5'12 |
| 10 | Polonaise-Fantasy in A Flat Op. 61 | 14'00 |

71'23

Viv McLean

piano

Viv McLean won First Prize at the 2002 Maria Canals International Piano Competition in Barcelona and has performed in all the major venues in the UK, as well as throughout Europe, Japan, Australia and the USA. He has performed concertos with orchestras such as the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, English Chamber Orchestra, Halle Orchestra, BBC Concert Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra, Sinfonia Viva, Orchestra of the Swan and the Northern Chamber Orchestra under the baton of such conductors as Daniel Harding, Wayne Marshall, Christopher Warren-Green, Owain Arwell Hughes, Carl Davis and Marvin Hamlisch. He studied from an early age with Ruth Nye and, after attending Chetham's School of Music, he went on to study at the Royal Academy of Music with Hamish Milne. At the Academy he held the Hodgson Fellowship and was made an Associate of the Royal Academy in 2005. He made his Wigmore Hall recital debut through winning the Friends of the Royal Academy Wigmore Award. Whilst studying at the Academy, he was the piano winner at the Royal Overseas-League Music Competition and was selected as one of three winners of the NFMS Young Artists Competition. He has appeared at numerous festivals including the International Beethoven Festival in Bonn, the Festival des Saintes in France, Vinterfestspill i Bergstaden in Norway and the Cheltenham International Festival in the UK. He has recorded for labels such as Sony Classical Japan, Naxos, Nimbus, RPO Records and ICSM Records.

Chopin Nocturnes & Polonaises

Probably no composer has been better loved by pianists and devotees of piano music than Fryderyk Chopin. The elusive Polish composer and pianist, who died of tuberculosis aged 39, has always been a figure of fascination, romanticized for his illness, his adoration of his homeland from exile, and his complex relationship with the novelist George Sand. But the real Chopin has many more facets than that. His physical frame may have been featherweight – legend has it that he never weighed more than 100 lb – and as a pianist he always preferred to work in twilight colours and subtle poetry, only occasionally letting rip with virtuoso display. Yet these preferences in no way limited the visionary intensity of his imagination.

Born in rural Poland at Zelazowa Wola in 1810, Chopin attended the conservatory in Warsaw, where his love for the piano overrode any attempts to persuade him to compose for other instruments. He was, however, intensely attracted to a young singer, Konstancia Gladkowska, who was starting her career at the Warsaw Opera. Although Chopin seems to have been content to adore her from a distance, he attended the opera house regularly and with enormous enthusiasm: he became the kind of opera buff who today would be termed a “canary fancier”. He assimilated into his music many characteristics of bel canto Italian opera: melodies decorated with filigree “fioritura”, duets sung in thirds and sixths, and apparently simple accompaniments that maintained crucial harmonic and rhythmic support for the singer’s free-flowing virtuosity.

Nowhere is this more evident than in his Nocturnes. The **Nocturne in E Minor Op. 72 No. 1** is a perfect example, with a long-breathed melody lamenting in an ever more decorated line over a regular accompaniment. Contrary to its late opus number, it is an early piece - possibly as early as 1827 - that Chopin left unpublished, thinking it not worth issuing; fortunately for us, his friend and sometime assistant Julian Fontana later decided otherwise. The **Nocturne in C Minor Op. Post.**, written ten years later in 1837, did not find its way into print for a hundred years. It remains notable for its simple, folksong-like melody that is increasingly embellished with fioritura. Another posthumously published piece, the **Nocturne in C Sharp Minor Op. Post.**, is from Chopin’s youth - maybe intended as a study piece for his sister; some of its themes are drawn from his Second Piano Concerto, which was in part, as the composer himself admitted,

about two years. It unfolds in a long line that modulates in continually unexpected ways - as if the colour Chopin seeks is in a state of limitless mutability. Chopin himself was pleased with it for that exact reason: "Well modulated," he noted, sending it to Fontana for editing.

Schumann famously described Chopin's Polonaises as 'guns buried in flowers'. Among the dance forms that Chopin transmuted into 'high art', this is the grandest and most formal, its processional qualities making it the perfect vehicle for Chopin's angriest expressions of national feeling. The composer was en route to Vienna at the time of the November Uprising in Warsaw in 1830; friends advised him not to return to Poland, and subsequently he became one of some 10,000 Poles who chose exile after the uprising collapsed and was crushed, with devastating effect, by Russia. "Cursed be the moment of my departure," Chopin wrote. The **Polonaise in C Sharp Minor Op. 26 No. 1** dates from the early 1830s, in that aftermath; the composer himself added the word "mélancholique" to it. By turns defiant, ironic and hopeful, it is more tone poem than salon dance; its central trio section is a poetic canvas full of complex harmonies and exquisite modulations.

Polish dance-forms bookended Chopin's creative life. His first piece, aged seven, was a polonaise and his last, when he was already gravely ill, a mazurka. The **Op. 17 Mazurkas**, however, date from between 1830 and 1833, shortly after he settled in Paris. Homesickness is virtually audible in **No. 4**, where the melody makes a lonely entry over subtly shifting harmonies, with sighing falls incorporated into its progress. At the centre there is a shift into A major and the music rises as if in hope, only to subside into the first theme's return and ultimately disappearing the way it began.

Chopin's Four **Ballades** were not designed as a set, but pepper the composer's output at intervals between 1835 and 1842. Each is immensely original, though they share certain qualities that mark them out as a genre, notably a lilting rhythm reminiscent of narrative poetry. Only No. 2, though, is known to be based on an actual poem, one by Adam Mickiewicz, Poland's literary national hero. When Robert Schumann identified Mickiewicz's *The Three Boudrys* as the source of the Ballade No. 4, however, he appears to have been mistaken. The poem, about three brothers who ride out to seek fortune, glory and love, each eventually

returning with a beautiful Polish bride, is far from that piece's apocalyptic conclusion – yet its narrative could quite easily fit No. 3 if one is so inclined. Nevertheless, it's worth noting that Chopin, unlike Liszt, rarely drew upon extramusical sources.

Dating from 1841, **No. 3 in A Flat** is the sunniest of the Ballades. The opening phrase flowers from a single E flat, with several distinct voices exchanging a tender melodic idea, again featuring that balladesque lilt. The second theme is based on the same rhythm, carrying the music first towards a rhapsodic new passage full of virtuoso figuration, and later to a darker episode in the minor that rises to dramatic heights before embarking on a homeward journey. This Ballade, alone of the four, concludes in a blaze of joy.

The year 1846 was the last in which Chopin was fully productive, being the last that he spent with Sand, upon whose support he had heavily relied. Their relationship was already under strain; the following summer they parted forever after a catastrophic misunderstanding over her daughter Solange's marriage. Without Sand's motherly care, the consumptive Chopin struggled for survival and his health began to deteriorate.

Choosing a title for a work he was sketching in 1846 caused him some difficulty. "I'd like to finish something that I don't yet know what to call," he noted. This piece was unlike any he had written before. It mingled the heroic character of his polonaises with the poetic introspection of a nocturne and the malleable, twilight adventurousness of his own improvisations. Today, the **Polonaise-Fantasy in A Flat Op. 61** is regarded as the start of Chopin's 'late' style – or at least of the structural experiments he undertook in his last years, when he was, after all, only in his mid thirties.

A slow, quasi-improvisatory introduction sets up a contemplative atmosphere before the polonaise rhythm is announced like a fanfare, ushering in the main theme. Later, a slow, central section slides into a dreamworld of harmonic exploration before the principal theme returns with flags flying. The towering coda carries the work to a triumphant, unifying conclusion: the theme of the central section finds fulfillment at last in the vigorous embrace of the polonaise.

Produced, edited and engineered by Anthony Faulkner.
Recorded 19th November 2018 at SJE Arts, Oxford, UK.
Steinway technician: Joseph Taylor.

Publisher: Paderewski Edition – Instytut Fryderyka Chopina.

Booklet notes © 2019 Jessica Duchen.
Photographs of Viv McLean © 2019 Sebastian Rice-Edwards.
Design: Red Engine Design.

Printed in the E.U.



5060192780970

STONE
records