

THE VERY BEST OF
CHOPIN



2 CDs

FRYDERIK CHOPIN (1810-1849)

HIS LIFE

Born near Warsaw in 1810, the son of a French émigré and a Polish mother, Chopin's prodigious musical gifts made it clearly apparent at an early age that he was destined to be Mozart's successor. As a pianist he had some lessons but appears to have been largely self taught, with a natural ability for improvisation, like today's great jazz musicians. Of humble origins, he was nevertheless sensitive and inherently elegant. This and his extraordinary pianistic talents opened the doors of the aristocratic salons to the young prodigy. He acquitted himself with distinction at the Warsaw Conservatory, where his tutors had the good sense to allow Chopin to follow his natural instincts and wrote fulsomely in his final reports of his "musical genius".

Chopin loved the piano through and through: there is no single work of his which does not feature the piano as either solo instrument, concerto instrument or as accompanist. He also adored his homeland and seems to have been adopted by audiences in Poland as a "national" composer by the age of 20. That said, he settled in Paris where he remained for the rest of his short life. Here he quickly became an established part of musical life. Liszt, Berlioz and Bellini became acquaintances – even if Chopin found himself at odds with much of their music - while his renown as a piano teacher spread far and wide across France. Schumann famously saluted him with the immortal words "Hats off gentleman, a genius!". For 10 years Chopin enjoyed a liaison with the writer George Sand, but she eventually broke with him. His final years were characterised by illness and depression. Despite generous hospitality in the finest English and Scottish houses in 1848, where he gave several notable performances, he longed to return to Paris, which he did in his final months.

HIS MUSIC

Chopin's compositions make a remarkable use of the piano, exploring its poetic possibilities. Although by this stage the instrument had been around for almost a century, it underwent significant developments in the early 19th century, the most important of which were the use of soft hammers instead of the hard ones previously deployed. This simple change revolutionised the poetic possibilities of the piano and Chopin quickly turned this to remarkable effect in his music, as did John Field in England, and Hummel in Vienna, both of whom influenced Chopin.

Chopin grasped instinctively that his improvisatory gifts had to be disciplined by an understanding of audience expectations; those expectations were in turn shaped by conventional musical forms. As a result, his works are underpinned by straightforward classical principles, even when they just appear to be impulsively romantic: analysis usually reveals them to have a clear structure, even in the longest and most complicated of his works.

Chopin's music is of the greatest musical and technical importance, with inspired melodies and forms of considerable originality. Pianists spend a lifetime with Chopin's works, rethinking them and coming at them afresh day after day. 150 years after his death, his legacy remains as large as ever.

Chopin gave names to help distinguish between the various forms in which he wrote. For instance, his Mazurkas bear the hallmark of his love for his Polish homeland, and feature dance and folk elements. Other typical names he used were Prelude, Nocturne, Polonaise, Scherzo, Etude, Waltz and Sonata, Ballade and Impromptu, each with their own character, style and form.

NOCTURNES

Nocturne for Piano No. 2 in E flat major (CD1, track 3)

Nocturne for Piano No. 2 in D flat major, Op. 27 (CD1, track 6)

Nocturne in C sharp minor (CD1, track 8)

Nocturne in E minor, Op. 72, No. 1 (CD2, track 3)

Berceuse in D flat major, Op. 57 (CD2, track 11)

Chopin was inspired by the quiet introspection of John Field's Nocturnes. With Chopin a Nocturne features a beautiful melody played in the right hand, while the left hand, assisted by the pedal, develops rich harmonies in broken chord accompaniment. If that sounds rather technical, the actual music in Chopin's hands is anything but mechanical. Those searching for the most relaxing yet intense music need look no further than to these 3-minute masterpieces. Less formal than the Nocturnes, but with a dreamy style all of its own is the *Berceuse* (CD2, Track 11) which is heard here in a version for piano and orchestra.

To hear more of the Nocturnes, please try:

Nocturnes, Book 1	8.554531
Nocturnes, Book 2	8.554532

MAZURKAS

Mazurka No. 13 in A minor, Op. 17, No. 4 (CD1, track 11)

Mazurka for Piano No. 23 in D major (CD2, track 7)

Chopin remained affectionate towards his homeland and these Mazurkas are his homage to its dances, its unique harmonies and folk melodies. They take their name from the country dances of the people known as Mazurs, who live in the plains of Mazovia near Warsaw. Chopin wrote his first at the age of ten, and the last in the year of his death 29 years later.

For more of Chopin's Mazurkas, please try:

Mazurkas Nos. 1 – 26	8.554529
Mazurkas Nos. 27 – 51	8.554530

WALTZES

Waltz for Piano No. 6 in D flat major 'Minute Waltz' (CD1, track 5)

Waltz for Piano in C sharp minor (CD2, track 9)

Grande Valse brillante in E flat major (CD2, track 4)

The immortal *Minute Waltz* is one of a set of three Waltzes written late in Chopin's career in 1846-7. Chopin's Waltzes are not the easy dance tunes of Johann Strauss - most of them would be impossible to dance to as they are either too fast or too slow or just too complicated! Perhaps the only thing they share with 'The Waltz King' is the 3-in-a-bar time signature, but they have remained popular and beloved by pianists and audiences alike.

More of Chopin's Waltzes are available on:

Waltzes	8.554539
---------------	----------

ETUDES

Etude for Piano Op. 10 No. 3 in E major (CD1, track 2)

Etude for Piano No. 12 in C minor 'Revolutionary' (CD2, track 1)

There are two sets of Etudes, each set comprising 12 Etudes or 'studies'. For many pianists they represent the pinnacle of pianism, technically challenging and musically fascinating. Each explores some unique facet of the piano. One demands an ability to play chords but to cope with a smooth legato melody in the same hand. Another confines the pianist exclusively to the black keys of the piano, yet another involves the repetition of single notes with the thumb and first finger. Yet each can be enjoyed utterly by the listener without awareness of the enormous technical feats behind the playing. Both of the Etudes included in this collection come from the first Opus 10 set, written between 1829 and 1832 when Chopin was at the height of his pianistic and musical powers. *No 3* is sombre and chromatic; *No. 12*, the "Revolutionary", is the best known study of all: dramatic and intense, it brings a rush of blood to the head of both player and listener.

To hear more of the Etudes, please try:

Etudes8.554528

POLONAISE

Polonaise for Piano No. 6 in A flat major (CD2, track 10)

Grande Polonaise brillante (CD2, track 5)

Another Polish dance, elevated by Chopin from village to ball-room, provided the basis of another characteristic form. The *Polonaise in A flat* is one of the best known of these works which spanned Chopin's entire compositional career.

To hear more of Chopin's Polonaises, please try:

Polonaises8.554534

Polonaises / Andante spianato and Grande Polonaise8.554535

PRELUDES, SCHERZOS, BALLADES AND OTHER WORKS

Barcarolle in F sharp major (CD1, track 1)

Scherzo for Piano No. 2 in B flat minor/D flat major (CD1, track 7)

Ballade for Piano No. 3 in A flat major (CD2, track 2)

Prelude in D flat major, Op. 28, No. 15 (CD2, track 6)

Fantasia-Impromptu for Piano in C sharp minor (CD2, track 8)

Chopin explored many other forms, and in a few cases only once. The Venetian “Barcarolles”, gondoliers’ songs, were well known to visitors to Venice even in the eighteenth century. The characteristic rhythm found a place in some Schubert songs and even by Mendelssohn in some of his *Songs without Words*. Perhaps the most famous of all is Chopin’s *Barcarolle* (CD1, Track 1) written in 1845, which is thought to have inspired French composer Gabriel Fauré to write his beloved set of thirteen towards the end of the century.

Ballade was a term Chopin invented and it has been thought that the term somehow suggests a narrative or story. Certainly these long works have different episodes, moments of introspection and moments of scale, power and brilliance. Typically the opening themes return towards the end, after several developments. The effect of this reprise is musically triumphant and exhilarating. The four Ballades are held by many to be Chopin’s most daring, innovative and greatest works. The Scherzos (of which Chopin also wrote four) are similarly extended in scale and highly virtuosic. The *Scherzo for Piano No 2 in B Flat minor* was written at the height of Chopin’s powers in 1837. Chopin completed his set of 24 Preludes while on holiday with George Sand in Mallorca.

For complete recordings, please try:

Ballades / Berceuse / Fantaisie	8.554527
Rondos / Variations / Mazurkas.....	8.554537
Impromptus and Scherzos	8.554538
The Preludes	8.554536

CONCERTOS

Piano Concerto No. 2: *Larghetto* (CD1, track 9)

Piano Concerto No. 1: *Romanza-Larghetto* (CD2, track 12)

As a young musician embarking on a career as a pianist, Chopin provided himself with half a dozen works for piano and orchestra. His two Piano Concertos date from his early life when he was still building his reputation. Inevitably with Chopin, the emphasis is on the brilliant part for piano.

Also available:

Piano Concertos Nos. 1 & 28.554540

SONATAS

Sonata for Cello and Piano in G minor, Op. 65: *Largo* (CD1, track 4)

Sonata for Piano No. 2 in B flat minor: *March funèbre* (CD1, track 12)

Chopin wrote an Introduction and Polonaise for cello and piano for an early patron and towards the end of his life a Cello Sonata. His G minor Piano Trio is a valuable addition to recital repertoire.

For more of the Sonatas, please try:

Cello Sonata / Polonaise brillante / Grand Duo8.553159

Piano Sonatas Nos. 1 – 38.554533

The Very Best of Chopin includes performances by Idil Biret.

Also available:

THE COMPLETE PIANO MUSIC OF FRYDERIK CHOPIN8.501501

15 CDs of Chopin, performed by Idil Biret.

T H E V E R Y B E S T O F C H O P I N

CD1	
1	Barcarolle in F sharp major 8:42
2	Etude Op. 10 No. 3 ' <i>Tristesse</i> ' 4:34
3	Nocturne in E flat major 4:32
4	Cello Sonata: Largo 3:31
5	Minute Waltz 1:48
6	Nocturne in D flat major 6:17
7	Scherzo No. 2 10:59
8	Nocturne in C sharp minor 4:03
9	Piano Concerto No. 2: Larghetto 9:28
10	Nocturne in F sharp major 3:49
11	Mazurka in A minor 4:35
12	Piano Sonata No.2: Marche funèbre 9:17
Total Timing 71:37	

CD2	
1	Etude Op. 10 No. 12 ' <i>Revolutionary</i> ' 2:58
2	Ballade No. 3 in A flat major 7:43
3	Nocturne in E minor 4:39
4	Grande valse brillante in E flat major 5:35
5	Grande Polonaise brillante 9:35
6	Prelude in D flat major 5:53
7	Mazurka in D major 2:33
8	Fantaisie-Impromptu in C sharp minor 5:30
9	Waltz in C sharp minor 3:58
10	Polonaise in A flat major ' <i>Heroic</i> ' 7:19
11	Berceuse in D flat major 4:41
12	Piano Concerto No.1: Romanza-Larghetto 11:47
Total Timing 72:11	

**FOR FULL LIST OF CHOPIN RECORDINGS WITH ARTIST DETAILS
AND FOR A GLOSSARY OF MUSICAL TERMS PLEASE GO TO
WWW.NAXOS.COM**



THE VERY BEST OF CHOPIN

“Hats off, gentlemen, a genius”

(Schumann on Chopin)

Probably the most popular composer of solo piano music the world has ever known, Chopin's best-known compositions include contemplative Nocturnes, lively Preludes, charming Waltzes, devilish Etudes and more besides. This outstanding compilation offers over 2 hours of the familiar and less familiar, including the immortal *Minute Waltz*, the *Polonaise No. 6* featured in the film *Shine*, and the *Raindrop Prelude*.

Compact Disc 1

- 1** Barcarolle in F sharp major **2** Etude Op. 10 No. 3 'Tristesse'
3 Nocturne in E flat major **4** Cello Sonata: Largo **5** Minute Waltz **6** Nocturne in D flat major **7** Scherzo No. 2
8 Nocturne in C sharp minor **9** Piano Concerto No. 2: Larghetto **10** Nocturne in F sharp major
11 Mazurka in A minor **12** Piano Sonata No.2: Marche funèbre

Compact Disc 2

- 1** Etude Op. 10 No. 12 'Revolutionary' **2** Ballade No. 3 in A flat major **3** Nocturne in E minor
4 Grande valse brillante in E flat major **5** Grande Polonaise brillante
6 Prelude in D flat major **7** Mazurka in D major **8** Fantaisie-Impromptu in C sharp minor
9 Waltz in C sharp minor **10** Polonaise in A flat major 'Heroic' **11** Berceuse in D flat major
12 Piano Concerto No.1: Romanza-Larghetto



8.552107-08
 ISBN 1-84379-210-9
 © 1987-1994 Naxos Rights International Ltd.
 © 2005 Naxos Rights International Ltd.
 Cartoon: John Minnion
 www.naxos.com

7 30099 21072 0