

NAXOS

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GRAND PRIX
DU DISQUE
CHOPIN
Warszawa 1995

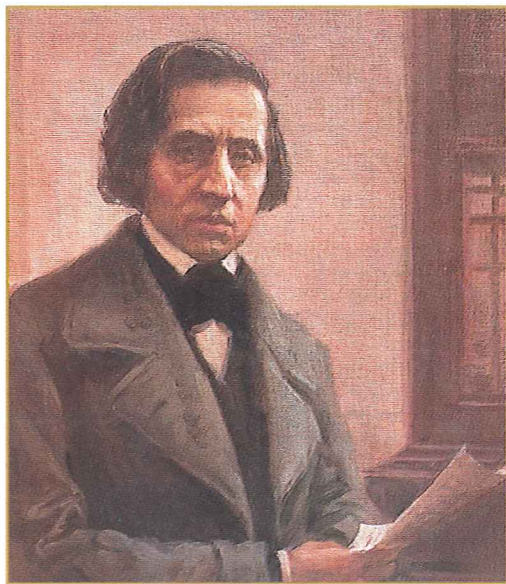
Grand Prix
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COMPLETE
PIANO
MUSIC



VOLUME
4

FRYDERYK CHOPIN



Mazurkas
Volume 2

Idil Biret

Fryderyk Chopin (1810 - 1849)

Complete Piano Music Vol. 4

Mazurkas Vol. 2

Fryderyk Chopin was born near Warsaw in 1810, the son of Nicolas Chopin, French by birth but a Polish patriot in sentiment. Chopin's early musical training was in Warsaw, where he had made a name for himself before setting out in 1830 to conquer the musical world of Vienna. Failing in this attempt, he moved to Paris, at a time when Poland had fallen a victim to Russia yet again, mixing there at first with émigré Polish patriots and then with a wider, fashionable circle. As a pianist he played with a delicacy better suited to the salon than to the concert hall, where Liszt and his virtuoso contemporaries held sway, although this did not prevent him from giving occasional concerts for audiences of distinction and discrimination. At the same time he proved an acceptable and presentable teacher in the families of the leading members of society. For ten years Chopin had a liaison with the novelist George Sand, who provided a refuge for him during the summer months spent at her country house, Nohant, but was alienated from her in the last years before his early death in 1849.

Among the Polish dance forms that Chopin adapted to his own purposes was the *Mazurka*, in origin a country dance from the plains of Mazovia, near Warsaw, among the people known as Mazurs. The dance gained respectability in the fashionable ball-rooms of Europe, losing much in the transformation. Chopin, however, relied more on the original rhythm and varying moods of the peasant dance for compositions that transform and elevate the ingenuous into a poetic musical form. The first of his *Mazurkas* was written in 1820, when he was ten, the last two in the year of his death, 29 years later.

The second of the Opus 41 *Mazurkas*, in E minor, bears the date 28th November, 1838. With the third and fourth, in B major and A flat major, completed in 1840, they were published in that year with a dedication to the Polish poet Stefan Witwicki. The three *Mazurkas* of Opus 50, in G major, A flat major and C sharp minor, varying in mood, appeared in 1842, with a dedication to Leon Szmitkowski, to be followed in 1843 by the three *Mazurkas* of Opus 56, in B major, a lively C major and a more sombre C minor, the set dedicated to Catherine Maberly, a foreign pupil of the composer. Two years later came a further set of three, in A minor, A flat major and F sharp minor, Opus 59,

published in Berlin in the year of composition, but without dedication.

In 1846, his health now deteriorating with his failing relationship with George Sand and her children, Chopin wrote another set of three *Mazurkas*, in B major, F minor and C sharp minor. These he dedicated to Laura Czosnowska, an old friend of his and of his sister Ludwika, now 36, a guest for the summer at Nohant, whose behaviour did nothing to endear her to George Sand and her grown-up children Solange and Maurice. The four *Mazurkas* of Opus 67 were to be published posthumously, in 1855. The group includes two *Mazurkas*, in G major and C major, Nos. 1 and 3, written in 1835, intended for friends from Poland, Anna Mlokosiewicz and for the writer Klementyna Hoffmann. No. 2, in G minor, and Opus 68, No. 4, in F minor, were written in the spring of 1849, as Chopin made a final attempt to summon energy. Opus 67, No. 4, in A minor, had been written in 1846, before the political turmoil that induced the composer to accept an invitation to London and to Edinburgh. The remaining *Mazurkas* of the group published in Berlin in 1855 as Opus 68 were early works. The first to be written, Opus 68, No. 2, in A minor, was composed in 1827 and Nos. 1 and 3, in C major and F major, two

years later, before Chopin left Warsaw. Two further *Mazurkas*, both in A minor, were the work of 1841, designed for anthology publication, the second dedicated to Emile Gaillard.

Interpreting Chopin *by Idil Biret*

Although the romantic era in its music and its performances is not so far from our own time, for various reasons we seem to have distanced ourselves from it. As a consequence, often composers very different from one another like Chopin, Liszt, Schumann and Wagner are brought under the same title of Romantic Composers. In this context it is quite normal to find Chopin and Liszt mentioned together as composers of similar style, while there are no two sound worlds as different from one another as those of Chopin and Liszt. The conception of the piano sound that Chopin created is based on the model of the voice. Liszt, on the other hand, fascinated by the development of the modern piano during his period, challenges the orchestra in an attempt to reproduce on the piano the richness of the orchestral palette.

It must be among the fondest wishes of any pianist to be able to have heard Chopin perform his own music. Fortunately there

are some recordings providing indirectly some evidence of this way of approaching the piano. One may in particular mention the recordings of Raoul von Koczalski who studied with Chopin's pupil Karol Mikuli. It is also enlightening to listen to the recordings of Cortot, a pupil of Decombes who received precious counsel from Chopin. Further, Friedman, de Pachmann and Paderewski who were not direct descendants of Chopin were still close enough to his aesthetic conceptions to be able to convey the spontaneity Chopin is said to have brought to his playing as well as the polyphonic and rhythmic richness which are so apparent in Chopin's conception of the piano. In spite of the inferior quality of the recordings from the earlier part of this century, a considerable number of common points are audible in the performances of these pianists. Notably, a very fine legato, a piano sound that never loses its roundness since intensity replaces force, the exact feeling of rubato, recognition of the importance of inner voices and consequently a remarkable sense of polyphony. Contrary to the popular image of the romantic virtuoso, simplicity and naturalness remain exemplary in the way these great Chopin interpreters approach music.

It is interesting to note also the evidence left

by musicians, contemporaries of Chopin, and Chopin's pupils about his interpretations. A perfect legato drawing its inspiration from bel canto and unimaginable richness in tone-colour were the product of subtle variations in a sound full of charm and a purity that lost none of its fullness even in its forte passages. Chopin could not sound aggressive, especially on the pianos of that period. Berlioz wrote, "To be able to appreciate Chopin fully, I think one must hear him from close by, in the salon rather than in a theatre."

Chopin's sense of rubato was unrivalled. The *temps dérobé* (stolen time) assumed under the hands of the great master its true meaning. Mikuli gives a description of the rubato as Chopin conceived it, which seems to be of penetrating clarity. After recalling that Chopin was inflexible in keeping the tempo and that the metronome was always on his piano, Mikuli explains, "Even in his rubato, where one hand - the accompanying one - continues to play strictly in time, the other - the hand which sings the melody - freed from all metric restraint conveys the true musical expression, impatience, like someone whose speech becomes fiery with enthusiasm."

Together with a certain classicism, moderation was the basis of the world of



Idil Biret

Born in Ankara, Idil Biret started to learn the piano at the age of three and later studied at the Paris Conservatoire under the guidance of Nadia Boulanger, graduating at the age of fifteen with three first prizes. A pupil of Alfred Cortot and of Wilhelm Kempff, she embarked on her career as a soloist at the age of sixteen, appearing with major orchestras in the principal musical centres of the world, in collaboration with conductors of the greatest distinction. To many festival appearances may be added membership of juries for international piano competitions, including the Van Cliburn, Queen Elisabeth of the Belgians and Busoni Competitions. She has received the Lili Boulanger Memorial Award in Boston, the Harriet Cohen / Dinu Lipatti Gold Medal in London, the Polish Artistic Merit Award and the French Chevalier de l'Ordre National du Mérite. Her more than sixty records include the first recording of Liszt's transcription of the symphonies of Beethoven, and for Naxos the complete piano works of Chopin, Brahms and Rachmaninov, with a Marco Polo disc of the piano compositions and transcriptions of her mentor Wilhelm Kempff.

Photo by Sefik Yuksel

Chopin. Hence, playing his music on the powerful modern pianos and in large concert halls is often problematic. One should ideally never go beyond a self-imposed limit of sound and keep in mind as the criteria the possibilities of the human voice. It is therefore better to somewhat reduce sonority without sacrificing the quality of the sound.

In performing Chopin's works one should neither try to reconstruct nor imitate the interpretations of the past which remain unique, but try, with the help of all the recorded and written material we are lucky to possess, to penetrate deeper into the musical texts and advance further in the unending quest for a better understanding of the art of Chopin.



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DDD

FRYDERYK CHOPIN

1810–1849

Complete Piano Music • Volume 4

Idil Biret

Playing
Time
77:18

Mazurkas			
1. No. 27 in E minor, Op. 41/2	3:11	19. No. 45 in A minor, Op. 67/4	2:37
2. No. 28 in B major, Op. 41/3	1:07	20. No. 46 in C major, Op. 68/1	1:47
3. No. 29 in A flat major, Op. 41/4	1:50	21. No. 47 in A minor, Op. 68/2	3:03
4. No. 30 in G major, Op. 50/1	2:38	22. No. 48 in F major, Op. 68/3	1:59
5. No. 31 in A flat major, Op. 50/2	3:05	23. No. 49 in F minor, Op. 68/4	2:32
6. No. 32 in C sharp minor, Op. 50/3	5:26	24. No. 50 in A minor, Op. Posth.	6:12
7. No. 33 in B major, Op. 56/1	5:41	25. No. 51 in A minor, Op. Posth.	2:40
8. No. 34 in C major, Op. 56/2	1:25		
9. No. 35 in C minor, Op. 56/3	7:16	"Any complete set of Chopin's piano works on CD is important. With world-class playing it's remarkable. And at [bargain price] it's astonishing. Who's inspiring the superlatives – Ashkenazy, Pogorelich, Pollini? No: Idil Biret." – <i>Classic CD</i>	
10. No. 36 in A minor, Op. 59/1	4:48	"She is Turkish, from Ankara, ... In 15 discs she makes a voyage through the entire work of Chopin, including the least known pieces, with a sharpened technique, fully blooming lyricism and minimised emotional outpouring." – <i>La Croix</i>	
11. No. 37 in A flat major, Op. 59/2	2:48	"Enjoyable and idiomatic, unhurried yet alive and alert to the innumerable incidental beauties of these scores." – <i>Gramophone</i>	
12. No. 38 in F sharp minor, Op. 59/3	3:59		
13. No. 39 in B major, Op. 63/1	2:13		
14. No. 40 in F minor, Op. 63/2	2:18		
15. No. 41 in C sharp minor, Op. 63/3	2:24		
16. No. 42 in G major, Op. 67/1	1:15		
17. No. 43 in G minor, Op. 67/2	1:57		
18. No. 44 in C major, Op. 67/3	1:17		

Recorded at Tonstudio van Geest, Heidelberg,
in March 1990.

Producer: Martin Sauer

Music Notes: Keith Anderson

Portrait medallion of Chopin by Bovy, 1837.

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