

Program Notes

Chopin, Waltz in E flat Major, Op. 18

This *Grande valse brillante* was the first waltz Chopin released in publication, with a dedication to Laura Horsford, his English pupil in Paris. A trumpet call leads into a succession of seven attractive melodies, some playful, some lyrical, culminating in a coda which synthesizes the ideas in a virtuosic display, perfect for fashionable Parisian salons of the 1830s.

Chopin, Etude in G sharp minor, Op. 25, No. 6

Chopin, Etude in C sharp minor, Op. 25, No. 7

Chopin was a dedicated piano teacher, regularly spending hours of his day with pupils who came to his home for lessons. Op. 25 has twelve exercises for technical skills he thought valuable, but it is also a set of poetic vignettes of great beauty. Flurries of chromatic parallel thirds sparkle over the melody-with-accompaniment played by the left hand in Etude No. 6. The Etude No. 7 in C-sharp minor begins with a left-hand recitative which develops into a poignant, cello-range aria of Belliniesque high tragedy. The right hand plays a sympathetic countermelody, along with a throbbing ostinato pulse of repeated chords.

Chopin, Sonata in B minor, Op. 58

Allegro maestoso

Scherzo

Largo

Rondo Finale

Although he was only thirty-five years old when he wrote this sonata in 1844, Chopin was suffering from tuberculosis and had just four more years to live. The sonata is a work of monumental proportions, and perhaps because the music of Bach was a fascination of Chopin's at this time, counterpoint is everywhere.

The first movement *Allegro maestoso* begins with a majestic B minor theme outlined in thick chords. A complex transition leads to theme two, a singing melody in D major. After development passages focussed on the opening material, the recapitulation is in B major (not the expected B minor) and truncated, avoiding the heroic first theme in favour of the lyrical second theme and ending optimistically.

The *Scherzo* is a whirling perpetual motion in E flat, rippling swiftly through all the registers of the piano. It has a quiet central trio with sonorous chords producing the effect of polyphony as they move, often over a bass pedal, and then the fleet Scherzo returns.

After a few dramatic chords, the third movement *Largo* is a long-breathed, ever-evolving, aria-like theme sung in B major. The middle section is deeply reflective, transported to E major with miraculous shifting harmonies. A variation of the aria tune returns to the home key and then the hushed coda combines the decorative melody of the A section with the slowly mutating harmonic colours of the middle section.

Several bars of introduction break the spell and the main theme of the *Rondo Finale* is launched in the lower half of the keyboard, driving and relentless, full of passion. Major key episodes have cascades of dazzling scales in the top half of the keyboard. The rondo theme is transformed with new harmonies and figurations at every appearance, the last time leading to a triumphant conclusion with a brilliant coda.

Haydn, Piano Sonata in C major, Hob. XVI:48

Andante con espressione

Rondo, Presto

Haydn was nearing the end of his twenty-eight years of service to Prince Nicolaus Esterhazy when he submitted this sonata as a contribution to a “Musical Pot-Pourri” published by Breitkopf in 1789. Its detailed dynamic markings show that Haydn had in mind the expressive powers of the fortepiano, although he concedes it could also be performed on the harpsichord (no doubt with an eye to increasing his market share). The first of its two movements, *Andante con espressione*, begins with an elegant theme in binary form. Three fantasia-like variations follow: a dramatic minor one, a major one with new ornamentation, and another in minor with more abstract figuration. An effervescent *Rondo* concludes the sonata.

Zarębski, Grande Polonaise in F sharp Major, Op. 6

Juliusz Zarębski (1854-1885) grew up in Poland and then studied in Vienna, St. Petersburg and Rome, where he became a protégé of Liszt. He toured as a piano virtuoso, and in 1880, was appointed as a professor at the Royal Conservatory in Brussels. His career was cut short by tuberculosis, which brought about his death at the age of just 31. His Grande Polonaise of 1881 uses rhythms and melodic shapes of the Polish dance in a free ternary form, suggesting the influence of Liszt in its thematic transformations and rhapsodic cadenzas.

Paderewski, Sarabande in B minor, Op. 14 No. 2

Red-headed Polish virtuoso Ignacy Paderewski (1860-1941) was a notable composer, as well as a philanthropist and politician. He toured inexhaustibly, performing over 1500 concerts in the US alone, regularly including his own compositions. This Sarabande, one of three *Humoresque de concert à l'antique*, is a wonderful little piece, featuring a singing melody with baroque dance characteristics in rhythm, ornamentation and form.

Ravel, La Valse

Ravel loved the rhythms of dance and had the idea of a piece which would be a tribute to the waltzes of Johann Strauss and the old Vienna. The concept came together with the offer of a commission for a ballet from Diaghilev around 1919, just after the war. The orchestral score was Ravel's main goal, but he also simultaneously completed versions for solo piano and for two pianos. The composer called it a choreographic poem, but ballet impresario Diaghilev's response when he heard it was, “it's a masterpiece but it isn't a ballet; it's a portrait of a ballet.” Its production as a ballet waited for others to conceive. Ravel claimed the setting was a ballroom scene at an Imperial Court about 1855, but the dancing is disrupted by fragmented themes and disturbing juxtapositions, building to a shattering climax in the final bars.

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