

CHOPIN

BALLADES & NOCTURNES

JONATHAN PHILLIPS



CHOPIN BALLADES & NOCTURNES

Ballades

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| 1. | Ballade No.1 in G minor, Op.23 | 9:43 |
| 2. | Ballade No.2 in F major Op.38 | 7:35 |
| 3. | Ballade No.3 in A flat major Op.47 | 7:26 |
| 4. | Ballade No.4 in F minor Op.52 | 12:05 |

Nocturnes

- | | | |
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| 5. | Nocturne in E flat major Op.9 No.2 | 4:49 |
| 6. | Nocturne in B major Op.32 No.1 | 4:36 |
| 7. | Nocturne in F major Op.15 No.1 | 4:54 |
| 8. | Nocturne in F minor Op.55 No.1 | 5:25 |
| 9. | Nocturne in B major Op.62 No.1 | 7:06 |

Total playing time	63:56
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So much has already been written about Chopin it's hard to know where to start. My remarks are intended to provide a context against which the Four Ballades and 5 nocturnes on this CD may be understood. Born in 1810 the same year as two other luminous contributors to the romantic tradition, Franz Liszt and Robert Schumann, Chopin's bequest to music in general, and to the development of the piano repertoire, in particular, is of enormous importance and significance. And whilst it is true that most of his output is for the piano and that we have no symphonies, or great choral works by him, that does not exclude him from the pantheon of great and important 19th century composers, in my view.

The piano repertoire he has left us is truly astonishing in the breadth, scale and originality of the achievement. Harmonically, technically, polyphonically he was a genuine original who pushed the boundaries of what was considered possible in music, via his medium, the piano. Extraordinary sonority, harmony, chromaticism, and polyphonic writing suffuses all his music. Sometimes overtly, sometimes at the service of a more deliberately Polish and nationalistic style, especially in the mazurkas and polonaises. Two vehicles he very much made his own.

Chopin himself was strongly influenced by JS Bach and encouraged his students to "study the works of Bach". You can hear Bach's influence everywhere in Chopin, not necessarily as strict counterpoint but as countermelody and inner part writing. These characteristics, especially the harmonic and chromatic elements influenced the writing of his contemporaries, and I would suggest that progression via Chopin through Liszt and Schumann had an important subsequent effect on the chromaticism and harmony of Wagner and on into Mahler and beyond.

So, to the four Ballades. Why? Why play them and why record them? Well, these four unique compositions capture the essence of Chopin's output for me. Op 23, Op 38,

Op 47 and Op 52, span his lifetime and represent a distillation of the evolution of his musical language. Crucially, I have been aware of them since I was a teenager, when as a 13-year-old I bought a wonderful Classics for Pleasure LP recording of all four Ballades played by Valentina Kamnikova (which I still have somewhere!) I think it fair to say that record together with another record of the Chopin Etudes (played by Samson Francois) lit the blue touch paper and ignited the rocket fuel required to convert my desire to learn, understand, possess, and recreate Chopin's extraordinary virile, powerful, muscular, and explosive music. Ultimately, they are a huge challenge, as anyone who has tackled them will know. The motivation for preparing them all to create my own recording of them can be traced back to those adolescent years!

Once again, and critically for me, this recording rather like the Bach Tranquillity album was made in such a way as to replicate a "live" performance. Two consecutive live performances were given, and that was it! There is no point in endless editing, as for me, the sanitised performance of a highly edited recording no longer communicates that which takes place in live performance.

The four Pieces themselves are utterly different and any formal analysis of them is beset with difficulty. Chopin's Ballades are essentially abstract musical forms. What I would say is that they each weave a narrative or story based on some magnificent themes and Chopin develops these in a beautifully structured way that is at once free and seemingly improvised but is at the same time highly structured and able hold the developing drama of the story together.

The Ballades together with the Nocturnes on this disc all exhibit the one immediately identifiable hallmark of Chopin's music, namely beautiful melodies, requiring genuine singing legato and beauty of sound. Chopin had an innate understanding of the physics of the piano, how to use the resonance, its harmonic overtones, and judicious use of the sustaining pedal to enhance the colour and projection of the music.

JONATHAN PHILLIPS

Jonathan is a Graduate of the Royal Northern College of Music where he studied with Sulamita Aronovsky, and as postgraduate with Alexander Kelly in London. His recital and Concerto debuts at the Queen Elizabeth Hall and Purcell room London were followed by winning the National Youth Orchestra of Wales Soloist award in 1986. As a result of this he was invited to give 5 performances of the Rhapsody on a theme of Paganini one of which was televised and broadcast live on BBC2.

Jonathan's Concerto experience is considerable, with over 100 performances including concertos by Rachmaninoff, Tchaikovsky, Chopin and Schumann. Jonathan worked with Tamas Vasary who recommended him to take part in the 1990 Tchaikovsky competition in Moscow. Since then, Jonathan has broadcast for the BBC, Russian and Italian and Swedish TV and radio, and given recitals all over the UK, Europe and former Soviet Union. Jonathan was interviewed by John Humphries and played live on Radio Four's Today programme following a full-page feature article in the Guardian Arts Section about the preparation and performance of the Rachmaninoff 3rd Piano Concerto he gave in London in 2003.

Jonathan lives in the Cotswolds, is married to a professional singer and has two grown up sons. These are perhaps his proudest achievements. An introvert who has never really sought the limelight, nonetheless he has enjoyed some considerable musical successes. He has degrees in Music and in Philosophy, a decent collection of good Bordeaux wine, a fascination with ancient Greek and Roman history, a temperamental twenty-year-old sports car and many wonderful friends.

Bach: Tranquillity, Jonathan's debut album from Divine Art was released in May 2023 receiving much praise and described by Classic FM's Katie Breathwick as "a little drop of heaven".

www.jonathanphillips.net



"A Musician of real quality and Finesse" **The Times**

"An assured technique and great power... vigorous expressive and reflective playing. The Rachmaninoff Etudes were masterful" **The Daily Telegraph**

"Jonathan Phillips has, outstanding technique, sensitive musical qualities, and strong performing projection" **Tamas Vasary**

Also by Jonathan Phillips



J.S. Bach: Tranquillity

"Jonathan Phillips has carefully selected music that affords pleasure to listener and performer alike, ultimately giving rise to feelings of centeredness and well-being. There are 21 pieces in all in this album "Tranquillity," all calculated to appeal to the inner man or woman in us all. And the performances are as treasurable as the music itself."

- Phil Muse (Atlanta Audio Club)

Divine Art DDX 21102

Produced by - David Wright, Jonathan Phillips and Natanya Hadda.

Ballades recorded at Wyastone in Monmouthshire July 2020, engineered by Oscar Torres.

Nocturnes recorded at St John the Evangelist Oxford September 2021, engineered by David Wright.

Artwork - James Cardell-Oliver, Divine Art

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