



**CHOPIN  
RECITAL  
FINGHIN  
COLLINS**



# FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810-1849)

## Four Mazurkas Op 17

- No 1 in B flat major
- No 2 in E minor
- No 3 in A flat major
- No 4 in A minor

## Two Nocturnes Op 32

- No 1 in B major
- No 2 in A flat major

## Prelude in C sharp minor Op 45

## Ballade No 4 in F minor Op 52

## Two Nocturnes Op 48

- No 1 in C minor
- No 2 in F sharp minor

## Polonaise-Fantaisie in A flat Op 61

Chopin was a voluntary exile from his native Poland. Born into relative affluence in Żelazowa Wola west of Warsaw, his father Nicolas was French. Due partly to political upheaval, he left home when he was twenty. Staying for a while in

Vienna, he secured a passport to Paris where he settled in October 1831. Once *in situ*, he became the idol of the aristocracy and was soon the friend of leading writers, painters and musicians. Yet, despite the glamorous and intellectual support of his surroundings, Chopin was lonely at heart. He expressed his nostalgia for Poland through his piano music in which he created a new idiom and performance technique.

Finghin Collins's programme on this CD covers the major period of Chopin's artistic activity and demonstrates the influence of Italian opera, particularly that of Bellini's sophisticated *bel canto* style, and his own inherent dramatic impulses.

This begins with the Op 17 Mazurkas written in the early 1830s when Chopin was settling into Parisian life. Although he wrote over fifty Mazurkas, Robert Schumann maintained 'few among them resemble each other [with] almost every one containing some poetic trait'. Finghin Collins's choice of elegiac Nocturnes date from 1837 and 1841 when Chopin was the centre of Parisian cultural life. The stand-alone Prelude Op 45, with its feeling of improvisation, is also from 1841. One of Chopin's

greatest works, the F minor Ballade Op 52 is the most challenging of his four Ballades while the concluding Polonaise-Fantaisie Op 61 masterpiece comes from a particularly difficult period in the composer's short life.

A traditional Polish dance, the Mazurka is in three-in-a-measure time, with an accentuation of the second beat and phrases ending on that beat. However, Chopin's Mazurkas are greatly refined with varying rhythms and tempi and occasionally introducing the characteristics of the related Kujawiak. The two dances, possibly local forms of the same thing, came from the Mazowsze and Kujawy provinces respectively. The first of the Op 17 set of four is marked *Vivo e risoluto*. In the robust and dynamic key of B flat major, it has two principal features intertwined. One is melodic, the other rhythmic. The brief and gentler central section moves into E flat major with its *dolce* rocking motion resembling Kujawy's country musicians. The rather sad E minor *Lento, ma non troppo* Mazurka also recalls the Kujawiak. Its mood maybe suggests a traditional violinist skilled in extemporisation. The short middle section is livelier before the intricate patterns of the opening return to end the piece quietly. The A flat major *Legato assai*, is fused with Chopin's instinctive touches. Running triplet figures enliven the vigorous E major central section. The final A minor Mazurka is actually more of a dance poem.

Its anguished *Lento, ma non troppo* main theme seems to arrive from nowhere. A sense of mystery is, at times, disturbed by more realistic intrusions. A new motif, in the brighter A major key, appears and is repeated until it reaches a climactic outcry. The opening returns somewhat timidly and eventually dies away in the *perdendosi* closing bars.

Even if often morbidly sad, Chopin's Nocturnes, influenced by those of Dublin-born John Field, are revered among his compositions. Reflecting his love of the mysteries of the night, they are ennobled with dramatic breadth, passion and grandeur. The expressive theme of the B major Op 32/1, marked *Andante sostenuto*, may possess an outer calm but there is underlying drama that surfaces in the unsettling concluding bars. In ternary form, its A flat major companion moves from an initial *Lento* into a more vigorous F minor central episode. When the principal idea returns Chopin marks it *Appassionato*. Orchestrated by Glazunov, this Nocturne assumed new life in the ballet *Les Sylphides*.

The C sharp minor Op 45 Prelude was completed at the writer George Sand's villa at Nohant near Paris. Another masterpiece, the mood is set in the opening *Sostenuto* phrases. With two themes, the second has a more positive melodic line while a cadenza-like passage enjoys an ecstatic quality. The opening theme returns only to waft into oblivion.

Composed in 1842, Chopin's *Andantino con moto* Fourth Ballade was revised the following year. As it progresses the music becomes increasingly rich and intricate with several connected themes developed simultaneously. The first of these, a haunting and mysterious *valse triste*, has a kind of Slavonic air to it. Stormy and dramatic octaves lead to the second subject, which resembles a barcarolle. This soon becomes more elaborate and is eventually interwoven into the first theme. Decorated and dazzling sections lead to a cadenza. Following this comes the astonishing power and intensity of the coda that concludes *fff* with four massive chords.

The two Op 48 Nocturnes may be described as 'ballades in miniature'. The *Lento* C minor is a dramatic piece that begins *mezza voce* but grows with majestic gravitas. It moves into a rhapsodic recitative, which leads to a chorale that is developed with almost orchestral sonorities. The F sharp minor *Andantino* Nocturne brings welcome contrast in its extended and profound song-like theme. But matters change with the unexpected key of D flat major in the central *Più lento*. The music's character is completely transformed.

Usually in triple time, the Polonaise is more of a procession than an actual dance. Like his Mazurkas, Chopin adapted it to serve his own artistic purposes and used it to express patriotism,

chivalry and pageantry and, in the case of the A flat Polonaise-Fantaisie, his more secret thoughts and emotions. The piece dates from 1845/46 when the composer's ten-year relationship with George Sand (Aurore Dupin, estranged wife of François Casimir Dudevant) was beginning to unravel. Written at her house at Nohant, the work has unusual breadth and structural novelty. Despite waywardness, the music follows a logical process in its ternary form construction. The broad introduction is a kind of meditative prelude opening out into the first section, which employs three thematic groups. The central sequence of ideas develops new subject matter while the final part is built essentially on the principal themes of the first and central sections. Chopin achieves an amazing sense of unity in the disparity of his material, which Liszt described as 'being dominated by an elegiac sadness, broken here and there by gestures of consternation, melancholy smiles, sudden starts and restful passages fraught with tremblings'.

*Pat O'Kelly*

## FINGHIN COLLINS, PIANO

One of Ireland's most successful musicians, Finghin Collins was born in Dublin in 1977 and, following initial lessons with his sister Mary, studied piano at the Royal Irish Academy of Music with John O'Connor and at the Geneva Conservatoire with Dominique Merlet. Winner of the RTÉ Musician of the Future Competition in 1994 and the Classical Category at the National Entertainment Awards in Ireland in 1998, he went on to take first prize at the Clara Haskil International Piano Competition in Switzerland in 1999. Since then he has continued to enjoy a flourishing international career that takes him all over Europe and the United States, as well to the Far East and Australia.

Collins has performed with such orchestras as the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Houston Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, Budapest Festival Orchestra, Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, Gulbenkian Orchestra, Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, garnering consistent praise from critics and public alike. Conductors with whom he has collaborated include Frans Brüggen, Myung-Whun Chung, Christoph Eschenbach, Hans Graf, Emmanuel Krivine, Nicholas McGegan, Gianandrea Noseda, Sakari Oramo, Tadaaki Otaka, Heinrich Schiff, Vassily Sinaisky, Leonard Slatkin and Gábor Tákacs-Nagy.

Performances across Europe have included such prestigious venues as Symphony Hall Birmingham, Royal Albert Hall, Wigmore Hall, The Barbican and Cadogan Hall, London, the Concertgebouw Amsterdam (both halls), De Doelen Rotterdam (both halls), Théâtre du Châtelet and Salle Cortot Paris, Salle Molière Lyon, Liederhalle Stuttgart, Auditorio Nacional Madrid, Palao de la Musica Valencia, Gulbenkian Hall Lisbon, Sala Verdi Milan, Teatro Manzoni Bologna, Konzerthaus Berlin, Konzerthaus Vienna, Franz Liszt Academy Budapest, Philharmonic Hall Warsaw and the Auditorium Stravinski Montreux. He has also performed at Carnegie Hall, New York and the Kennedy Center, Washington DC, as well as at both Ravinia and Gilmore Festivals in the USA. Further festival appearances include the BBC Proms, Mostly Mozart Festival and Ryedale Festival (UK), the Piano Festival at La Roque d'Anthéron and les Musicales de Colmar (France), Klavier-Festival Ruhr and Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival (Germany), Lockenhaus Festival (Austria), Delft

International Chamber Music Festival and Storioni Festival (The Netherlands), Chopin Festival (Poland), Musical Olympus Festival (Russia), Sommets Musicaux de Gstaad and Lavaux Classic (Switzerland), the Wuhan International Piano Festival (China) as well as the Australian Festival of Chamber Music.

Chamber music plays a significant role in his musical life and he has collaborated with London Winds and the Aviv, Callino, Carducci, Chilingirian, ConTempo, Cremona, Ebène, Goldner, Navarra, Shanghai, Skampa, Sine Nomine, St Petersburg, Terpsycordes, Vanbrugh, Vertavo and Vogler String Quartets. Chamber music partners have included violinists Tasmin Little, Kristóf Bárati and Ilya Gringolts, cellists Han-Na Chang, Marc Coppey, István Várdai, clarinetists Michael Collins, Emma Johnson, and Romain Guyot, sopranos Ailish Tynan and Lenneke Ruiten, tenor James Gilchrist, baritones Benjamin Appl and Maarten Koningsberger, as well as his sister pianist Dearbhla Collins and many others.

In 2010 Finghin Collins gave his second critically-acclaimed performance at the BBC Proms in London. In 2013 he completed his three-year tenure as Associate Artist of the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra in Dublin, completing a cycle of the complete Mozart and Beethoven piano concertos and commissioning a new work for piano and orchestra by Deirdre Gribbin.

In 2016 Finghin made his debuts in Turkey, China and Australia as well as performing throughout Europe. Engagements in 2017 include performances in Ireland, the UK, Jersey, France, Switzerland, China and the USA, where he makes his debut at the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival in August 2017, performing with counter-tenor David Daniels and others. He also makes his debut at the Zermatt Festival in Switzerland in September, and returns as soloist to the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra later in the same month. In October he performs a solo recital at Wexford Festival Opera. Another busy schedule of recitals and concerts is scheduled for 2018, including a return to the Wigmore Hall for a solo recital in June 2018. He will also be a member of the Jury of the Dublin International Piano Competition in May 2018.

Over the past two decades Collins has developed a close relationship with Claves Records, recording two double CDs of Schumann's piano music in 2006 and 2009 (which won numerous awards including Gramophone's Editor's Choice in 2006), followed by a recording of works for piano and orchestra by Charles V. Stanford with the RTÉ NSO / Kenneth Montgomery (Editor's Choice, May 2011). In May 2013 RTÉ lyric fm launched his recording of four Mozart piano concertos directed from the keyboard with the RTÉ National



Symphony Orchestra. The current Chopin recording is a co-production between RTÉ lyric fm and Claves Records, and further recordings are planned for the future.

Finghin Collins is very active as a programmer, commissioner and concert presenter in Ireland, having been Artistic Director of the New Ross Piano Festival since its inception in 2006, and Artistic Director of Music for Galway since 2013. He also curates the annual Dublin Song Series together with Dearbhla Collins. In addition, he has been a member of the Board of Directors of the Dublin International Piano Competition (2006 - 2015), a member of the Board of Directors of the National Concert Hall (2001 - 2006), Musician-in-Residence in South Dublin County Council (2005 - 2008) and Artist-in-Residence in Waterford Institute of Technology (2005 - 2009).

Find out more at [www.finghincollins.com](http://www.finghincollins.com)

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**FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810-1849)****Mazurkas, Op. 17 (1832-1833)**

1	I. Vivo e risoluto	02:25
2	II. Lento, ma non troppo	02:05
3	III. Legato assai	04:08
4	IV. Lento, ma non troppo	04:34

**Nocturnes, Op. 32 (1836-1837)**

5	I. Andante sostenuto	05:13
6	II. Lento	05:28

**Prelude, Op. 45 (1841)**

7	Sostenuto	05:16
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**Ballade No. 4, Op. 52 (1842)**

8	Andante con moto	11:23
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**Nocturnes, Op. 48 (1841)**

9	I. Lento	06:20
10	II. Andantino	07:47

**Polonaise-Fantaisie, Op.61 (1846)**

11	Allegro maestoso	13:32
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