

Fryderyk Chopin
(1810-1849)

Nadia Reisenberg, piano

Studio and Concert Recordings (1947-1957)

Disc A (77:46)

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| 1) Nocturne Op. 9, No. 1, B-flat Minor | (5:54) |
| 2) Nocturne Op. 9, No. 2, E-flat Major | (4:05) |
| 3) Nocturne Op. 9, No. 3, B Major | (6:37) |
| 4) Nocturne Op. 15, No. 1, F Major | (4:30) |
| 5) Nocturne Op. 15, No. 2, F-sharp Minor | (3:31) |
| 6) Nocturne Op. 15, No. 3, G Minor | (4:14) |
| 7) Nocturne Op. 27, No. 1, C-sharp Minor | (5:05) |
| 8) Nocturne Op. 27, No. 2, D-flat Major | (6:07) |
| 9) Nocturne Op. 32, No. 1, B Major | (4:49) |
| 10) Nocturne Op. 32, No. 2, A-flat Major | (5:44) |
| 11) Nocturne Op. 37, No. 1, G Minor | (5:55) |
| 12) Nocturne Op. 37, No. 2, G Major | (6:07) |
| 13) Nocturne Op. 48, No. 1, C Minor | (5:47) |
| 14) Nocturne Op. 48, No. 2, F-sharp Minor | (8:02) |

Disc B (78:53)

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| 1) Nocturne Op. 55, No. 1, F Minor | (4:58) |
| 2) Nocturne Op. 55, No. 2, E-flat Major | (5:07) |
| 3) Nocturne Op. 62, No. 1, B Major | (6:36) |
| 4) Nocturne Op. 62, No. 2, E Major | (5:16) |
| 5) Nocturne Op. 72, No. 1, E Minor | (4:05) |
| 6) Nocturne Posth., C-sharp Minor | (3:25) |

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| 7) Barcarolle, Op. 60, F-sharp Major | (8:07) |
| 8) Berceuse, Op. 57, D-flat Major | (4:17) |

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| 9) Allegro de Concert, Op. 46, A Major | (12:07) |
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| Sonata No. 3 in B Minor, Op. 58 | (23:52) |
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| 10) I. Allegro maestoso | (8:36) |
| 11) II. Scherzo: Molto vivace | (2:13) |
| 12) III. Largo | (7:51) |
| 13) IV. Finale: Presto non tanto; Agitato | (4:59) |

Disc C (76:54)

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| 1) Mazurka Op. 6, No. 1, F-sharp Minor | (2:41) |
| 2) Mazurka Op. 6, No. 2, C-sharp Minor | (2:37) |
| 3) Mazurka Op. 6, No. 3, E Major | (1:57) |
| 4) Mazurka Op. 6, No. 4, E-flat Minor | (:40) |

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| 5) Mazurka Op. 7, No. 1, B-flat Major | (2:18) |
| 6) Mazurka Op. 7, No. 2, A Minor | (3:02) |
| 7) Mazurka Op. 7, No. 3, F Minor | (2:34) |
| 8) Mazurka Op. 7, No. 4, A-flat Major | (1:08) |
| 9) Mazurka Op. 7, No. 5, C Major | (:33) |

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| 10) Mazurka Op. 17, No. 1, B-flat Major | (2:21) |
| 11) Mazurka Op. 17, No. 2, E Minor | (1:43) |
| 12) Mazurka Op. 17, No. 3, A-flat Major | (4:59) |
| 13) Mazurka Op. 17, No. 4, A Minor | (4:06) |

14) Mazurka Op. 24, No. 1, G Minor	(2:51)
15) Mazurka Op. 24, No. 2, C Major	(2:06)
16) Mazurka Op. 24, No. 3, A-flat Major	(2:23)
17) Mazurka Op. 24, No. 4, B-flat Minor	(5:21)
18) Mazurka Op. 30, No. 1, C Minor	(1:20)
19) Mazurka Op. 30, No. 2, B Minor	(1:10)
20) Mazurka Op. 30, No. 3, D-flat Major	(3:03)
21) Mazurka Op. 30, No. 4, C-sharp Minor	(4:02)
22) Mazurka Op. 33, No. 1, C-sharp Minor	(1:40)
23) Mazurka Op. 33, No. 2, D Major	(2:32)
24) Mazurka Op. 33, No. 3, C Major	(1:25)
25) Mazurka Op. 33, No. 4, B Minor	(5:15)
26) Mazurka Op. 41, No. 1, C-Sharp Minor	(3:30)
27) Mazurka Op. 41, No. 2, E Minor	(1:59)
28) Mazurka Op. 41, No. 3, B Major	(1:25)
29) Mazurka Op. 41, No. 4, A-flat Major	(1:42)
30) Mazurka Op. 50, No. 1, G Major	(2:32)

Disc D (67:10)

1) Mazurka Op. 50, No. 2, A-flat Major	(3:15)
2) Mazurka Op. 50, No. 3, C-sharp Minor	(5:17)
3) Mazurka Op. 56, No. 1, B Major	(4:12)
4) Mazurka Op. 56, No. 2, C Major	(1:44)

5) Mazurka Op. 56, No. 3, C Minor	(5:58)
6) Mazurka Op. 59, No. 1, A Minor	(3:51)
7) Mazurka Op. 59, No. 2, A-flat Major	(2:41)
8) Mazurka Op. 59, No. 3, F-sharp Minor	(3:29)
9) Mazurka Op. 63, No. 1, B Major	(2:10)
10) Mazurka Op. 63, No. 2, F Minor	(1:31)
11) Mazurka Op. 63, No. 3, C-sharp Minor	(2:01)
12) Mazurka Op. 67, No. 1, G Major	(1:11)
13) Mazurka Op. 67, No. 2, G Minor	(2:07)
14) Mazurka Op. 67, No. 3, C Major	(1:43)
15) Mazurka Op. 67, No. 4, A Minor	(2:30)
16) Mazurka Op. 68, No. 1, C Major	(1:37)
17) Mazurka Op. 68, No. 2, A Minor	(2:57)
18) Mazurka Op. 68, No. 3, C-sharp Minor	(1:37)
19) Mazurka Op. 68, No. 4, F Minor	(1:47)
20) Mazurka "Notre Temps", A Minor	(3:34)
21) Mazurka "A Emile Gaillard", A Minor	(2:40)
22) Mazurka, Op. Posth., B-Flat Major	(1:11)
23) Mazurka Op. Posth., D Major	(1:22)
24) Mazurka, Op. Posth., C Major	(2:39)
25) Mazurka, Op. Posth., G Major	(1:13)
26) Mazurka, Op. Posth., D Major	(1:15)



Nadia Reisenberg – or Mother, as I used to call her for short – was the quintessential non-specialist, blithely shaking off any number of attempts to pigeonhole her talents. In her twenties, she was pegged as a new music enthusiast, and true enough she gave first American performances of works by Schönberg and Stravinsky. But then came her astounding – and never since duplicated – feat (in the 1939-40 season) of playing all the Mozart Concertos in weekly coast-to-coast broadcasts. Clearly, here was a Mozart maven to cherish.

Later in the 1940's and 50's, Mother became the soloist of choice when the N.Y. Philharmonic planned a concerto off the repertoire list of most other pianists: at Sir John Barbirolli's specific request, she learned and premiered a piano concerto by Hollywood composer Mischa Portnoff, and later played d'Indy's "Symphony on a French Mountain Air" ("it is indeed a very lovely work," the conductor wrote to her, "and requires the collaboration of a fine musician as well as pianist"). Artur Rodzinski asked Mother to play the then not frequently heard Prokofiev Third Concerto, and the to-this-day rarely encountered Kabalevsky Second.

When she began making her celebrated series of recordings for Westminster in the 1950's, the company – perhaps recalling those Philharmonic performances, plus the Rimsky-Korsakov Concerto that Mother played with the Little Orchestra Society in November of 1950 – anointed Nadia Reisenberg as its Slavic scholar. Following orders, Mother somewhat grudgingly sat down and learned the cumbersome Tchaikovsky Sonata, then with increasing enthusiasm tackled all sorts of smaller, often obscure Tchaikovsky pieces. An all-Rachmaninoff LP was soon in process, followed by the complete Kabalavesky Preludes and Moussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition."

Wait a minute. Nadia Reisenberg's supreme mastery – and, truth be told, her preferred medium – was chamber music. "Rarely do I experience the elation I find in chamber music," Mother said to me in 1974 (her 70th year). "This is music-making in the purest sense. When we play a concerto, it's our right to show off – we are the soloist, we are the main thing, our own way of doing things can be in front. Never in chamber music! This is the time when our own ego goes back. It's no longer 'I,' it's 'we,' it's 'us,' it's the ensemble, it's the music. In the give and take of chamber music, you discover the most beautiful combinations of sounds. You sit there, and you're in heaven..."

Her first (78 rpm) recording was a Brahms Sonata with Benny Goodman; she played frequently with (then) New York Philharmonic principals Michel Piastro, Simeon Belison and Joseph Schuster; through the 1960's, her favored violin partner was William Kroll and she often was a guest artist with the Budapest String Quartet (I have three separate photos of the ensemble, alternately autographed to Mother in Russian, Yiddish and English). In her later years, she performed most often with clarinetist David Glazer, violinist Erick Friedman, and she recorded both Brahms Sonatas with violist Paul Doktor. She celebrated her 75th birthday year by giving sonata recitals with Erick Friedman at Carnegie Hall and the Caramoor Festival, then came back the next year to play the Mendelssohn Trio and Fauré Quartet at the Library of Congress with members of the Juilliard String Quartet.



*The Reisenberg Family, clockwise left to right:
Rachel (mother), Newta, Nadia, Aaron (father), Clara*



Clara Rockmore and Nadia Reisenberg

So where does Chopin fit into the Nadia Reisenberg performance picture? Everywhere. Mother played a short piece at her American recital debut in 1924, the Barcarolle and the “Trois Ecossais” at her return to Aeolian Hall the following year, and the B Minor Sonata at her last solo recital in 1947 (the Carnegie Hall performance here issued for the first time). A decade later came the other superb recordings contained in this set. Yes, Mother had persuaded Westminster to expand her repertory, resulting also in two LPs of Haydn Sonatas and Variations.

Again, though, Mother never approached Chopin as a specialist who knew exactly how everything should be done; she was simply an artist who sought out the emotional heart of every piece she played, and approached Chopin in awe of his

creative magic. “Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the Nocturnes,” she said, “is their consistent level of genius – one is more glorious than the next.” Mother found the Mazurkas a bit more challenging: “I love them too, “ she told me, “and maybe being Russian helped me feel the very special rhythms of these stylized dances. They need so much freedom and rubato and fantasy, yet they must be focused and planned out at the same time.”



Georges Enesco, Richard Tucker, and Nadia Reisenberg

The Nocturnes fit neatly on two LPs, but the Mazurkas only took 2½, so Mother added three more favorites. “The Berceuse is just exquisite” she told me, “tender and sensitive. The Barcarolle is another masterpiece, one of the most wonderful of Chopin’s works, with its delightful Italian-like tunes and what could even be snatches of street music. I’m especially fond too of the Allegro de Concert, perhaps because I studied it long ago with Nikolayev (Leonid Nikolayev, her primary mentor at the St. Petersburg Conservatory). It has beautiful, wonderful themes, plus a marvelous display of pure pianism. Except for the fact that it’s extremely difficult, I can’t understand why it’s so seldom played.”

A highly personal aspect of the Nocturnes was poignantly recounted by Mother’s two sisters, my aunts Anna (Newta) Sherman and Clara Rockmore, when I spoke with them some thirty years later (1985). “Nadia was scheduled to record the Nocturnes shortly after Sasha (my father, Isaac J. Sherman) died,” Clara said, “and she refused to postpone the sessions. You can imagine the kind of emotional climate we were living in, but it drew us closer than ever before. In fact, I think that the release of such deep sorrow through her music may have saved her sanity.”

“I was with Nadia every day,” Newta added, “listening on the couch as she practiced and cried, cried and practiced. It was incredibly painful, and yet at the same time what an unforgettable experience to hear her pouring her very heart and soul into the music.” And Clara again: “I never saw Nadia under such emotional strain before or since. It was heartbreaking. Her breathing became so heavy during the taping that I was afraid it would ruin the record, but if there was desperation, there was inspiration too. She never played anything more beautifully than those Chopin Nocturnes.”

In 1974, during a broadcast celebration of Mother’s 70th birthday, I asked her about some of those LPs. “It’s a little painful listening to my recordings again,” she admitted, “because I always feel that I could improve things, but basically I’m very satisfied. You see, I’ve always aimed for simplicity in my conceptions. I hate doing anything ‘original’

for its own sake, and while I feel everything I play very deeply, the music always comes first. I have no right to meddle with it. As a result, many of the basic values are still there, even after twenty years. I might play certain things more simply now, or with greater refinement – after all, I am a few years older! – but I would still try to get at the truth of the music, and that truth hasn't changed."

Just as the Berceuse, Barcarolle and Allegro de Concert were added to fill the sixth side of Mother's Mazurka set, we found that our reissues here left the fourth CD with half an hour to spare. With no little trepidation, I considered adding the B Minor Sonata from Carnegie Hall. Why my concern? I remember Mother's upset when a collector sent us cassette copies of some of her Duo-Art piano roll recordings from the 1920's. "They're horrible," Mother shrieked in dismay. "I couldn't possibly have played that way. For heaven's sake, don't ever let anybody hear them."



Gregor Piatigorsky, NR, and Jascha Heifetz

Would she have had the same reaction here?

Would she be troubled that in the rush of live performance not every note was in place, not every nuance perfectly achieved? On the other hand, technical perfection was not one of the criteria she admired in other pianists; she appreciated sensitivity, a warm sound, natural phrasing (which is why she always loved Arthur Rubinstein's playing). On the third hand, I felt that at Carnegie she had conveyed the kind of impetuosity and passion that would not necessarily have been captured in the recording studio. Perhaps, in other words, Mother would be pleased after all to know that her approach to large-scale Chopin would finally be available.



Nadia Reisenberg and Benny Goodman

In the end, I decided to put the problem to a pair of trusted friends, superb pianists who shared many of Mother's musical instincts and values: Morey Ritt, now head of the keyboard department at Queens College (and for many years one of Nadia's prize students) and Ann Schein, an advisor to the Nadia Reisenberg / Clara Rockmore Foundation, and herself a renowned Chopin interpreter.

What a relief. "No question," said Ann. "It would be fantastic to have this included. It takes your breath away – it's a blazing performance, absolutely wonderful."

And Morey, who follows many of Mother's precepts with her own students, added this highly personal insight. "I'd like to think that Nadia, after she'd let loose some steam about how she'd like to do this over and that over, and you mustn't allow it, and she regrets this and that, would say 'go ahead and use it.' It's exhilarating playing, so sensitive, with beautiful tempo ideas, and it's a great snapshot of that time. I guess she was in her early 40's, if I did my math right (*) and she was very virtuosic in her approach. She got excited – she went for broke, is what she did – and so a few things got dropped in consequence of that, but it's still amazing playing. I really think that even if she marked in her score, or in her mind, things she would not approve of, I bet on further reflection, even she would say 'OK: it represented what I did then, so go ahead and use it...'"

So here it is, steam and all.

Robert Sherman

Producer: Robert Sherman

Mastering Engineer: Seth B. Winner

The *Nocturnes* were originally released on Westminster LPs: XWN-18256 and 18257; and the *Mazurkas, Allegro de Concert, Barcarolle* and *Berceuse* were originally released on three Westminster LPs: XWN-18830, 18831, 18832; recorded 1955-57. *Sonata No. 3* was recorded in concert at Carnegie Hall on November 21, 1947.

Original engineers and producers: unknown

Design: Douglas H. Holly

Liner notes: Robert Sherman

Photographs courtesy of the Nadia Reisenberg/Clara Rockmore Foundation

Cover - *Photograph by James Abresch*

Page 6 - *Nadia Reisenberg by Mishkin, NY*

Photos with Heifetz/Piatigorsky and Barber - *Robert Sherman*

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* in April of 1947, Nadia Reisenberg was three months away from her 43rd birthday

