

# Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849)

Vassily Primakov, piano

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|-----|---|--------|
| 1.  | Mazurka in C major, Op. 24, No. 2       | (2:11) |
| 2.  | Mazurka in f minor, Op. 63, No. 2       | (1:34) |
| 3.  | Mazurka in b-flat minor, Op. 24, No. 4  | (5:06) |
| 4.  | Mazurka in B-flat major, Op. 17, No. 1  | (2:08) |
| 5.  | Mazurka in c-sharp minor, Op. 6, No. 2  | (2:06) |
| 6.  | Mazurka in a minor, Op. 67, No. 4       | (2:45) |
| 7.  | Mazurka in D major, Op. 33, No. 2       | (2:12) |
| 8.  | Mazurka in g-sharp minor, Op. 33, No. 1 | (2:05) |
| 9.  | Mazurka in c-sharp minor, Op. 50, No. 3 | (5:11) |
| 10. | Mazurka in B major, Op. 63, No. 1       | (1:58) |
| 11. | Mazurka in c minor, Op. 56, No. 3       | (5:26) |
| 12. | Mazurka in A-flat major, Op. 59, No. 2  | (2:16) |
| 13. | Mazurka in D-flat major, Op. 30, No. 3  | (2:42) |
| 14. | Mazurka in a minor, Op. 68, No. 2       | (3:28) |
| 15. | Mazurka in C major, Op. 56, No. 2       | (1:32) |
| 16. | Mazurka in e minor, Op. 41, No. 2       | (2:33) |
| 17. | Mazurka in A-flat major, Op. 41, No. 4  | (2:15) |
| 18. | Mazurka in f minor, Op. 68, No. 4       | (2:24) |
| 19. | Mazurka in f minor, Op. 7, No. 3        | (2:17) |
| 20. | Mazurka in c-sharp minor, Op. 63, No. 3 | (1:54) |
| 21. | Mazurka in a minor, Op. 17, No. 4       | (5:36) |

## CHOPIN: 21 Mazurkas

It has often been said that the Mazurkas are 'the soul of Chopin', works in which he bares his emotions more directly and reveals otherwise-unglimpsed aspects of his musical personality. His 60-odd essays in the genre can be viewed almost as a kind of diary, to which he confided his most personal feelings and thoughts. Of all the forms he cultivated throughout his life, it was the Mazurka to which he turned most often. The first example he composed dates from 1824 when he was 14, while the last – op. 68 no. 4 – was the last work he ever wrote. On his ceaseless travels it was the Mazurkas, even more than the Polonaises, which became his 'home thoughts from abroad', songs and dances of nostalgia and exile.

The dance which has become known as the Mazurka (in Polish, *Mazurek*) takes that name from the district of Mazovia, around Warsaw, originally inhabited by the Slavic ethnic group known as the Mazurs: though it has come to be a general designation applied to a number of dances from that area, principally the moderate-paced Mazur, the slow Kujawiak and the fast Oberek, which share similar features. All these dances, which would normally have been danced to the accompaniment of a bagpipe and fiddle, are in triple time, with a dotted rhythm and a strong accent (signalling a tap of the heel) on the

second or third beat. Unlike the Polonaise, which was widely recognized throughout Europe by the Classical era, the Mazurka was not elevated to the status of a national dance, nor thought a suitable subject for stylization in concert music, until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century or even the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup>. By the late 18<sup>th</sup> century it had stabilized into a form consisting of two or four parts of eight bars in 3/4 or 3/8 time, with a strong accent on the second beat of the bar. Chopin's Mazurkas retain much of their Polish flavour, but with an added veneer of Parisian good taste and sophistication. However, they remained intense expressions of his Polish nationalism: it was not for nothing that Robert Schumann once famously described them as 'cannon hidden in flowers'.

In his Mazurkas, as in his Polonaises, therefore, Chopin took a folk-derived dance form which had been used for mere entertainment and raised it to an expressive art form: one, moreover, which despite its national characteristics has become part of the universal heritage of piano literature. He usually evoked the basic ingredients of the folk dance, such as the abrupt contrasts of pace and emotion, and sometimes even the drone of the bagpipes. But although his Mazurkas seldom last more than a few minutes he invests them with a sense of poetry, and not infrequently a harmonic and contrapuntal adventurousness, that places them among the most personal, even experimental, of his piano works, so that they verge on miniature tone poems.

The British composer Havergal Brian – a perhaps unlikely admirer, for in his own creative output he concentrated rather on large-scale symphonies than piano miniatures – wrote sensitively about Chopin's mazurkas in an article published in 1932:

*Chopin's mazurkas lead us into a strange land – the twilight of dreams, whose boundless groves veil sounds and sights in perpetual mist. It is the tomb of expired love. These mazurkas are built on melodies as slender, sweet and tender as any love lyrics of Herrick or Suckling. Berlioz said that when Chopin played his mazurkas, they were scarcely audible. Liszt said: 'Of the mazurkas, one must harness a new pianist of the first rank to them'. Herein lies the very core of their difficulty: for technically their demands are not excessive. Many are 'songs-without-words'. Their difficulty lies in the equipoise of melody and accompaniment; for the former must be phrased as though sung, interspersed with breath marks.<sup>1</sup>*

Chopin himself is reported to have played these pieces with great freedom, often in an almost improvisatory manner. At one of his last recitals, in Glasgow in September 1848, he played one of the op. 7

Mazurkas and then played it again as an encore with entirely different nuances to the first rendition. Given that all the Mazurkas are officially in 3/4 time, subtle rhythmic variation through *rubato*, phrasing, pedalling and other means is almost demanded of any pianist who elects to play a considerable number of them at one time. And in this Chopin's own example is instructive. Some people who heard him play his mazurkas report that his rhythm was closer to two or four beats to the bar, although it was only noticeable if the listener counted time. A prime example is op. 33 no. 3 (not included on the present CD), about which a famous story involving the opera composer Giacomo Meyerbeer is recorded by Chopin's pupil, the Latvian diplomat and pianist Wilhem von Lenz, in his book *Die grossen Pianoforte – Virtuosen unsere Zeit* (published in Berlin in 1872).

*During one of my lessons with Chopin Meyerbeer made his appearance [...] I was just playing the Mazurka in C major. Meyerbeer sat down and Chopin told me to continue. 'This is in 2/4 time,' Meyerbeer said. Chopin contradicted him, told me to start again, and kept time by loudly tapping a pencil against the piano top [...]. 'It's 2/4' Meyerbeer repeated calmly. This was the only occasion when I saw Chopin lose his temper. [...] 'It's in 3/4' he said, raising his voice, although it was his custom to speak softly. ... 'It's in 3/4,' reiterated Chopin, almost shouting, and played it himself. He*

*performed the Mazurka several times, counting loudly and keeping time with his foot: he lost all control! To no avail. Meyerbeer insisted on 2/4. They parted, irritated with each other ... Chopin disappeared in his study without bidding me goodbye. [...] Nonetheless, it was Chopin who was right: despite the fact that the third [beat] is swallowed in the [main] theme, it does not cease existing.*

On another occasion the pianist Karl Halle (later, as Sir Charles Hallé, to found the Hallé Orchestra) listened to Chopin playing a mazurka and declared he was playing it in 4/4. This time, the composer reluctantly agreed, saying that his playing reflected "a national trait". Indeed, one of the reasons for his rhythmic freedom is probably that he never lost sight of his pieces' origins in rustic dances, with their leaps, heel-clicks and spur-of-the-moment gestures. On the topic of rhythm and *rubato* we should also note the remarks of no less an authority than the next great Polish pianist-composer, Ignaz Paderewski (as quoted by Havergal Brian in the aforementioned article), who in a eulogy of Chopin delivered on the occasion of the composer's birth-centenary in Lemberg (Lwów) in 1910, declared of the mazurkas that '... this music bids us hear, know, and realise that our nation, our land, the whole of Poland, lives, feels and moves in *tempo rubato*'.

Altogether Chopin composed 62 Mazurkas (there are also a few

doubtful and probably spurious examples). Their chronology is not always clear, for some may have been improvised and carried around in his head long before they were written down, and some may have been printed a considerable time after they were written. Forty-one of these were published in his lifetime, issued in groups of three, four or five.

The nine Mazurkas of opp. 6 and 7 were composed just before Chopin left Poland, and in Vienna, where he received the news of the unsuccessful uprising of his countrymen against the Russian Empire. The Four Mazurkas of op.6 were epoch-making in their presentation of a national dance as both an expression of patriotic fervour and a major compositional statement. They are dedicated to Chopin's pupil Paulina Plater, the daughter of a Polish emigré family who enjoyed dancing the mazurka. Yet in a letter of 22 December 1830 written from Vienna to his family Chopin says he has not yet copied them out, and cautions that they are 'not for dancing', proof that he essentially viewed these pieces as concert music. The bagpipe drone of the folk dance nevertheless sounds immediately in the open fifths of the mysterious introductory bars of the **Mazurka in C sharp minor, op. 6 no. 2**; next it shows the similarities between Mazurka and Waltz in its mellifluous opening strain, but the Polish folk-song origins, more wayward rhythm and delicate melodic ornamentation of the form are very soon apparent. The trio suggests the

Lydian mode – folk influence expressed in a different way.

The Five Mazurkas of op. 7, composed between 1830 and 1832, were dedicated to an American musician from New Orleans, Paul Emil Johns. Though they were a sell-out success as soon as they were published, in the article quoted above, Havergal Brian sees these pieces as the true beginning of Chopin's musical individuality. He notes that the poet and novelist Ludwig Rellstab – he who gave the epithet '*Moonlight*' to Beethoven's Piano Sonata op. 27 no. 2 – thought the op. 7 mazurkas outrageous, and in his review of the publication 'metaphorically tore it up and threw it at the composer's feet'. Brian suggests what baffled Rellstab and other contemporaries was the pieces' 'sense of mystery' and 'experimental impressionism' to create 'atmosphere'. Brian sees the **Mazurka in F minor, op. 7 no. 3**, which he praised for its impressive beginning, as 'an early example of impressionism, foreshadowing similar passages in Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony [...]' Noting Chopin's *pp sotto voce* markings, he continues that 'It also shows Chopin seeking in shadow effects that inaudibility mentioned by Berlioz'.<sup>2</sup>

Listeners will further note the guitar-like chords of the accompaniment, and the solo for the left hand, which Brian also praised for its dark colouring.

The 32 Mazurkas published as opp. 17 to 63 are known to have been written and published at fairly regular intervals between 1833 and 1847. Of these, the Four Mazurkas of op. 17 were written in 1832-33 and published the following year with a dedication to the singer Lina Freppa, whom Chopin had met in Paris in the company of Vincenzo Bellini. The **Mazurka in B flat major, op. 17 no. 1** is a vigorous, almost knightly piece with a touch of severity about it. Unlike op. 17 nos. 1-3, the long, lamenting **Mazurka in A minor, op. 17 no. 4** goes back to a much earlier conception, to one of Chopin's earliest attempts in the genre written between 1824 and 1828. According to von Lenz, Chopin's pupils used to call this Mazurka "The sad face" [*das Trauergesicht*], a description that Chopin was pleased with. The trio section is more rustic in effect.

The Four Mazurkas op. 24 were composed in 1834-5 and published in 1836 with a dedication to the Comte de Perthuis, director of music to King Louis-Philippe of France. With its gay alternating chords at the opening and cheerful melodic fioriture, the **Mazurka in C major, op. 24 no. 2** is one of the most positive of all Chopin's Mazurkas, and uses the Lydian mode to add a spice of the exotic. (In 1918 Manuel de Falla made a superb orchestration of this piece as part of his unfinished opera *Fuego fatuo*, a work entirely based on Chopin's music.) By contrast the highly elaborate **Mazurka in B flat minor, op. 24 no.**

**4** is one of Chopin's most seductive in its entwining ornamentation and perfumed harmonies, expressed in a complex seven-section form including coda.

The four Mazurkas op. 30 were composed in 1836-7 and published in 1838. The dedication is to the Polish-born Princess Maria Warttemberg; she had been born into one of Poland's most distinguished families, the Czartoryskis, who had settled in Paris in 1832. Prince Adam Czartoryski was one of the leaders of the Polish community in exile; Chopin had attended their soirées in Warsaw. The brilliant and animated **Mazurka in D flat, op. 30 no. 3** is notable for the carillon effects that start with the strident repeated A-flat in its opening bars. An admirer once said to Chopin that the piece 'seemed like a Polonaise for a coronation', and he replied: 'Yes, something like that'. But the trio section is Chopin at his most graceful.

The four Mazurkas op. 33, dedicated to the Comtesse Roza Mostowska, whose father had served as Polish Minister of the Interior, date from 1837-8. The **Mazurka in G sharp minor, op. 33 no. 1** is short and depressed in mood, though exquisitely expressed, but its successor, the **Mazurka in D major, op. 33 no. 2** is bright and bustling (it was later successfully arranged as a song by Clara Schumann's friend Pauline Viardot-Garcia).

I have written four new Mazurkas', Chopin announced to his publisher Fontana in a letter of 8 August 1839, 'they seem to me pretty, as the youngest children usually do when the parents grow old'. (He was not yet 30.) These were to be published in 1840 as his op. 41, dedicated to the poet Stefan Witwicki. The **Mazurka in E minor, op. 41 no. 2** can be precisely dated to 28 November 1838, when Chopin was in Palma, and is an utterance heavy with nostalgia, rising to a passionate outcry near the end. By contrast the **Mazurka in A flat major, op. 41 no. 4**, which dates from July 1839, is one of his most sheerly enjoyable and playful: this is another one with a waltz-like lilt.

The three Mazurkas of op. 50 were composed between the autumn of 1841 and the summer of 1842 and were published before the end of that year, dedicated to Léon Smitkowski. The **Mazurka in C sharp minor, op. 50 no. 3** blends nobility and nostalgia – C sharp minor seems to have been a key for Chopin that especially evoked the lost glories of his homeland – and also gives evidence of the composer's study of J. S. Bach in its close-woven contrapuntal textures and magnificently-crafted coda.

The three Mazurkas op. 56, composed in 1843, were published the following year with a dedication to one of Chopin's English pupils, Catherine Maberly. We are now definitely in the territory of the 'late Mazurkas', which were not to the taste of many contemporary critics. Some regretted

the loss of the 'peasant' elements, as Chopin's invention became more elegant and refined. (Schumann, enunciating this opinion, complained that Chopin was 'losing his Sarmatian skin'.) On the other hand his invention was always deepening and becoming increasingly individual. Of this group, the **Mazurka in C major, op. 56 no. 2** begins with open-air liveliness but soon modulates to A minor for a more melancholic strain. The following **Mazurka in C minor, op. 56 no. 3** is one of the longest: it has even been termed 'symphonic' in its sense of scale. The eerie harmony of the arabesques in the coda give an otherworldly feel to the piece.

The three Mazurkas op. 59 were composed in 1845 and issued in that year by the Berlin publisher Stern, without dedication. The **Mazurka in A flat major, op. 59 no. 2** has often been praised as one of the most beautiful of all and shows Chopin's chromatic harmony at its ripest and most exploratory. In the autumn of the following year he followed these with the three Mazurkas op. 63, issued with a dedication to an old friend, Comtesse Laura Czossowska, in 1847. Simpler (on the surface) than some of the sets that preceded them, they form a perfect triptych of mood. **Mazurka in B major, op. 63 no. 1** is vivacious and highly rhythmic, the **Mazurka in F minor, op. 63 no. 2** predominantly elegiac and lingering, and the final **Mazurka in C sharp minor, op. 63 no. 3**, the best-known of the three, a beautiful, lightly dancing piece with something of the character of a lyric waltz, yet concealing feats of contrapuntal artistry like a canon at the octave.



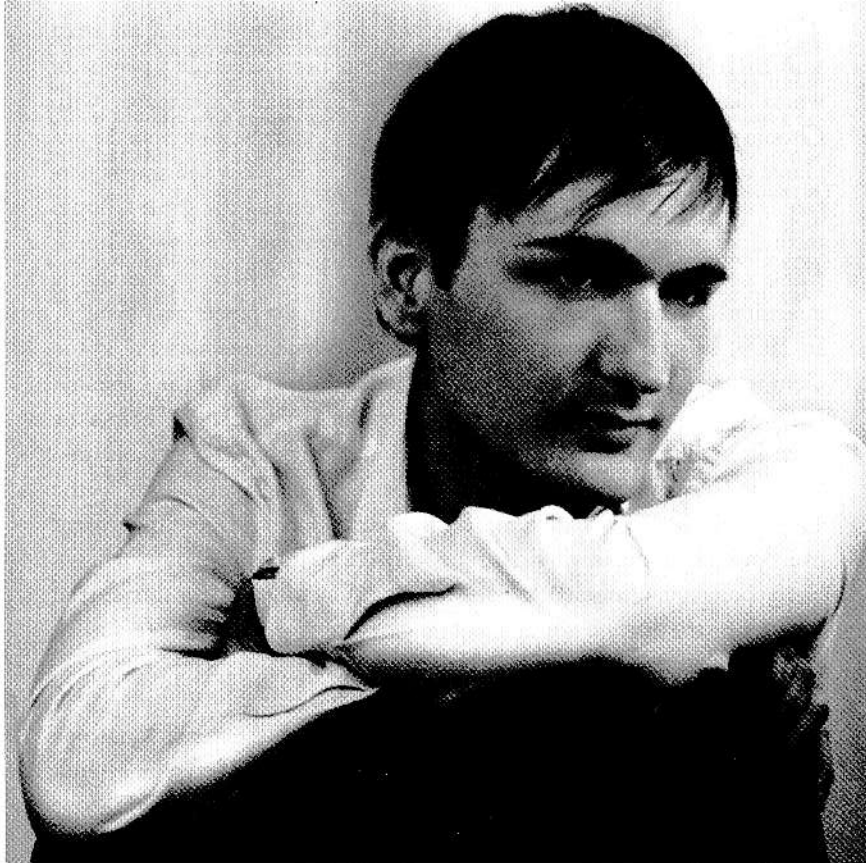
The eight mazurkas which form the last two groups, opp. 67 and 68 were composed at various times, the earliest as far back as 1827, the latest shortly before the composer's death. He left instructions that they were to be destroyed, but instead they were issued posthumously by Julian Fontana in 1855. The **Mazurka in A minor, op. 67 no. 4** resonates with a sense of the exotic. It in fact dates from 1846, preceding the political turmoil that induced the composer to accept an invitation to London and to Edinburgh. In the same key, the **Mazurka in A minor, op. 68 no. 2** is in essence an early work originally written in 1827. Like Nos. 1 and 3 of this set it is dedicated to Emily Elsner.

The **Mazurka in F minor, op. 68 no. 4** is by contrast the latest of all Chopin's works, composed in the summer of 1849 and found by his deathbed. The piece, almost improvisatory in mood, is subdued, morbid, and highly chromatic. Its slow dance-measure marks it out as more a Kujawiak than a mazurka, a last look back to the Polish countryside that Chopin knew, by then, that he would never see.

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Since the release of his recording of the Chopin Piano Concertos (BRIDGE 9278), **Vassily Primakov** has been hailed as a pianist of world class importance. *Gramophone* wrote "Primakov's empathy with Chopin's spirit could hardly be more complete", and the *American Record Guide* stated "This is a great Chopin pianist. Primakov's timing is perfect." *MusicWeb-International* called the CD "one of the great Chopin recordings of recent times. Primakov's interpretations of the two Chopin piano concertos combine grace and fire in the service of unflagging intensity. These are performances of extraordinary power and beauty." In 1999, as a young prizewinner of the Cleveland International Piano Competition, Primakov was cited by Donald Rosenberg of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* for his idiomatic mastery of the Chopin style: "Primakov once again played Chopin's *Sonata No. 3*, showing why the jury awarded him the Chopin Prize. How many pianists can make a line sing as the 19-year-old Moscow native did on this occasion? The slow movement overflowed with dreamy lyricism shaped with a patient and colorful hand. Every poignant phrase took ethereal wing. Elsewhere the music soared with all of the turbulence and poetic vibrancy it possesses. We will be hearing much from this remarkable musician."

Vassily Primakov was born in Moscow in 1979. He entered Moscow's legendary Central Special Music School at the age of eleven as a pupil of Vera Gornostaeva. While in Russia, Mr. Primakov won First Prize



in the Rachmaninoff International Young Artist Competition. At seventeen, after a summer at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, he came to New York to pursue studies at the Juilliard School with the noted pianist Jerome Lowenthal, himself a student of Alfred Cortot and Willam Kapell. At Juilliard Mr. Primakov won the William Petschek Piano Recital Award, which presented his debut recital at Alice Tully Hall. While a student at Juilliard, aided by a Susan W. Rose Career Grant, Mr. Primakov placed among the top two laureates of the Cleveland International Piano Competition, and won both the silver medal and the Audience Prize in the 2002 Gina Bachauer International Artists Piano Competition. Vassily Primakov began his American career after winning First Prize in the 2002 Young Concert Artists (YCA) International Auditions, an award which presented him in solo and concerto performances throughout the USA. In 2007, he was named the Classical Recording Foundation's *Young Artist of the Year*. Vassily Primakov's recordings for Bridge Records include Beethoven Sonatas (BRIDGE 9251), the Chopin Concertos (BRIDGE 9278) and a disc of Tchaikovsky's *Grand Sonata*, Op. 37 and *The Seasons*, Op. 37-bis (BRIDGE 9283). Upcoming recordings for Bridge include a Mozart piano concerto cycle with the Odense Symphony Orchestra, Schumann's *Carnaval* and *Kreisleriana*, and Antonín Dvořák's *Piano Concerto*, Op. 33 coupled with solo works by Dvořák.



**Producer:** David Starobin  
**Engineer:** Viggo Mangor  
**Editor:** Charlie Post  
**Mastering Engineer:** Adam Abeshouse  
**Piano:** Steinway D, Hamburg  
**Piano Technician:** Henrik Clement  
**Annotator:** Malcolm MacDonald  
**Graphic Design:** Douglas H. Holly  
**Executive Producer:** Becky Starobin  
**Photographs of Vassily Primakov:** Konstantin Soukhovetski  
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*This Recording is dedicated to Carlos Dos Santos*

-V.P.

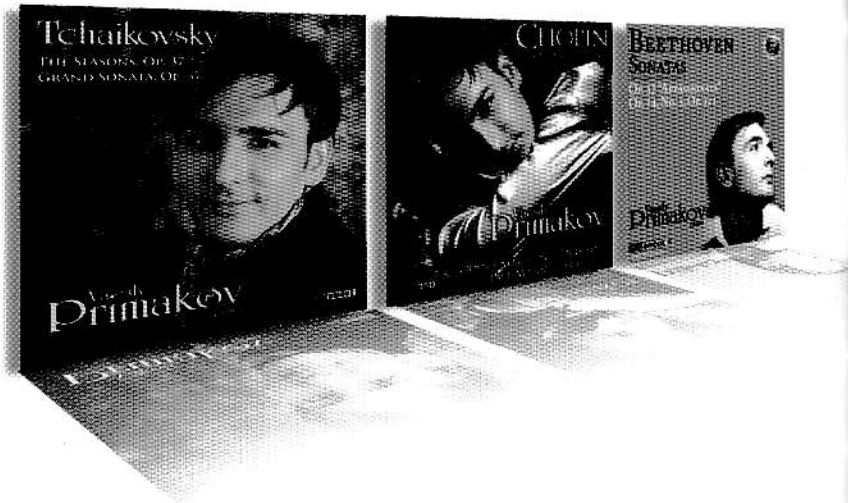


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