



Nocturnes

Frédéric Chopin

INGRID FLITER

Credits →

Tracklist →

Programme note →

Biography →

Nocturnes

Frédéric Chopin

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Moon by Ingrid Fliter

Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849)
Nocturnes

107:07

MENU

INGRID FLITER
piano

- | | | | | | | | |
|----|---|--|------|----|---|--|------|
| 1 | — | Nocturne in D flat major,
Op. 27 No. 2 | 5:52 | 11 | — | Nocturne in F minor,
Op. 55 No. 1 | 5:00 |
| 2 | — | Nocturne in B major,
Op. 32 No. 1 | 4:48 | 12 | — | Nocturne in F major,
Op. 15 No. 1 | 4:14 |
| 3 | — | Nocturne in B major,
Op. 9 No. 3 | 6:27 | 13 | — | Nocturne in B flat minor,
Op. 9 No. 1 | 5:21 |
| 4 | — | Nocturne in G minor,
Op. 15 No. 3 | 4:44 | 14 | — | Nocturne in E flat major,
Op. 9 No. 2 | 4:18 |
| 5 | — | Nocturne in G major,
Op. 37 No. 2 | 5:48 | 15 | — | Nocturne in E flat major,
Op. 55 No. 2 | 5:13 |
| 6 | — | Nocturne in F sharp major,
Op. 15 No. 2 | 3:26 | 16 | — | Nocturne in F sharp minor,
Op. 48 No. 2 | 7:04 |
| 7 | — | Nocturne in C minor,
Op. 48 No. 1 | 6:09 | 17 | — | Nocturne in C sharp minor,
Op. 27 No. 1 | 4:58 |
| 8 | — | Nocturne in A flat major,
Op. 32 No. 2 | 5:19 | 18 | — | Nocturne in G minor,
Op. 37 No. 1 | 7:00 |
| 9 | — | Nocturne in B major,
Op. 62 No. 1 | 7:22 | 19 | — | Nocturne in E major,
Op. 62 No. 2 | 6:06 |
| 10 | — | Nocturne in E minor,
Op. 72 No. 1 | 3:49 | 20 | — | Lento con gran espressione
in C sharp minor, Op. posth. | 4:02 |

Frédéric Chopin

Nocturnes

When John Field published his first three piano Nocturnes in 1812, the ‘Nocturne style’ was far from new, especially among composers of the early French and English piano schools. Vocal imitations, whether of the French romance or the Italian aria, are fundamental to what we now recognize as a trademark Nocturne idiom. So too are those widespread arpeggiations so characteristic of the left-hand accompaniment layer, greatly facilitated by the development of the sustaining pedal. But in truth these characteristics were not unique to the Nocturne. Indeed we need to be careful about attributing too much significance to the title ‘Nocturne’ when we address the music of composers such as Field. Genre titles were used permissively and even interchangeably in the world of post-Classical pianism, and were in any case often supplied by the publisher rather than the composer. It was only really in the music of Chopin that the ‘Nocturne style’ and the genre title ‘Nocturne’ truly converged. They did so above all in the three Nocturnes of Op. 9, the first set Chopin himself submitted to a publisher. There was, however, a precursor, an earlier E minor piece composed in Warsaw probably around 1830 and published posthumously as a Nocturne (Op. 72 No. 1) by Julian

Fontana. Since there is no autograph manuscript for this piece, we cannot know for sure whether the title was Chopin's or Fontana's. Even so, it undoubtedly set the compass reading for the astonishingly rich and diverse series of Nocturnes that Chopin would later compose in what was really a very short creative life.

Just how he defined and formalized the genre becomes clear when we consider the Op. 9 and Op. 15 sets together. All six pieces were composed in the early 1830s, mostly in Vienna, where Chopin spent almost a year before settling in Paris. The three of Op. 9 all conform to the archetype. The melodic substance is subject to cumulative ornamental variation, its improvisatory character at times blurring any meaningful distinction between vocally inspired melody and pianistic ornament. In the first two Nocturnes these ornamental 'arias' alternate with more developmental 'themes', while in the third, whose affective character is markedly different, they are squared off against a contrasted middle section. It is telling that the second and third Nocturnes close with cadenzas, since this spells out a generic link with the operatic aria, as also with the slow movements of concertos. Interestingly, in the case of the E flat major Nocturne, probably the most famous of the entire series, there exist several versions of this cadenza in the composer's hand, prepared it seems with individual students in mind. This is a salutary reminder that in the early nineteenth century text and performance stood in a more fluid mutual relation than we are inclined to recognize today, with ornamentation in particular treated rather freely and spontaneously by pianist-composers, Chopin included. By the time he came to compose his last Nocturnes some fifteen years later the pianistic landscape had changed in significant ways, and the later music registers those changes.

Having established an archetype for the genre in Op. 9, Chopin then demonstrated in Op. 15 that the title ‘Nocturne’ could attach itself to music of varied formal and generic characteristics, and even to pieces that seem to defy the expectations aroused by the title. Thus, it is only the second of the Op. 15 set that conforms to the model established in Op. 9. It is built around one of the most beautiful of his ornamental melodies, offsets this melody with a powerful tension-building middle section, and reserves for the reprise some of the most delicious *floriture* yet conceived by the composer. The other two Nocturnes, in contrast, perfectly exemplify a classic Chopin trait, which is to admit ‘guest’ genres to the Nocturne, though we should note that the effect of this depends precisely on the controlling genre having a determinate meaning. In Op. 15 No. 1, for example, a Pastorale in the eponymous key of F major alternates with an impassioned Etude in the tonic minor. It is hard to resist a comparison with the rather later Ballade No. 2, Op. 38, though in that work the Etude is in the mediant rather than the tonic minor. Likewise, in Op. 15 No. 3, a Mazurka and a Chorale sit side by side under the umbrella of a Nocturne. These days it is hard to think our way back beyond a work-centred understanding of music to a time when listeners might have responded more readily to this play of genres, bearing in mind that genre is one means by which music can point beyond itself.

While in Vienna Chopin composed one other work that has been assigned the title ‘Nocturne’, though not by the composer himself. It was in the 1890s that Mily Balakirev revived the little known, or long forgotten, *Lento con gran espressione* in C sharp minor, introducing what was then a Chopin rarity to Polish audiences. His copy of the piece was based on one made by Oskar Kolberg, and it bears the title ‘Reminiscences. Nocturne pour le piano’, so it may have

been Kolberg who first described this teasingly interesting piece as a Nocturne. It was not published during Chopin's lifetime, and has a complex manuscript history. In addition to the extant copies by Kolberg and Balakirev, there is a copy by the composer's sister Ludwika, approved and corrected by the composer, as well as an autograph (currently residing in Majorca), which stands apart from the others textually. A notable feature of this autograph is the polymetric notation that accompanies the first of the 'Reminiscences', a direct quotation from the Piano Concerto No. 2, Op. 21, since this notation is not present in the copies. In any event, the quotation, along with an explicit reference to another Warsaw-period work, the song *Życzenie*, creates an autobiographical resonance (perhaps for Ludwika's benefit) that renders this work more or less unique in Chopin's output.

From Op. 27 onwards, Chopin published his Nocturnes in contrasted pairs rather than in groups of three. The two of Op. 27, composed in 1835, are perfectly complementary, the darkly brooding C sharp minor of the first transformed enharmonically into the consolatory D flat major of the second. In formal organization the two Nocturnes also work rather differently. The first encloses within its outer flanks a faster, more dramatic middle section, while the second incorporates two very distinct melodic shapes within its apparently seamless melodic flow. The first of these is a through-composed aria, with ever more elaborate ornamentation, while the second is a stanzaic developmental theme that builds towards major tension points in a dynamic and evolutionary fashion. The two Nocturnes of Op. 32, composed in 1837, are likewise complementary in mood and contrasted in formal organization. The startling instrumental recitative that interrupts the melody of the B major Nocturne undoubtedly constitutes one of Chopin's most unusual codas, and it has often attracted comment. But there

are other subtleties here. The flow of the music is such that we can easily fail to notice that the opening melody never really returns, but that certain phrases from it are subtly drawn into new contexts. Conversely the A flat major Nocturne is concerned precisely with the transformation of meaning that occurs when the opening melody does indeed return, now ‘enlarged’ by the experience of a climactic middle section.

The second of the Op. 37 Nocturnes was among the first pieces Chopin composed in George Sand’s manor house Nohant, where he would spend seven summers creating some of his very greatest music (the first Nocturne had already been composed when he arrived at Nohant on that first summer of 1839). In both pieces the Nocturne again plays host to other genres from the world of early nineteenth-century popular pianism: Funeral March and Chorale in the G minor, Barcarolle and Pastorale in the G major. In the case of No. 2, the Pastorale remembers the world of the Ballade No. 2, composed a few months earlier in Majorca, while the Barcarolle foreshadows the world of the late great Barcarolle, Op. 60. Such cross-references are not simply a matter of incidental affinity. They draw attention to the fundamental expressive significance of those popular genres that infuse so much of Chopin’s music. In an age that increasingly separated out the popular and the significant, his genius as a composer was not to abandon the popular in favour of the significant, but rather to transform the popular into the significant.

It is customary to refer to a caesura in Chopin’s evolving style in the early 1840s, and it is true that the first of the Op. 48 Nocturnes, composed in Nohant in 1841, is among the most imposing and dramatic of the series. It is certainly one of the most expansive, and its ‘fully scored’ reprise enlarges to

powerfully climactic effect one of Chopin's most expressive ornamental melodies. The second Nocturne is hardly less ambitious, allowing the constantly unfolding *unendliche Melodie* of its outer sections to stand in sharp relief against the obsessive two-bar repetitions of the middle section, whose D flat major tonal setting is telling in a work cast in F sharp minor. Certainly in sheer scale and ambitions these two Nocturnes constitute something of a step change in Chopin's engagement with the genre, and the level is more than maintained in the two Nocturnes of Op. 55, almost certainly composed in 1843. In these late Nocturnes, one simply cannot know what to expect. Thus, in the first of the Op. 55 set the melancholy circular theme, seemingly without teleology, yields to a recitative in octaves, in an unexpected outburst of aggression that builds to a major, contrapuntally energized, climax. Then, when the melancholy finally returns, it yields in its turn to a surprisingly skittish and lightweight coda. The companion piece in E flat major is no less extraordinary, not just for its improvisatory 'mid thought' opening but for the remarkable independence of its part movement, allowing an unorthodox level of dissonance – really a kind of dissonant counterpoint – in which there is maximum differentiation between melody and accompaniment, to use terms that are no longer really adequate.

Aside from a late C minor Nocturne (not recorded here), whose history is complex, to say the least, Chopin's last thoughts on the Nocturne come in Op. 62. These two Nocturnes were composed in 1846, shortly after his break-up with George Sand, and they represent the pinnacle of his achievement in the genre. Two features from Op. 55 are sublimated in the opening B major Nocturne, the endless flow of the melody, akin to a musical prose, and the contrapuntal interest of the accompaniment layer, where motivic fragments interact delicately with the principal melodic layer. It is worth stressing that in this opening section,

as also in the middle section, Chopin exercises the greatest possible restraint in the ornamentation of his basic material. It is all the more magical, then, when the reprise of the main theme is presented entirely in trilled notes and allowed to open out, albeit briefly, into ecstatic yet carefully controlled *fioriture*. It is a measure of how far we have come from Op. 9 No. 2 that it would be inconceivable to alter a note of this ornamentation. There is similar restraint in the ornamentation of the second Nocturne in E major, whose tone, at least in the outer sections, is as calm, benign and untroubled as that other great work in E major, the Scherzo No. 4, Op. 54, despite the unusual tonal dislocations that accompany its unfolding. Exact repetition is kept to a minimum in the opening section, and even the abbreviated reprise that precedes the agitated middle section is effectively another variation of the theme. It is striking that in these very late works (Jeffrey Kallberg speaks of a ‘last style’) Chopin arrived – within the constraints of his own, highly individual stylistic world – at some of the major technical preoccupations of late nineteenth-century music, the ‘developing variation’ of Brahms and the ‘dissonant counterpoint’ of Mahler.

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Ingrid Fliter

piano

Born in Buenos Aires, Ingrid Fliter began her piano studies in Argentina with Elizabeth Westerkamp and, after moving to Europe, continued them in Freiburg at the Hochschule für Musik with Vitaly Margulis, in Rome with Carlo Bruno and in Imola, at the Academy 'Incontri col Maestro', with Franco Scala and Boris Petrushansky. She has also worked with and been mentored by Zoltán Kocsis, Louis Lortie, Alexander Lonquich and Alfred Brendel. Fliter has established a reputation as a pre-eminent interpreter of Chopin: her 2014 album of the Preludes for Linn was named among the top 10 Chopin recordings by *Gramophone*. In addition, her recording, also for Linn, of the two Piano Concertos with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and Jun Märkl attracted extensive critical acclaim.

Winner of the Silver Medal in the 2000 International Chopin Piano Competition in Warsaw, Fliter was awarded the 2006 Gilmore Artist Award, one of only a handful of pianists to have received this honour. She now divides her time between Europe and the USA, where she works with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, The Cleveland Orchestra, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Minnesota Orchestra, the National Symphony Orchestra, the San Francisco Symphony, the Seattle Symphony, the St Louis Symphony Orchestra and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Fliter has appeared with many European orchestras, including the Philharmonia Orchestra, the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, the

Rotterdam Philharmonic, the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, the Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra, the Danish National Symphony Orchestra, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. She also returns regularly to Australia, where she works with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and the West Australian Symphony Orchestra.

In recital, Fliter has appeared at many of the great halls and festivals around the world such as Het Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, Suntory Hall in Tokyo, Wigmore Hall and Southbank Centre in London, Carnegie Hall and Metropolitan Museum in New York, Kölner Philharmonie and Großes Festspielhaus in Salzburg. Festival highlights include La Roque d'Anthéron, the Valldemossa Chopin Festival and the BBC Proms. Fliter has also appeared at the Tivoli, Mostly Mozart, Grant Park, Aspen and Blossom festivals.

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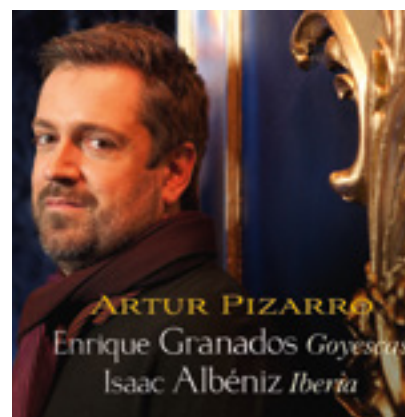
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