ONDINE

SCRIABIN
MAZURKAS

PETER JABLONSKI

The young composer

ALEXANDER SCRIABIN (1872–1915)

Mazurkas

	10 Mazurkas, Op. 3	**33:55**
1	No. 1 in B minor (Tempo giusto)	4:05
2	No. 2 in F sharp minor (Allegretto non tanto)	2:08
3	No. 3 in G minor (Allegretto)	1:41
4	No. 4 in E major (Moderato)	3:53
5	No. 5 in D sharp minor (Doloroso)	4:18
6	No. 6 in C sharp minor (Scherzando)	2:05
7	No. 7 in E minor (Con passione)	3:43
8	No. 8 in B-flat minor (Con moto)	2:48
9	No. 9 in G sharp minor	2:48
10	No. 10 in E flat minor	6:26
	9 Mazurkas, Op. 25	**32:24**
11	No. 1 in F minor (Allegro)	3:14
12	No. 2 in C major (Allegretto)	3:20
13	No. 3 in E minor (Lento)	2:17
14	No. 4 in E major (Vivo)	4:28
15	No. 5 in C sharp minor (Agitato)	4:04
16	No. 6 in F sharp major (Allegretto)	3:20
17	No. 7 in F sharp minor (Moderato)	5:27
18	No. 8 in B major (Allegretto)	2:29
19	No. 9 in E flat minor (Mesto)	3:45
	2 Mazurkas, Op. 40	**3:08**
20	No. 1 in D flat major (Allegro)	1:48
21	No. 2 in F sharp major (Piacevole)	1:20
22	**Mazurka in F major (1889)**	**3:12**
23	**Mazurka in B minor (1889)**	**2:20**
24	**Impromptu à la mazur in C major, Op. 2 No. 3**	**1:49**

PETER JABLONSKI, piano

Scriabin: Mazurkas

Alexander Scriabin was born in Moscow on Christmas Day of 1871, according to the Julian calendar (also called Old Style), which was used in Russia until early 1918, when the country joined the rest of the world in adopting the Gregorian calendar.

Scriabin's musical talent was discovered early; he studied piano with the famous teacher and mentor Nikolay Zverev, also a teacher of Rachmaninoff, and was destined to become one of the Moscow Conservatoire's most famous graduates. Only three years after his graduation, he was already a hot topic: the prominent music critic, writer, and editor Nikolay Findeizen wrote that Scriabin's name was on everyone's lips, from Rimsky-Korsakov to Stasov, and much was expected of him. Mitrofan Belayev, a wealthy industrialist, music publisher, and philanthropist who supported many promising Russian musicians, committed to publishing Scriabin's works, no matter what they were. Although Scriabin looked like a young boy at the time, aged 24, Findeizen remembered that he already was speaking like a true and mature artist, pronouncing that to sell his works would mean to 'sell off his own inspiration.' However, the lifeline provided by Belayev (and later other publishers) was not something the young composer could do without.

As an artist, Scriabin developed in the musical environment in Moscow where Beethoven, Chopin, Schumann, and Tchaikovsky were revered and diligently studied, where Wagner's music influenced even the staunchest defenders of traditional harmony and melody (like Sergey Taneyev), and where the virtuoso genius of Anton Rubinstein reigned supreme. Scriabin's composition teacher at the Moscow Conservatoire, Sergey Taneyev, was himself a student of Tchaikovsky, but he struggled to find common language with his talented student. Having never really understood Scriabin's creative genius, he could only offer comments on the rules of composition, and shake his head in disbelief at Scriabin's adventurous departure from them. Taneyev sarcastically noted that for the first time in his life he met a composer who, instead of giving his compositions tempi indications, gave them praises instead: *divine*, *grandiose*, *sublime*, etc.

When in 1902 Scriabin visited Taneyev and spoke about his philosophical views, the astonished Taneyev noted Scriabin's pronouncements in his diary: 'I am I', 'the world is my creation', and 'I am above God'. The music of Scriabin's Third Symphony, however, which was

performed in Moscow at the same time, left Taneyev feeling 'as if beaten up by sticks'. Later, Scriabin would develop his aesthetic philosophy and devotion to mysticism into a kind of Messianic vision, and an actual belief that he was destined to bring about the dissolution of the world itself through his multi-media creation, *Mysterium*. This he did not finish, having died rather prosaically at the age of 43 from sepsis caused by a sore on his lip.

Scriabin composed prolifically and predominantly for the piano. Only a handful of his works were written for orchestra, although these remain as popular as his piano compositions.

As a performer, he was described by one of his contemporaries, Leonid Sabaneyev, as a 'magician of sounds'. Although Scriabin insisted on playing in large halls, his pianism was most suited to smaller venues, and ideally to an intimate circle of a salon. He simply did not have enough physical power, a result of his small stature and frailty and also due to a recurring strain in his right hand caused by the over practice of Liszt's *Don Juan Fantasy* for his graduation recital in 1892, but he more than compensated for it with the mesmerising brilliance and imagination of his tonal nuances. It was as if this alchemist of sounds possessed a secret with which he was able to transform the sounds of the piano into a variety of orchestral timbres.

Scriabin was close to the family of Boris Pasternak, whose younger brother remembered the impression left by his playing: it was as if, against all physical laws and the mechanics of the instrument, he did not press the keys down, but rather appeared to be extricating himself from the keyboard. This appearance of fluttering of the fingers above the keyboard created the unique sound for which Scriabin was remembered by so many of those who heard him play.

As for performing his own works, Sabaneyev believed that no one could compare with him in being able to transmit 'his own delicately sensuous, erotic moments in his compositions'. Scriabin never performed the same piece in the same way, as if the work was an independent entity, plastic and living and breathing on its own accord, allowing Scriabin to interpret varied nuances of its existence on the piano.

In the beginning of his professional career as a pianist and composer Scriabin was drawn to, and influenced by, the music of Chopin—the undisputed poet of the piano. And Chopin, in

turn, was inspired and drawn to the mazurka—the only form in which he composed regularly throughout his short life, and which he elevated into an intensely personal and nostalgic art form.

The mazurka, originally a Polish country dance, developed from the ancient *Polska* and its descendants, *kujawiak*, *oberek*, and *mazurek*, a folk dance in triple time with strong accents on the second or third beat. The mazurka was popular in Mazovia, the area around Warsaw, and from there conquered European ballrooms in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, even reaching America in the nineteenth century. Throughout the vastness of nineteenth-century Russia, the mazurka was a very popular dance, not least in glittering ballrooms in the estates and palaces of the nobility. Although today the mazurka in classical music is first and foremost associated with Chopin, it was explored by various composers from Glinka and Balakirev, through Debussy and Scriabin, and is still cherished in Poland, in the works of Szymanowski, Maciejewski, Gradstein and others.

Scriabin composed his **Ten Mazurkas Op. 3** between 1888 and 1890, publishing them in 1893. Although often compared in style or at least inspiration to the musical language of Chopin and Schumann, Scriabin's voice is unmistakable here. It is not surprising to hear these influences—virtually every Russian composer (especially if he was also a pianist) of that period grew up on a diet that included a large portion of these composers' music. But there is also Wagner, whose music Scriabin may have first encountered at the home of Taneyev, and who influenced many Russian composers of the period. These pieces show that, despite his youth, Scriabin already possessed the very special talent of being able to distil a mood or a sentiment in just a few pages. Many of his mazurkas found their way into his concert programmes throughout his performance career. For example, Op. 3 No. 4 already charmed Anton Rubinstein who had come specially to hear the young Scriabin perform at his final exam at the Moscow Conservatory in 1892.

The **Nine Mazurkas Op. 25** were composed between 1898 and 1899. Bursting with harmonic and melodic invention, these pieces show Scriabin's imagination taking flight with chords already often built on fourths and not thirds. Here, the composer is starting to push harmonic and melodic invention to their extremes, delaying harmonic resolution, blurring the lines between the distinct lilt of the mazurka and often entering the realm of a dream waltz, or a tone poem. Scriabin further enhances the form with the use of unusual and innovative

pedalling and also his very distinctive polyrhythmic and polyphonic writing, often in a single hand. In the mazurkas Op. 25 Scriabin goes further than before in his aim to be able to capture a fleeting dream, a mood, a scent, into sounds that take flight and are burning with an inner flame—something that Scriabin wanted his music to encapsulate. In his last ever public performance in St Petersburg on 2 April, 1915 Scriabin included his mazurka Op. 25 No. 4 into the programme.

The **Two Mazurkas Op. 40**, published in 1903, are more economic and concise in their means of expression, and show the spiritual, intimate, distilled light of Scriabin's sound world. Written around the same time as the prophetic Fourth Sonata these mazurkas are already pointing to completely new harmonic and philosophical directions that were to dominate Scriabin's mind from then on.

The **Mazurkas in B minor and F major**, although published in 1893, with the date of composition given as 1889, were most likely composed between 1884 and 1886, when Scriabin had barely entered his teenage years. These two pieces had to wait half a century before they were included into Scriabin's collected works, edited by Konstantin Igumnov (a pianist well known as one of the important Scriabin interpreters). These are two contrasting pieces, with the dreamy and lyrical B minor, to the jubilant and full of youthful exuberance in F major. However, the F major mazurka could also be interpreted in a subtler, more melancholy and introverted way, despite its brightness and openness.

Op. 2 No. 3 (Impromptu à la mazur) was published in 1889, and strictly speaking, this is not a mazurka but rather an improvisation on and contemplation of the form. This charming work shows just how personal a form the mazurka had already become to the young composer, about to take flight into the far reaches of his very own musical universe.

Anastasia Belina

Peter Jablonski is an internationally acclaimed Swedish pianist. Discovered by Claudio Abbado and Vladimir Ashkenazy and signed by Decca at the age of 17, he went on to perform, collaborate, and record with over 150 of the world's leading orchestras and conductors, including the Philharmonia, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Mariinsky, La Scala Philharmonic, Tonhalle Zurich, Orchestre Nationale de France, NHK Tokyo, DSO Berlin, Warsaw Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Philadelphia and Cleveland Orchestras, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Valery Gergiev, Kurt Sanderling, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Riccardo Chailly, Daniele Gatti, and Myung-Whun Chung, to name a few.

He has performed and recorded the complete piano concertos by Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff, and Bartók, and all piano sonatas by Prokofiev. Hailed as an 'unconventional virtuoso', during his three-decade-long career he developed a diverse repertoire that includes works by Barber, Gershwin, Szymanowski, Lutosławski, Copland, Stenhammar, and Nielsen, with most recent additions by such Scandinavian and European composers as Valborg Aulin, Elfrida Andrée, Laura Netzel, Johanna Müller-Hermann, and Alexey Stanchinsky.

He worked with composers Witold Lutosławski and Arvo Pärt, and had a number of works composed for, and dedicated to him, including Wojciech Kilar's First Piano Concerto, for which he won the Orpheus world premiere performance award at the Warsaw Autumn Festival. He remains a supporter of today's composers and regularly gives world premieres of new works, together with those that have been neglected by music history.

Jablonski's extensive discography includes recordings on Decca, Deutsche Grammophon, Philips, Altara and Octavia labels, and now Ondine. He has received numerous awards for his recordings, including the Edison award for best concerto recording of Shostakovich's First Piano Concerto, Rachmaninov's Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, and Lutoslawski's Paganini Rhapsody with Ashkenazy and RPO for Decca.

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