

A portrait of pianist Goran Filipiec is the central focus of the image. He is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark, high-collared shirt. He is looking slightly to the left of the camera with a serious expression. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights on his face and hair against a dark background. At the bottom of the image, there is a faint, upside-down portrait of Frédéric Chopin, which is partially obscured by the text.

CHOPIN Preludes, Ballades
and Scherzos GORAN FILIPEC

Fryderyk CHOPIN (1810–1849)

Preludes, Ballades and Scherzos

Born in 1810 into a Franco-Polish family in Żelazowa Wola, Frédéric François (Fryderyk Franciszek) Chopin was recognised as an exceptional talent at an early age, and studied at the Warsaw School of Music under Józef Elsner. At the age of 19 Chopin made his debut in Vienna, and had his first composition printed by the Viennese publisher Tobias Haslinger. After his arrival in Paris in 1831, Chopin's reputation grew rapidly. The success of his concert at the Salle Pleyel, organised by Friedrich Kalkbrenner, assured him a contract with Schlesinger, the leading Parisian publishing company, as well as numerous students and admirers. There, Chopin became friends with personalities of the cultural milieu such as Franz Liszt, Felix Mendelssohn, Sigismond Thalberg, Vincenzo Bellini and Eugène Delacroix, as well as with Adam Mickiewicz and Albert Grzymała, his Polish compatriots. Unlike some of his keyboard virtuoso friends, he disliked public performances and appeared in concerts rarely and rather unwillingly. He realised that the extreme delicacy of his pianistic style was not to everyone's taste in larger concert environments and preferred to disclose the finesse of his artistry in intimate, more ambient spaces. During his companionship with George Sand, probably the brightest and the most creative period in his life, Chopin spent most of his time in Nohant in central France, leaving for Paris mainly during the winters. His health problems, which had pursued him since youth, were aggravating with time, and in the year following his last concerts held in Glasgow and London in 1848, he died from tuberculosis. He was buried at the cemetery of Père Lachaise in Paris while his heart, in accordance with his will, was brought by his sister to Warsaw where it was placed in an urn installed in a pillar of the Church of the Holy Cross.

In the context of his time, Chopin's intimate, miniaturist pianistic style was unique and somewhat peculiar. It was rather seen as the successor of the art of Johann Nepomuk Hummel, Johann Baptist Cramer and John Field rather than aligned with some of the tendencies of his time, which were oriented towards bolder pianistic effects. We remark that his contemporaries such as Liszt and Anton Rubinstein developed experimental, innovative and progressive styles, which were destined for larger halls, and these can be regarded as opposite to Chopin's aesthetic. Pianists such as Carl Tausig, Theodor Leschetizky, Aleksander Michałowski or Ferruccio Busoni tried to adapt Chopin's works to the context of the time and spaces within which they were performing, and arranged parts or passages of Chopin's works in the spirit of the 'grand style'. For this present recording different sources were used in order to try to trace the practices of these pianists, whose rendering of Chopin was rather majestic. In the spirit of Liszt's 'modernisation' of Schubert's *Wanderer Fantasy* or Tausig's rewriting of Chopin's *First Concerto*, some of the passages of the recorded repertoire were rewritten in more efficient and idiomatic pianistic forms. In these minor interventions Chopin's original idea was always preserved.

Inspired by the poems of Adam Mickiewicz, an exile in Paris and a friend of the composer, Chopin conceived a new musical genre – the ballade – and reinvented the scherzo, making it independent from the traditional sonata cycle, and giving it larger proportions. The four ballades and four scherzos were published between 1835 and 1843, without being conceived as cycles, but rather as independent works, not destined to be performed as sets. Therefore, this recording – in order to avoid the sequence never intended by the composer, and taking into consideration the correspondence during the time of composition between the pieces – presents the works in four diptychs of ballade-scherzo, each of which is preceded by one of Chopin's preludes. The contextualisation of the preludes as introductory pieces here is hypothetical, although there is evidence, such as in the programme announced in *The Scotsman* for Chopin's concert in Glasgow in 1848, that Chopin himself performed, or intended to perform a prelude followed by a ballade. It is certain that he never performed or intended the preludes to be performed as a cycle, although that is what we regularly hear in the present day. Observing the preludes in the context of the time they were written in, and taking into consideration the very common practise of prelude in the 18th and 19th centuries, makes me believe that Chopin's preludes should be coupled with his other, larger works more often. The preludes chosen to precede the four diptychs of ballade-scherzo were picked according to tonality, with the exception of *Prelude, Op. 45*, which is believed to correspond to the introduction of the first ballade in texture and character.

Chopin started working on the first ballade and the first scherzo approximately in the same period. Although we lack precise information about the genesis of these works, we may assume that sketches of both of them date back to 1831, and their completion took place somewhere around 1833. The *Scherzo* was circumstantially published first, as *Op. 20* in 1835, followed by the *Ballade* in 1836 as *Op. 23*. It is believed that the *Ballade*

was inspired by *Konrad Wallenrod*, a historic poem by Adam Mickiewicz. As it is hardly possible to relate the piece to the programme of Mickiewicz's work, we may assume that Chopin never intended to transfer the plot directly into music, but that the inspiration he drew from the poem was that of its general character. We have little information regarding the ontology of *Scherzo No. 1*, but the predatory and tempestuous character of the piece is noticeable, indicating that Chopin saw in that genre a potential for transformation which goes beyond the pure emancipation from the sonata cycle. Of particular note is the appearance of the Polish Christmas carol *Lulajże Jezuniu* in the middle section of the piece.

Ballade No. 2, finished in Mallorca in 1839 and published as *Op. 38*, had a particular genesis. Robert Schumann, to whom the work was dedicated, wrote: 'I recollect very well that when Chopin played the ballade here, it ended in F major; now it closes in A minor', and added that 'its impassioned episodes seem to have been inserted afterwards'. Chopin had seen Schumann in Leipzig back in 1835, and had obviously played the first pastoral section of the *Ballade* as an individual piece. The stormy episodes were combined with the *pastorale* later, possibly during his stay in the Balearic Islands. Although the popular second *Scherzo* was published before *Ballade No. 2*, in 1837, both pieces had too been conceived at the same time – around 1835.

It was the opinion of Jan Kleczyński that *Ballade No. 3*, published in 1841, was evidently inspired by Mickiewicz's tale of Undine (Świtezianka), a water nymph in love with an unfaithful mortal. We recognise the barcarolle-like character of the piece, and despite the lack of firm proof to support Kleczyński's theory, we may accept it as possible if not probable. The third *Scherzo*, dating from 1839, probably the most dramatic of the four, was completed shortly after Chopin's departure from Mallorca.

The last of the four ballades was published in 1843, and according to Alfred Cortot, it was inspired by Mickiewicz's poem *The Three Budrys*. Here again it is difficult to identify firm links between the music and the plot of the poem. The bright, humoristic character of the fourth *Scherzo*, *Op. 54* finally corresponds to the traditional character of the genre. Light and capricious, and written with plenty of good humour, this piece was conceived during Chopin's stay in Nohant and published in 1843, the same year as *Ballade No. 4*.

Goran Filipec

24 Preludes, Op. 28 – Nos. 18 and No. 4, Fantasy in F minor, Op. 49 and Polonaise No. 6 in A flat major, Op. 53 'Heroic' are available for download and streaming on a digital EP (9.70383).

Goran Filipec

Widely renowned for his exceptional interpretations of the Romantic repertoire, Goran Filipec (b. Rijeka, 1981) is a pianist of fiery virtuosity and evocative pianistic style, often performing his own arrangements and adaptations. Initially a pupil of Evgeny Zarembka and Oxana Yablonskaya, Filipec studied with Naum Grubert and Natalia Trull at the Royal Conservatoire The Hague and the Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatory. He also holds a PhD in music from Sorbonne Université and the Conservatoire national supérieur de musique et de danse of Paris. His recordings for Naxos have received exceptional critical acclaim. *Paganini Studies* (8.573458) and *Hungarian Fantasy* (8.573866) were awarded the Grand Prix du Disque by the Liszt Ferenc Society of Budapest. A laureate of several international piano competitions, Filipec has appeared internationally as a recitalist and soloist with symphony orchestras worldwide. He has been invited to appear at the Faces of Modern Pianism International Festival (Mariinsky Theatre), Progetto Martha Argerich and Dubrovnik Summer Festival. Filipec is co-founder and president of the Société Franz Liszt de Genève. www.goran-filipec.com



Photo © Elisa Caldana

The extreme delicacy and finesse of Chopin's pianistic style was unusual in an era when star pianists such as Liszt and Anton Rubinstein were developing more virtuosic and experimental effects. It led some performers of the day to adapt Chopin's works to suit the context of their time. Goran Filipec has traced the practices of these pianists to fashion a programme of Chopin's works performed in the spirit of the 'grand style'. A digital EP featuring four bonus tracks is also available to stream and download (9.70383).

**Fryderyk
CHOPIN**
(1810–1849)

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| 1 | Prelude No. 25 in C sharp minor, Op. 45 (1841) | 3:33 |
| 2 | Ballade No. 1 in G minor, Op. 23 (c. 1833) | 8:17 |
| 3 | Scherzo No. 1 in B minor, Op. 20 (c. 1833) | 8:42 |
| 4 | 24 Preludes, Op. 28 – No. 23 in F major (1838–39) | 0:56 |
| 5 | Ballade No. 2 in F major, Op. 38 (1838–39) | 6:22 |
| 6 | Scherzo No. 2 in B flat minor, Op. 31 (1837) | 9:24 |
| 7 | 24 Preludes, Op. 28 – No. 17 in A flat major (1838–39) | 2:58 |
| 8 | Ballade No. 3 in A flat major, Op. 47 (1841) | 7:12 |
| 9 | Scherzo No. 3 in C sharp minor, Op. 39 (1839) | 7:14 |
| 10 | 24 Preludes, Op. 28 – No. 1 in C major (1838–39) | 0:57 |
| 11 | Ballade No. 4 in F minor, Op. 52 (1842–43) | 9:47 |
| 12 | Scherzo No. 4 in E major, Op. 54 (1842–43) | 10:56 |

Goran Filipec, Piano

Recorded: 28–30 July 2024 at Saffron Hall, Saffron Walden, UK
Producers and editors: Andrew Walton (K&A Productions Ltd) **1** **2** **4** **5** **8** **10** **11**,
Tim Burton (K&A Productions Ltd) **3** **6** **7** **9** **12** • Engineer: Deborah Spanton (K&A Productions Ltd)
Booklet notes: Goran Filipec • Cover photo of Goran Filipec by Elisa Caldana