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Fryderyk CHOPIN | Polonaises

Andrzej PIKUL - piano

1 CD

Fryderyk CHOPIN

*Polonaise in B flat major NE 1, *Polonaise in G minor NE 2, *Polonaise in A flat major NE 3

*Polonaise in G sharp minor NE 4, *Polonaise in B flat minor NE 10, *Polonaise in D minor NE 11

*Polonaise in F minor NE 12, *Polonaise in B flat major NE 17, *Polonaise in G flat major NE 35

CD 2

*Polonaise in C sharp minor Op. 26 No. 1, *Polonaise in E flat minor Op. 26 No. 2,

*Polonaise in A major Op. 40 No.1 *Polonaise in C minor Op. 40 No., *Polonaise in F sharp minor Op. 44,

*Polonaise in A flat major Op. 53, *Polonaise-Fantasie in A flat major Op. 61

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Among various dance forms cultivated by Chopin, the polonaises appear to be the most significant. When he is seven they are the beginning of his creative journey, the end of which is marked by *Polonaise-Fantasie* – his last great piano solo piece. Therefore the polonaises are not only the proof of the composer's genius; they are also the unique genre that shows the pianistic and stylistic evolution of Chopin's work.

As a seven year old boy, Chopin was undoubtedly under the influence of Polish pre-romantic composers of polonaises, such as Franciszek Kurpiński, Józef Elsner, Maria Szymanowska and, most of all, of Michał Kleofas Ogiński, who is the creator of the typical polonaise form – the trio, and who provided their division into heroic and elegiac.

The Polonaise in B flat major (NE [National Edition] 1, 1817), written down by his father, and the Polonaise in G minor (NE 2, 1817) show a typical and conventional yet charming child's vision of the polonaise. They are not without charm and show signs of the great future of this genre in the *oeuvre* of this great Pole.

Chopin dedicated the Polonaise in A flat major (NE 3, 1821) to his only piano teacher, Wojciech Żywny, and presented it as a name-day gift on 23rd April 1821. It is proof not only of the young composer's more mature approach towards composition, but also of the immense development he had made within those four years. Although the textural means in the work still remain within the conventions of the period, nevertheless one can see signs of his original invention and elaborate expression and ornamentation. The trio in this piece becomes a more autonomous part of the composition.

The Polonaise in G sharp minor (NE 4, 1824) illustrates the next period of Chopin's development. The youthful, slightly excessive and exaggerated sentimentalism does not negate its brilliant virtuosity (especially in the elaborate trio), with the period's characteristic effects, such as crossing hands over a large ambitus. The finesse and originality of the composer's ideas is particularly visible in the trio, which henceforth shall become something of a rule in Chopin's later polonaises. His next one in B flat minor (WN 10, 1826) is a documentation of his seeing Gioachino Rossini's *La gazza ladra* with his friend, Wilhelm Kolberg, for whom the piece is dedicated just before the Chopin family left for Duszyniki. Chopin quotes elements of the opera (the cavatina of Gianetto, *Vieni fra queste braccia...*, Act 1) and writes in the trio: "*Au revoir.*"

In spite of their virtuoso effects, the 1826 polonaises – in D minor (NE 11) and in F minor (NE 12) – are somewhat of an elegiac nature. The later Polonaise in B flat major (NE 17), employs not only the effects typical for the brilliant style, but also imparts a heroic mood on certain episodes. The form and expression of those pieces show Chopin as a mature composer, a master of the musical craft, possessed of a fully-formed aesthetic.

The last of the so called "Warsaw" polonaises, the one in G flat major (NE 35, 1829/30), is the perfect realization of the genre of the period. Chopin maintains an elegant balance between the art of composing learned during his studies under Józef Elsner, and his visionary creative individuality. He keeps up with the current musical trends but leaves a mark of his genius which is fully present in his later creations.

Chopin deemed his subsequent seven polonaises worthy of being published and gave them Opus numbers. In 1836, the Polonaise in C sharp minor, Op. 26 No. 1 and the Polonaise in E flat minor, Op. 26 No. 2 are published. In a letter to his publisher, Maurice Schlesinger, Chopin calls them *polonaises mélancoliques*. Their character oscillates between the heroic and the sentimental; both works possess an interesting rhetoric of beginning. In both polonaises, the trio has an extraordinary role. The elaborate trio of the C sharp minor (in D flat major) provides solace, it soothes the hysterical expression of the extremes and is very different from the concise yet heroic trio (in B major) of the Polonaise E flat minor, full of the muted sound of the "male choir."

The Polonaises Op. 40: No. 1 in A major and No. 2 in C minor take a very condensed form. Their expression, strongly polarized in the heroic expression, is reflected also by the use of other registers of the instrument, which illustrate the euphoria of triumph, the despair of the fall and a dramatic protest, perhaps towards the attitude of Karol Kurpiński, the author of the pro-tzar song *Witaj królu* ("Welcome, King!"), which has similar melody in major key.

In *Chopin. Człowiek, dzieło, rezonans* (1998: 343), Mieczysław Tomaszewski writes: „The last three polonaises: F sharp minor, Op. 44, A flat major, Op. 53, and A flat major, Op. 61 named by the author *Polonaise-Fantasie*, are different from all his former polonaises in form and in character. They have been called poems. [...] Each in its own way abandons the compact, conventional dance model, reaching a free, sometimes loose and unstable form, which is broadly and elaborately sketched and determined by the imperative of expression.

The epic-dramatic Polonaise F sharp minor, Op. 44 was first pictured by Chopin as a fantasia (which would explain the *à la polacca* in its reprise), evokes two types of dance: the *polonaise* of the Polish nobility and, the folk *mazurka* (here in the form of the *kujawiak*) in the trio. The "fantastic" nature of the work can be seen by the uncharacteristic use of the formal element before the trio, based on the obsessive ostinato that imitates drumrolls and emphasizes the contrast

of the sweetness and charm of the following mazurka.

In a letter written in Paris on the 23rd August, 1941 to Pietro Mechetti, his publisher in Vienna, Chopin notes: "I have now a manuscript for you. It is a type of fantasia in the form of a Polonaise. I will, however, call it a Polonaise."

The Polonaise in A flat major, Op. 53 is the most brilliant realization of the heroic polonaise. The allusions to the most glorious parts of Polish history, the radiance, glory and fame emanating from this musical poem cheered up hearts yearning for freedom. The work will always be the quintessence of Polish identity. The originally expressive trio based on a heroic, Sarmatian, and nostalgic episodes constitutes the perfect complementation of the extremes.

The *Polonaise-Fantasie* in A flat major might be seen as a résumé of the composer's *oeuvre* in this genre. In a 1845 letter to his family in Warsaw, Chopin writes: "Now I would like to finish the Cello Sonata, the barcarole and another work, that I still don't know what to call." The double title of the work is a kind of compromise, a "justification" of its construction. The form of the polonaise is incrustated with improvisational episodes. The expressive contrast are based on all idiomatic elements that are also present in his previous polonaises: elegy and melancholy compete with Sarmatian pride. The episodes of refined expression are in contrast with the symphonic sound of the instrument. Let us quote the observation of Arthur Hedley (1949: 201): "the piano has spoken in an unheard-before language."

Andrzej Pikul

translated by Karolina Rybicka

ANDRZEJ PIKUL graduated from the piano class of Prof. Tadeusz Żmudziński at the Academy of Music in Kraków (1980). He continued his studies in the master class of Prof. Paul Badura-Skoda at the Hochschule für Musik in Vienna (1981–1983). He also participated in many other master courses taught by eminent pianists (including A. Jenner, V. Perlemuter, G. Agosti, T. Vasary).

He is a Laureate of the Polish Piano Festival in Słupsk (1981), the International Competition Foundation Cziffra in Senlis (1983), the European Broadcasting Competition in Bratislava (1985).

He began his international artistic career with a successful performance at the festival Szene der Jugend in Salzburg (1982). Since that time, he gave many performances in prestigious concert-halls (such as the Brahms-Saal and the Beethoven-Saal in Vienna, the Wigmore Hall in London, the Norsk Opera in Oslo, the Izumi Hall in Osaka, the National Theatre in Brasilia, Grand Theatre Ningbo, Philharmonic Halls in Sofia, Kosice and Kiev). He has already appeared in almost all European countries, Brazil, China, Chile, Columbia, Israel, Japan, Turkey and in the USA.

He has participated in numerous festivals, including the Polish Piano Festival in Słupsk, Wratislavia Cantans, Bydgoszcz Music Festival, Music in Old Kraków, International Days of Kraków Composers, Encuentro de Musica Internacional de La Serena (Chile), International Festival of Music in Bucamaranga (Columbia), Leipziger Chopin Tage, Košická hudobná jar (Slovakia), Sofia Music Weeks (Bulgaria), Sollertinski Festival in Vitebsk (Belarus), the International Music Festival in Kiev and Polish Music Days in Israel and Turkey.

He has made numerous recordings for Polish Radio and Television, Österreichische Rundfunk und Fernsehen, Radio Suisse Romande, and several CD albums (including Dux 0320: Karol Szymanowski: *Symphonie concertante* Op. 60, Aleksander Tansman: *Suite for 2 pianos and orchestra* and Dux 0552/3: Alberto Ginastera *The complete music for piano*, Dux 0929: Franz Liszt *Italia*). He has also performed premieres of 20th- and 21st-century pieces. He has been the dedicatee of music by many contemporary composers (including Krystyna Moszumańska-Nazar's *Apigram*). He has taught master courses for pianists in Brazil, Chile, Italy, Israel, Japan, Germany, Portugal and Spain, and sat on juries of Polish and international music competitions (among others in Andorra, Barcelona, Jaén, Hong-Kong and Osaka).

He was a visiting professor in Kobe College, Japan (2002/2003) and at Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz (2011/2012).

He is Professor of Piano and head of the Piano Department at the Academy of Music Kraków.