



PIANO
CLASSICS

Chopin

NOCTURNES

complete

Vincenzo Maltempo

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN 1810-1849

NOCTURNES COMPLETE

Nocturnes

1	No.1 in B flat minor Op.9 No.1	5'09	12	No.12 in G Op.37 No.2	5'22
2	No.2 in E flat Op.9 No.2	4'45	13	No.13 in C minor Op.48 No.1	6'31
3	No.3 in B Op.9 No.3	6'53	14	No.14 in F sharp minor Op.48 No.2	6'04
4	No.4 in F Op.15 No.1	4'27	15	No.15 in F minor Op.55 No.1	4'59
5	No.5 in F sharp Op.15 No.2	3'46	16	No.16 in E flat Op.55 No.2	4'56
6	No.6 in G minor Op.15 No.3	5'43	17	No.17 in B Op.62 No.1	7'34
7	No.7 in C sharp minor Op.27 No.1	5'02	18	No.18 in E Op.62 No.2	6'33
8	No.8 in D flat Op.27 No.2	5'14	19	No.19 in E minor Op.72 No.1 (posthumous)	3'49
9	No.9 in B Op.32 No.1	5'09	20	C sharp minor Op. posthumous	3'58
10	No.10 in A flat Op.32 No.2	5'37	21	C minor (1837, pub 1938)	2'33
11	No.11 in G minor Op.37 No.1	6'22			

Vincenzo Maltempo *piano Steinway Concert Grand 1888*

NOCTURNES

*So intimate, this Chopin, I think his soul
Should be resurrected only among friends
Some two or three, who will not touch the bloom
That is rubbed and questioned in the concert room.
- T S Eliot -*

Dublin son, London worker, Russian icon. John Field. The new pianist for a new era who changed people's ideas about fingering. Who evolved impressionistic pedal effects. Who developed wide-spread arpeggiated accompaniments to vibrate an instrument into humming sound. The poet-composer who allured the civilised world with his feeling for pre-Bellini *bel canto* and embellishment. Who 'achieved status for the "character piece" in the formative stages of romantic piano literature' (David Rowland). Who forged the nocturne/romance (1814-36) bequeathed to Chopin. 'In his poetic nocturnes,' Liszt adored, Chopin 'sang not only the harmonies which are the source of our most ineffable delights, but likewise the restless, agitating bewilderment to which they often give rise.' To a Leipzig critic in July 1836 'the name [nocturne] admits nothing else but a fancifully dark hue [...] It is the dream, which celebrates its round dances with longing, longing which chose pain on its own, because it could not find again the joy that it loves'. A modern view – Samson's – places emphasis on their qualities of 'expressive, reflective lyricism. [They] are above all character pieces, exploring many nuances within a deliberately restricted affective range, most often nostalgic, languid, consolatory, the music of a sad smile' (Samson). Pre-Second World War opinion – John F. Porte's – invokes the idea of Chopin

par excellence and *in excelsis*: 'we see him quiet, alone, musing, brooding, melancholy, lighting up here and there with a kind of morbid or feverish fire, sometimes allowing his thoughts to dwell on those funereal processions of chords, and always there is a suggestion of a gloomy apartment, with old furniture, darkish paintings, and heavy velvet or plush curtains or hangings'. To Huneker they were 'tropical', 'Asiatic': 'the exotic savour of the heated conservatory'. Arias without words.

Op.9 (1830-31) Dedicated to Marie Pleyel – 'celestial pianofortist', fiancée of Berlioz, wife of the piano-maker Camille Pleyel, *reine de l'amour* (her conquests including Liszt in Chopin's rooms, triggering a fallout between the two men). *No.1 B flat minor* Melancholic

ornament, exotic curves, languid dreams, 'a long sad colour', twilight into darkness. A foreign tongue removed from the Germans or the French or Albion. The second of its four strophes reminded an Edwardian commentator, Ashton Jonson, of Matthew Arnold. 'Roses that down the alleys shine afar, And open, jasmine-muffled lattices, And groups under the dreaming garden-trees, And the full moon, and the white evening-star.' *No.2 E flat major*. The most celebrated of the Chopin canon, and the one nearest to Field in idiom, gesture and accompaniment – his E flat Romance, H 30, published in Leipzig c 1814-16. 'Where Field smiles, Chopin makes a grinning grimace,' ranted the Berlin critic Ludwig Rellstab. 'Where Field shrugs his shoulders, Chopin twists his whole body; where Field puts some seasoning into the food, Chopin empties a handful of cayenne pepper. In short, if one holds Field's charming romances before a distorting concave mirror, so that every delicate impression becomes coarse, one gets Chopin's work. We implore Mr Chopin to return to nature.' *No.3 B major* 'Exquisite *salon* music

[...] Although the atmosphere is close, impregnated with musk and other perfumes, there is here no affectation. The concluding cadenza, that twirling line, reads plainly Frederic Chopin' (Niecks). Longer than its companions, it introduces the idea of an agitated central section in the minor.

Op.15 *No.1 F major* (1830-31) Delicately voiced, witness the left hand's lower gilding of the right's *tranquillo* melody, with a fiery middle episode in F minor. 'This nocturne does not express night. There is sunlight in it, and the middle section is storm, but not darkness' (Jonson). *No.2 F sharp major* (1830-31) Delirious flights of fancy, rhapsody and ornament, the central *doppio movimento sotto voce* disquietening the tonal base. Jonson quotes an anonymous *fin de siècle* writer: 'quite Persian in style; it paints the palm and the cypress, the rose thicket and the great stars burning low in the southern sky' (*The Dome*, 1897-1900). The last five bars, from high D sharp to low harmonic murmur, lighthouse beam to wine dark sea, evoke one of the great romantic images. *No.3 G minor* (?1833). 'A declaration of war with the entire past' (Schumann). *Languido e rubato* Chopin challenges, marking the modal third strophe *religioso*. *In the Graveyard* goes legend. Enigmatic music without melodic *da capo* (despite one in the sketches), combining *kujawiak* with chorale, dance with chant. There is no autograph evidence confirming or rejecting a late 19th century story (apparently from Oskar Kolberg) that the piece was inspired by *Hamlet*. On the other hand, Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger has pointed out, Chopin in 1832-33 was on close terms with Berlioz, an ardent Shakesperean. And in January 1833 *Hamlet* was given in Paris, with Berlioz's future wife, the Irish actress Harriet Smithson, as Ophelia. 'The chronological coincidence is remarkable.'

Op.27 (1835 [1833-36]) A diptych essaying transformations of mode and mood in a (*Moonlight Sonata*) world enclosed, Janus-like, by the same key-note – the closing *tierce de picardie* of the first number melting imperceptibly into the opening of the second. The principal melodies of both start from the third degree of the scale, but take revealingly opposite directions – the first swinging towards the subdominant, the second consolidating home ground. *No.1 C sharp minor* A ternary design in which the central *più mosso* oscillates between dotted and doubledotted rhythms before climaxing in a touch of *con anima* Polishness and a cry of diminished-seventh, *fff*. *No.2 D flat major* A rondo yielding emotions and tracteries horizons away from the turns and routines of salon tradition, 'the *cheval de bataille* of the professional'. 'A song of the sweet summer of two souls' (Huneker). 'Such a pretty new nocturne' (Mendelssohn).

Op.32 ([1835-] 1836-37) *No.1 B major* Gently repetitious, four halts pausing the way to Arcady. Foreign tones, a 'rapping' bass motif, declamation, jagged chords, a *minore* close, halt the reverie. *No.2 A flat major* Triplet-motion and *appassionato* reprise (cf Op.27/2), foreand after-worded by the same bars of calling-card. Fieldian in reversion, Chopinesque in realisation.

Op.37 'We all know how Chopin was formerly strewn with pearls, spangles and golden trinkets. He has altered and grown older; he still loves decoration, but now of that nobler kind under which poetic ideality gleams more transparently' (Schumann). *No.1 G minor* (1837) 'Plaintive and longing,' Niecks pictured, with 'a wailing accompaniment', almost like a slow march. Echoing the G minor of Op.15 there is a prayerful element: the dark-registered, organ-style E flat middle episode. *No.2 G major* ([1838] 1839) A rondo-barcarolle

of mellifluous thirds and sixths, beautiful for its rocking second subject (? a song from Normandy). Journeying by steam-schooner from Palma to Majorca, November 1838, George Sand wrote in her diary: 'The night was warm and dark, illuminated only by an extraordinary phosphorence in the wake of the ship; everybody was asleep on board, except the steersman, who, in order to keep himself awake, sang all night, but in a voice so soft and subdued that one might have thought that he feared to awake the men of the watch, or that he himself was half asleep [...] a reverie rather than a song, a kind of careless floating of the voice [...] which kept time with the swaying of the ship [...] a vague improvisation, restrained nevertheless by sweet and monotonous forms'.

Op.48 (1841) Tapestries of *aurora borealis* and constellation coppered in winter moonrise. *No.1 C minor* A fantasy-ballade drawing together slow march, *maggiore* chorale, heightened tension (*doppio movimento*), and miraculous die-away: the grandest, most imposing and theatrical of the nocturnes. 'Chopin in the mode masculine' (Huneker). *No.2 F sharp minor* This explores tenderer recesses, speaking through recitative, and closing in a fevered coda of finally sweetening major. Could somewhere within its fading heart lie echoed the end of Schumann's *In der Nacht*?

Op.55 (1842-43) Dedicated to Jane Wilhelmina Stirling, pupil and friend, who, along with her sister, Katherine Erskine, played a major rôle in Chopin's last years. 'During lesson-times at the master's house,' Sand's daughter Solange remembered, 'one would often come across two long persons, of Scottish origin and size, thin, pale, ageless, solemn, dressed in black never smiling. Under this rather lugubrious surface were concealed two lofty,

generous and devoted hearts.'Victorian hearts that, in Jane's case at least, also knew unrequited love. *No.1 F minor* Another steady left-hand slow march (the downbeats rising to offbeat harmonies), with a rhetorical *più mosso* trio, embellished *da capo*, and extended *tierce de picardie* coda. *No.2 E flat major* A through-composed *lento*, focussing less on episode, tempo contrast or theme than texture and rhythm (Chopin having gone through a learning curve of Cherubini counterpoint in 1842). Complex emotions, polyphony and harmony. 'The night and its soft mysteries' (Huneker).

Op.62 (1845-46) Synthesizing earlier elements within and around the genre, these harmonically advanced works date from the highground of Chopin's maturity. *No.1 B major* [*Tuberose*] 'A warm moonlit, tree-shaded night in an Italian garden, with the heavy scent of daturas on the air, and the nightingale singing in "full-throated ease"' (Jonson, summoning Keats). Remarkable for the trembling chaintrills blossoming the reprise. *No.2 E major* A tripartite variation-nocturne, agitated in the middle (contrasting the corresponding paragraph of its companion, *sostenuto*). 'The authentic Bardic ring' (Huneker).

Op.72/1; B 19 E minor (?[1827] 1828-30) Published 1855 *Ostinato* left-hand (conjoining harmony with fragments of melody), sad voices, modest elaboration. 'Slight as it is we would not willingly exchange it for the whole of Field's works bound in full morocco' (Jonson). First of the series.

B 49; KK IVa/16 Lento con gran espressione C sharp minor (1830) Published 1875 Intended for Chopin's sister Ludwika, who added the subtitle 'nocturne'. Unusually (Chopin not being given to self-quotation), the piece draws on

material from the F minor Concerto (1829-30) and the song *Zyczenie* (*The Wish*), Op.74/1 (1829/30) – 'Were I the sun in the sky'. A subtly-voiced pastel of striking trills, roulades and melancholic beauty, cadencing magically in the major. Balakirev used to play it.

B 108; KK IVb/8 C minor (?) Published 1938 The genesis of this frail effort ('unsuccessful' Kallberg dismisses) is unclear. Originally it was thought to be 'the earliest of Chopin's nocturnes', from the Warsaw years circa 1826-27. Later Brown in his 1960 catalogue proposed 1837, thinking it a possibly 'rejected item from Op.32'. Current opinion, based on paper type, handwriting and style, now allocates it to Chopin's closing Paris days, the 'feeble' months c 1847-48. Central to its main idea is the Polish folksong *Pod Krakowem* – a widely-met tune familiar from Spain to Sweden, throughout Eastern Europe (Smetana's *Vltava* is based on it), and as the anthem of the early Zionists, *Hatikvah*.

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VINCENZO MALTEMPO

The artistic personality of Vincenzo Maltempo has gained an important place in the heterogeneous contemporary music scene thanks to his demanding work of rediscovery of the music of Charles Valentin Alkan, of which he is now considered as one of the most authoritative interpreters and connoisseurs in the world.

Since 2011 Maltempo has recorded the most important works of the French composer for the Piano Classics label; this remarkable work has attracted the attention of the most renowned international magazines such as Diapason, The Guardian, PianoNews, Gramophone and many others. Andrew Clements (The Guardian) defines him: "Exciting, a real revelation!", And Robert Nemecek (PianoNews) writes: "considered one of the greatest contemporary interpreters of this composer [Alkan], no other pianist like Maltempo has managed to dominate in so well thought out and orchestral way the enormous difficulties of his music".

Maltempo has recorded and played Alkan's most important works and is one of the very few performers to have played the entire collection of his colossal "**Douze études dans toutes les tons mineurs**" op. 39 in a single recital, in Yokohama, in November 2013. As a result of his continuous work of rediscovery and promotion of Alkan's music he has been named an honorary member of the "**Alkan Society**" of London. In 2019 he began his collaboration with the prestigious **G. Henle Verlag**. In 2020 he publishes a voluminous biography on Alkan, the first in Italian language (Florestano 2020).

Vincenzo Maltempo is defined as a "resourceful musician with a formidable technique and intelligence" (Jeremy Lee, Top Ear), with "sounds as if carved

in marble" (PianoNews). Praised by many great contemporary pianists, **Alexander Lonquich** writes of him as "an extraordinary pianist / musician [...]". He is one of the few who can do justice to Alkan's music, which seems to have no secrets from him. Maltempo generally tends to explore the extreme sides of a style. It doesn't surprise me that his latest Schumann album hit the center. Rarely, I have heard a Humoreske so convincing and multifaceted at the same time [...] It is certainly not surprising his dedication to the transcription of important orchestral scores [...] And one last important thing: one has the feeling that for him the instrument should always be a means and not an end in itself".

The famous music critic Bryce Morrison on **Gramophone** appreciates his bright and colorful dynamics, which he compares to that of a Horowitz, and Lorenzo Arruga – Italian journalist and music critic - recognizes in his "free phrasing, in his warm touch and in his attitude of love for composers and music" a deep bond with the 'piano school of the past'. Despite his young age Vincenzo Maltempo can count in his discography, in addition to five albums with works by Alkan (collected in 2014 in a box set), numerous other titles: to Franz Liszt he dedicated two albums, "Klavierwerke" (Gramola 2009), and "The complete Hungarian Rhapsodies" (Piano Classics, 2016), a double album nominated by Gramophone as "**Editor's choice**" and defined as "the most beautiful integral I have ever heard" by Paul Ruckert in his review of the album in the same magazine; to Robert Schumann (Piano Classics 2014) an album with some of his most important piano works; a double album (Brilliant Classics 2014) with the violinist Carmelo Andriani, with the music for violin and piano by Michele Esposito; while to the music of S. Lyapunov (Piano Classics, April 2017) he devoted an important recording of the 12 Transcendental Studies, which is added to the very few previous

complete recording in existence and which earns 5-star reviews on Diapason and on other Italian and foreign magazines. In 2018, and again for Piano Classics, a double album was released with the two Piano Concertos by J. Brahms, recorded live with the Mitteleuropa Orchestra conducted by Marco Guidarini, while in 2019 for the same label was issued a double album with the 10 Piano Sonatas by A. Skrjabin: Maltempo is the first Italian in history to record the complete set.

Winner of the 2006 **Venice Prize** at the La Fenice Theater, his international concert career sees him perform from that point in the most important festivals and theaters in Europe (Venice "La Fenice", Cagliari "Teatro Lirico", Spoleto "Festival dei due Mondi", Festival F. Liszt di Raiding, "Raritäten der Klaviermusik" in Husum etc), America (Miami "International Piano Festival", etc), Mexico ("Festival Internacional de Piano en Blanco y Negro"), Asia. His musical career, which began spontaneously at a very early age in his family, is strongly influenced by Salvatore Orlando, pianist and teacher, a pupil of Sergio Fiorentino, with whom he graduated in 2005 at the S. Cecilia Conservatory in Rome with summa cum laude. He continues his studies with Riccardo Risaliti at the International Piano Academy "Incontri col Maestro" in Imola, where he has the opportunity to attend masterclasses with pianists such as V. Aschkenazy, O. Marshev, R. Levin, Z. Kocsis and others.

His piano transcriptions are published by **Ries & Erler** in Berlin and by **MusePress** in Tokyo.

Since 2017 he has been the founder and artistic director of the International Piano Competition "**Alkan Prize for piano virtuosity**".

He currently lives in Turin and he teaches at the Conservatory in Alessandria, Italy.



PERFORMERS NOTE

'Chopin's compositions opened a new era in the history of the piano. But they risk being misunderstood when one does not know the performance he gave of them, his intentions, and his conception of the piano. In fact, their appearance on paper is quite different from the effect they make in the kind of environment that brings them to life.'

Wilhelm von Lenz, 1872

Performers are aware that, for various reasons, what the listener perceives is an experience related but not identical to the musician's own more or less conscientious and informed realisation of the notes and signs on the score in front of them (or residing in their memory). This principle holds even truer for Chopin than it does for most other composers. Anyone who had the good fortune to hear the composer play his own music found that they, or the pieces themselves, were cast with a kind of spell which makes a 'performance practice' uniquely hard to codify and then follow. How these pieces work, and the effects they make, are inextricably linked to the way Chopin played.

To guide us (both listeners and performers) in this regard, friends and contemporaries of Chopin left us with no shortage of written anecdotes and memories of his playing. More vivid and valuable still, perhaps are the audio documents left by the 'grand-pupils' of Chopin: those students of his students who survived to make recordings in the 78 era.

No one believes that a performing tradition should or even could be fixed in stone, passed down unchanging from generation to generation. If we did, pianists would all follow Rachmaninoff's own recordings of his concertos to the last rubato-inflected quaver. All the same, those descendants of Chopin have a good deal to teach modern performers, as well as to make them think for themselves.

I refer here to the recordings left by Raoul Pugno, Alfred Cortot, Moritz Rosenthal, Vladimir de Pachmann and Raoul Koczalski. What their recordings share is a relatively free or liberal interpretation of elements in the score that are now treated more rigidly. Their application of rubato is more subtle, their pedal technique does not cloud the sound but clarifies melodies and harmonies. Despite the technological limitations of the recording itself, they communicate a wide and infinitely varied dynamic range, and a diaphanous warmth of phrasing, without falling into mannerism or 'sentimentality'. They do this thanks to an absolute mastery of technique, a musicianship and a thorough grasp of Chopin's style.

There is no absolute 'truth' to these recordings made by the pianistic heirs of Chopin – for they vary among themselves a good deal in any case – any more than there is to any performance of any music. All the same, in listening to Pugno, Cortot and their colleagues, I have always felt peculiarly at ease as a musician and as a listener, as if in this piano tradition the original warmth and colour of that music remained more vibrant. This is music that, by its nature, speaks with a potentially universal appeal, but in practice must be communicated in an intimate setting.

Thus a recording presents an ideal medium for its transmission, at least in theory; the fleeting moods evoked by many of these pieces resist any attempt to fix them, or a single version of them, in perpetuity and in front of microphones. This album presents, therefore, only one of countless possibilities to unlock the secrets of these pieces, offered in the faint hope that a connection may be made between listener, performer and composer, like the echo of a faint voice singing in the distance.

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