



TOM HICKS – PIANO

# CHOPIN

THE COMPLETE NOCTURNES

# Chopin

## The Complete Nocturnes

Tom Hicks, piano

### Disc 1

- |     |   |      |
|-----|---|------|
| 1.  | Nocturne No. 1 in B flat minor, Op. 9 No. 1   | 5:41 |
| 2.  | Nocturne No. 2 in E flat major, Op. 9 No. 2   | 4:24 |
| 3.  | Nocturne No. 3 in B major, Op. 9 No. 3        | 6:25 |
| 4.  | Nocturne No. 4 in F major, Op. 15 No. 1       | 4:03 |
| 5.  | Nocturne No. 5 in F sharp major, Op. 15 No. 2 | 3:20 |
| 6.  | Nocturne No. 6 in G minor, Op. 15 No. 3       | 5:25 |
| 7.  | Nocturne No. 7 in C sharp minor, Op. 27 No. 1 | 5:08 |
| 8.  | Nocturne No. 8 in D flat major, Op. 27 No. 2  | 5:43 |
| 9.  | Nocturne No. 9 in B major, Op. 32 No. 1       | 5:08 |
| 10. | Nocturne No. 10 in A flat major, Op. 32 No. 2 | 4:43 |
| 11. | Nocturne No. 11 in G minor, Op. 37 No. 1      | 7:48 |
| 12. | Nocturne No. 12 in G major, Op. 37 No. 2      | 5:52 |

Total playing time 63:47

## Disc 2

1.	Nocturne No. 13 in C minor, Op. 48 No. 1	5:54
2.	Nocturne No. 14 in F sharp minor, Op. 48 No. 2	7:43
3.	Nocturne No. 15 in F minor, Op. 55 No. 1	4:34
4.	Nocturne No. 16 in E flat major, Op. 55 No. 2	4:54
5.	Nocturne No. 17 in B major, Op. 62 No.1	7:43
6.	Nocturne No. 18 in E major, Op. 62 No. 2	6:29
7.	Nocturne No. 19 in E minor, Op. posth.	3:53
8.	Nocturne No. 20 in C sharp minor, Op. posth.	3:52
9.	Nocturne No. 21 in C minor, Op. posth.	3:04

Total playing time 48:11

# The Nocturnes

“Chopin, in his poetic *Nocturnes*, sang not only the harmonies which are the source of our most ineffable delights, but likewise the restless, agitating bewilderment to which they oft give rise. This flight is loftier, though his wing is more wounded; and his very suaveness grows heartrending, so thinly does it veil his despairful anguish.” (Franz Liszt, *Life of Chopin* (Paris, 1877)).

Having written his twenty-one *Nocturnes* between the years of 1827 and 1846, Frédéric Chopin’s compositional activity contributed to central transformations in musical genre, form, and aesthetics that took place within the realm of nineteenth-century piano works. Chopin amplified miniature preludes into a large-scale cyclical work and elevated the genre of the nocturne, which scholars have traced to Irish composer John Field. While the latter composer wrote a number of piano works, he is remembered for his eighteen nocturnes. Field’s first publication of his second E flat major nocturne in 1812 went by the name of *Romance*, and 1814 marks the first year in which the term “nocturne” appeared in print (See Nicholas Temperley, “John Field and the First Nocturne,” *Music & Letters* Vol. 56, 3/4 (1975)).

As the story goes, little did Chopin think of Field upon meeting him in 1832. And yet, the fact that Chopin likewise utilized the 12/8 meter and a *bel canto* melodic line accompanied by left-hand broken chords could be said to suggest a potential act of homage to the earlier composer’s nocturnes—all while radically developing the genre aesthetically and with regards to pianistic musical idioms. Liszt wrote in his diaries that it was Chopin who “invented those wonderful harmonic progressions which would enhance with a serious aspect even those pages which, considering the lightness of their subject, did not seem to aspire to such importance.” More than this, Liszt argued that composers, interpreters, and listeners alike owed to Chopin “the small groups of added grace notes, falling

like tiny drops of speckled dew over the melodic figure.” Liszt added that “to this kind of ornamentation ... [Chopin] gave an unexpectedness and a variety beyond the reach of the human voice, which had hitherto been slavishly copied by the piano in embellishments that eventually became stereotyped.” (Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher: As Seen by his Pupils*. (Cambridge: University Press, 1986), 18).

Chopin’s *Nocturnes* were hardly complete in the modern sense of the term that often suggests supposedly finite musical entities that offered little to no room for alterations. Chopin revised his music heavily—and at times, even after publishing. Instead of having a singular autograph manuscript for each work, Chopin would frequently have several manuscripts. One key point of comparison emerges: while Beethoven famously worked through multiple sketches, he would hardly make revisions after publication. Publishing houses worked with multiple Chopin manuscripts, revealing numerous inconsistencies, thus complicating the status of the original work and offering new challenges for scholars and performers into central questions regarding the authenticity and originality of musical works.

To put it simply, it is clear from Chopin’s creative practices as a composer, and even more so as a performer, that he did not view the work, or at least not the score, as embodying a singular truth. This owes a great deal to the thinking of historical musicologist Richard Taruskin, who redefined authenticity in the context of historically informed performance practice and reintroduced the active creativity of the performer. Taruskin recognized the irony of retrospectively applying principles promoted by Stravinsky and Boulez to Bach, Mozart, Beethoven or Chopin. He also argued that because the score is a less-than-perfect representation of a musical work, and that we can only ever know so much about what the composer intended, that an authentic performance *requires* the active participation of the performer—or it risks being not only inauthentic but incomplete. (See Taruskin, *Text and Act* (Oxford: University Press, 1995), 90-154).

Besides the well-known Padarewski edition and those by Cortot and Debussy, two editions were published in 1860 by Francois-Joseph Fétis and Thomas Tellefsen. On the one hand, and as Music scholars have shown, Fétis makes judgments about what sources to begin with and what to leave out of the edition based on his own preferences (Jim Samson, *Chopin: The Four Ballades*. (Cambridge: University Press, 1992), 26). On the other hand, Tellefsen, a student of Chopin who provided a second edition, aspired to preserve as much as he could of the composer's performance and teaching tradition. A century later, Jan Ekier included variants in the main text and in the editorial commentary to allow performers to make decisions according to their intuitions.

In recording these nocturnes, Hicks takes Ekier's print edition, including some of those lesser-heard variants, as a starting point but also refers to the Chopin Online edition, which provides access to high-quality scans of manuscripts and early editions, paying homage to Chopin's multifaceted creative process, in which improvisations were central. Hicks includes some of Chopin's own embellishments and occasional localized improvisations, which are rarely heard in performance and especially recordings. Inspired by Raoul Koczalski's recording of *Nocturne* Op. 9 No. 2, for instance, Hicks performs several of the same variants while performing a different version of the closing cadenza as an aesthetic choice that opts away from the most decorative of Koczalski's chosen variants in order not to detract from the simplicity that is so essential to this particular piece.

Painter Eugène Delacroix, who maintained a close friendship with Chopin through most of their lives, once wrote that Chopin "told me that his improvisations were much bolder than his finished compositions. It is the same, no doubt, with a sketch for a painting compared to a finished painting." Delacroix valued the unfinished work aesthetically (comparing painting with improvisation) when he wrote that "there is less scope for the imagination in a finished work than in a sketch." (Delacroix, *Journal*, (Paris, 1931-2), p.330; translation by M. Hannoosh, *Painting and the "Journal" of Eugene Delacroix* (Princeton, 1995), p.72). George

Sand, in turn, who had a long-term relationship with Chopin, also documented his compositional process when she wrote that

[Chopin's] creativity was spontaneous, miraculous. He found it without seeking it, without expecting it. It arrived at his piano suddenly, completely, sublimely, or it sang in his head during a walk, and he would hasten to play it to himself, casting it down on his instrument. But then would begin the most heart-breaking labor I have ever witnessed. It was a series of efforts, indecision and impatience to recapture certain details of the theme he had heard. What had come to him all of a piece, he now over-analyzed in his desire to transcribe it, and his regret at not finding it again "neat," as he said, threw him into a kind of despair. He would shut himself in his room for days at a time, weeping, pacing, breaking his pens, repeating and changing a bar one hundred times, writing it and erasing it with equal frequency, and beginning again the next day with meticulous and desperate perseverance. He would spend six weeks on a page, only to end up writing it just as he had done in his first outpouring.<sup>1</sup>

For Sand, then, Chopin's compositional process at once demonstrated his agonizing labors while also revealing his "spontaneous, miraculous" creativity, which she witnessed upon hearing his improvisations and encountering extensive revisions of his works.

Theoretically critical and historically informed, this recording offers novel avenues of thinking about what Chopin's performances could have been like. The *Nocturnes* were recorded with few edits, an aesthetic choice that placed emphasis upon capturing "live" performances of each nocturne in its entirety in order to envisage a nineteenth-century sense of continuity that precedes twentieth-century recording technologies. What is more, Hicks envisages a

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1. George Sand, *Histoire de ma vie*, (Euvres autobiographiques, (Paris, 1971)), as cited in Jeffrey Kallberg, "Chopin The Aesthetics of the Sketch," *Early Music*, 29/3 (2001), 409.

proximity to Chopin's nightly modes of music-making. Cultivating a sense of intimacy that characterized nineteenth-century chamber music, recordings took place at night and in relative darkness. While this was primarily for pragmatic reasons that allowed a minimization of noise from both outside and inside the concert hall, this choice also lent a unique atmosphere entirely appropriate to Chopin's mode of performing these pieces.

In synthesizing modern and historical approaches to the interpretation of these works, the recording that follows offers a fresh take on Chopin's pianism and aesthetics. It provides listeners with in-depth historical understandings of Chopin's compositional process and practice, which listeners can hear in subtle incorporations of both textual and other interpretative choices. The lesser-known historical perspectives provided here encourage listeners to think critically about contemporary perspectives on the singular and authentic musical work, ultimately honoring Chopin's creative musical labors and unique approach to publication and improvisation.

Dr. Kim Sauberlich





# Tom Hicks

Hailed as an artist of ‘magnificent pianism’ with an ‘engaging personality’, Guernsey-born pianist Tom Hicks has been praised for his ‘brilliantly evocative’ (International Piano) and ‘gorgeously creative playing’ (Fanfare).

Hicks has an expansive repertoire and has appeared as recitalist in venues such as The Wigmore Hall in London, The Bridgewater Hall in Manchester, and in many other venues throughout Europe and the United States. He has appeared as concerto soloist on more than 60 occasions, including complete cycles of the Rachmaninoff and Brahms Piano Concerti. Hicks is a gold medallist in competitions including the Wales International Piano Competition, the EPTA UK Piano Competition, and the Croydon Piano Concerto Competition.

In 2019, Hicks released a recording of John Ireland and Tchaikovsky, supported by the John Ireland Charitable Trust. The album has been celebrated by critics writing for magazines including *International Piano*, *Fanfare*, *Piano Journal*, and *Classical Music Daily*. Two further recordings were released in 2022. The first, for Divine Art, *Liszt and Ireland Piano Sonatas*, features those monumental sonatas alongside music by Charles Stanford, Samuel Coleridge Taylor, and Rebecca Clarke. Hicks’ playing of ‘consistent excellence’ and the ‘commanding performance, balancing the dramatic with the intimate’ on this disc have been praised by Robert Matthew-Walker and John France in *Musical Opinion* and *MusicWeb International*. This disc was also selected in the *America Record Guide* Best of 2022 Critics Choice. The second 2022 release for Métier, *Blue Sounds*, follows premières of Camden Reeves’ *Tangle-Beat Blues* in 2014, *Nine Preludes* in 2016, and *Blue Sounds* in 2019. Hicks has been recognised on this recording for his ‘playing distinguished by fluidity, authority, and musicality’ (Textura). Hicks also appears on Augusta Read Thomas’ latest Grammy-nominated album for Nimbus.

In 2019, Hicks gave the launch recital as Artistic Director of the Fanny Davies

International Piano Series, an ambitious project bringing masterclasses and recitals to students and audiences in Guernsey. The series has featured musicians including Joanna MacGregor, Leon McCawley, Noriko Ogawa, and Alexander Panfilov. In 2012, he co-founded Terra Nova, a new music collective in Guernsey that has premiered composers' works from across the United Kingdom. He is a skilled accompanist and chamber musician with performance highlights including the piano quintets of Schumann and Dvorak with the Coull Quartet and a performance on two pianos of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* with Eylam Keshet.

Following lessons with Mervyn Grand in Guernsey, Hicks studied with Murray McLachlan at Chetham's School of Music in Manchester, and continued with him on the prestigious joint course at The Royal Northern College of Music and Manchester University. He then studied with Boris Berman at Yale University's School of Music and with James Giles at Northwestern University's Bienen School of Music in the USA, graduating with a Doctorate in Musical Arts in December 2021. He is a recipient of the Gold Medal Award and Peter Frankl Piano Prize from the Royal Northern College of Music, and the Faculty of Humanities Outstanding Academic Achievement Award, the Keith Elcombe Prize for Best Overall Performance, and three Proctor-Gregg Performance Prizes from the University of Manchester, having graduated with the highest degree mark ever awarded from the Department of Music. He was also awarded a Charles R. Miller Scholarship and Frances G. Wickes Fellowship at Yale University and an Eckstein Scholarship and Fellowship at Northwestern University. He has enjoyed chamber music coaching from Boris Berman, Hung-Kuan Chen, Leonard Elschenbroich, Mark Steinberg and Ralph Kirshbaum.

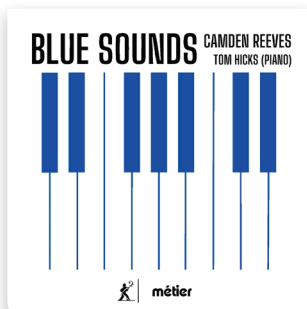
As a teacher, Hicks has taught piano at Yale University, Northwestern University, and Whitman College. He is currently Assistant Professor of Piano, Director of the Piano Area, and Artistic Director of the International Piano Series at the College of Charleston. He is a Yamaha Artist.

For more information, please visit [www.tomhickspianist.com](http://www.tomhickspianist.com) or follow on instagram (@tomhickspianist) or facebook (/tomhickspianist).



Cordiner Hall, Walla Walla, Washington, USA

# Further Tom Hicks Recordings



## Camden Reeves: Blue Sounds

Blue Sounds is a set of meditations on a colour – from its abstractness as an electromagnetic wave to Blues as a scale, a genre and a harmonic structure. All three works were written for Tom Hicks and mark a growth in fluency and an experimental approach to the sonority of the piano.

### *American Record Guide*

“Camden Reeves combines the blues and energy of jazz with spectralism and modernism in these pieces. Tom Hicks handles these astonishingly difficult pieces with ease and a tone that’s firm but never harsh; the piano sound is impeccable.” —Stephen Estep

Tom Hicks, piano

Métier

MSV 28604



## Liszt & Ireland Piano Sonatas

In his first recording for Divine Art, Tom presents stellar performances of two major Sonatas – those of Franz Liszt and John Ireland. A generation apart, both are highpoints of the Romantic and post-Romantic era. This playing puts Hicks at the top of the tree for his bold expressiveness and vision.

### *Musical Opinion*

“There is no doubt that Tom Hicks is a serious musician, possessor of a formidable technique and has the intellectual capacity to master a relatively wide range of repertoire. Playing of consistent excellence supported by very fine recording quality.” —Robert Matthew-Walker

Tom Hicks, piano

Divine Art

DDA 25227

This album was recorded at Cordiner Hall, Walla Walla, Washington, USA, between May 2023 and March 2024.

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