



# Great Pianists • Rubinstein

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Fryderyk  
**CHOPIN**

**Polonaises  
(Selection)**

**Andante spianato  
and Grande  
polonaise brillante**

**Artur Rubinstein**

Historical Recordings 1934 & 1935

# Fryderyk CHOPIN (1810-1849)

- 1** **Andante spianato and Grande Polonaise Brillante, Op. 22** 13:46  
**Andante spianato: Tranquillo** 4:37  
**2** **Grande Polonaise Brillante in E flat major: Allegro molto - Meno mosso** 9:09  
Recorded on 7th & 8th February, 1935.  
HMV D.B.2499 & 2500; 2EA.1250-I, 2EA.1256-I & 2EA.1257-I  
Victor Set M353 - 14287-B 14288-A & B (06041, 06042 and 06043)
- 3** **Polonaise in C sharp minor, Op. 26, No. 1** 6:59  
**Allegro appassionato**  
Recorded on 6th February, 1935.  
HMV D.B. 2493; 2EA.1246-I and 2EA.1247-III; Victor Set M353 - 14281-A & B (06028 and 06029)
- 4** **Polonaise in E flat minor, Op. 26, No. 1** 7:09  
**Maestoso**  
Recorded on 6th February, 1935.  
HMV D.B.2494; 2EA.1248-II & 2EA.1249-I; Victor Set M353 - 14282-A & B (06030 & 06031)
- 5** **Polonaise in A major, Op. 40, No. 1** 3:39  
**Allegro con brio**  
Recorded on 5th December, 1934.  
HMV D.B.2495; 2EA.579-II; Victor Set M353 -14283-A (06032)
- 6** **Polonaise in C minor, Op. 40, No. 2** 4:54  
**Allegro maestoso**  
Recorded on 6th December, 1934.  
HMV D.B.2495; 2EA.582-I; Victor Set M353 -14283-B (06033)
- 7** **Polonaise in F sharp major, Op. 44** 9:30  
**Tempo di polacca - doppio movimento, tempo di mazurka - Tempo I**  
Recorded on 29th January, 1935.  
HMV D.B.2496; 2EA.1221-I & 2EA.1222-I; Victor Set M353 -15284-A & B (06034 and 06035)
- 8** **Polonaise in A flat major, Op. 53 "Héroïque"** 6:19  
**Maestoso**  
Recorded on 2nd February, 1935.  
HMV D.B.2497; 2EA.1244-I and 2EA.1245-I; Victor Set M353 - 14285-A & B (06036 & 06037)
- 9** **Polonaise-Fantaisie in A flat major, Op. 61** 11:59  
**Allegro maestoso**  
Recorded on 5th December, 1934.  
HMV D.B.2498 & 2499; 2EA.572-III, 2EA.573-III and 2EA.578-I  
Victor Set M353 - 14286-A & B, 14287-A (06038, 06039, and 06040)

Recorded in HMV Studio No. 3, Abbey Road, London

## Artur Rubinstein plays Chopin Polonaises

When Artur Rubinstein died in 1982 at the age of 95, a last great link to the golden age of pianism had finally been severed. In a career that lasted three quarters of a century, Rubinstein transcended the changing fashions and philosophy of performance practice without losing artistic relevance or compromising his basic musical personality. Although born in the 1880s, Rubinstein's playing owed little to the 'romantic' tradition that surrounded him. His was an eclectic approach. As a musician he rejected the excesses of his older colleagues, but retained their emotional warmth and combined it with modern concepts of textual fidelity and objectivity. These qualities help explain Rubinstein's reputation as a supreme exponent of Chopin and why his recorded performances continue to hold their place in the catalogue.

Artur Rubinstein was born in the provincial Polish City of L'odź in 1887, the seventh child of middle class Jewish parents. Like many of the great pianists, Rubinstein's natural musical gifts manifested themselves early. The boy had large, perfectly formed hands; an infallible memory and an accurate ear enabling him to recognise any note or chord played on the piano. Such precocity at first delighted, and then bewildered his family, who sought advice from the great violinist and colleague of Brahms, Joseph Joachim. Eighty years later, Rubinstein could still recall the meeting, which took place in Berlin

in 1890. Back in L'odź the boy studied with a number of local teachers before travelling to Warsaw where he was placed with a Professor Rózyck. The relationship was hardly productive. According to Rubinstein, Rózyck slept through his lessons and he remembered his teacher without affection as a '*big, fat, old man, lazy and flabby*'. In 1897 the family travelled to Berlin where Rubinstein again met Joachim who suggested the boy study with Heinrich Barth, a stern, distant man whose pupils included Ernest Schelling and later, Wilhelm Kempff. Barth was one of the finest teachers in Berlin, but Rubinstein grew to loathe his unbending Teutonic discipline. In truth, there was a clash of egos. The young Rubinstein needed musical sustenance and was unable or unwilling to submit to the dull, but necessary technical routine of scales and exercises. In spite of their differences, the boy progressed rapidly and in 1900 made his début in the Great Hall of the Berlin Hochschule playing Mozart's *A major Concerto* under the watchful eye of Joachim.

Berlin at the beginning of the twentieth century was one of the great musical capitals of the world and Rubinstein absorbed the atmosphere like a sponge. The experience of hearing Busoni, Godowsky, d'Albert, Paderewski and Hofmann left a lasting impression, but in 1903 after six years with Barth, Rubinstein broke acrimoniously with his teacher and left for Poland. The failure to

complete his formal education left Rubinstein with a deep sense of artistic insecurity that was only alleviated by years of applause and growing acclaim. From then on, he was on his own. He gave a series of concerts in Paris in 1904 and travelled to America for the first time in 1906. It was not an unqualified success. The audiences gave him a warm reception, but the critical response was far less ecstatic. Later Rubinstein would sum up the tour philosophically by explaining “*I was not a prodigy any more, and I was not a mature artist. The critics were severe, much too severe. I thought I had lost America forever*”.

The years before the Great War were busy for the young pianist. He settled in Paris and developed important friendships with the artistic and musical elite, his charm and good looks ensuring that he became a favourite at aristocratic soirees. Although today remembered as an interpreter of Chopin and the great romantic composers, during these Parisian years Rubinstein became the darling of the avant garde. He championed and commissioned music by contemporary composers such as de Falla, Debussy, Ravel, Stravinsky and Szymanowski - works that would play little part in his active repertory after the 1940s. He appeared successfully in Berlin in 1910 and made his London debut at the Bechstein [now Wigmore] Hall in 1912. At the beginning of the War, Rubinstein was in London, but left for Paris to join the Polish Legion. He might have become one of the army cut down in the slaughter, but fortune intervened. The Legion had been

disbanded and Rubinstein returned to London and secured a series of concerts in Spain. The Spanish tour was his greatest triumph to date and he returned in 1916 for a handful of concerts and stayed to give 120. In subsequent years, he repeated this success in South America, but artistically, Rubinstein had become dissatisfied with his playing. He admitted that these early concerts were littered with wrong notes, but such trifles were of little importance to his Spanish and Latin American audiences. This uncritical acceptance undoubtedly bolstered his self-confidence, but in the long term made him lazy technically, fostering a cavalier attitude to the music that he played. The 1920s were highly successful for Rubinstein. He was described in the 1924 edition of *Modern Music and Musicians* as ‘*one of the most celebrated pianists of our time*’, and at about the same time began his long series of recordings, initially on piano roll, and subsequently for *His Master’s Voice/Victor* on flat discs. These early recordings demonstrate a pianist of remarkable temperament and personality, but one with occasionally fallible fingers and questionable musical judgement. His 1928 disc of the Chopin *Barcarolle* was poorly reviewed by *Gramophone* who complained that “*the pianist completely ruins the piece by a most unnecessary rubato*”. The criticism was not entirely unjustified.

For years Rubinstein had lived out of a suitcase, basing his playing on temperament and natural facility but in 1932 at the age of 45 he married and began to take stock of his artistic achievements.

The technical accomplishments of other pianists such as the young Vladimir Horowitz were capturing the public imagination and leaving Rubinstein far behind “*Was it to be said of me that I could have been a great pianist? Was this the kind of legacy to leave my wife and children?*” He withdrew from the concert platform and began working ferociously to acquire the technical control and accuracy that he felt was lacking. When Rubinstein re-emerged in 1935, he was - according to the American critic Harold Schonberg - ‘*the giant he could have been from the beginning*’. For the next four decades until his retirement in 1976, Rubinstein became one of the busiest musicians in the world, honoured by

governments and lionised by an adoring public. He gave thousands of recitals and left a huge and representative legacy of recordings that continues to further his reputation and communicate his art to an ever-growing army of supporters.

Rubinstein’s recordings of the Chopin *Polonaises* presented on this Naxos CD are the first and most spontaneous of his three studio versions. Recorded by HMV in 1935/6 on eight 12-inch double-sided 78rpm discs, these glorious performances reveal Rubinstein in sovereign command of his technical and musical resources at the beginning of his artistic renaissance.

**Jonathan Dobson**

### **Producer's Note**

Artur Rubinstein’s 1934/35 recordings of Chopin’s *Polonaises* were restored from the original “scroll” Victor discs issued at the time. The detailed side, matrix and label information are provided in this booklet. The Roman numerals following the matrix numbers indicate which session takes were actually released.

The 78rpm discs were played back on a modified Technics SP-15 turntable with a Diapason digital speed readout. Stanton cartridges and styli were utilized. Pitch and key accuracy were confirmed using the Peterson 590 AutoStrobe Tuner and a digital piano. The discs were restored using minimal analog circuitry. The process consisted of several steps: phono preamplification followed by signal equalization. The equalization stage ensured that the disc-manufacturer’s disc cutting equalization curves were correctly utilized. The analog signal was then converted into the digital domain using a DCS 904 A/D converter. All subsequent audio processing and editing was maintained entirely in the digital domain. The digital audio restoration consisted of the CEDAR® Declick and NR3 noise reduction systems and a Weiss EQ1-MK2 parametric equalizer.

We were very lucky to have at our disposal four exceptionally clean complete sets of the *Polonaises*. In all cases, the 78s were restored utilizing the full capabilities of the CEDAR® system, although we were sensitive on the declicking and the noise removal, always attempting to maintain the warmth and clarity of the original piano sound, while taking into consideration the inherent low-level rumble and varying levels of surface noise on the discs. Several archivists and collectors have commented to us that Rubinstein actually used two different pianos in recording this set, and as a result there is an audible variance discernible between some of the *Polonaises*. The ordering on the Naxos disc is by opus number, with the *Andante Spianato* and *Grande Polonaise*, receiving two tracks for accessibility. We are grateful to collectors Richard Wahlberg, Joseph Banowetz and Lance Bowling for their invaluable help on this project.

**Marina and Victor Ledin**

### **Marina and Victor Ledin**

Co-founders and principals of Encore Consultants, a highly regarded firm specializing in musical research, production and restoration work, Marina and Victor Ledin bring to the Naxos Historical series many years of broadcasting, archiving, preservation, research, restoration and publishing experience. Their archive includes extensive collections of one-of-a-kind photos of composers and performers, over 25,000 musical scores, and a similar quantity of rare 78rpm recordings. Their restoration philosophy is to present the great artists of the past in as clean sound as possible, utilizing the latest technology (CEDAR® and SonicSolutions) in order to maximize the musical information and minimize the noise.

The Naxos Historical label aims to make available the greatest recordings in the history of recorded music, in the best and truest sound that contemporary technology can provide. To achieve this aim, Naxos has engaged a number of respected restorers who have the dedication, skill and experience to produce restorations that have set new standards in the field of historical recordings.



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RUBINSTEIN - CHOPIN: Polonaises (Selection)

NAXOS Historical

COMPACT  
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Restoration Producers and Archivists: Marina and Victor Ledin, Encore Consultants  
 Restoration Engineer: Stuart A. Rosenthal  
 Special thanks to Richard Wahlberg for the loan of source materials.  
 Restored at Pleasant Lane Restoration Studios, San Rafael, California.

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Cover Photograph: Artur Rubinstein (Lebrecht Collection)

Fryderyk  
**CHOPIN**  
 (1810 - 1849)

## Polonaises (Selection)

Artur Rubinstein, Piano

Playing  
 Time:  
 64:16

- |   |   |              |
|---|---|--------------|
|   | <b>Andante spianato and Grande Polonaise Brillante, Op. 22</b>            | <b>13:46</b> |
| 1 | Andante spianato - (Tranquillo)   | 4:37         |
| 2 | Grande polonaise brillante in E flat major - (Allegro molto - Meno mosso) | 9:09         |
|   | <b>Polonaise in C sharp minor, Op. 26, No. 1</b>                          |              |
| 3 | Allegro appassionato  | 6:59         |
|   | <b>Polonaise in E flat minor, Op. 26, No. 2</b>                           |              |
| 4 | Maestoso  | 7:09         |
|   | <b>Polonaise in A major, Op. 40, No. 1</b>                                |              |
| 5 | Allegro con brio  | 3:39         |
|   | <b>Polonaise in C minor, Op. 40, No. 2</b>                                |              |
| 6 | Allegro maestoso  | 4:54         |
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| 7 | Tempo di polacca - doppio movimento, tempo di mazurka - Tempo I           | 9:30         |
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