

NAXOS

# CZERNY

## Nocturnes

Roberte Mamou, Piano



## Carl Czerny (1791–1857)

### Nocturnes, Opp. 368, 537 and 604

Carl Czerny was born in Vienna on 21 February 1791, and died there on 15 July 1857. His grandfather and father were both musicians with Czech heritage, and Czerny's father was his first piano teacher. An only child and confirmed bachelor, Czerny lived with both his parents until the death of his father in 1832 and subsequently lived alone. Although his parents were by no means wealthy, Czerny's precocity as a child served to recommend him to Vienna's best teachers including Hummel and Salieri. Following his debut recital in 1800, the ten-year-old was offered lessons by Beethoven.

Czerny certainly found himself in the right place at the right time. Austria, under Emperor Joseph II's encouragement, had become a central hub of European musical excellence with the so-called First Viennese School of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert giving rise to magnificent musical achievements. Furthermore, the development of the fortepiano was racing ahead towards a much larger and sturdier instrument, the pianoforte, which promised richer tonalities and unheard-of brilliance. Yet, as a counterpoint, the turmoil of the French Revolution and rise of Napoleon Bonaparte was causing unrest within central Europe.

Lessons with Beethoven, and Beethoven's subsequent choice of Czerny as the favoured interpreter of his keyboard works, placed Czerny at the very centre of Viennese music and led huge talents such as the young Franz Liszt to his door for lessons. His decision not to give concerts internationally but rather to compose and teach with astounding energy left the world a legacy of around 1,000 compositions and treatises on almost all aspects of pianism at the time.

Beethoven's titanic piano technique using arm weight to supplement his finger-work in octaves and chords, often resulting in many broken piano strings, was undoubtedly a factor in pushing piano development towards bigger, stronger instruments. Czerny certainly adopted some of this pianism when he commenced his weekly series of Beethoven concerts in Vienna in 1816 with the composer often present. But from Czerny's many elegant études, sonatas and other keyboard works one senses his playing was probably smoother, more polished and more akin to Hummel and Mendelssohn than either the playing of his teacher Beethoven or his own celebrated pupil Franz Liszt.

Czerny's great efforts to equip other pianists with equal polish and finesse through hundreds of études, which have lasted the test of time and are still practised today, may have come at the expense of his own creativity as a composer. Although that was the verdict of many contemporary musicians, others, such as Brahms, expressed warmer feelings about his music.

The piano's meteoric rise in popularity had spread to the furthest frontiers of Europe, and Russian-based Englishman John Field's *18 Nocturnes*, composed from 1812 onwards, are generally regarded as precursors of many others that followed, with their languid floating melodic lines and arpeggiated accompaniments. Undoubtedly, Czerny's *8 Nocturnes, Op. 368*, which date from around 1830–35, and his later *Nocturnes romantiques, Op. 604* offer today's listener a window onto a less familiar Czerny, the sensitive artist that Beethoven recognised when Czerny was very young.

For many years following Napoleon's abdication, and with the resourceful Chancellor Metternich in charge, Viennese artistic life settled into the so-called Biedermeier period dominated by bourgeois frugality, sobriety, orderliness and industry. At the centre of this, Czerny's music enabled piano performances by amateurs and professionals in homes and salons to reflect the prevailing mood and yet brought the newest musical developments within their grasp.

### 8 Nocturnes, Op. 368

With their exquisitely sensitive tonal colourings, small-scale construction and constrained emotions, these were absolutely fit for purpose in Viennese households.

*No. 1 in E major*: This delicate work falls into two main sections, its polished *cantabile* melody being followed by more chordal material, somewhat darkly arpeggiated on the first occasion and in a more declamatory manner on the second occasion.

*No. 2 in E flat major*: The attractive 6/8 sway of this slightly chromatic work gives added momentum. The main theme moves into more melancholy waters as it develops and modulates into A flat major before it makes its final return.

*No. 3 in A flat major*: The high-flying melody contains lofty sentiments as well as inhabiting some extreme upper registers of the piano. A very modulatory middle section travels as far as B major before the main theme returns to A flat major.

*No. 4 in D flat major*: This thoughtful work contains an attractive use of particularly colourful chords throughout that lends a sepia colour to the musical canvas.

*No. 5 in E major*: A light mood prevails. In the simplest fashion each half of the theme is repeated followed by a fairly extensive coda that quieters the atmosphere for a gentle ending.

*No. 6 in A minor*: There is mild agitation about this somewhat more substantial nocturne with its triplet left-hand chords adding tonal depth. Moreover, there is a feeling of new material during the modulatory middle section.

*No. 7 in B minor, en forme de rondeau*: The only *Op. 368* nocturne to proclaim its musical form, this is necessarily a longer work. Almost Schubertian in tone, its six sections – A, B, A, C, B, A – are shot through with enigmatic mood changes.

*No. 8 in B flat major*: The bright key and 3/4 time is perfectly suited to this elegant, fair-weather piece. Its crystal transparency is also reflected in the clarity of its musical form with first and second themes initially in B flat and F respectively.

### **Nocturne sentimental et brillant sur la Valse Alexandra, un motif favori de Strauss, in A flat major, Op. 537** (pub. 1931)

Dedicated to the Russian Empress Alexandra Feodorovna, Johann Strauss Senior's *Alexandra Waltz* appeared in 1832. Czerny's fond reminiscence of this composition has an attractive improvisational character. Czerny selects the *Waltz's* insistent second theme as his main focus, and for a more mellow ambience transposes his music down to A flat from Strauss's original orchestral key of A.

### **8 Nocturnes romantiques de différents caractères, Op. 604**

From the early 1840s, these pieces are altogether more robust and openly emotional than Czerny's *Nocturnes, Op. 368*. Technical limits are still observed however, enabling home performance by advanced amateurs.

*No. 1. L'Hommage* (E major): This carries the emotional weight of a small sonata movement and its musical form lacks only the development section that would have given it complete sonata form. The reverent mood of the first subject then morphs into a second subject that is initially dramatic and then almost balletically graceful.

*No. 2. Le Désir* (A flat major): There is joyful anticipation and downright heroics in this energetic piece, far removed from the traditional nocturne mood. Furthermore the 2/4 time signature adds rhythmic drive.

*No. 3. La Persuasion* (A major): With its Straussian opening, this slow waltz is in simple ternary form. Its 9/8 time signature, however, allows the waltz pulse to sound in quavers but encased inside a spaciouly slow three dotted crotchets in a bar beat, providing almost a waltz within a waltz.

*No. 4. La Colère* (A minor): The tempestuous first theme in A minor and troubled second theme in E minor are then repeated in A minor to resolve the piece. As dramatic as Chopin's famous *Revolutionary Étude*, its technical challenges are, however, far less demanding.

*No. 5. L'Excuse* (F major): A very polite apology, Czerny has written the simplest and most transparent piece, imbued with good humour throughout this musical morsel.

*No. 6. La Consolation* (E major): Commencing with a troubled E minor introduction, consolation follows in the form of a benign, floating Mendelssohnian theme in E major leading to a more fervent theme in B major.

*No. 7. La Méditation* (F sharp minor): Tonally, we hear echoes of Beethoven's slow movements in this introspective work, although perhaps it is more imbued with melancholy than Beethoven himself would have countenanced.

*No. 8. La Joie* (E major): As with characteristic waltzes of the era the main theme reappears among numerous others, and with a flourish they all briefly take a bow in a final reprise.

**Rodney Smith**

## Roberte Mamou



Photo: Aleksandra Devin

The pianist Roberte Mamou is a charismatic soloist and passionate chamber musician, with an eclectic repertoire that includes many rarities and unexpected musical choices. Her critically acclaimed discography, which spans recordings as soloist, chamber musician and with an orchestra, has won various prestigious awards, including a Diapason d'Or for *Cimarosa: 32 Sonatas* (Pavane/Ligia), Record Geijutsu's highest honour for *Mozart: The Complete Piano Sonatas* (Pavane/Ligia) and an Opus Klassik 2022 nomination for *Viennese Variations* (Ars Produktion), which features works by Beethoven, Czerny, Haydn, Hummel, Mozart and Schubert. Other recordings include *Field: 18 Nocturnes* (Pavane), *Russian Seasons* (Pavane), *Mendelssohn: Songs Without Words* (Meridian) and works by Schumann, Bruch and Brahms. As a soloist she has performed with many international orchestras and ensembles, including the Berliner Symphoniker, Dresdner Philharmonie, Moscow Soloists, Collegium Instrumentale Brugense and the Orchestre National de Lille, among others. A devoted educator, she teaches at the Royal Conservatory of Brussels, and appears at numerous masterclasses and on juries around the world. She is also closely involved with many international festivals. Roberte Mamou is a Steinway Artist.

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Czerny is remembered as Beethoven's favoured interpreter of his own piano works and is well known as Liszt's teacher, but it is for his pedagogic works, still in use to this day, that he continues to enjoy renown. The *Nocturnes* offer a less familiar view of Czerny. These sensitively shaped, small-scale Biedermeier compositions offered domestic households the opportunity to savour their sense of delicacy and enigmatic mood changes. The *Op. 604* set is rather more robust than *Op. 368*, which is exquisitely sensitive, but equally convincing in characterisation and scope.

# Carl CZERNY

(1791–1857)

	<b>Huit Nocturnes, Op. 368 (1830–35)</b>	<b>30:54</b>
1	No. 1 in E major	4:13
2	No. 2 in E flat major	2:58
3	No. 3 in A flat major	3:56
4	No. 4 in D flat major	3:56
5	No. 5 in E major	3:16
6	No. 6 in A minor	3:12
7	No. 7 in B minor, en forme de rondeau	6:26
8	No. 8 in B flat major	2:57
9	<b>Nocturne sentimental et brillant sur la Valse Alexandra, un motif favori de Strauss, in A flat major, Op. 537 (pub. 1931)*</b>	<b>8:46</b>
	<b>Huit Nocturnes romantiques de différents caractères, Op. 604 (pub. 1843)</b>	<b>42:55</b>
10	No. 1. L'Homage	6:16
11	No. 2. Le Désir	4:42
12	No. 3. La Persuasion	5:52
13	No. 4. La Colère	2:57
14	No. 5. L'Excuse	4:30
15	No. 6. La Consolation	7:03
16	No. 7. La Méditation	6:54
17	No. 8. La Joie	4:31

**\*WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING**

**Roberte Mamou, Piano**

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