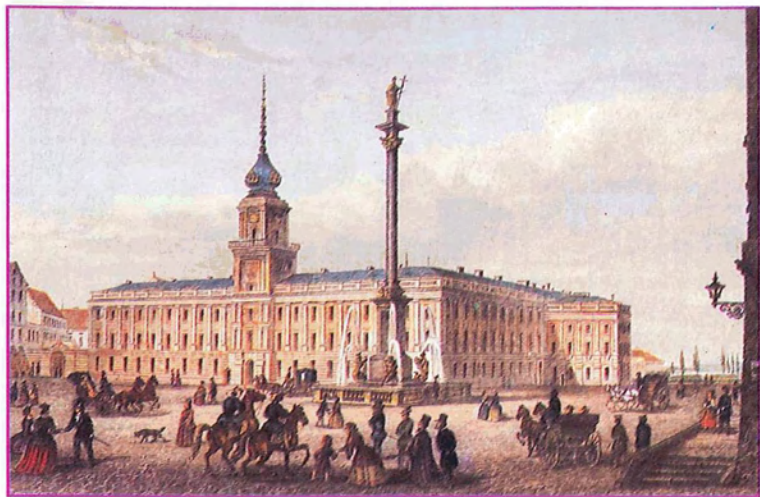


**CHOPIN**  
**Polonaises (Complete)**  
**Vol. 2**

**Idil Biret, Piano**



## **Fryderyk Chopin (1810 - 1849)**

### **Polonaises Vol. 2**

Fryderyk Chopin was born in 1810 at Zelazowa Wola, near Warsaw. His father Nicolas Chopin was French by birth but had moved to Poland to work as an accounting clerk, later serving as tutor to the Laczynski family and thereafter to the family of Count Skarbek, one of whose poorer relatives he married. His subsequent career led him to the Warsaw Lyceum as a respected teacher of French, and it was there that his only son, Fryderyk, godson of Count Skarbek, whose Christian name he took, passed his childhood.

Chopin showed an early talent for music. He learned the piano from his mother and later with the eccentric Adalbert Zywny, a violinist of Bohemian origin, and as fiercely Polish as Chopin's father. His later training in music was with Jozef Elsner, director of the Warsaw Conservatory, at first as a private pupil and then as a student of that institution.

In the 1820s Chopin had already begun to win for himself a considerable local reputation, but Warsaw offered relatively limited opportunities. In 1830 he set out for Vienna, a city where he had aroused interest on a visit in the previous year and where he now hoped to make a more lasting impression. The time, however, was ill-suited to his purpose. Vienna was not short of pianists, and Thalberg, in particular, had out-played the rest of the field. During the months he spent there Chopin attracted little attention, and resolved to move to Paris.

The greater part of Chopin's professional career was to be spent in France, and particularly in Paris, where he established himself as a fashionable teacher and as a performer in the houses of the rich. His playing in the concert hall was of a style less likely to please than that of the more flamboyant Liszt or than the technical virtuosity of Kalkbrenner. It was in the more refined ambience of the fashionable salon that his genius as a composer and as a performer, with its intimacy, elegance and delicacy of nuance, found its place.

Chopin could not but admire the ability of Liszt, while not sharing his taste in music. His own background had been severely classical, based on the music of Bach, Mozart and Haydn, and by these standards Beethoven, the object of adulation for Liszt and his circle, seemed on occasion uncouth, by comparison with the classical restraint of Mozart's pupil Hummel. At the same time he held reservations about the Bohemian way of life that Liszt followed, although he himself was to become involved in a liaison with the novelist George Sand (Aurore Dudevant), which lasted for some ten years, coming to an end two years before his death, while Liszt's more dramatic association with another married woman, a less successful blue-stocking, the Comtesse d'Agout, forced his withdrawal from Paris society. Both women were to take literary revenge on their paramours.

Paris was to provide Chopin with a substantial enough income as a teacher, and there was a ready market for his compositions, however reluctant he might be to commit them to paper. The country retreat of George Sand at Nohant provided a change of air that was certainly healthier for him than that of Mallorca, where, in 1838, the couple spent a disastrous winter that intensified the weakness of Chopin's lungs, already affected by the tuberculosis from which he was to die.

In 1848 political disturbances in Paris made teaching impossible, and Chopin left the city for a tour of England and Scotland. By this time his health had deteriorated considerably. At the end of the year he returned to Paris, now too weak to play or to teach and dependent on the generosity of others for subsistence. He died there on 17th October, 1849.

The greater part of Chopin's music was written for his own instrument, the piano. At first it seemed that works for piano and orchestra would be a necessary part of his stock-in-trade, but the position he found for himself in Paris enabled him to write principally for the piano alone, in a characteristic idiom that derives some inspiration from contemporary Italian opera, much from the music of Poland, and still more from his own adventurous approach to harmony and his own sheer technical ability as a player.

The Polish dance, the Polonaise, found its way from village to ball-room and thence abroad. In Paris in 1830 Poland was in the news, with the attempted rising against Russia and its suppression, and things Polish enjoyed considerable popularity, a fact from which Chopin benefited on his arrival in the city. As with other relatively trivial dance forms, he was able to raise the Polonaise to a new level, imparting a degree of complexity and a degree of feeling that had not always been present in the work of his elders in Warsaw. His first attempts at the form were at the age of seven and his last in 1846, three years before his death.

The three Polonaises published as Opus 71 are all early works. The first, in D minor, was probably written in 1825, and the second and third in 1828. All three were published posthumously in Berlin in 1855. The first Polonaise of all is the Polonaise in G minor, BI 1, written in 1817 and published with the help of Canon Cybulski of the Church of our Lady in Warsaw, a family friend. The printed dedication is to Countess Victoria Skarbek, the wife of Chopin's godfather, Count Fryderyk Skarbek. The composer's father had served as tutor to the Skarbeks and married a poor relation of the family. Count Skarbek did much to advance Chopin's early career in Warsaw as the Polish Mozart. The derivative B flat major Polonaise, BI 3, of the same year, only remarkable for the age of the composer and his subsequent achievement, was first published in 1947.

In 1821 Chopin wrote a Polonaise in A flat, BI 5, which he dedicated to his eccentric teacher, the Bohemian violinist Adalbert Zywny, as a birthday present. It was followed in 1822 by a Polonaise in G sharp minor, BI 6, dedicated to a family friend, Madame Du Pont. A further work in the form, the Polonaise in B flat minor, BI 13, based on Rossini's *La gazza ladra*, performed in Warsaw in the same year, was written in 1826 and dedicated to his schoolfriend Wilus Kolberg. The series of early Polonaises comes to an end with the G flat major Polonaise of 1829, BI 36, first published in 1870.

The Grande Polonaise in E flat, Opus 22, was written in Vienna, where Chopin spent a disappointing winter in 1830, before leaving for Paris.

Originally for piano and orchestra, the work was later augmented by an introductory Andante spianato for piano alone, and later performed by the composer as a solo piano work. It was published in Paris in 1836 by Schlesinger with a dedication to Baroness d'Est.

### **Idil Biret**

Born in Ankara, Idil Biret began piano lessons at the age of three. She displayed an outstanding gift for music and graduated from the Paris Conservatoire with three first prizes when she was fifteen. She studied piano with Alfred Cortot and Wilhelm Kempff, and composition with Nadia Boulanger. Since the age of sixteen Idil Biret has performed in concerts around the world playing with major orchestras under the direction of conductors such as Monteux, Boult, Kempe, Sargent, de Burgos, Pritchard, Groves and Mackerras. She has participated in the festivals of Montreal, Persepolis, Royan, La Rochelle, Athens, Berlin, Gstaad and Istanbul. She was also invited to perform at the 85th birthday celebration of Wilhelm Backhaus and at the 90th birthday celebration of Wilhelm Kempff. Idil Biret received the Lily Boulanger Memorial Fund award (1954/1964), the Harriet Cohen/Dinu Lipatti Gold Medal (1959) and the Polish Artistic Merit Award (1974) and was named Chevalier de l'Ordre du Mérite in 1976.

## Interpreting Chopin

Although the romantic era in music and its performances is not so far from our time, for various reasons we seem to have distanced ourselves from it. As a consequence, often composers very different from one another like Chopin, Liszt, Schumann and Wagner are brought under the same title of Romantic Composers. In this context it is quite normal to find Chopin and Liszt mentioned together as composers of similar style, while there are no two sound worlds as different from one another as those of Chopin and Liszt. The conception of the piano sound that Chopin created is based on the model of the voice. Liszt, on the other hand, fascinated by the development of the modern piano during his period, challenges the orchestra in an attempt to reproduce on the piano the richness of the orchestral palette.

It must be among the fondest wishes of any pianist to be able to have heard Chopin perform his own music. Fortunately there are some recordings providing indirectly some evidence this way of approaching the piano. One may in particular mention the recordings of Raoul von Koczalski who studied with Chopin's pupil Karol Mikuli. It is also enlightening to listen to the recordings of Cortot, a pupil of Decombes who received precious counsel from Chopin. Further, Friedman de Pachmann and Paderewski who were not direct descendants of Chopin were still close enough to his aesthetic conceptions to be able to convey the spontaneity Chopin is said to have brought to his playing as well as the polyphonic and rhythmic richness which are so apparent in Chopin's conception of the piano. In spite of the inferior quality of the recordings from the earlier part of this century, a considerable number of common points are audible in the performances of these pianists. Notably, a very fine legato, a piano sound that never loses its roundness since intensity replaces force, the exact feeling of rubato, recognition of the importance of inner voices and consequently a remarkable sense of polyphony. Contrary to the popular image of the romantic virtuoso, simplicity and naturalness remain exemplary in the way these great Chopin interpreters approach music.

It is interesting to note also the evidence left by musicians, contemporaries

of Chopin, and Chopin's pupils about his interpretations. A perfect legato drawing its inspiration from bel canto and unimaginable richness in tone-colour were the product of subtle variations in a sound full of charm and a purity that lost none of its fullness even in its forte passages. Chopin could not sound aggressive, especially on the pianos of that period. Berlioz wrote, "To be able to appreciate Chopin fully, I think one must hear him from close by, in the salon rather than in a theatre."

Chopin's sense of rubato was unrivalled. The temps dé robé (stolen time) assumed under the hands of the great master its true meaning. Mikuli gives a description of the rubato as Chopin conceived it, which seems to be of penetrating clarity. After recalling that Chopin was inflexible in keeping the tempo and that the metronome was always on his piano, Mikuli explains, "Even in his rubato, where one hand - the accompanying one - continues to play strictly in time, the other - the hand which sings the melody - freed from all metric restraint conveys the true musical expression, impatience, like someone whose speech becomes fiery with enthusiasm."

Together with a certain classicism, moderation was the basis of the world of Chopin. Hence, playing his music on the powerful modern pianos and in large concert halls is often problematic. One should ideally never go beyond a limit of sound and keep as the criteria the possibilities of the voice in mind. It is therefore better to somewhat reduce the sonority without sacrificing the quality of the sound.

In performing Chopin's works one should neither try to reconstruct nor imitate the interpretations of the past which remain unique, but try, with the help of all the recorded and written material we are lucky to possess, to penetrate deeper into the musical texts and advance further in the unending quest for a better understanding of the art of Chopin.

Idil Biret



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STEREO

# CHOPIN

## Polonaises (Complete)

### Vol. 2

Idil Biret

DDD

 Playing  
Time :  
76'30"

- |   |  |         |
|---|--|---------|
| 1 | Polonaise in D Minor, Op. 71, No. 1        | (6:06)  |
| 2 | Polonaise in B Flat Major, Op. 71, No. 2   | (9:39)  |
| 3 | Polonaise in F Minor, Op. 71, No. 3        | (10:03) |
| 4 | Polonaise in G Minor, BI 1                 | (3:57)  |
| 5 | Polonaise in B Flat Major, BI 3            | (3:05)  |
| 6 | Polonaise in A Flat Major, BI 5            | (6:01)  |
| 7 | Polonaise in G Sharp Minor, BI 6           | (6:43)  |
| 8 | Polonaise in B Flat Minor ('Adieu'), BI 13 | (6:40)  |
| 9 | Polonaise in G Flat Major, BI 36           | (8:49)  |

### Andante spianato and Grande Polonaise in E Flat Major, Op. 22

- |    |                  |        |
|----|------------------|--------|
| 10 | Andante spianato | (5:01) |
| 11 | Grande Polonaise | (9:44) |

Recorded at Tonstudio van Geest, Heidelberg, in April, 1991.  
 Producer: Martin Sauer  
 Music Notes: Keith Anderson

Cover: Warsaw 1855 (Topographikon)



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