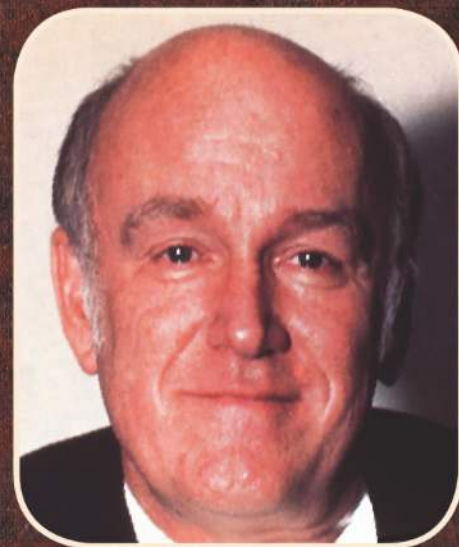


Chopin

Four Scherzi

Preludes from Op.28



**Sviatoslav
Richter**

alto



Frédéric Chopin

[1]	Scherzo No. 1 in B Minor, Op. 20	10:32
[2]	Scherzo No. 2 in B-flat Minor, Op. 31	9:49
[3]	Scherzo No. 3 in C-sharp Minor, Op. 39	7:32
[4]	Scherzo No. 4 in E Major, Op. 54	11:38
	Thirteen Preludes from Op. 28	
[5]	No. 4 in E Minor	2:41
[6]	No. 5 in D Major	0:33
[7]	No. 6 in B Minor	2:17
[8]	No. 7 in A Major	0:56
[9]	No. 8 in F-sharp Minor	1:39
[10]	No. 9 in E Major	1:19
[11]	No. 10 in C-sharp Minor	0:32
[12]	No. 13 in F-sharp Major	3:23
[13]	No. 19 in E-flat Major	1:09
[14]	No. 11 in B Major	0:45
[15]	No. 2 in A Minor	2:05
[16]	No. 23 in F Major	0:50
[17]	No. 21 in B-flat Major	2:25

Sviatoslav Richter, *piano*

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

The Polish-born composer **Frédéric [Fryderyck] Chopin** (1810–49) left his homeland, then under Russian occupation, in 1830 and the following year settled in Paris. Being already an outstanding virtuoso pianist, he had previously given concerts in Warsaw and Vienna and had visited Prague and Dresden. Having moved to Paris, he was soon immersed in the artistic life of that great cultural centre of Europe becoming friends with fellow musicians Hiller, Liszt, Berlioz, Bellini, Mendelssohn and Schumann, the poets Heine and de Vigny, and the painter Delacroix. Audiences at Chopin's concerts marvelled at the delicacy and lucidity of his pianism and he soon established a formidable reputation based upon a handful of concerts given in Vienna, Paris and a number of German cities.

During a visit to Dresden in September 1835 Chopin met and fell in love with the beautiful and talented young artist Maria Wodzinska, with whose brothers he had been school-friends. They became secretly engaged a year later but their plans to marry and settle back in Warsaw were opposed by Maria's father. In 1837 she terminated the engagement and some years after their break-up she married Jozef Skarbeck, the son of Chopin's godfather. The marriage only lasted a short while, ending in divorce. An early biographer of Chopin, James Huneker, mischievously speculated that Maria she played too much Chopin for her jealous husband's entertainment!

Gradually Chopin rejected the career of concert pianist, preferring to play in small and select gatherings, increasingly devoting more time and energy to composition and occasional teaching. Chopin composed a funeral march in 1837 following the end of his relationship with Wodzinska. The remaining three movements of what was to become his *Sonata in B flat minor Op 35* followed two years later. In the period between composing the Funeral March and the rest of the Sonata, Chopin also wrote the collection of *Preludes Op 28*.

Following the disappointment of his failed marriage proposal to

Wodzinska, Chopin formed a somewhat unlikely relationship with the novelist George Sand (1804–76), whom he met through Liszt's mistress Marie d'Agoult. The two seemed scarcely compatible – he was a narrow-minded conservative, refined and devoutly Catholic, whilst she was a liberal free thinker several years his senior who had had a succession of affairs and came with two children.

In late 1838 they decided to leave Paris for Majorca where they hoped to live in peaceful seclusion. However, Majorca proved to be a disaster: inclement weather played havoc with Chopin's delicate health; antisocial and suspicious neighbours ostracised the couple; and the initial lack of a piano drove Sand and Chopin almost to despair. Following the arrival of the Pleyel piano, imported at great expense by Sand, Chopin was able to complete the *Preludes Op 28*, begun as far back as 1836. Concern about Chopin's declining health (he was coughing up blood and the islanders' fears about consumption were becoming justified) finally forced them to leave Majorca in February 1839, eventually settling in Sand's chateau at Nohant, south-west of Limoges. That summer Chopin was able to complete the *B-flat minor Sonata* and other works including the *Nocturne in G major Op 37 No 2*, the *Second Impromptu* and three *Mazurkas Op 41*. For most of the following decade Chopin and Sand divided their time between Nohant and Paris, before the relationship ended in 1847, both parties having drifted irreconcilably apart. The tuberculosis that had afflicted Chopin finally struck him down two years later.

Listeners familiar with the largely rustic scherzo movements from Beethoven symphonies who expect Chopin's four *Scherzi* to be similarly merry are in for a surprise. Although each have a contrasting calm middle section, only the *No 4 in E major* is remotely light-hearted. These four pieces were written between 1834-5 and 1843, an often difficult period in his life.

The exact date of composition of Chopin's *Scherzo no 1 in B minor* is not known but it was probably written in late 1834 or early 1835. Its publication date was February 1835 and it was dedicated to Thomas Albrecht, for many years a good friend. Two cataclysmic chords unleash a stormy and disturbed outpouring of emotion on

the unsuspecting listener. Following this impassioned first section comes a calmer middle section, the melody of which is taken from a Polish Christmas song. The reprise of the impulsive opening seems even more frenzied than before; certainly nothing quite as angst-ridden had been heard in Chopin's previous works.

Similar tensions are evoked within the *Scherzo No 2 in B flat minor op 31*, which was composed in December 1837 in the wake of his devastating rejection by Maria Wodzinska. Dedicated to Comtesse de Fürstenstein, Chopin said of the opening that it must resemble a charnel house.

The *Scherzo No 3 in C sharp minor op 39* was published October 1840 and was dedicated to Adolph Gutmann, a favourite pupil of Chopin's who was at the composer's bedside when he died. Chopin enjoyed Gutmann's powerful playing of this piece "because he could 'knock a hole in the table' with a certain chord in the left hand" six bars in. It was begun in Majorca and completed in Nohant in 1839. This piece, perhaps more than the first two *Scherzi*, is so full of passion that one can only imagine what was passing through the composer's mind at that time. The chorale-like middle section perhaps represents the sought-after soothing effect of the monastery in which Chopin was living in Majorca.

The *Scherzo No 4 in E major op 54*, thought to have been composed some time later in 1842-3 and published in December of the following year, was dedicated to one of Chopin's rich and glamorous friends, Mlle Jeanne de Caraman. This piece is more in keeping with the modern idea of a scherzo and has often been likened to the Mendelssohn of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The 24 *Preludes Op 28* were also completed over a period of time. It is difficult however not to attach them all to Chopin's and George Sand's stay in Majorca. Following the example of Bach each Prelude is in a different key and ranges over the full gamut of human emotion from the happy and playful, agitated and menacing, to the overtly dramatic. One can also picture the elements in the famous 'Raindrop' Prelude No 15 in D flat major and lightning flashes in No 10 in C sharp minor, and perhaps a mighty waterfall in No 8 in F

sharp minor. Chopin only composed a handful of songs but much of his music is deeply lyrical so that one may imagine them to be operatic arias without words: *Nos 13 in F sharp major* and *21 in B flat major* are well-known examples of his innate lyricism, whilst *No 6 in B minor* might have been composed for the cello (another favourite instrument of Chopin's) and piano. Chopin might have drawn inspiration from his monastic surroundings in Majorca in the 'churchy' *Prelude Nos 9 in E major* and his intolerance is possibly depicted in the impatient *No 21 in B flat major* in which one might imagine the composer angrily closing the window on the playful children outside his house in the *Third Prelude*.

NOTES ON THE ARTIST

Sviatoslav Richter (1915–97) gave his first public recital in Odessa in 1934 and was taught by Heinrich Neuhaus at the Moscow Conservatory. Having played Prokofiev's Fifth Piano Concerto under the composer's direction, Richter gained a formidable reputation in the USSR and played in the West for the first time in 1960. Each subsequent visit to the West was eagerly awaited, but Richter became highly selective in his choice of venue, (often preferring smaller venues and following an extensive tour of the USA in 1970, he chose not to return to that country; Aldeburgh and selected sites in France, Italy and Japan became his preferred venues outside Russia). In 1986 Richter gave ninety-one concerts over a four month period during a massive tour by car from Leningrad to Vladivostok and then back to Moscow. In addition to numerous solo concerts Richter often played alongside friends such as Britten, Rostropovich, Fischer-Dieskau, Schreier, Oistrakh and Fournier.

Richter, whose repertoire was vast, was nevertheless often highly selective in his choice of works, disregarding those he felt disinclined to perform. On one occasion he was criticised by the composer Shostakovich for only picking some of the Preludes and Fugues to play. Richter's reply was to say 'There was no reason for him to feel offended: I played the ones that I liked, why should I play the ones that I didn't?' (Sviatoslav Richter: Notebooks and Conversations Faber 2001). There is reason to suppose that he felt the same way about Chopin's Preludes for surely few pianists would plan to record the better-known pieces without, for example, including the 'Raindrop' Prelude no 15 in D flat!

– 2011, **James Murray**

Alto ALC1159 5055354411595

Tracks 1-4 recorded 25–30 July 1977, Munich, Germany

Producer: **Hans Richard Stracke**

Engineer: **Horst Lindner**

Tracks 5-17 recorded 20 March 1979, Kanagawa Kenmin Hall, Tokyo

Producer: **Tomoo Nojima**

Engineer: **Takashi Watanabe**

Mastered for alto by **Paul Arden-Taylor** (dinmore-records)

Cover image: Frédéric Chopin, 1847 portrait by **Eugène Delacroix**

Design produced by [Imergent Images Ltd](#)

Project co-ordinator: [Robin Vaughan](#)

©&© 2011, Musical Concepts.

Digital edition ©&© 2025, Musical Concepts.

No part of this sound recording and its component audio, text, or graphics files may be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, or shared electronically in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, file sharing, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, contact the publisher, using the subject line “Attention: Permissions Coordinator,” at the address below.

**Musical Concepts
c/o ALTO Distribution
Magnus House
8 Ashfield Rd
Cheadle SK81BB, UK**

alto