



Maxim Abrossimov

UGA
presents.

24|25 SEASON

YULIANNA AVDEEVA, piano

SUN, JAN 12, 3:00 pm
Ramsey Concert Hall

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Ms. Avdeeva's recordings are available on ECM, Deutsche Grammophon, Mirare and Pentatone. Her newest Pentatone album, *Chopin: Voyage*, was released in September 2024.

Please silence all mobile phones and electronic devices. Photography, video and audio recording, and texting are prohibited during the performance.



PROGRAM

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810-1849)

Polonaise-Fantaisie in A-flat major, Op. 61 (1846) [13:00]

Barcarolle in F-sharp major, Op. 60 (1846) [8:30]

Prelude in C-sharp minor, Op. 45 (1841) [5:00]

Scherzo No. 3 in C-sharp minor, Op. 39 (1839) [8:00]

Andante spianato et Grande Polonaise brillante,
Op. 22 (1836) [13:00]

INTERMISSION

Nocturne in B major, Op. 62, No. 1 (1845-46) [7:00]

Sonata No. 3 in B minor, Op. 58 (1845) [27:00]

I. *Allegro maestoso*

II. *Scherzo: Molto vivace*

III. *Largo*

IV. *Finale: Presto non tanto*

Program is subject to change.

PROGRAM NOTES

by Laurie Shulman ©2024

Solo piano music by Frédéric Chopin falls into a category all its own. Few composers have established so broad and lasting a berth in music history within such a relatively narrow medium. Yet the capabilities of the piano expanded significantly in his hands.

His instrument was larger than Haydn's and Mozart's fortepiano, but it had not yet grown to the full 88-key instrument on which his music is played today. As both a performer and a composer, he had an uncanny communion with his piano. The potential of that instrument, a keyboard in transition, was territory begging for exploration.

Through the piano, Chopin ventured to previously unimagined musical continents, speaking a language unmistakably identifiable as his own. Nocturne, waltz, etude, mazurka, ballade, prelude, polonaise, scherzo – all these are inextricably linked with his name; what other composer can lay claim to so enormous a domain?

Ms. Avdeeva's all-Chopin program explores a variety of genres in which he composed, including a rarely performed smaller work (his last Prelude, Op. 45) that many pianists overlook.

***Polonaise-Fantaisie* in A-flat major, Op. 61**

Frédéric-François Chopin (1810-1849)

The late *Polonaise-Fantaisie* is an exploratory work that may well have heralded a new phase in Chopin's evolution as a composer. Alas, that phase was never to flower. Chopin's health was declining in 1845 and 1846 when he composed his Opus 61.

The consumption that would claim his life in 1849 compromised his productivity during his final years.

This work's ambiguous title is the key to its structure. Chopin refused to pigeonhole himself. The distinctive polonaise rhythm is sometimes present, elsewhere conspicuous by its absence, almost as if we focus in and out of an awareness of the dance. The concept is quite original, with an extended introduction that traverses a remarkable span of harmony. Cadenzas and improvisatory passages give vent to Chopin's lyric impulses, supporting the idea of a fantasy. The triumphant conclusion bursts through the earlier moodiness and melancholy.

The *Polonaise-Fantaisie* was misunderstood by Chopin's contemporaries. One reviewer observed that its "pathological contents" caused it to "stand outside the realm of art." Even Liszt felt that it was "overshadowed by a feverish apprehension." He wrote: "An elegiac sadness reigns here, broken by startled movements, melancholy smiles, and sudden gasps." The piece was slow to achieve popularity and acceptance. Yet it has a peculiar unity and persuasiveness that has won over connoisseurs. Today the *Polonaise-Fantaisie* is regarded as one of Chopin's late masterpieces.

Barcarolle in F-sharp major, Op. 60

Among Chopin's 74 published opus numbers (about a dozen of which appeared posthumously), there is only one *barcarolle*. Whereas he composed dozens of mazurkas, waltzes, and nocturnes, 27 preludes and 24 études, four ballades and four scherzi, and some 16 polonaises, the *barcarolle* stands alone. Unlike the other Polish dances he favored, the *barcarolle* has

Venetian origins: Its gentle, rocking meter (Chopin uses 12/8) is associated with gondoliers' songs.

Chopin's is a late work, begun in 1845 and published the following year. He spins a spellbinding tale in the deliciously rich key of F-sharp major. Following an understated introductory flourish, a lilting left-hand accompaniment establishes the groundwork. Above it, he builds an intricate and lovely melodic edifice.

Often the right hand is responsible for two melodies—even double trills—at once, a compositional ploy that requires immense technical and musical control from the performer. Despite the inherent delicacy of the *barcarolle*, Chopin brings this work to a convincing climax that never compromises the subtlety and refinement of the whole. The coda is sublime, spinning magic with a succession of new ideas that enchant the ear. His *barcarolle* is as much of a pleasure to play as it is to hear in performance.

Prelude in C-sharp minor, Op. 45

This last of Chopin's preludes is a stand-alone work, completely independent of his better-known 24 Preludes, Op. 28 (that set includes the beloved "Raindrop" Prelude). Broader in scale at about 5 minutes, the Op. 45 prelude is also unique in its improvisatory approach to the keyboard.

Opening with four measures of chords that lack a clear tonal foundation, the movement then eases into a deceptively simple texture: a slow-moving melody set forth in octaves and chords, with a flowing accompaniment in arpeggiated eighth notes. Gradually the two ideas commingle, making it difficult to discern which part actually has the

melody. Harmonies are equally complex, meandering through multiple key centers. The result is ingenious and subtle, the more so because the volume is subdued nearly throughout. Chopin wrote out a cadenza toward the prelude's end: a difficult passage with double notes in both hands that culminates in one of the few fortes in the entire piece.

Chopin composed this prelude in August 1841, while in Nohant, the country home of George Sand (nee Aurore Dudevant), with whom he lived for ten years. It was published in December 1841 with a dedication to one of his students, Princess Elisabeth Czernicheff. When Chopin sent the manuscript to his copyist, Julian Fontana, he appended an uncharacteristic note of satisfaction: "It is well modulated, is it not?"

Scherzo No. 3 in C-sharp minor, Op. 39

Chopin's four scherzi share little in common with the Beethovenian sonata scherzo other than triple meter and ternary form. Larger in scale than their prototype, each is a major one-movement work that maximizes the expressive contrasts of which the piano is capable. The Scherzo No. 3, composed and published in 1837, is the most dramatic of them.

Dark, passionate, and poetic, this scherzo represents Chopin in full command as a composer. Physically, however, he was failing, increasingly compromised by the toll that tuberculosis was taking on his frail constitution. He began it on the Spanish Mediterranean island of Mallorca, on the heels of the splendid *Préludes*, and completed it at George Sand's country estate of Nohant. Sand was nonplussed

by this new work, writing of its "obstinate battle with the language of communicability."

Indeed, the Third Scherzo is elusive, dark, passionate, poetic, and enigmatic. Its introduction includes all twelve tones, further confounding us with rhythmic ambiguity: two measures of four beats within a triple-meter time signature. Chopin see-saws between intensity and lyric narrative, with loose connections to sonata form. After a while, we do not care that these structural underpinnings are there. Still, their musico-architectural anchor gives us our aural roots.

Perhaps the scherzo's most enchanting moment occurs during the central trio. Chopin decorates a chorale worthy of Luther with a cascade of delicate filigree that seems to sum up romantic pianism in one splendid, inimitable gesture. He surprises us again in the coda, which concludes in major mode.

Chopin dedicated the scherzo to Adolf Gutmann, a German pianist who began studying with him in 1834 at age 15. When Ignaz Moscheles visited Chopin, the composer summoned Gutmann to play the C-sharp minor scherzo. "I am unfortunately too weak to play my things for him, so you must play," he told the youth. Wilhelm von Lenz, one of Liszt's and Chopin's pupils, described Gutmann as "strong enough to punch a hole through a table," one indication of the stamina this scherzo demands.

Andante spianato et Grande Polonaise brillante, Op. 22

Chopin's splendid output for piano comprises waltzes, nocturnes, etudes, ballades, scherzos, preludes, sonatas, polonaises, and mazurkas. A small

handful of his works occupy none of these categories. The *Andante spianato et Grande Polonaise Brillante* is one of those anomalies: neither fish nor fowl. Indeed, it is unique in that it is a hybrid of two unrelated sections composed at different times. Furthermore, the piece exists in versions for solo piano and for piano and orchestra. It has fared better as a solo piece, as Ms. Avdeeva plays it this afternoon.

The actual title of the piece is *Grande Polonaise brillante précédée d'un Andante spianato*: that is, a polonaise preceded by an *andante spianato*. The Italian verb *spianare* means to make level, to even out, to smooth. This opening segment of Chopin's Opus 22 is a spiritual cousin to his nocturnes. Idyllic and pastoral, it unfolds in a gentle rippling 6/8 meter like a *barcarolle*, almost in suspended animation. The body of the piece is in G major. A central section switches to 3/4 time and a chordal texture, but the atmosphere remains tranquil. Chopin's celebrated finger technique and delicious countermelodies invite both a delicate touch and rich tone.

The *andante spianato* functions as an introduction to the flashy *Polonaise brillante*. Chopin makes the transition via a fanfare and a slick modulation to E-flat major. This sixteen-bar bridge is a reduction of the original orchestral tutti that ushers in the main Allegro. Essentially Chopin's polonaise is a cross between rondo and variations. Each time the main theme recurs, he embroiders it with invention and sparkle.

Chopin's sole public performance of this work took place on 26 April 1835. The occasion, the conductor François Antoine Habeneck's benefit concert, was one of Chopin's few Parisian successes with a large audience; he

was more comfortable in the intimacy of a salon.

The exact chronology of the polonaise is uncertain. It probably dates from 1830 or 1831. We know that he added the *Andante spianato* in 1834. The combined pieces were published as Opus 22 in 1836 in a sort of orchestral shorthand. The piece has become more popular as a solo vehicle, because of its remarkable combination of grace, elegance, and technical brilliance.

Nocturne in B major, Op. 62, No. 1

We have come to associate Chopin's nocturnes with his melancholy, lyric style: more introspective, especially in comparison to his other more "public" genres, such as waltz, etude, and polonaise. His nocturnes favor a *cantabile* theme over an elegant, broken chord accompaniment, rarely in regular arpeggios. He develops his melodies through chromaticism and ornamentation, as opposed to a Beethovenian motivic approach. Mini-cadenzas provide a springboard for flights of fancy: coloratura outbursts that captivate the ear and the soul, never exceeding the boundaries of good taste.

The most ambitious of his nocturnes seethe with virtuosic passion in their middle sections. Even the shorter, simpler ones make every note count with the eloquence of poetry. He composed Nocturnes throughout his career. The two of Opus 62, composed in September 1846, were his last in the genre.

The B major Nocturne has had its critics. James Huneker, in his early monograph *Chopin: The Man and His Music* (1900), described it as "faint with a sick, rich odor." He added that "the climbing trellis of notes ... is charming and the chief tune has a fruity charm."

(His observations have led to the nickname 'Tuberose' for this nocturne, after the fragrant flower that has been used by perfumers for centuries.) The English composer Lennox Berkeley, writing in the Nocturnes chapter of *The Chopin Companion* (1966) was considerably more generous. He praised the Opus 62 Nocturnes for their "freedom of melodic line, richer and more unpredictable harmony, and a looser and less stereotyped form."

The B major Nocturne is an excellent example of that flexible approach to form. It is a modified ternary structure whose return to the A section is not symmetrical. Chopin's introduction of a mysterious, floating secondary theme is quite magical, as is his modulation to A-flat major for the middle section. The reprise of the first theme is noteworthy for its chains of trills, which pianist and scholar Charles Rosen likens to a sort of re-orchestration. They lead to a poetic coda, an imaginative area in which Chopin excelled.

Piano Sonata No. 3 in B minor, Op. 58

One of Chopin's universally recognized works is his funeral march: the slow movement to the Sonata No. 2 in B-flat minor, Op. 35. Because of that movement's disproportionate familiarity and the popularity of the Second Sonata, the Third Sonata has taken something of a back seat to its older sibling. Among pianists and musical connoisseurs, however, the B minor sonata is much beloved and an undisputed masterpiece of Chopin's final years. It dates from 1844—just five years before he succumbed to tuberculosis—and ranks with other late masterpieces such as the *Berceuse*, Op. 57 and the *Barcarolle*, Op. 60.

At nearly half an hour, this sonata is the largest scale of Chopin's solo compositions. Like the B-flat minor sonata, it is cast in four movements of widely varying length and content. As in that sonata, Chopin places the scherzo second and invests the slow movement with considerable rhetorical power and emotional weight. This later work, however, shows advances in Chopin's style, particularly in his integration of the pianistic filigree and the imagination of its musical episodes. In April 1844, the German poet and critic Heinrich Heine, who lived in Paris, wrote:

I am forced to keep repeating that there are only three pianists worthy of serious notice; these are, in the first place Chopin, the enchanting poet-musician, who has unfortunately been very ill this winter, and is seldom visible to the public. [The other two, in his estimation, were Liszt and Thalberg.] ... When I am near Chopin, I quite forget his mastery of piano technique, and plunge into the soft abysses of his music, into the mingled pain and delight of his creations, which are as tender as they are profound.

The Third Sonata has every quality Heine mentions, from its anguished opening declamation to the sublime second theme, which becomes the dominant melodic idea of the first movement. The rich textures of the Allegro maestoso show Chopin's absorption of broken chord techniques reminiscent of Carl Maria von Weber, and piano figuration from contemporary virtuoso works like Schumann's *Carnaval* and *Davidsbundlertänze*.

A more startling influence is a significantly earlier composer, however:

Johann Sebastian Bach. Chopin freely acknowledged that Bach and Mozart were his principal models. Before composing the B minor sonata, he had spent weeks poring over counterpoint treatises by Luigi Cherubini and Jean-Georges Kastner. Always, he studied Bach. His preoccupation with dense polyphony and imitative counterpoint found an outlet in the development section of the first movement.

Chopin's scherzo is brilliant and fleet, requiring an evenness of touch. Its understated, Mendelssohnian atmosphere only partly masks the tumultuous harmonic journeys. The slow movement shows a kinship to the first movement through its brief, dramatic introduction, followed by a nocturne-like texture in the dominant lyric theme. The Largo's extended middle section is vocal, specifically the caressing *bel canto* style of Bellini. As Charles Rosen has observed:

Here, for the only time in Chopin, the accompaniment is a literal pastiche of Italian opera orchestration—a pastiche full of affection and admiration.

The finale is both dramatic and virtuosic, with dazzling passagework to balance the quasi-military principal theme. Chopin sustains momentum through his adaptation of the rondo form, which allows him to alternate romantic passion with bravura display. The mood is at once epic and driven, culminating in a triumphant B major flourish.

Chopin completed the Third Sonata in autumn 1844. The Parisian house of Joseph Meissonier published it in June 1845 with a dedication to Comtesse Emilie de Perthuis, a friend and pupil who was the wife of the royal aide-de-camp. Chopin also dedicated his Op. 24 Mazurkas to her.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

YULIANNA AVDEEVA

A pianist of fiery temperament and virtuosity, Steinway artist Yulianna Avdeeva is the First Prize winner of the 2010 International Chopin Piano Competition, which launched her to international fame. She plays with power, conviction, and sensibility, winning over audiences around the world.

Avdeeva returned to Carnegie in October with another sold-out program that she will play on stages in Spain, Germany, France, Austria, Italy, and Seattle. In Boston, she will perform Liszt and Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* sonata, and an all-Chopin recital here in Athens. In spring 2025, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the death of Dmitri Shostakovich, Avdeeva performs his Preludes and Fugues, Op. 87, at Gewandhaus, part of a Shostakovich festival with the Gewandhaus Orchestra in partnership with the Boston Symphony. She will also play the cycle at Pierre Boulez Hall in Berlin, Palau de la Música in Barcelona, Madrid, Tokyo, and Lanaudiere Festival.

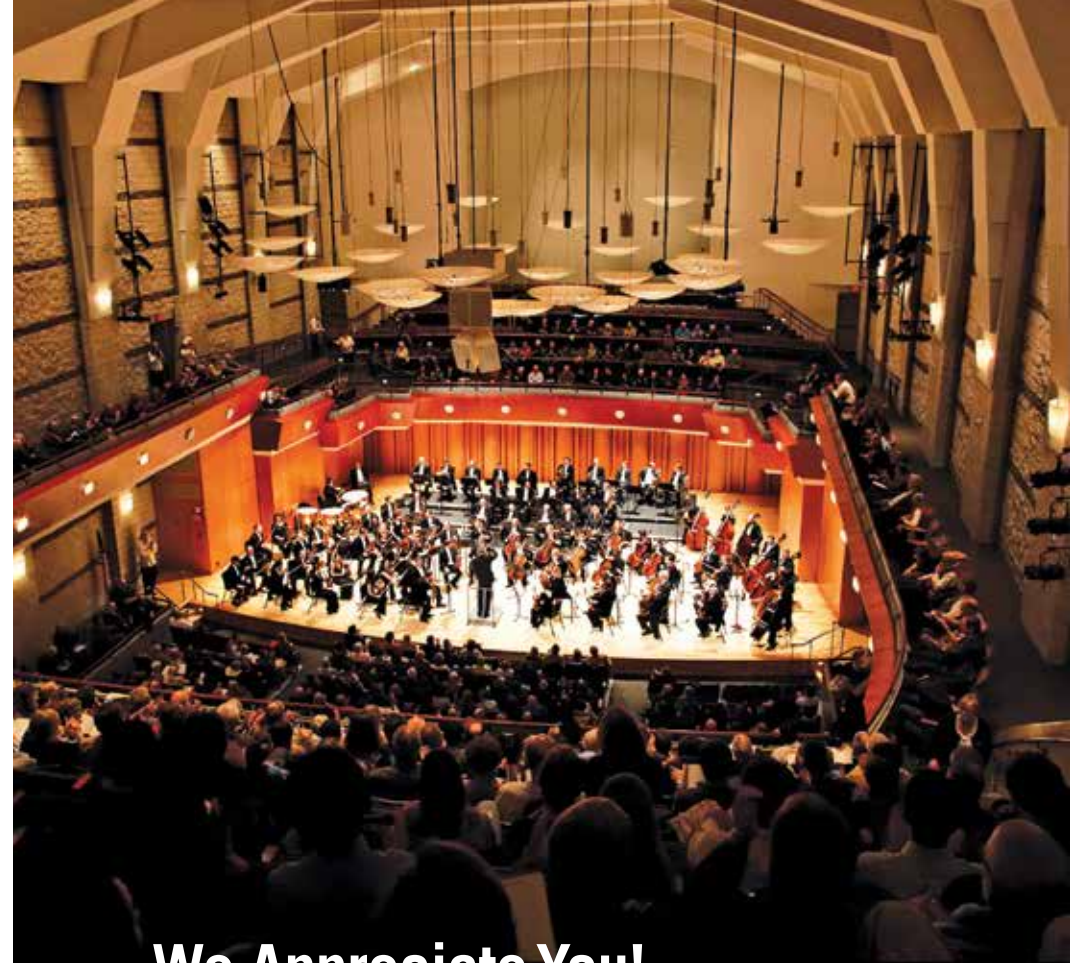
Avdeeva's recent and upcoming orchestral highlights include Chopin with the Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century on tour in Japan, with Barcelona Symphony, and in her debut with the Chicago Symphony; Mozart with the Baltimore Symphony; Prokofiev with the Pittsburgh Symphony; Beethoven with the Pacific Symphony; Rachmaninoff with The Florida Orchestra, Tokyo's NHK Symphony and with the Philharmonia Orchestra at festivals in Switzerland and Italy; Bernstein with RAI Italian Radio Orchestra and Minnesota Orchestra; and Grieg with the Orquesta Sinfónica de Galicia.

Other extensive orchestral collaborators include the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Montreal Symphony, City of Birmingham Symphony, Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, London Philharmonic, Finnish and Danish Radio Symphonies, Czech Philharmonic, Gewandhaus Orchestra, and Yomiuri Nippon Symphony.

Chamber music highlights of her 2024-25 season include Schnittke's Quintet, with members of the Vienna Philharmonic at the Salzburg Festival; Schnittke's Concerto for Piano and Strings, and Concerto Grosso No. 6, with Gidon Kremer and Kremerata Baltica; and a trio tour across Europe with Julia Fischer and Daniel Müller-Schott.

An artist with a substantial discography, Avdeeva released *Resilience* in 2023, featuring music by Szpilman, Weinberg, Shostakovich, and Prokofiev—composers who endured in times of great political instability. Avdeeva's latest album, *Voyage*, released in September 2024, features the late works of Chopin (both on Pentatone).

In late 2023, Avdeeva launched *#YuliannasMusicalDialogues*, an engaging online initiative that provides an open space for her followers and aficionados of the art of the piano to share their passion for music. Her *#AvdeevaBachProject*, during the Covid-19 lockdown, gained over half a million views.



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