

PAUL LEWIS
piano

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756–1791)

Sonata No. 17 in B-flat major K 570

Allegro

Adagio

Allegretto

(approx. 18 minutes)

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797–1828)

Drei Klavierstücke D 946

Allegro assai – Andante – Tempo I

Allegretto

Allegro

(approx. 23 minutes)

INTERMISSION

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810–1849)

Polonaise in C-sharp minor Op. 26 No. 1

Allegro

(approx. 9 minutes)

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810–1849)

Two Nocturnes Op. 32

Andante sostenuto

Lento

(approx. 10 minutes)

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756–1791)

Sonata No. 13 in B-flat major K 333

Allegro

Andante cantabile

Allegretto grazioso
(approx. 20 minutes)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Sonata No. 17 in B-flat major K 570

The period of the 1770s and 1780s brought regime change to the world of keyboard music as the harpsichord was gradually edged out by the first generation of fortepianos, capable of playing both loud (*forte*) and soft (*piano*) on the same set of keys. The pace of development was dizzying, comparable to that of computers today, with game-changing new models coming out every few years.

While Haydn delighted in exploiting the sonic capabilities of each new instrument that came under his fingers, Mozart was much more conservative in his approach. He remained generally much closer, in his keyboard writing, to the lean contrapuntal textures of the chamber ensemble than to the bold new pianistic world of hand-crossings, extreme ranges and pedal effects explored by Haydn.

The *Sonata in B-flat K 570* is a perfect example of Mozart's more conservative approach. Its unusually "thin" texture, often just two contrapuntal voices in dialogue, suggest that it might have been written for one of Mozart's students. And indeed the challenge it presents for modern pianists is how to shape so few notes into an engaging, ear-filling experience for the listener.

It opens with a "meet-and-greet" introduction to the home key: the B-flat major chord is spelled out note by note in a gracefully rocking pattern, and the key is confirmed by a running passage containing all the notes of the scale.



Then, like a celebrity chef challenged to create a multi-course meal using only a few ingredients, Mozart re-uses the first theme in his second theme, but cast into the bass register, as in a Haydn "monothematic" sonata movement.



It's the same arpeggiated chordal theme, presented anew with some entertaining contrapuntal chatter in the treble, rife with repeated notes and, in a remarkable display of motivic economy, a scale figure almost identical to that in bar 5 of the opening.

And it is this contrapuntal chatter that will eventually dominate in the development section in bare-bones passages of shifting interest between right and left hands, such as this:



Mozart is masterfully economical in this movement, constantly re-using his material over and over again, like a skilled chef mixing garnish and main course at will.

The second movement *Adagio* opens with a theme for imaginary horns registering as somewhere between stately and solemn, a theme as lovingly devoted to the notes of the E-flat major chord as the first movement's opening was to that of B-flat.



Written in the form of a rondo, it features two contrasting episodes, the first of which is in the minor mode, raising an eyebrow of concern with its "sighing" right hand set against an insistent patter of repeated notes in the left hand.



The second episode features an active, vocally inspired melody over an Alberti-style accompaniment.



Both episodes are quicker in pulse, more expansive in mood and wider in melodic range than the more static refrain to which they reliably return.

The last movement *Allegretto* evokes the innocently playful world of *opera buffa*, with a blithely skipping melody and recurring tick-tock beat that pianist Robert Silverman says “conjures up, for me at least, an image of Maurice Chevalier strolling down a Paris boulevard.”



At the same time, it intersects just as convincingly with the mechanical world of clockwork music, popular at the end of the 18th century, well represented by the Andante from Haydn’s “Clock” Symphony No. 101.

Most delightful in this “French rondo” (i.e., without a central refrain section) is the second episode



with its quasi-robotic C-3PO-style humour, featuring comic leaps and mock-confused meanderings of imitative counterpoint.

* * *

Franz Schubert

Drei Klavierstücke D 946

Schubert’s *Three Piano Pieces D 946* were likely composed in 1828, the last year of the composer’s life, and remained in manuscript until they appeared in a published edition in 1868. All three are structured in a rondo-like sequence of contrasting sections, and in their wide range of moods and inventive pianistic textures they represent some of Schubert’s most adventurous keyboard writing.

In these types of pieces, likely intended in the first instance for private performance by Schubert himself before an amateur audience, you hear some of the distinctive traits of Viennese popular music, especially its typical dance rhythms and the close-position chordal textures of its part songs.

And from time to time, just every once in a while, you hear hints from Schubert — who, after all was not a professional, publicly performing pianist — of the extravagant keyboard rhetoric and theatrical flair of the emerging generation of Romantic virtuoso pianists.

* * *

The first of the set, marked *Allegro assai*, opens in the gloomy key of E-flat minor with an agitated rippling of triplets and a breathless melody that evokes the famous forest ride of the horseman who “rides so late through night and wind” in the composer’s *Erkönig* ballad.



Further developments take the theme into major-mode territory (as in much of Schubert) and eventually to a brashly self-confident chordal theme with the forthright directness of a Schumann march.



The slower and more deliberate middle section features a lyrical moment of repose



made vividly dramatic with dazzling runs and swirling tremolos



that anticipate the improvisatory piano recitatives of Liszt.

The *Allegretto* second piece opens with a drone-textured lullaby in a style that Brahms would later make his own.



And in this regard, it is perhaps not irrelevant to mention that the editor of the 1868 edition of these pieces was none other than Johannes Brahms himself.

The first contrasting episode is conspiratorial in tone, with strange harmonic shifts and jabbing hemiola accents.



The second, in the extraordinary seven-flatted key of A-flat minor, is tinted with a rapturous serenity, combined with a melodic expansiveness that is Schubertian melody-making at its most enchanting.



The jubilant syncopations of the *Allegro* third piece in the set will have you cross-eyed in bewilderment, wondering where the downbeat is. Its emphatic, off-kilter syncopations and many five-bar phrases point to the stomping exuberance of Hungarian village music.



The contrasting middle section puts you on firmer rhythmic ground, thanks to its stabilizing drone tone in the bass and its grave, hymn-like demeanour.



But embedded within its repetitive rhythm is an urge to dance that soon breaks out to enliven the proceedings,



which, when eventually adopting its own syncopated lilt, leads naturally back to the village square evoked in the piece's opening bars and the animated celebrations still there underway.

Frédéric Chopin

Polonaise in C-sharp minor Op. 26 No. 1

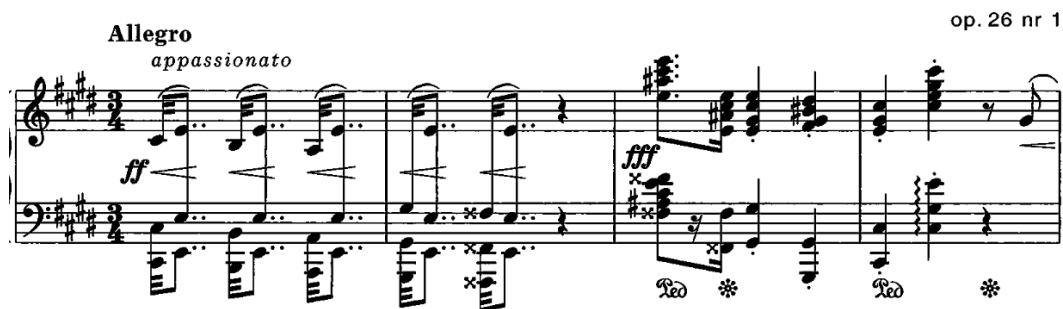
By 1836, when Chopin published his first two polonaises Op. 26, the *polonaise* had a two-hundred-year history behind it. By the 19th century it had taken on a conventional character as an instrumental dance piece in triple meter, at a moderate tempo, with this genre-defining rhythm:



Stylized as it might have become, the polonaise in the hands of Chopin became something more than just a national folk dance. After being forced into exile in the wake of the failed November 1830 uprising for Polish independence from the Russian Empire, Chopin turned the polonaise into a symbol of Polish nationalism that conveyed the deep patriotic feelings of his

fellow exiles for their homeland. Elevating it to the concert stage was a gesture of defiance, and imbuing it with virtuoso bravura made performing it a heroic act.

This new, expanded emotional resonance and dramatic intensity is evident from the very first bars of the *Polonaise in C# Minor Op. 26. No. 1*, which opens with four volleys of cannon fire – and their rebounding echoes – leading to a fiercely proud cadence spread widely over the keyboard.



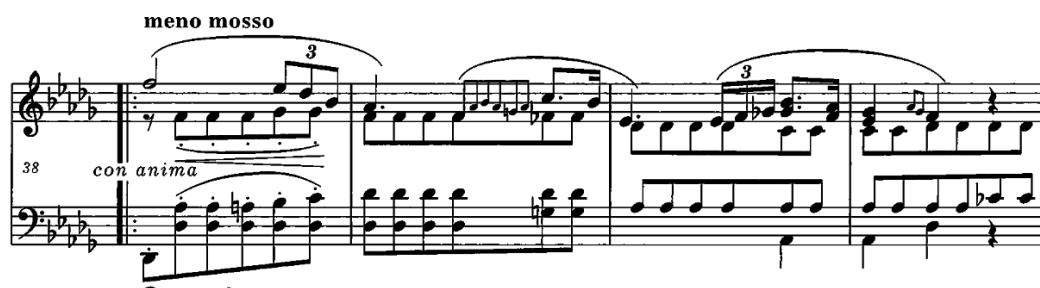
The polonaise melody that follows this weighty introduction begins no less impressively with a 9th dissonance proudly maintaining its independence from a bass octave at the very bottom of the keyboard that booms out like distant thunder.



Colourful flourishes reinforce the expansive multi-register domain over which this polonaise's volcanic sentiments are proclaimed.



Over the course of its history the polonaise, like other dances such as the minuet, had acquired a “trio” middle section of a contrasting lyrical character. The middle section of this polonaise (in D flat, the enharmonic major tonality of C# minor) is an oasis of calm, a soothing, songful refuge from the intense drama of the opening and closing sections that surround it.



And yet even here a sad memory of the homeland emerges in a soulful left-hand melody in the baritone range of the cello:



In this way, Chopin depicts with uncanny insight the patriotic feelings, the proud memories and the painful longings of his fellow Polish émigrés, dreaming of returning one day to the land of their birth.

Frédéric Chopin Two Nocturnes Op. 32

The Romantic-era nocturne that Chopin inherited from its founding composer, Irish pianist John Field (1782–1837), featured a cantabile melody floating dreamily over an accompaniment of arpeggiated harmonies, widely spaced over the lower regions of the keyboard to evoke the vast stillness of the night.

Chopin expanded the emotional range of the nocturne by decorating the melodic line with serenely rapturous flights of ornamentation in the style of his favourite contemporary opera composer, Vincenzo Bellini (1801–1835), and often by interrupting the ongoing reverie with an anxious or turbulent middle section to suggest that there was more to the depths of the night than just moonlight.

The second of Chopin's Two Nocturnes Op. 32 is very much in this vein. The first, however, is an anomaly that has confounded critics and performers alike because of its unusually stark and emotionally ambivalent ending.

* * *

The *Nocturne in B major Op. 32 No. 1* opens with a melody of considerable charm, poise and even nobility, with a lullaby-like accompaniment.

It has one disturbing quality, however: when the harmony turns minor in the 6th measure, it attempts to press on hurriedly (*stretto*) but then stops cold for a moment of complete silence before regaining its composure to complete the phrase.

The musical score for the first system of 'Nocturne in B major Op. 32 No. 1' is shown. It begins with the tempo marking 'Andante sostenuto.' and is divided into two sections, A and B. Section A features a melody with various ornaments and a lullaby-like accompaniment. Section B is marked 'B a tempo' and includes dynamic markings like 'f' (forte) and 'p' (piano), as well as performance instructions like 'stretto' and 'poco riten.' (poco ritenuto).

It's as if a sudden dark thought had cropped up and had to be repressed before going on. This happens several times again, in the same place in the melodic flow, until the final time when the dam seems to break and the tortured emotions that had been covered up burst out into the open in dramatic recitative and menacing murmurs of stored-up grievance and regret.

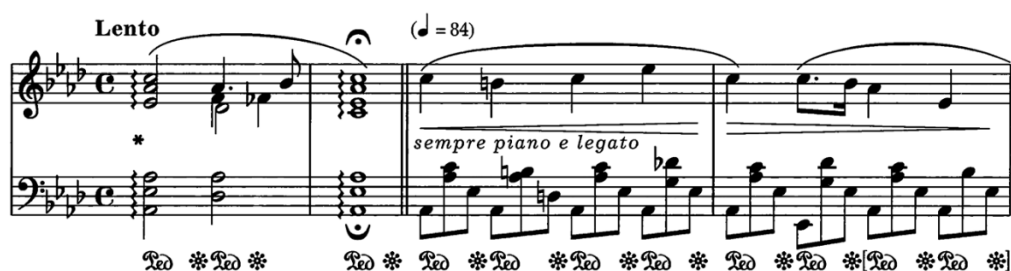
The musical score for the second system of 'Nocturne in B major Op. 32 No. 1' is shown. It continues the melodic flow with dynamic markings like 'pp' (pianissimo), 'f' (forte), and 'fz' (forzando). It includes performance instructions like 'Adagio' and 'p' (piano). The score shows a transition from a lullaby-like accompaniment to a more dramatic and menacing sound.

This ending is so shockingly unexpected that editors have been divided as to whether the last chord should be major or minor.

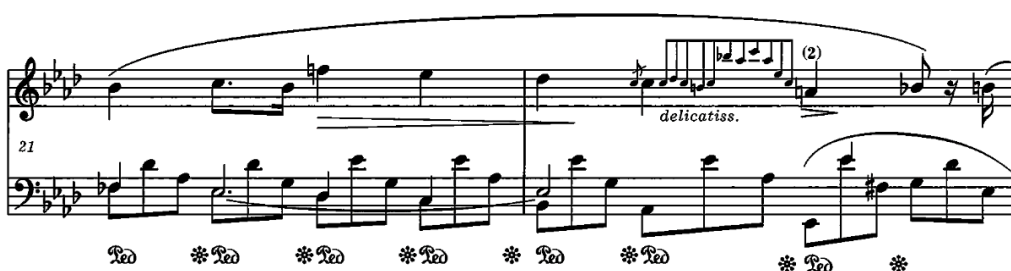
Arthur Rubinstein, the healthy optimist, played it major.

Paul Lewis may have other ideas...

The narrative arc of the *Nocturne in A-flat major Op. 32 No. 2* is much less controversial and more gently nuanced. It begins with a harp-like introduction, one that bookends the piece at the beginning and end, as if to remind us that what unfolds within is a dreamlike tale.



The main melody is an endearing waltz-like tune, made ever more affectionate as it goes along by the application of elegantly spun-out melodic embroidery, à la Bellini.



The refinement and dancelike character of this theme prompted Russian composer Alexander Glazunov (1865–1936) to give it a major role in his orchestrations of Chopin's music for the ballet *Les Sylphides*, premiered in Paris in 1909 by Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes.

The innocence and grace of the opening, however, turns anxious in the middle section in F minor, when the lilt of the accompaniment's triplets takes over the entire texture and the diatonic melody-making of the previous section turns chromatic in a breathy fit of fretting.



The return of the opening then follows as a kind of “triumph” over this hand-wringing mood, with a re-affirmation in the repeat of the opening harp-strummed chords that it all might well have been a dream.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Sonata No. 13 in B-flat major K 333

To the ears of modern audiences, given to admiring the thunderous eruptions of a nine-foot grand piano projecting the well-upholstered scores of 19th-century pianist-composers, the crystalline perfection of Mozart's almost minimalist keyboard writing might seem thin broth indeed. But then again, Mozart was not about making boom-box music for the powdered-wig set. He had little taste for sonic padding. He wrote only the notes necessary to outline his musical ideas with clarity.

Which is not to say that he had no larger sound palette in mind and no care for "effect" when composing for the keyboard. His *Sonata in B-flat major K 333* shows clearly the influence of the concerto style in the contrasts between the "solo" and "tutti" textures of its first movement, and more strikingly still in the way its last movement rondo stops dead in its tracks on a cadential 6-4 chord to set the stage for a full-on "soloist" cadenza.

This was not a work aimed at the market for home music-making or study. Rather, it is something of a "showpiece" meant to display not only the performer's ability to create ear-tickling keyboard effects, but also his sense of taste and refinement.

In this regard, the influence of Mozart's mentor, Johann Christian Bach (1735–1782), is evident in the composer's borrowing from J. C. Bach's Sonata in G major Op. 17 No. 4 to create the gracious and carefree six-note descending scale figure used in the first movement's opening theme,



and in its equally poised and elegant second theme as well:



Johann Christian, the so-called "London" Bach, was a leading exponent of the *style galant*, and elements of this style are apparent in the short, balanced phrases of the first movement's themes, and in its pervasive use of coy little two-note sigh motives throughout.

Even the light overlay of minor-mode tonal colouring in the development section seems to be something that can be effortlessly waved away, as if by the leisurely command of a frilly-cuffed hand politely calling in the recapitulation. This movement is an elegant amalgam of textbook sonata-form construction, Italianate vocal melodies and scintillating keyboard figuration.

* * *

The sonata's emotional centre of gravity is the second movement *Andante cantabile*, an operatic aria transferred to the keyboard idiom.



Its mood of dignified lyrical reflection is enlivened by frequent decorations of the melodic line and unified by the recurrence of the rhythmic motif of three repeated notes leading into the first beat of the following bar. This motif occurs both in the treble's melody line and in the bass, as well.



This three-note motive becomes especially important as the central focus of the probing chromatic deliberations of the development section.

* * *

An aristocratic tone of playfulness returns in the rondo finale marked *Allegretto grazioso*, with its breezy opening refrain tune featuring a whimsical downward hop of a 7th.



The influence of the showy, display-oriented concerto style is evident in the contrasts between “solo” and “tutti” textures, and more strikingly still in its full-on “soloist” cadenza:



After which, with a few coquettish flutters of the fan, the movement ends in the same eye-twinkling good humour with which it began.

Donald G. Gíslason 2026