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RECORDINGS



*The
Chopin
I Love*

Peter
Donohoe *piano*

THE TITLE OF THIS COLLECTION is not original on my part; one of the most formative recordings of my youth was an LP of Arthur Rubinstein with the same title, one that seemed so aptly to represent Rubinstein's intentions as an artist. His great pianistic abilities go without saying; however, the priority given via his playing to demonstrating how wonderful the music is, to captivating the listener on behalf of the composer, always appealed to me as a child and continues to do so. The title of his recording – *The Chopin I Love* – seems to sum up what Rubinstein always stood for, and indeed what we performers should all stand for. So I “borrowed” it – despite the fact that the works in question are different.



It is important to note that, as with Rubinstein, the title is not in any way intended to suggest that I do not “love” the music of Chopin not included in this selection – merely that these particular works have always resonated very much with me, in addition to the fact that they represent some of the most challenging, unique and significant repertoire for piano ever written.

Préludes, Op.28

The most substantial works in this collection are the Préludes, Op.28. Despite this extraordinary group of 24 short pieces (along with the 3 Écossaises) being from a somewhat earlier stage of Chopin’s output than the other works, the degree of harmonic invention, diversity of moods and pure originality make this opus one of the great landmarks, not only of piano music but of all Western classical music. It is said that the composer did not necessarily intend for all 24 Préludes to be played contiguously, but rather that they could be selected and performed in groups of four or five. While this is undoubtedly a valid way to present them, a performance of the complete cycle forms a fascinating and satisfying outpouring, almost rendering the set as a single work of 24 short movements. The combination of the harmonic simplicity of the First Prélude and the dark, tonally ambiguous second sets the tone for the whole collection. The overriding sense of tragedy when listening to all 24 is extremely arresting – despite the presence of many beautiful, lyrical, melodic préludes, several purely charming ones, and some whose étude-like technical demands place them firmly amongst Chopin’s most virtuosic works.

Barcarolle, Op.60

Polonaise-Fantaisie, Op.61

2 Nocturnes, Op.62

3 Écossaises, Op.72 No.3

My feelings regarding these wonderful works are undoubtedly very personal and subjective. That the 2 Nocturnes, Op.62 are for me the culmination of that form, that the Polonaise-Fantaisie is one of the most beautiful but enigmatic works in the piano repertoire, and that the Barcarolle is the piece that sums up – perhaps most satisfyingly of all his works – the whole being of Chopin and his contribution to music are very definitely personal feelings, with which many others may disagree.

However, I have an even more personal feeling towards the 3 Écossaises, Op.72 No.3 (the late opus number is misleading as they were written much earlier than it suggests, and then published posthumously). One of my first experiences of classical music dates back to when I was around five years old. My family acquired a wind-up gramophone and a small collection of 78-rpm discs, one of which was of the wonderful Ukrainian and French pianist Alexander Brailowsky playing Chopin's Grande valse brillante, Op.18 and these Écossaises. They were thus amongst the first pieces I ever knew and were formative for me. That they are much less serious than any of the other works here does not detract from their originality and charm.

Peter Donohoe © 2026

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810–1849) and Franz Liszt (1811–1886) were the first great composers for the pianoforte (to give the instrument its full name) outside the Austrian-Germanic tradition. They expanded a lasting repertoire that began – in so far as the evolution of the modern-day instrument is concerned – in the first half of the 18th century with the later works of Johann Sebastian Bach and continued in the second half of the century with music by his sons Wilhelm Friedemann and Carl Philipp Emanuel, and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Works by Haydn, Beethoven, Weber and Schubert ushered in the 19th century, so that by the time of Chopin and Liszt the repertoire for the piano was thoroughly established.

Frédéric Chopin was born near Warsaw, and although he became a noted patriot, he lived in Paris from 1831 and never returned to Poland. It was in his homeland, however, that his genius was first noticed, following his concert debut in Warsaw at the age of nine. Political considerations played no little part in Chopin leaving Poland, the country being at that time under Russian domination.

Chopin suffered from tuberculosis (then known as consumption), which was almost always fatal in the 19th century. A significant love of his adult life was the novelist George Sand (born Aurore Dupin). They lived together for nine years from 1838 but never married or had children. (Sand was legally separated from her husband Casimir Dudevant in 1835 and had custody of their two teenage children.) Her solicitude towards Chopin enabled him to live a somewhat longer life than he otherwise might have done; they stayed in parts of Europe where the climate was best suited for delaying the spread of the disease, but their association ended after a series of bitter quarrels, and Chopin – now short of

money – embarked upon a series of concert tours, the pressure of which, allied to his failing health, hastened his early death at the age of 39. (By contrast, Liszt, the dedicatee of Chopin's first book of Études, Op.10 and the author of the first biography of Chopin, was to live almost twice as long, until death claimed him in his 75th year.)

During his time with Sand, Chopin produced an impressive body of work, all of it – uniquely among great composers – involving the one instrument, the piano, which remained central to his expression. Many of his shorter works, such as the "Raindrop" Prélude, the Waltz in A minor and the "Revolutionary" Étude, remain amongst the most popular pieces in the entire classical music repertoire. From Chopin's broad output Peter Donohoe has chosen music for which he feels particular affinity, the most significant being the set of **24 Préludes, Op.28**.

The two sets of 24 Preludes and Fugues by J.S. Bach were the model for many later composers who penned collections of a similar nature, though most of them stopped short of pairing their preludes with fugues – doubtless feeling their contrapuntal skills could not begin to compare with those of the master. The sum of all the major and minor keys is 24, and that is the number of préludes in Chopin's Opus 28 – the most significant contribution to the genre since Bach.

Having completed his set of 24 Préludes in February 1839 (they would be published in Paris the following June), Chopin wrote a further single **Prélude, Op.45** in C sharp minor in 1841, ostensibly for Princess Elizabeth Chernichev. This is a much longer and detailed study than almost all of the individual numbers in the Opus 28 set (the sole exception being the famous D flat "Raindrop" Prélude,

which is identical in length) and therefore clearly warrants its own opus number – Chopin was not about to embark upon a second set of 24. It is interesting to note that the C sharp minor Prélude is, emotionally, more probing and expressive than its Opus 28 predecessor in the same key, the gossamer, delicately spun Prélude No.10 (Molto allegro). In Opus 45, the pulse moves far more slowly; ruminative and intimate, almost Impressionistic in character, it thus allows us, as listeners, to create our own pictures to accompany the music's mood.

Chopin's **Barcarolle, Op.60** followed, composed in 1845–46. The key is F sharp major, and it has been claimed that the work is a pianistic reflection on the Venetian *barcarola* song genre. This may be true, for although Chopin never visited Venice, he could have encountered a similar atmosphere during his time in Mallorca in 1838–39. Whatever the inspiration, the nature of the music – an early-evening study recalling the Italianate tracery of *bel canto* opera's ornamented lines, a paradigm of early Romanticism – and its technical and expressive demands elevate the work's significance.

An obvious feature of Chopin's music is its distinctive character, and that character often includes the national flavour of his native Poland. He wrote 16 polonaises, two of them when he was only seven years old, long before he would leave his country as a young man. Those early examples are not great music, by any means, but they are remarkable illustrations of a youthful genius at work and display the inherent sense of nationalism that was to emerge more strongly in Chopin's adult life. Although he never returned to Poland after leaving at the age of 20, it may well be that he used the polonaises he wrote as an adult to maintain strong ties to his homeland, as Arthur Rubinstein suggested. In this regard, the inherent

nobility and style of the single **Polonaise–Fantaisie, Op.61** in the rich key of A flat major, written three years before the composer's death, is a most profound expression, the central slower section glowing in the golden key of B major, his musical patriotism here set forth for all to hear.

Chopin did not invent the solo piano nocturne, but he raised the form to an unparalleled degree. In Chopin's nocturnes, short pieces of lyrical or elegiac character, we find a combination of Italianate melody – a recreation of the popular *bel canto* style in pianistic terms – and hallmarks of extemporisation (a discipline in which Chopin, by all accounts, was a master), the whole possessing a strong structural sense. The **2 Nocturnes, Op.62** are in the related keys of B major and its sub-dominant E major, the tempos, respectively, Andante and Lento. The first begins almost as an improvisation, the structure gradually tightening and encapsulating a rare depth of feeling. The emotion of its companion is more direct, opening with a hauntingly expressive theme that is less improvisatory in thought and extended more fully than that of its predecessor, perhaps communicating more directly with the listener.

Communicating more directly through the rhythm of dance is the essence of Chopin's **3 Écossaises, Op.72 No.3**, published posthumously as part of the Opus 72 set. These delightful miniatures in D major, G major and D flat, respectively, and altogether lasting around two minutes in performance, demonstrate – as surely as any of his music can – the essence of the immortal legacy of the art of this great and original composer.

It was in the last years of Chopin's life that Liszt started work on and eventually published a number of transcriptions of Chopin's Polish songs, and following the latter's death, wrote a book on the Polish master. It is also believed by some authorities that Liszt's noble *Funérailles*, subtitled "October 1849" (the month of Chopin's death), was a tribute to his friend, but such considerations are perhaps for another time.

Chopin's **Berceuse, Op.57**, composed in 1843–44, was originally entitled *Variantes*. The variations implied by the title, however, are not so clearly or individually identifiable as to warrant the name. This music is more akin to a series of short, continuous contemplations upon a simple, nocturne-like theme, each arising organically and naturally from its predecessor. The textural originality of the work is remarkably adept and invariably moving.

Robert Matthew-Walker © 2026



Photo © Sussie Ahlburg

Since his unprecedented success as joint winner of the 1982 International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, **Peter Donohoe** has developed a distinguished international career. He is acclaimed as one of the foremost pianists of our time, for his musicianship, stylistic versatility and commanding technique.

Donohoe has performed with all the major London orchestras, as well as multiple European and American orchestras. He made his 18th appearance at the BBC Proms in 2012 and has played at many prestigious festivals.

Donohoe has an impressive catalogue of recordings. His most recent discs include six volumes of Mozart's Piano Sonatas with SOMM Recordings. Other recent recordings include Haydn Keyboard Works, Volume 1 (Signum), Grieg Lyric Pieces, Volume 1 (Chandos), the Dora Pejačević Piano Concerto (Chandos), Brahms and Schumann Viola Sonatas with Philip Dukes (Chandos) and Busoni: Elegies and Toccata (Chandos), which was nominated for a *BBC Music Magazine* Award.

Peter Donohoe was born in Manchester in 1953. He studied at Chetham's School of Music for seven years, graduated in music at Leeds University and went on to study at the Royal Northern College of Music with Derek Wyndham, and then in Paris with Olivier Messiaen and Yvonne Loriod.

Peter Donohoe is an honorary doctor of music at seven UK universities and was awarded a CBE for services to classical music in the 2010 New Year Honours List.

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The Chopin I Love

Peter Donohoe *piano*

Frédéric Chopin 1810–1849

24 Préludes, Op.28

| | | | | | |
|----|---------------------------|------|----|---------------------------|------|
| 1 | No.1 in C major | 0:38 | 13 | No.13 in F \sharp major | 2:44 |
| 2 | No.2 in A minor | 2:11 | 14 | No.14 in E \flat minor | 0:36 |
| 3 | No.3 in G major | 1:03 | 15 | No.15 in D \flat major | 4:33 |
| 4 | No.4 in E minor | 1:49 | 16 | No.16 in B \flat minor | 1:12 |
| 5 | No.5 in D major | 0:39 | 17 | No.17 in A \flat major | 2:47 |
| 6 | No.6 in B minor | 1:50 | 18 | No.18 in F minor | 0:56 |
| 7 | No.7 in A major | 0:44 | 19 | No.19 in E \flat major | 1:29 |
| 8 | No.8 in F \sharp minor | 1:59 | 20 | No.20 in C minor | 1:51 |
| 9 | No.9 in E major | 1:08 | 21 | No.21 in B \flat major | 2:03 |
| 10 | No.10 in C \sharp minor | 0:30 | 22 | No.22 in G minor | 0:47 |
| 11 | No.11 in B major | 0:41 | 23 | No.23 in F major | 0:59 |
| 12 | No.12 in G \sharp minor | 1:12 | 24 | No.24 in D minor | 2:42 |

[37.16]

| | | |
|----|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| 25 | Prélude, Op.45 | 4:31 |
| 26 | Barcarolle, Op.60 | 8:42 |
| 27 | Polonaise-Fantaisie, Op.61 | 12:47 |
| | 2 Nocturnes, Op.62 | [12.43] |
| 28 | No.1 Andante | 7:01 |
| 29 | No.2 Lento | 5:42 |
| 30 | 3 Écossaises, Op.72 No.3 | 2:05 |
| | D major · G major · D \flat major | |
| 31 | Berceuse, Op.57 | 4:20 |
| | Total Duration | 82:26 |

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