



SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Presents

Joshua Stanczak, piano

Saturday, December 2, 2023

7:00 P.M.

Ed Landreth Auditorium

Program

Nocturne No. 1 in B major, Op. 32

Frédéric Chopin
(1810-1849)

Polonaise in F-sharp minor, Op. 44

Frédéric Chopin

Three Mazurkas, Op. 56

No. 1 in B major
No. 2 in C major
No. 3 in C minor

Frédéric Chopin

Ballade No. 1 in G minor, Op. 23

Frédéric Chopin

Intermission

Sonata No. 3 in B minor, Op. 58

I. Allegro maestoso
II. Scherzo: Molto vivace
III. Largo
IV. Finale: Presto non tanto

Frédéric Chopin

. Joshua Stanczak is a Sophomore on the Bachelor of Music Degree in Piano Performance.
He is a student of Dr. Tamás Ungár.

The use of recording equipment or taking photographs is prohibited.
Please silence all electronic devices including watches, pagers, and phones.

Program Notes

Nocturne: This nocturne is the first in a set of two nocturnes written by Chopin in 1837. These are the ninth and tenth nocturnes out of the twenty-one total nocturnes that he wrote in his lifetime. The Op. 32, No. 1 Nocturne is initially marked as “Andante sostenuto,” and is quite simplistic in harmony and overall structure. Although there are sporadic occurrences of tempo fluctuation, the nocturne remains relatively stable and consistent until the last five measures. It is here that Chopin does a sudden modulation that nearly disregards the entire structure that preceded the coda, and he slowly brings the listener down into a dark place where it eventually comes to an end at a forte-marked B-minor chord. This coda section is a defiant, dramatic, and original passage that shows a stark contrast compared to the rest of the piece.

Polonaise: The Polonaise in F-sharp minor, Op. 44, was written by Frédéric Chopin in 1841. It is often referred to as the "tragic" polonaise, due to its dark nature. The polonaise is dedicated to Princess Ludmilla de Beauveau, a prominent member of the Polish émigré community in Paris.

The polonaise itself is a dance of Polish origin and one of the five Polish national dances in $\frac{3}{4}$ time. It originated first as a “peasant dance” around the 15th century and later went on to be a favorite dance style of the Polish aristocratic class. It is a very popular dance used in Poland to this day, most commonly for the opening of a big event, ball, or party. The character and rhythmic qualities of the polonaise are really what define the style of the dance. However, Chopin took this dance style to yet another level, composing his polonaises with more qualities of a fantasy implemented into it.

This polonaise is written in a ternary form. The main theme is stated multiple times with a very powerful yet lyrical sound which finally cascades to a strong conclusion with a bridge leading to the next section. The middle section represents the mazurka style of dance in the contrasting relative key of A major. It is within this section that the power and fervor of the main theme is sedated, and a new spark of light shines with a beautiful melody, providing that stark contrast from the beginning. At the conclusion of this section, we come to another quick and contrasting bridge that leads us directly back into the main theme which repeats again at fortissimo until the final coda climax which directs us into a peaceful ending and then a surprise double octave as the final note of this dark and tragic polonaise.

Mazurkas: The Opus 56 Mazurkas is a set of three mazurkas written presumably between 1843 and 1844. Being that this was the middle of the nineteenth century, the demand for new and different genres and forms of music was high. At the same time, due to the Russian invasion of Poland which had played into Chopin’s decision to leave Poland for France, the feelings of patriotism and nationalism were also at a high for the Polish natives and supporters. These factors led Chopin to indulge in the short character pieces known as the mazurkas. This was a common style of Polish dance that could display a plethora of rhythmic, harmonic, modal, textural, and emotional variety.

The Op. 56 Mazurkas are a great example of the dramatic contrast that is possible to have within the same genre. The first is a joyous, tender reflection, with an intimate feel. The

contrasting sections demonstrate Chopin's lyrical ability, and the subtle change of melody between hands attests to his developing style. The second mazurka has a true Polish flavor, with a rhythmic drone accompaniment, irregular accents, and rustic grace note figures. The chromaticism and sophisticated imitation among the voices are further evidence of Chopin's maturing style. The dance-like second piece is followed by a mysterious and unusual third mazurka. The rhythmic ambiguity, combined with the stronger emphasis on the second and third beats, creates a truly native feel. The contrasting section bursts into a patriotic, rhythmic, chordal texture, but quickly returns to the original, winding theme.

Ballade: The first of four ballades written by Chopin, the creation of this piece began in 1831 while Chopin was in Vienna. It was later finished and published in 1835 in France. It is known as one of his greatest works, as he himself proclaimed to the great composer Robert Schumann a year after it had been published that it was his favorite and dearest work.

Interestingly, the ballade begins immediately on a Neapolitan chord. The main section of the ballade is built from two main themes. The brief introduction fades into the first theme in G minor, introduced at measure 8. After dramatic development, the second theme in Eb major is introduced softly at measure 68. The exposition is once again followed by development, in which the two themes, transferred to another tonal center (A minor and A major), undergo transformation. Then, a reprise presents the two themes in their original keys, albeit in reverse order. A thundering chord introduces the coda, marked *Presto con fuoco*, to which the initial Neapolitan harmony re-emerges in constant dynamic forward propulsion, which eventually ends the piece in a fiery double octave scale run down the keyboard.

Sonata: Completed in 1844, this is the last of Chopin's sonatas, viewed by many as one of his most challenging compositions, both technically and musically. It consists of four movements, the first (*Allegro Maestoso*) being the most complex. The main theme is presented from the beginning, yet shortly after, a new lyrical theme emerges almost out of nowhere, creating an ethereal atmosphere with a soaring melody over an arpeggiated accompaniment. The first theme returns with a different change of character. This time, Chopin adds an unexpected modulation by changing the second lyrical theme from B minor to B major for the remainder of the movement. The second movement is a *Scherzo* and is the shortest of the four movements. The main theme consisting of a flurry of arpeggios comes to a climactic resolution with an E-flat major chord and modulates in a subtle and almost magical fashion to B major. After this secondary theme is finished, a repeat of the original segment enters back in E-flat major before another big finish that immediately launches into the *Largo* movement. This movement has similar qualities to that of a nocturne and creates the perfect balance of simplicity and beauty, which flows out of the previous virtuosic two movements before heading to the dramatic finish. The *Finale* is an outstanding climax, with turbulent sounds that keep the intensity and drama pushing forward until the jubilant conclusion.

Program notes by Joshua Stanczak