



Chopin's manuscript of the Ballade in G minor

A Chopin Recital

St. John Vianney Church

September 25, 2022 5:00 p.m.

by **Robert M. Mondoy**

*In celebration of 42 years of parish music ministry and
the 60th anniversary of the foundation of the parish*

Frédéric François Chopin (born Fryderyk Franciszek Chopin 1 March 1810 – 17 October 1849) was a Polish composer and virtuoso pianist of the Romantic period, who wrote primarily for solo piano. He has maintained worldwide renown as a leading musician of his era, one whose “poetic genius was based on a professional technique that was without equal in his generation”.

Chopin was born in Żelazowa Wola in the Duchy of Warsaw and grew up in Warsaw, which in 1815 became part of Congress Poland. A child prodigy, he completed his musical education and composed his earlier works in Warsaw before leaving Poland at the age of 20, less than a month before the outbreak of the November 1830 Uprising. At 21, he settled in Paris. Thereafter – in the last 18 years of his life – he gave only 30 public performances, preferring the more intimate atmosphere of the salon. He supported himself by selling his compositions and by giving piano lessons, for which he was in high demand. Chopin formed a friendship with Franz Liszt and was admired by many of his other musical contemporaries, including Robert Schumann.



For most of his life, Chopin was in poor health. He died in Paris in 1849 at the age of 39, probably of pericarditis aggravated by tuberculosis.

All of Chopin’s compositions include the piano. Most are for solo piano, though he also wrote two piano concertos, a few chamber pieces, and some 19 songs set to Polish lyrics. His piano writing was technically demanding and expanded the limits of the instrument; his own performances noted for their nuance and sensitivity. His major piano works also include mazurkas, waltzes, nocturnes, polonaises, the instrumental ballade (which Chopin created as an instrumental genre), études, impromptus, scherzi, preludes, and sonatas, some published only posthumously. Among the influences on his style of composition were Polish folk music, the classical tradition of J. S. Bach, Mozart, and Schubert, and the atmosphere of the Paris salons, of which he was a frequent guest. His innovations in style, harmony, and musical form, and his association of music with nationalism, were influential throughout and after the late Romantic period.

Chopin’s music, his status as one of music’s earliest celebrities, his indirect association with political insurrection, his high-profile love-life, and his early death have made him a leading symbol of the Romantic era. His works remain popular, and he has been the subject of numerous films and biographies of varying historical fidelity.



What to listen for:

1. Grande Valse Brillante in F, Op. 34, No. 3; composed 1838.

Chopin used the waltz-form to great effect, even if his waltz-compositions were intentionally non-danceable, the energy and the excitement of a grand and aristocratic ball still bubbles up through the music.

2. Mazurka in F minor, Op. post. 68, No. 4; composed 1849.

This piece reveals his great love for Poland, his motherland, in this case as a melancholic sadness. Listen for the Slavic dance rhythm of 3/4 “weak-strong-weak”.

3. Ballade in G minor, Op. 23; composed 1835.

The first of his ballades is replete with contrast and great mood-swings, although in a most organized fashion and harmonically developed to great dramatic effect. Listen for the first theme in G minor, followed eventually after dramatic intercourse by a most sweet and personable melodic theme. No theme is left untouched in the name of dramatic development and interplay. A piece both tender and fierce.

4. Étude in C minor, Op. 10, No. 12 “Revolutionary”; composed 1831.

The 12th Étude appeared around the same time as the November Uprising in 1831. Upon the conclusion of Poland’s failed revolution against Russia, he cried, “All this has caused me much pain. Who could have foreseen it?” Dedicated to Franz Liszt.

5. Étude in E minor, Op. 25, No. 3; composed 1837.

Chopin wrote this étude with a series of quick, dissonant minor seconds. The effect has earned the étude the nickname “Wrong Note”. However, the middle lyrical section is incredibly tender and romantic.

6. Scherzo No. 2 in B-flat minor, Op. 34; composed between 1835-1837.

To me this scherzo is a ballade on steroids, with no holds barred. The beginning is marked Presto and opens in B-flat minor. However, most of the work is written in D-flat major. The opening consists of two arpeggiated pianissimo chords, and after a moment’s pause, goes into a set of fortissimo chords, before returning to the quiet arpeggiated chords. The piece then goes to an arpeggio section which leads to the con anima. Then, the middle section appears in A major. After the middle section ends (modulating in B-flat minor), the first section reappears with a coda. Beautiful and fierce.





(photo by Richard Heirakuji)

I recall that when I was 12 my then piano teacher, Mrs. Virginia Vilmaire (1907-1999), asked my parents to purchase for me the genre'd works of Chopin. My folks somehow obtained them from the House of Music store in (then) distant Honolulu, and I loved those books, and any piano books people would give me. I always loved reading notation, and music was a great way to see the world beyond Moloka'i. Chopin has always seemed to me a great way to see and feel the internal world of human emotion. The impression was lasting. I hope in this recital to celebrate the extraordinary and rich world of Chopin's music. I do thank you for being here to listen and enjoy.

I am profoundly grateful to you, my fellow parishoners who entrust me with their music at worship, and to you, friends and family and students who have always enriched my life. I am very grateful to all who nurtured my education and musicianship as mentors and teachers in my upbringing. And I am very grateful to the divine Creator of all beauty and sophistication who graces us always with such surprising joy and deep wonder.



Robert M. Mondoy (b. 1952) was raised on Moloka'i and first learned piano at the age of 7 from his mother, and Kualapu'u musicians Sharon (Komata) Narimatsu, Mrs. Juan Trinidad and elementary educator Mrs. John (Kahana) Lake, and Mrs. Virginia Vilmaire. During high school he studied with Maryknoll Sister Ann Lillian Layden and was involved in numerous community service projects including accompanying choruses in Handel's Messiah and playing for beauty pageants and talent shows on Moloka'i. An AMFAC scholarship enabled his Punahou Music School Studies with Raylette Ing and climaxed with a radio broadcast performance on Ben Hyams' "Young Hawai'i Musician of the Month." University of Hawai'i scholarships provided tutorship under Beebee Freitas and Robert graduated with a Bachelors Degree in Music Piano Performance in 1976. He continued at San Francisco State University to complete a Masters Degree in Music Theory and Composition. A piano instructor himself, he has also directed the music ministry at St. John Vianney since 1980 and continues to serve as the music consultant to the Diocese of Honolulu. In 2006 he was recognized by the Congress of Visayan Societies for his contributions to the community-at-large in art and entertainment. Robert has been invited as a concerto artist by local community orchestras. He is also known state-wide for his secular and religious compositions that incorporate Hawai'i ethnic musical genius. Visit www.mondoymusic.com to see more about his compositions and performance.

