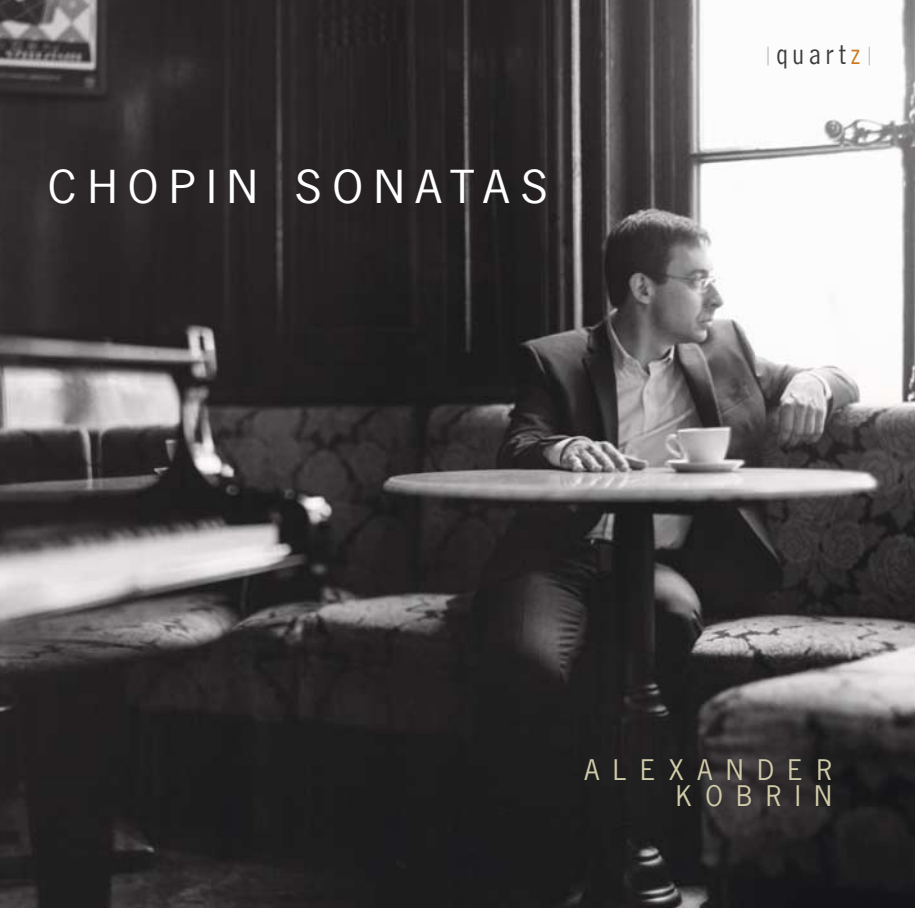




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# CHOPIN SONATAS

ALEXANDER  
KOBRIIN

# CHOPIN SONATAS

Frédéric Chopin (1810 – 1849)

## CD1

### SONATA NO.1 IN C MINOR, Op.4

1	Allegro maestoso	11'01
2	Menuetto	4'29
3	Larghetto	3'43
4	Finale: Presto	7'32

### SONATA NO.2 IN B-FLAT MINOR, Op.35

5	Grave – Doppio movimento	8'14
6	Scherzo	7'25
7	Marche funèbre: Lento	9'02
8	Finale: Presto	1'34

*Total playing time: 46'56*

## CD2

### SONATA NO.3 IN B MINOR, Op.58

1	Allegro maestoso	14'37
2	Scherzo: Molto vivace	2'59
3	Largo	10'45
4	Finale: Presto non tanto	5'17

*Total playing time: 33'40*

Producer and engineer: Slava Poprugin  
Recording at Steppenwolf Studio, October 2018 – August 2019  
Photos by Ira Polyarnaya  
Rear digipak photo by Alyona Vogelmann

# CHOPIN SONATAS

Chopin's piano sonatas span a wide creative period, from his time as a student to five years before his death, when he was still in good health and his relationship with George Sand had not yet begun to deteriorate. Two of the three Chopin piano sonatas are cornerstones of the romantic piano repertoire; the first sonata is heard far less frequently in performance or recording. Chopin has been most revered as a miniaturist. Much has been written discussing Chopin's larger-scale works; some have criticised his seeming lack of formal skill, while others have come to praise his compositional anomalies as innovation and ingenuity. Regardless, Chopin's characteristically transcendent, fluid melodies, unique pianistic beauty and distinctive poetic voice permeate these three sonatas.

## Sonata No.1 in C minor, Op.4

- i Allegro maestoso
- ii Menuetto
- iii Larghetto
- iv Finale: Presto

The first piano sonata, Op.4, was completed in 1828, but was not published until two years after his death. It is a juvenile composition dedicated to Józef Elsner, the only teacher whom Chopin formally recognised. Op.4 is Chopin's first large-scale work, and while it might not have the compositional deftness of later works, it has many moments of great appeal, and has been perhaps unfairly neglected in comparison to the two later sonatas. Chopin wrote: "My father has written to say that my old sonata [in C minor, Op.4] has been published ... and that the German critics praise it."

The first movement *Allegro maestoso*, is in a somewhat stoic, tempestuous sonata form, with Chopin's usual melodic beauty not as prominent or as sustained as in others of his sonata form movements. The *Minuetto* that follows is the only piece with this title that Chopin is known to have composed. Its charm and lightness stand in contrast to the scherzo movements of the more mature sonatas, which offer more dazzle and virtuosity; in this *Minuetto*, even the trio – in the parallel minor mode – retains this more beguiling character.

The *Larghetto* third movement is in 5/4 time, a choice which James Huneker calls a "failed novelty" in his introduction to an 1895 Mikuli edition of the sonata. A more sympathetic ear might hear that the unusual meter choice creates a dreamy, improvisational quality, as Chopin teases out the long melodic lines, warm sonorities and arpeggiated harmonies that will become such distinctive aspects of his mature piano writing.

The fourth movement, *Presto*, is the longest final movement of any of his sonatas. Like the first movement, it has a rather stern, bravura character, overlaid at times with characteristically brilliant passagework in the right hand – a familiar style that is not so prevalent in the previous movements. The unrelenting energy of this final movement ends with a dramatic flourish that encompasses the full registral range of the work.

#### **Sonata No.2 in B-flat minor, Op.35**

- i Grave – Doppio movimento
- ii Scherzo
- iii Marche funèbre: Lento
- iv Finale: Presto

Chopin's second piano sonata was completed in 1839 at Nohant, the French country house of George Sand. The emotional core of the sonata, the famous

funeral march, had been composed a year or two earlier: "I am writing here a Sonata in B flat minor which will contain my March which you already know. There is an *Allegro*, then a *Scherzo* in E flat minor, the March and a short *Finale* about three pages of my manuscript-paper. The left hand and the right-hand gossip in unison after the March." The second sonata comprises four movements: a sonata-form movement followed by a *Scherzo*, the *Funeral March*, and a fleeting and elusive final movement.

While the piece was a success with the public, this sonata also encountered the same critical scrutiny as others of his large form works. Schumann, otherwise Chopin's champion, had this to say: "The idea of calling it a sonata is a caprice, if not a jest, for he has simply bound together four of his most reckless children, thus under his name smuggling them into a place into which they could not else have penetrated."

The sonata opens in *Grave*, with a dramatic diminished seventh leap reminiscent of Beethoven's sonata, Op.111. The four-measure introduction transforms into the *Doppio movimento* turbulence, with a fragmented and breathless melody atop the agitated patterns of the left hand. The tranquil second theme is, unusually, the material that Chopin highlights in the recapitulation before the movement tumbles to an ecstatic conclusion.

The *Scherzo* is a study in emotional and pianistic contrasts, with the explosive opening octaves and ranging character of the first section in stark relief to the floating, otherworldly middle section, where the piece reaches a kind of stasis. While the original, dazzling array of effects does reemerge, Chopin finally redirects the exuberant tension with a magical shift to G-flat major, where he recaptures the serene, peaceful mood of the middle section, and provides a stunning transition to the next movement.

The third movement, *March funèbre* – one of the most universally recognised pieces in the canon – was played at the funerals of John F. Kennedy, Winston Churchill, Margaret Thatcher, Leonid Brezhnev and Chopin himself. The somber and truly tragic outer sections are offset by the placid nocturne-like center section, where Chopin exploits pedal and registral effects to transport the listener into a dream-like haze.

The relentlessly whirling parallel octave figurations of the final movement have resisted any definitive interpretation. There is a sense of the unanchored, music that is flying without a compass, releasing and elevating the grounded earthly passions of the previous movements.

### **Sonata No.3 in B minor, Op.58**

- i Allegro maestoso
- ii Scherzo: Molto vivace
- iii Largo
- iv Finale: Presto non tanto

Like the second sonata, Chopin completed his third piano sonata at the Nohant estate, at a happy time in his relationship with George Sand, and when he was still physically well. It is dedicated to his student and friend, Countess Emilie de Perthuis.

The first movement is a rich kaleidoscope of thematic and motivic material, well-conceived, and contained within the most traditional *sonata-allegro* movement of the three sonatas. The preternaturally beautiful second theme is again reminiscent of a sublime nocturne; this is the thematic material with which Chopin chooses to start the recapitulation, omitting much of the first theme in favour of a broad and generous restatement of the second theme in B Major.

As in Op.35, the *Scherzo* precedes the slow movement in this sonata. The outer sections are a charming, mercurial filigree, and the inner section has more emotional stillness – harmonies suspended under shifting chromatic colours and a dreamy, wending melody.

The *Largo* here is also a slow march that makes use of dotted rhythms, but with an entirely different emotional impact beyond the introduction. The tragedy of the second sonata's funeral march is replaced by a *cantabile* (song-like) character, the rhythms here taking on a gently lyrical quality. The extended middle section is a mesmerising wander through harmonies and unending melodic phrases, creating a sense of hypnotic timelessness.

The finale to this last piano sonata could not be a greater contrast to the ephemeral enigma that is the last movement of the second sonata. This finale is a wild, unleashed romp of a rondo, undulating melodies riding waves of relentless harmonies, periodically interrupted by striking chordal statements or sparkingly ebullient virtuosic figurations. The *coda* contains some of Chopin's most unabashedly bravura writing, bringing the piece to a radiant, thrilling conclusion in B Major.

Nikola Melville  
Professor of Music, Carleton College, Minnesota  
Co-Chair of the Chautauqua Summer Festival Piano Program

### **Alexander Kobrin**

The distinguished pianist Alexander Kobrin – heralded as the “Van Cliburn of today” by BBC Russia – has placed himself at the forefront of today's performing musicians. His many prize-winning performances have been praised for their brilliant technique, musicality, and emotional engagement with the audience. Reviewing Mr. Kobrin's recital at the New School's Mannes College of Music, Allan Kozinn of *The New York Times* wrote:

“He surrendered neither the smoothness nor the dynamic fluidity that the modern piano allows, and he gave his sense of fantasy free rein, and created an almost confessional spirit.”

Mr. Kobrin has been an active guest soloist with leading orchestras throughout his career, including the New York Philharmonic, Tokyo Philharmonic, Russian National Orchestra, Belgrade Philharmonic, English Chamber Orchestra, Orchestra Verdi, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, Moscow Philharmonic, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Dallas Symphony, Berlin Symphony, Chicago Sinfonietta, Swedish Radio Symphony, Birmingham Symphony, Warsaw Philharmonic, and the BBC Symphony Orchestra. He has collaborated with such conductors as Mikhail Pletnev, Mikhail Jurovsky, Sir Mark Elder, Vassiliy Sinaisky, James Conlon, Claus Peter Flor, Alexander Lazarev, Vasily Petrenko, and Yuri Bashmet.

He has appeared in recital at major concert halls worldwide, including Carnegie Hall and Avery Fisher Hall in New York, the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C., Royal Albert Hall and Wigmore Hall in London, the Louvre Auditorium, la Salle Gaveau and Salle Cortot in Paris, Munich's Herkulesaal and Berlin Philharmonie Hall, the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatoire, Sheung Wan Civic Centre in Hong Kong, and the Sala Verdi in Milan, amongst others. Notable past engagements have included recitals under the aegis of the Cliburn Series, Washington Performing Arts Society, Chautauqua Institution Music Festival, La Roque d'Antheron, Ravinia Festival, Beethoven Easter Festival, Busoni Festival, Klavier-Festival Ruhr, Festival Musique dans le Grésivaudan, and International Keyboard Institute & Festival, as well as annual concert tours in Japan, China, and Taiwan.

In addition to his international performing career, Mr. Kobrin has also been an active figure in music education for many years. From 2003 to 2010, he served on the faculty of the Russian State Gnessin's Academy of Music. In 2010, Alexander Kobrin was named the L. Rexford Distinguished Chair in Piano at the Schwob School of Music at Columbus State University, and from 2013 until 2017 was a member of the Artist Faculty of New York University's Steinhardt School. In July 2017, Mr. Kobrin joined the faculty of the renowned Eastman

School of Music in Rochester, NY. His masterclass schedule has included engagements with the International Piano Series and the Conservatories of Japan and China, as well as jury participation for international piano competitions, including the Busoni International Piano Competition in Bolzano, Hamamatsu International Piano Competition, and others. Mr. Kobrin is currently a member of Van Cliburn International Piano Competition pre-screening jury.

Alexander Kobrin has released recordings on the Harmonia Mundi, Quartz, and Centaur labels, covering a wide swath of the piano literature. Bryce Morrison of *Gramophone* endorsed his Cliburn Competition release on Harmonia Mundi, writing that "In Rachmaninoff's Second Sonata, despite firestorms of virtuosity, there is always room for everything to tell, and Kobrin achieves a hypnotic sense of the music's dark necromancy."

Born in Moscow in 1980, Mr. Kobrin was enrolled in the world-famous Gnessin Special School of Music at the age of five, after which he attended the prestigious Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory. His teachers have included renowned professors Tatiana Zelikman and Lev Naumov. Besides the Van Cliburn, Mr. Kobrin is the winner of numerous international piano competitions, and has garnered top prizes from the Busoni, Hamamatsu, and Glasgow International Piano competitions.

Sonata Allegro moderato op. 4

The image shows the first page of a handwritten musical score for Chopin's Sonata Op. 4. The score is written on five systems of staves, each system containing a treble and bass clef staff. The music is in G major and 3/4 time. The tempo is marked 'Allegro moderato'. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, accidentals, and dynamic markings like 'p' (piano) and 'f' (forte). There are also some handwritten annotations and corrections in the margins and between the staves. The paper is aged and shows some wear and tear.

First page of Chopin's Sonata Op.4  
(from the time of studies under  
professor Elsner)

Prof. Piotr Paleczny, Anna Bednarska  
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