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# CHOPIN

<sup>19</sup> *Nocturnes*

ARTHUR  
RUBINSTEIN



*Frédéric*  
CHOPIN  
THE RUBINSTEIN COLLECTION  
(1810-1849)  
*19 Nocturnes*

disc

I

(52:15)

- |   |  |    |  |
|---|--|----|--|
| 1 | Op. 9, no. 1 in B-flat minor /<br>b-moll / si bémol mineur<br>(5:20) | 7  | Op. 27, no. 1 in C-sharp minor /<br>cis-moll / do dièse mineur<br>(5:32) |
| 2 | Op. 9, no. 2 in E-flat /<br>Es-dur / mi bémol majeur<br>(4:20)       | 8  | Op. 27, no. 2 in D-flat /<br>Des-dur / ré bémol majeur<br>(6:07)         |
| 3 | Op. 9, no. 3 in B / H-dur /<br>si majeur<br>(6:42)                   | 9  | Op. 32, no. 1 in B / H-dur /<br>si majeur<br>(4:35)                      |
| 4 | Op. 15, no. 1 in F / F-dur /<br>fa majeur<br>(4:14)                  | 10 | Op. 32, no. 2 in A-flat / As-dur /<br>la bémol majeur<br>(5:45)          |
| 5 | Op. 15, no. 2 in F-sharp /<br>Fis-dur / fa dièse majeur<br>(3:51)    |    |  |
| 6 | Op. 15, no. 3 in G minor /<br>g-moll / sol mineur<br>(4:57)          |    |  |

disc

2

(54:41)

- |   |  |   |  |
|---|--|---|--|
| 1 | Op. 37, no. 1 in G minor /<br>g-moll / sol mineur<br>(6:14)              | 6 | Op. 55, no. 2 in E-flat / Es-dur /<br>mi bémol majeur<br>(5:43)*             |
| 2 | Op. 37, no. 2 in G / G-dur /<br>sol majeur<br>(6:47)                     | 7 | Op. 62, no. 1 in B / H-dur /<br>si majeur<br>(6:43)                          |
| 3 | Op. 48, no. 1 in C minor /<br>c-moll / ut mineur<br>(5:46)               | 8 | Op. 62, no. 2 in E / E-dur /<br>mi majeur<br>(5:13)                          |
| 4 | Op. 48, no. 2 in F-sharp minor /<br>fis-moll / fa dièse mineur<br>(7:11) | 9 | Op. 72, no. 1 in E minor /<br>e-moll / mi mineur ( <i>Posth.</i> )<br>(4:41) |
| 5 | Op. 55, no. 1 in F minor /<br>f-moll / fa mineur<br>(5:34)               |   | Recorded August 30 -<br>September 2, 1965, and<br>*February 21, 1967         |



Produced by Max Wilcox

Recording Engineer: Sergio Marcotulli

Recorded at RCA Italiana Studios, Rome

Reissue produced by Nathaniel S. Johnson

Engineer: Thomas MacCluskey

Digitally remastered in BMG / RCA Studios, New York City

Compilation Producer and

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Executive Producer: Daniel Guss

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Design: I:I

*Cover photograph by Wayne Shilkret / courtesy of ICM Artists, Ltd.*

*Arthur Rubinstein*

1963

John G. Ross

BMG Classics



## IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY,

THE TERM *NOTTURNO* OR *NACHTMUSIK* USUALLY REFERRED TO AN INSTRUMENTAL COMPOSITION WRITTEN FOR PERFORMANCE AT LATE-NIGHT SOCIAL GATHERINGS, USUALLY OUTDOORS AND DURING THE SUMMER. The best-known examples of such works are Mozart's *Serenata notturna*, K. 239, *Notturmo*, K. 286, and *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, K. 525. In the nineteenth century, however, the term "nocturne" came to refer to pieces that were either inspired by the night or intended to create or evoke a nocturnal atmosphere.

The person who is usually attributed with having created the latter type of nocturne—calm, meditative, and often melancholy—was John Field (1782–1837), an Irish pianist whose entire compositional output consisted of music for the piano or for groups of instruments that included the piano. Liszt went so far as to claim that Field's nocturnes "opened the way for all the productions which have since appeared under the various titles of Songs without Words, Impromptus,

Ballades, etc., and to him we may trace the origin of pieces designed to portray subjective and profound emotion." However exaggerated this statement may be, it demonstrates the esteem in which poor Field—who ended his days as a largely forgotten alcoholic—was held by some of the most important musicians of the generation after his own. The Nocturne from Mendelssohn's *Incidental Music to A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Schumann's four *Nachtstücke* (night pieces), Debussy's Three Nocturnes (*Nuages, Fêtes, and Sirènes*) for Orchestra, and, closer to our own day, Luigi Dallapiccola's *Piccola musica notturna* are among the more outstanding examples of works derived from the form that Field had created. But the solo piano nocturnes of Chopin, who adapted Field's form to his own more sophisticated musical language, remain paradigmatic within the genre: for musicians and music lovers, the word "nocturne" immediately brings to mind the name "Chopin"; the reaction is virtually Pavlovian.

Between 1830 and 1846 Chopin composed eighteen nocturnes that he authorized for publication in roughly the order in which they were written. An earlier nocturne, dating from 1827, when Chopin was seventeen, was not published until 1855, six years after the

composer's death; it was listed as Nocturne No. 19, Op. 72, No. 1. (There are two additional nocturnes—one in C-sharp Minor, written in 1830, and one in C Minor, written in 1837, both without opus numbers. Chopin did not want them published and Arthur Rubinstein did not play them in public or record them.) Most of the nocturnes are in A-B-A form and have relatively simple left-hand parts that establish the pace and character of each piece, whereas the right hand must spin a vocal melodic line that begins simply but becomes increasingly florid throughout the first "A" section. "B" contrasts with what has come before it, sometimes subtly, as in Op. 9, No. 1, and Op. 32, No. 1, but often drastically, as in Op. 9, No. 3, and Op. 32, No. 2. The return of "A" frequently presents substantial variants on the original version, with respect to ornamentation (Op. 48, No. 2, for instance), volume (Op. 32, No. 2), or even the entire musico-dramatic context (Op. 48, No. 1). In the early nocturnes, Chopin favored triple meters over duple meters; in the later ones, the opposite was the case, although in some of the duple-meter pieces triplet or sextuplet accompanying figurations give the impression that triple meters dominate.

The nocturnes' key signatures make as interesting an object of speculation as their time signatures. Only five of the pieces have fewer than three sharps or flats in their opening key signatures, and none of the nocturnes is in a key that has no sharps or flats. Perhaps Chopin sensed that richer, more complicated keys were, on the whole, more suitable than "open-sounding" keys for achieving the ambiguous and indeed nocturnal half-shades with which he painted these extraordinary miniature canvases.

For the most part, the nocturnes require considerably less technical virtuosity than do the scherzos, ballades, études, sonatas, and quite a few of Chopin's other works. Like the waltzes and many of the mazurkas, polonaises, and preludes, the nocturnes were meant to be playable by moderately accomplished students. On the other hand, only master pianists can reveal the nocturnes as the sophisticated masterpieces they are, and, at the same time, no amount of technical prowess will be sufficient without similarly refined musical subtlety and emotional and psychological depth on the performer's part.

Surely no twentieth-century pianist has been as successful an interpreter of these works as Arthur Rubinstein, who recorded

complete sets of the nineteen nocturnes in 1936-37, again in 1949-50, and a third time in 1965-67. One may safely assume that the second and third versions were made not only to register changes in the pianist's interpretive point of view, but also to take advantage of new recording techniques: the second set, when it was originally issued, represented one of Rubinstein's earliest forays into the world of magnetic tape and long-playing, monaural, vinyl records, whereas the third set was recorded in stereophonic sound. But whatever the reasons for their existence may be, the three versions enable today's listeners to compare Rubinstein's interpretations of these pieces as they evolved during a thirty-year segment of his nearly eighty-year-long career. In all likelihood, *The Rubinstein Collection* is making all three sets available simultaneously for the first time ever.

Rubinstein's characteristically warm sound and intensely communicative music-making are easily perceptible in all three sets, but the tempo differences among them are striking. Some of the tempos that he decided on for the 1949-50 version were faster than those he had chosen for its predecessor, but many more were slower. Comparison with the final version—the one presented in this album—reveals that

on the whole the pieces that Rubinstein took relatively slowly in 1949-50 remained slow in 1965-67, whereas those that he took quickly in 1949-50 had slowed down considerably by 1965-67. In short, the interpretations heard in this final set are slower, on the average, than those heard in either of the other versions. But the nocturnes, which are fundamentally meditative in character and gentle in pace, can stand slow tempos and sometimes even benefit from them, especially if their melodic lines are played with the pregnant intensity that Rubinstein brought to them. He was well aware of the fact that Chopin had been a connoisseur of *bel canto* singing and had listened with great interest to the operas of such masters as Rossini, Donizetti, and Bellini, and he knew that Chopin had always insisted that his pupils give the piano as vocal a quality as possible.

In comparing the 1936-37 set with the 1965-67 one, one is safe in saying that the former often demonstrates greater variety of tempo and wider dynamic range within each piece whereas the latter is stronger with respect to structural cohesion and gives a more accurate idea of Rubinstein's sound, thanks to the highly evolved recording technique that was available by the mid-1960s. Certain features of the 1965-67 set

are particularly worth noting: the brilliant approach to the overall structure of the first five nocturnes; the terrible sadness of the beginning and ending of No. 7 (C-sharp Minor, Op. 27, No. 1); the restraint with which rubato is applied in No. 11 (G Minor, Op. 37, No. 1); the intelligent integration of tempos in No. 13 (C Minor, Op. 48, No. 1); the astonishing subtlety with which the chords are voiced in No. 13's *poco più lento* middle section—a truly magisterial example of musicianly piano playing; and the sheer beauty and depth of sound throughout the series. Rubinstein's remarkable sense of identification with Chopin's spirit is practically tangible here, and no matter how many times one listens to these recordings one comes away with a sense of having been involved in a particularly moving musical event.

—Harvey Sachs

*Harvey Sachs's books include biographies of Arturo Toscanini and Arthur Rubinstein. He writes for many of the best-known North American and European newspapers and magazines.*



#### THE ARTHUR RUBINSTEIN COLLECTION

brings together all of his approved, commercially released recordings made between 1928 and 1976. They progress in approximate chronological order. All of the albums in The Arthur Rubinstein Collection were compiled from original sources. Disc-to-digital transfers were made, whenever possible, directly from metal stampers. Tape sources were transferred through CELLO playback electronics and remastered in 20-bit technology using universally compatible UV22™ Super CD Encoding.

