CHOPIN
WALTZES
(complete)

ANTONIO
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pianist
In the early years of the nineteenth century the waltz became a popular form for keyboard "miniatures." Such composers as Schubert, Weber, and Clementi found the still-new dance form as well suited to the characteristics of the still-new pianoforte, as the minuet, gavotte, etc. had been to those of the harpsichord. Schubert alone composed more than ten dozen waltzes for the piano; many of them have been all but forgotten now, but Weber's famous Invitation to the Dance, both in its original form and in the Berlioz orchestration, is probably the most frequently performed of all Weber's works. Neither Schubert nor Weber in their waltzes, however, so much as hinted at the level of poetry Chopin was to realize in this form, nor is there any evidence to suggest he was in any way influenced by them, any more than by the waltzes of Lanner and the elder Johann Strauss. Indeed, it seems probable that Chopin was not even exposed to the Invitation to the Dance until some time after he had conquered Paris with his own waltzes.

Not surprisingly, it was with the waltzes (and the nocturnes) that Chopin achieved his first great success in Paris. Robert Schumann wrote of the Opus 34 set, "So throbbing a life flows in them that they seem to have been actually improvised in the ballroom." Schumann also remarked, though, that if the Chopin waltzes were ever to be played for dancing "at least half the dancers would have to be countesses," and Arthur Hedley, in his masterly study of the composer (Chopin, Farrar, Strauss & Cuddihy, 1947; paperback edition published by Collier Books, 1962), ruled out even countesses: "With Chopin the waltz forsook the noisy ballroom or beer-garden and became a salon piece, assuming the fine manners and ardeurs of the jeunesse dorée. (In our time these dance poems have found something approaching their true milieu in the rarefied atmosphere of the larger architecture cogent.)"

Even in the ballroom, of course, not all of the Chopin waltzes have been danced. Only three of them are used in Les Sylphides (Opus 70, No. 1, in G-flat, the melancholy, nocturnale Opus 64, No. 2, in G-sharp Minor, and as finale, the Grande Valse brillante in E-flat, Opus 18), and only a handful have been choreographed in other dance works. Some are eminently more suitable than others for such treatment, to be sure, for in some the element of dance is more a matter of title than of actual character.

Chopin wrote more than twenty waltzes, the earliest known to us being a C Major work of 1826 and the latest, discovered as recently as 1952, one in G Major composed in 1848. The fourteen performed by Antonio Barbosa on this record, all composed between 1829 and 1847, constitute the generally recognized "complete" series of the Chopin waltzes, since most of these were published during the composer's lifetime and all but one of them, in any event, at least have opus numbers. The opus numbers, however, have little relation to the actual chronology of these works, and some were not even assigned by Chopin himself.

The latest of these opus numbers, 69 and 70, were affixed to works published six years after Chopin's death, including the two earliest waltzes in this sequence of fourteen, Opus 69, No. 2, in B Minor, and Opus 70, No. 3, in D-flat, both composed in 1829. Next in order of composition is the E Minor of 1830, published posthumously without an opus number. The Grande Valse brillante in E-flat, Opus 18, the first of the waltzes to be published (in 1834), was written in 1831, as was Opus 34, No. 2, in A Minor. The unifying factor for the Opus 34 group is that each of its three components is designated a Valse brillante, although they were written years apart, the supers A-flat (Opus 34, No. 1) in 1835 and the F Major in 1838, the year all three were published.

Opus 70, No. 1, in G-flat, and Opus 69, No. 1, in A-flat (the so-called L'Adieu, which Chopin gave to Maria Wodzińska shortly before his departure from Dresden) were also composed in 1835. Opus 42 in A-flat was composed and published in 1840, and Opus 70, No. 2, in F Minor, was written in 1842. The latest of the works recorded here, the three waltzes of Opus 64, were composed in 1846 and 1847 and published in the latter year. Chopin played them in London the following year and scored a particular success with the light-hearted Minute Waltz in D-flat, which has since suffered and survived the peculiar abuses reserved for only the best-loved works in music.

Hedley suggests the Opus 18 Grande Valse brillante in E-flat as a good illustration of "the plan generally adhered to" in the waltzes: "a suite of sixteen-bar waltz movements in contrasting character, purely rhythmic, coquettish or ardently sentimental, leading to a dance which, although the dance comes to a head," He specifies out Opus 34, No. 1, in A-flat, however, as the waltz which "shows this form at its highest point: it is the Chopin waltz par excellence, full of gallantry and noblesse. At the end it is as though a door suddenly closes, and the listener begins to move away from the bustling scene; only fragments of the dance are heard and finally nothing but the tapping of the waltz rhythm."

It will be noted that the key of A-flat figures prominently in this group of works: four of the fourteen waltzes recorded here are in that key (as is yet another, composed in 1827), and all four are, for one reason or another, among the most interesting pieces in the series. One of the most appealing is Opus 64, No. 3, a work of "discreet, suave elegance and much more harmonic interest than its companions," according to Hedley, who notes that "the dance element disappears altogether in the C Major trio with its broad cella melody."

One of the most unusual is Opus 42, more or less in rondo form, in which the melody itself is in two-four time against the three-four bass.
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WALTZES (complete)

Band 1: Waltz in E-flat, Op. 18
Band 2: Waltz in A-flat, Op. 34, No. 1

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5754
33 1/3 RPM
Stereo

Band 3: Waltz in A-flat, Op. 34, No. 2
Band 4: Waltz in F, Op. 34, No. 3
Band 5: Waltz in A-flat, Op. 63
Band 6: Waltz in G-flat, Op. 64, No. 1

ANTONIO BARBOSA, piano

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