

STEREO

MCS 2157

CHOPIN

4 Ballades (complete)

Nocturne

in C Sharp Minor, Op. 27 No.1

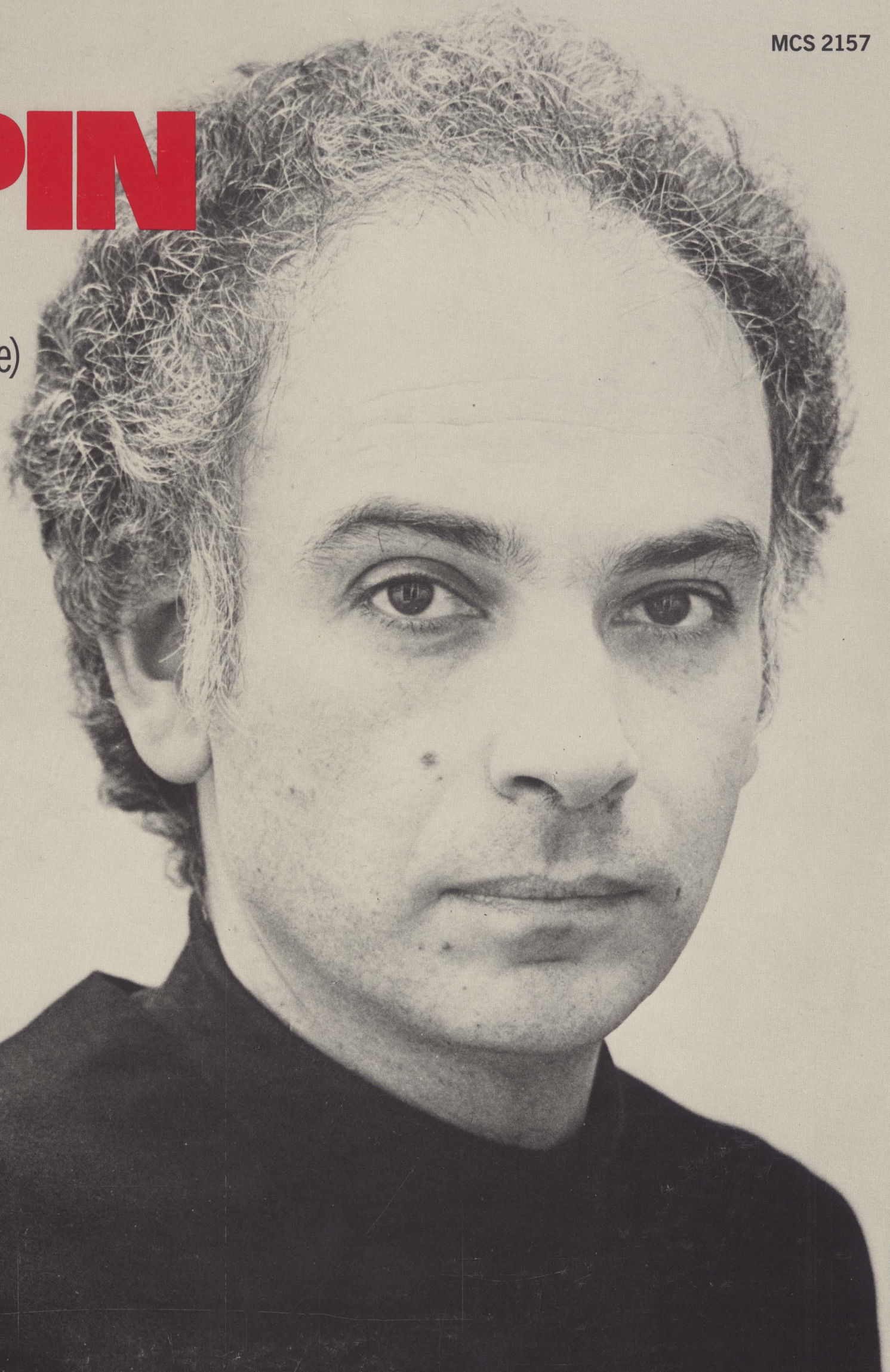
Mazurka

in A Minor, Op. 17 No.4



Ludwig
Olshansky

piano



CHOPIN

FOUR BALLADES

Nocturne, Op. 27 No. 1/Mazurka, Op. 17 No. 4

LUDWIG OLSHANSKY, *Piano*

He was of slight build, with fair hair, blue-grey eyes and patrician features. He was unfitted both by temperament and physique for the career of virtuoso. And so it was not surprising that he devoted a relatively small amount of time to his concert career, playing only when forced to earn money or on certain occasions. On the other hand he delighted in teaching, made great demands on his pupils, and played indefatigably for them.

Despite his dislike of public appearances, Frederic François Chopin was a master of the piano: it is said that the evenness of his scales and passages was astounding. Although he had a small hand, it was extremely supple and enabled him to play the most complex passages (and even wide stretches) with ease and without the sacrifice of tone quality, evenness or *legato*. In fact, it was the tone he elicited from his instrument that really amazed and delighted his listeners. As with any great composer-performer (and perhaps more than with most), various legends grew up around him—many of them unfounded—one of the most pernicious untruths being Chopin's treatment of *rubato* or flexibility of rhythm within the bar. Whether the melodic line was being played "straight" or with *rubato*, the accompanying figure maintained an almost metronome-like beat. And Chopin's finger-work was never sloppy or muddy but always precise, clear and *cantabile*.

One of the extraordinary things about Chopin was the crystallization of his musical style at a very early age. Although he refined and elaborated his material in later life, his basic style and what we have come to know as "Chopinesque" were established in his earliest works. It might be of more than passing interest to note that sketches for the Mazurka included in this recording (Op. 17 No. 4) were found to go back to 1825, when he was fifteen years old. And so it was with many other compositions: by the time Chopin was twenty-two, he had already composed or sketched his two piano concertos, the first set of etudes, Op. 10, and numerous mazurkas, polonaises, waltzes and other works.

Chopin was born near Warsaw on February 22, 1810. In his early years he absorbed the Polish influences which were to affect almost his entire musical output. But after giving a recital in Paris in 1831 he was so delighted with the musical environment and with the cordial reception given him that he was never to return to Poland again. The social and political ferment following the defeat of the Polish uprising of 1830 may also have contributed to his decision to remain in Paris.

Paris suited Chopin's essentially aristocratic outlook. He became an intimate of many of the great musicians of

Chopin



Autograph of the Ballade in A Flat Major (Bars 99-123)

the time, and through Liszt he was introduced to George Sand (Mme. Aurore Dudevant) in 1836, and so began a stormy relationship which endured until two years before his death. By 1847 his failing health (he suffered from progressive tuberculosis) and other causes forced a separation, and Chopin went to Great Britain, where he gave concerts and put even greater strain on his physical condition. He finally returned to Paris to die on October 17, 1849.

The four Ballades were composed over a period of eleven years: 1831-1842. The musical structure of each of them is different, but all have in common the gentle statement of a slow theme alternating with sections of great tempestuousness and sweep. All of them require the utmost in pianistic agility and command of the keyboard.

The first Ballade (G Minor, Op. 23) was written during the years 1831-35 while Chopin was living in Vienna and is dedicated to Baron von Stockhausen. Ballade No. 2 (F Major, Op. 38) was dedicated to Robert Schumann and was composed during the years 1836-39. Ballade No. 3 (A Flat Major, Op. 47) was dedicated to Pauline de Noailles and composed in 1840-41. Ballade No. 4 (F Minor, Op. 52) was written in 1842 and dedicated to Baroness Rothschild.

The Mazurka in A Minor (Op. 17 No. 4) which he had sketched as early as 1825 was revised and joined by three other mazurkas in Opus 17 in 1832-33. The A minor Mazurka is probably one of the most introspective and sensitively written of all his mazurkas—with barely a *forte* in it.

The Nocturne in C Sharp Minor (Op. 27 No. 1) was the first of two nocturnes to which Chopin assigned the opus number 27 in 1834-35. The C Sharp Minor Nocturne is marked *Larghetto*, and its theme is announced with *sotto voce* simplicity. A middle section reaches stormy heights, and then the original theme is heard again as the Nocturne subsides to a dreamy conclusion.

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LUDWIG OLSHANSKY has given recitals throughout the United States, Canada and Europe. In New York he has appeared at Carnegie Hall, Town Hall and, in November 1976, at Alice Tully Hall in Lincoln Center. He has also been heard in Boston, Washington, D.C., San Francisco, Los Angeles and in universities and colleges throughout the States. His European tours have taken him to London, Amsterdam, Paris, Oslo, Copenhagen, Zurich, Vienna, Milan and many other cities.

Born in New York City, Ludwig Olshansky received his musical training at the Juilliard School of Music in the class of Irwin Freundlich. He was awarded the highest honors the school offers: the Damrosch Scholarship for graduate study and the Loeb Memorial Prize "awarded to the pianist most excellent in talent and achievement."

His previous recordings for Monitor have been highly praised. Among the works singled out for "romantic playing at its best" (Martin Mayer in *Esquire Magazine*) was the Schumann C Major Fantasy. Most recently Mr. Olshansky has recorded an all-Brahms disc consisting of the Fantasias, Op. 116, the Intermezzo, Op. 117, and the Rhapsody in B Minor, Op. 79 No. 1.

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