



Frédéric Chopin: Master of Melody

Because of his poor immune system he was frequently weak with illness.

He was unable to play the piano with enough volume to fill a large concert hall.

Frédéric Chopin, a Polish composer born on March 1st, 1810, contributed a significant amount to the piano's repertoire. In fact he wrote almost exclusively for solo piano. He composed a few chamber pieces, piano concertos and songs with Polish lyrics, but all of those contained a part for piano. Starting as a child prodigy, he later became known for his technical skills as a pianist which were impressive for his time. Sickness followed him through most of his life until he died in Paris at age 39, most likely of tuberculosis.

Because of his poor immune system, he was frequently weak with illness; he was unable to play the piano with enough volume to fill a large concert hall, thus he turned to playing in a salon (a gathering of cultured and wealthy individuals with the intent of amusement and personal growth through conversation at the home of a wealthy host) which he preferred because of its more intimate setting. He was the first composer to present the concept of the instrumental ballade, one of my favorites being Ballade No.1 in G minor. His major works include mazurkas, waltzes, nocturnes, polonaises, études, impromptus, scherzos, preludes, and sonatas. As one of the first piano superstars, he was in high demand as a teacher and composer up until his death.



Pictured above is an excerpt from Chopin's *Valse Brillante in Ab Major Op. 34, No. 1*. It is not one of his easier pieces, but it is a lot of fun to play once the technical challenges are overcome. Another of his Waltzes, one I love, is his *Valse in Db Major Op. 64, No. 1* also known as the "Minute Waltz". I once heard a story claiming that he wrote this piece while watching a puppy chasing its tail. It was the first piece I learned that exposed me to the fantastic repertoire of Chopin.

He set a new precedent by writing nocturnes with musical depth allowing them to last for many years instead of only being played once and then set aside as most nocturnes were. He used the concept of the concert etude, developed by his colleague and friend, Franz Liszt, to demonstrate his ability to write poetic and expressive music in one of his favorite styles. Mazurkas by Chopin gave an entirely new feeling to the style because unlike the mazurkas of old, which are intended to be ballroom dance music, his were written specifically for the concert hall.

With more than 230 surviving works by Chopin consisting of many different styles, you are bound to find something that catches your ear. Happy practicing!

Mazurkas by Chopin gave an entirely new feeling to the style because unlike the mazurkas of old, which are intended to be ballroom dance music, his were written specifically for the concert hall.

\$5 OFF YOUR NEXT TUNING

For every person you refer me to that I complete work for, I will give you a \$5 credit toward your next tuning as my thanks. This only applies to private piano owners and not to institutions (Churches, Schools, Piano dealerships, etc.).