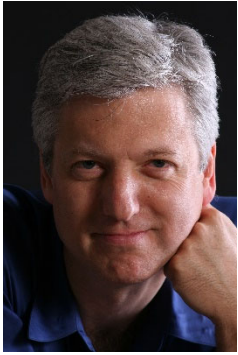


Brian Ganz Chopin Recital, Feb. 26 2022



This was the eleventh concert in Brian's performance of the entire works of Chopin. Its theme was "Breaking the Rules," referring to the unconventional, for that time, shifting of tonalities in the course of a musical composition – that must have sounded shockingly anarchic to listeners steeped in Bach and Mozart. A secondary theme was a reprise of the one from a previous concert titled "The Growth of Genius," which juxtaposed early and late works of the same genre. It was a concert presenting a beautiful mosaic of many different instances of Chopin's style, beautifully performed.

The recital opened with an early Mazurka in B-flat major, composed in 1832 and published in 1909. It is based on traditional mazurka rhythms of Polish folk music, and is totally danceable, as opposed to some later mazurkas and waltzes that are abstractions of the dance, not meant for the feet. This was followed by the four mazurkas of Op. 30, which depart somewhat from the folk tradition, although the first one is clearly in the style of a *kuyaviak*, a slow version of the mazurka. Each one of the set employs increasingly unconventional harmonies and changes in tonalities. The last, C-Sharp minor, is an extensive composition that goes far beyond an adapted folk dance and is a work of sophisticated construction. As always, Brian's performance showed a deep affinity for this music, and he clearly brought out the sequential development of ideas from one piece to the next.

The next set explored waltz forms. First was the Contredanse, composed in 1827 and published posthumously in 1934 without opus number. Although this type of French dance appeared in both duple and triple time, Chopin's is in 6/8 and is waltz-like, although more in the square style of an early form derived from the German *Ländler*. Four waltzes followed, ranging over many years of Chopin's creativity, from his late teens to two years before his death. They show a progressive departure from literal dance forms – there is no way a couple could dance to the D-flat major "Minute Waltz."

Next were two polonaises. D Minor, Op. 71 No. 1 was composed sometime between 1825 and 1827, and published in 1855 with two other polonaises from Chopin's teen years. Even at that early stage of Chopin's creativity, it exhibits some departure from a dance form. Then came perhaps the most famous of the polonaises – A-Flat Major "Heroic." Although the outer sections are danceable, the thunderous rotating octaves in the left hand and the gentle trio (middle part) certainly are not. Brian played with brilliant virtuosity, showing the requisite power in the octaves and beautiful delicacy in the trio, but just a little too fast in the outer sections.

After intermission came a set of Nocturnes. The first was in C-Sharp minor, published posthumously, subtitled *Lento con gran' espressione*. Although now it is a staple of Chopin recitals (sometimes in arrangement for violin and piano), in the past some critics have panned it as being haphazardly put together with fragments of ideas Chopin would use for constructing better works of this genre, shards glued together without sense of balance. Brian's performance belied that assessment – his execution presented the work as a unified whole. The two Nocturnes of Op. 32 show Chopin's evolution of the genre. The second, in A-Flat Major, is in ABA form, perhaps representing a peaceful evening, a stormy night, and a return to a tranquil dawn. Brian wonderfully brought out the contrasts between the calm and tumultuous parts.

The last set began with the Mazurka in A minor, Op. 17 No. 4. Although mostly in the rhythm of a *kuyaviak*, it is far removed from dance music, and exhibits many subtle shifts of tonality. The concert ended with two large-scale works – Ballade No. 2 in F Major, Op. 38, and Scherzo No. 2 in B-Flat minor, Op. 31. Both have tempestuous, rapid sections interspersed with quieter ones. It takes a pianist of considerable skill and superb technique to unify them into a cogent whole rather than a sequence of episodes, and Brian's performance did that splendidly.