

CHOPIN RELEVATIONS

to re-levate – to lift a certain content into attention again,
for a particular context, indicated by thought and language.

David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, 1980

It is an immense privilege and a source of great satisfaction to place this album in your hands: the fruit of work undertaken during a particular chapter of my life. I can mark out that chapter's symbolic boundaries – from a piano lesson in January 2019, when Professor Katarzyna Popowa-Zydroń heard my first attempts at performing the Sonata in B-flat minor, to the final moments of the recording session on 23 January 2026, when Filip Podgórski, the recording engineer, said, 'We've got it!' Yet the decisive period in which the concept presented here came to maturity was the last two or three years, beginning with a bold idea that entered my imagination: what would happen if one were to try playing the Mazurka in F minor, traditionally regarded as Chopin's last composition, after the Sonata in B-flat minor?

I could not possibly encompass in this introduction every aspect of the process by which the concept took shape. Instead, I would like to point to its key inspirations, reveal something of my interpretative pursuit of coherence and, in doing so, explain my deliberate use of certain unconventional means.

Looking to nourish my amateur understanding and read more about the dissonances between relativity and quantum mechanics, I came across David Bohm's *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*. Bohm, an American physicist and later a philosopher, sought ways of counteracting the pervasive fragmentation of the world, believing it to be a source of chaos and suffering. What caught my attention was a passage in which, in the interest of better human communication, he proposes a linguistic experiment: a new, dynamic mode – the *rheomode* – which foregrounds continuity and movement, allowing language to accord

more closely with the processual nature of reality. It assigns verbs primacy and gives them new meanings, with the aim of avoiding further atomisation and ever-deepening misunderstandings. I discovered that one of Bohm's neologisms – *to relevate* – captures with extraordinary precision the nature of the artistic approach I seek to cultivate!

To complete his experiment, Bohm revives the archaic verb *to relevate* (beginning with *to levate*), develops from it a family of forms, and uses them to articulate the perceptual act of apprehending *relevance* – an act he regards as, in one sense, prior even to judging truth or falsity. In everyday English, the familiar adjective *relevant* denotes something that bears on the matter at hand, yet conceals the motion held in its roots. Bohm restores that motion: *to re-levate* is to lift a certain content into attention again and perceive whether it fits a particular context. The old noun *relevation*, in turn, evokes raising or elevation, but also relief, alleviation and even refreshment, echoing the Latin *relevo*.

The act of 'lifting' content anew – cleansing and revitalising it as new meanings emerge; finding fitting contexts and considering those meanings in terms of their relevance – prompted me to shape the **idea of Revelations**: the search for a **new, essential dimension of meaning** in music.

The obvious, traditional context for the Sonata in B-flat minor is death. To convey the many dimensions in which death permeated Chopin's life and the ways it found reflection in his work, I offer a narrative in several chapters. The successive works interact intertextually, each illuminating the others. They meet on a harmonic plane as one passes suggestively into the next – continuing it or contradicting it. They also correspond in their dramaturgy, colour and motifs drawn from places that might seem far apart. At times they speak in a singular voice through the **death motif**, which, in this interpretation, I have predestined to guide the creation of **Revelations**.

Fryderyk Chopin

(1810-1849)

I. PROLOGUE

1. Mazurka in F minor, Op. 63, No. 2

II. DEATH OF THE NATION

2. Ballade in F major, Op. 38

III. DEATH OF MEMORY

3. Mazurka in E minor, Op. 41, No. 1

4. Mazurka in B major, Op. 41, No. 2

5. Mazurka in A-flat major, Op. 41, No. 3

6. Mazurka in C-sharp minor,
Op. 41, No. 4

IV. DEATH OF THE CREATOR

Sonata in B-flat minor, Op. 35

7. I. Grave – Doppio movimento

8. II. Scherzo

9. III. Marche

10. IV. Finale – Presto

V. POSTSCRIPT

Mazurka in F minor, Op. 68, No. 4

VI. IMMORTALISATION

11. Polonaise-Fantaisie in A-flat
major, Op. 61

RELEVATION ONE

Postscriptum et prologus

Is it fitting to speak when words can add nothing more? Even so, thought rises higher still, seeking a **new perspective**. The darkness that descends after the final chord of the Sonata in B-flat minor becomes the ground upon which the musical world and the actual world are fused. Offering a glimpse into the composer's final thought, the Mazurka in F minor enters at the threshold between idea and its realisation – and proves to be a metaphysical key to understanding the four-movement masterpiece.

Yet the mystery of the Mazurka in F minor, published as Op. 68, No. 4 by Julian Fontana six years after Chopin's death, seems more complex still. Jeffrey Kallberg, a leading authority on Chopin sources, has proposed that the piece may have been composed as early as 1846. In a letter to his family dated 11 October 1846, Chopin writes of new mazurkas (later submitted for publication

as Op. 63). It contains an enigmatic remark suggesting a measure of doubt: only some time after a work has been completed does 'reflection come and reject or accept it'. According to Kallberg, the so-called 'last' Mazurka may have been **rejected** by Chopin in favour of the other Mazurka in F minor, now known as Op. 63, No. 2.

What accounts for the kinship between these mazurkas – not only in their overall character, but also in specific passages, such as the densely chromatic *dolente* phrases that close the principal themes of both works? On this album, the 'accepted' Mazurka in F minor opens the narrative as its first remembrance of a lost past: it establishes the formal frame, signals the dramatic threads to come and introduces the **death motif**.

RELEVATION TWO

A Triptych of Glimpses into the Future

The clamour of wandering thoughts, stirred by an awareness of the magnitude of the loss and the need to face an inexorably approaching future, is in fact the harbinger of a **new perspective** taking shape. Once the sounds of the funeral march have died away, we witness a transgression – a gaze beyond the boundary of death, but also beyond the boundaries of the age.

The enigmatic texture and harmonic language of the Finale of the Sonata in B-flat minor express this opacity of the future perfectly, while proving strikingly prescient. To the first listeners they sounded alien – and truly so, for in compositional terms they contain the seeds of twentieth-century atonality; in expressive terms, the anxieties of modernism. In a sense, then, they come from the future.

If it was indeed rejected, the Mazurka in F minor, traditionally regarded as Chopin's last, may have seemed to him too ... progressive. Jeffrey Kallberg suggests that the piece appears to be a failed attempt to put the advances of a new, experimental style into practice (as opposed to the successful attempt represented by the Polonaise-Fantaisie). If Chopin found his own ideas too far-reaching and deliberately chose not to publish the piece for that reason – as

though resisting further exploration of new aesthetic territory – then it might be understood as the symbolic endpoint of his stylistic development: a moment at which Chopin all but **refused** to cross into a new era.

An intriguing transitional passage lends weight to this speculation: it bears an almost exact resemblance to the opening form of the theme from Richard Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde*. It is worth noting the function this transition serves in the Mazurka: by exploiting the harmonic ambiguity of a single chord, it effects an instantaneous shift to a remote key. Late-Romantic composers would juggle tonal properties with considerable freedom – a practice Chopin modestly foretells in this passage.

The Polonaise-Fantaisie, meanwhile, offers a magnificent example of how accurately Chopin anticipated future developments in piano texture. Inspiring late-Romantic composers to probe the instrument's possibilities more deeply, it blazed a trail towards new expressive qualities. It also remained the seed of the composer's own future works – works that were never to be written.

RELEVATION THREE

Leitmotiv: der Tod

Masterpieces such as the Polonaise-Fantaisie attest to their creator's true immortalisation: after his death they 'live' among performers and audiences, disclosing ever-**new perspectives** to successive generations. They form a crown, won through a lifetime's struggle with death. As in the case of certain other demiurges of musical history, the death that accompanied Chopin through life left an exceptionally deep imprint on the very pages of his scores.

An almost fatalistic course of events shapes the Ballade in F major. Even if we set aside its supposed inspiration in Adam Mickiewicz's ballad *Świtezia*, in which the inhabitants of a stronghold escape massacre through self-annihilation, the clash between an Arcadian ideal and brutal forces of destruction speaks to the imagination with extraordinary directness. When the scales tip towards the power of devastation, its ascendancy is sealed by a triumphal procession in the Ballade's finale. At the very end, however, the final word is soun-

ded – stark, though spoken in the narrator’s measured voice. It may be read as a warning, addressed to Polish émigrés, of the irreversible consequences that a crushing defeat holds for an entire nation: a meaning expressed elsewhere to perfection by Zygmunt Krasiński in the words ‘and perhaps they shall even be forgotten’, which Chopin later set in one of his songs.

From one perspective, among Chopin’s entire arsenal of forms, the mazurka may be singled out as the instrument with which he most effectively plays upon his compatriots’ sense of responsibility. He mummifies within Polish dances the idyllic reality they carried in their hearts – a reality seemingly impossible to recover in the aftermath of the uprising. Through the tragic tenor of many of these pieces, vividly depicting the potentially irrevocable loss of that reality, he galvanises them. Thus the first Mazurka in Op. 41, in E minor, echoes the Ballade, commenting on it bitterly through the minor-key resemblance between its theme and the patriotic song *Tam na błoni błyszczą kwiecie* (‘There on the meadow a flower gleams’).

And although, apart from the Ballade, only this Mazurka, known as the Palma Mazurka, leaves no doubt as to its Majorcan provenance, the experiences of Chopin’s stay on the island surely influenced the collection’s other mazurkas as well as the Sonata. Much later, as late as 1848, Chopin was still haunted by the ‘accursed apparitions [...] from the Chartreuse monastery’, which he had to **repel** while performing the Sonata at a concert in England. On the other hand, certain vivid inspirations – such as the energetic guitar motif of the Mazurka in B major, Op. 41, No. 2 – suggest the many-coloured character of his time in Majorca. Nevertheless, the Spanish episode is overshadowed by the weeks during which Chopin was forced to look upon the terrifying face of death. The nearness of his own death evidently marked his creative imagination as well, and would soon find its most momentous expression in the Sonata in B-flat minor.

The March, completed a year and a half earlier – in 1837, on the eve of the anniversary of the November Uprising – proved to be a seed that sprouted luxuriantly in the soil of Chopin’s Majorcan experiences and grew beyond art’s existing conceptions of the human end. The only comparable example of such a formal design known to Chopin was Ludwig van Beethoven’s Op. 26, in which the march, the third movement in the cycle, bears the title *Marcia funebre sul-*

