

CHOPIN
GIL
POLONAISES
SULLIVAN
BOLERO



HUNNIA RECORDS

GIL SULLIVAN

Steinway Model D. Concert Grand Piano, Hamburg



CHOPIN POLONAISES

The Polonaise is a dance form whose history reaches back many centuries. Always in triple time, and always utilising a uniquely individual rhythm (see below), the name "Polonaise" is derived from its country of origin – Poland. Almost all the most famous composers in history, including Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Liszt, Tchaikovsky, wrote polonaises, or movements entitled *alla polacca* – "in the style of a polonaise". This notwithstanding, the Polonaise has become inextricably linked to Chopin, who took this predominantly processional, courtly dance, and transformed it into a powerhouse of fervent, passionate nationalism.

Born in Poland, Chopin's devotion to his country was wedded to a blazing hot fervour. When the 1830 revolution fulminated in Poland, Chopin was in Germany for what was intended only as a brief sojourn. With the resultant occupation of Poland by Russia, his dreams of returning were - to the end of his short life - extinguished, weighing heavily on his emotions and deep-rooted love for his homeland. This forced exile is demonstrably reflected in the outpouring of emotion in these 6 Polonaises, dragging this polite dance from the courts into his own emotional world, only for others such as Liszt and Tchaikovsky to later follow suit.

Chopin wrote more than 25 Polonaises; many have been lost, and most were published posthumously. Indeed, his first composition at the tender age of 7 is believed to have been a Polonaise. While these earlier are very dance-like, those composed in his teens were overtly virtuosic, salon-like, and rather formulaic in design. Of greatest contrast are these early Polonaises composed in **Poland**, compared to these later Polonaises composed **Paris!!** The latter are more formally structured, and their language relies heavily on solid musical argument, striking contrasts, and thematic unity, and rather less – as in the earlier Polonaises – on fleet fingerwork and loose designs. The passion “in exile” is also on full display in these later Polonaises.

The Bolero – in contradiction – is a Spanish Dance whose history reaches back only a little over 2 centuries. Also in triple rhythm, it has found universal acclaim in Ravel's famous work. One might ask, why include a Bolero on an album of polonaises? In the decades I have been playing this work, I have always believed Chopin's Bolero is much more of a polonaise than a bolero, and it seems even Wikipedia agrees – “Despite the ostensibly Spanish flavour of the piece, it has been described as a polonaise in disguise, or a *boléro à la polonaise*, as its rhythms are more redolent of the national dance of Chopin's homeland than anything Spanish”.

Many of the dance forms we take for granted as originating in this or that country, actually didn't! The Flamenco – a famous Spanish dance actually means Flemish! The French Allemande translates as “German dance”, while the deeply traditional & profoundly revered Japanese Gagaku originates from the court music of the medieval Chinese Tang Dynasty, so appearances can often be deceiving.

Chopin's Bolero is a rarely heard/performed work of great charm, colour, and extreme contrasts, another reason to bring it out from the closet. With an introduction and slow dance in C major, this all preludes the main theme in A minor, which gives way to an excited and rather decidedly **polonaise-like** theme in A major. After some clearly Spanish-type maracas, this skilfully morphs into a beautifully lyrical theme in A flat major (a beautiful Senorita?), modulating to B flat minor for a while, then returning to the main A minor theme. However, the whole work climaxes in the polonaise-like A major theme. As indicated, there are some Spanish elements, but certainly all attempts over time to give it a formal key signature have been rather fruitless. It is simply - Chopin's Bolero Op.19.

Gil Sullivan



The Polonaise rhythm



The Bolero rhythm

RECORDING SETUP

Microphones: **2x Neumann M-149, 2x Neumann U87, Schoeps MK2 Stereo pairs**

AD/DA: **Merging Hapi**

DAW: **Pyramix MassCore**

EQ: **Prism Sound Maselec MEA-2**

Peak limiter: **Prism Sound Maselec MPL2**

Effect: **Bricasti Design M7 + M10**

Analog Mixing Console: **Studer 962**

TRACK LIST

01	Chopin Polonaise No. 1 in C-Sharp Minor, Op. 26 No. 1	09:18
02	Chopin Polonaise No. 2 in E-Flat Minor, Op. 26 No. 2	09:41
03	Chopin Polonaise No. 3 in A-Major, Op. 40 No. 1 "Military"	06:06
04	Chopin Polonaise No. 4 in C-Minor, Op. 40 No. 2	09:31
05	Chopin Polonaise No. 5 in F-Sharp Minor, Op. 44 "Tragic"	11:58
06	Chopin Polonaise No. 6 in A-Flat Major, Op. 53 "Héroïque"	07:37
07	Chopin Bolero Op. 19	09:29
Total time:		63:40

Recorded: **ProVibe Studio A, 08-15 November, 2024**

Piano technician: **Balázs Tóth**

Recording engineer: **Sándor Árok**

Balance engineers: **Sándor Árok, Kevin Roper**

Recorded audio format: **DSD256**

Mastering engineer: **Tom Caulfield**

Photo by **David Merriman** in Kew Gardens - London

Producer: **Róbert Zoltán Hunka**

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