

MIT Music & Theater Arts
Emerson Fellowship Recital
Wednesday, April 12, 2005
Killian Hall, 5:00 pm

Lindy Blackburn (G), piano

Frederic François Chopin (1810 – 1849)

Ballade in g minor, Op. 23

Ballade in F Major, Op. 38

Ballade in A-flat Major, Op. 47

Ballade in f minor, Op. 52



Frederic Chopin (1810-1849) moved to Paris in the autumn of 1831, shortly after finishing musical studies at the Warsaw conservatory. During the next several years, Chopin made his career as a premier pianist, extraordinary composer, and sought-after teacher. It was during these early years in Paris that Chopin completed his first Ballade in *g* minor, which was published in 1836. The remaining three ballades followed in the next productive few years of Chopin's life – with the *F*-Major ballade completed in 1839, the *A-flat* Major in 1841, and the *f*-minor ballade in 1842.

The *Ballade* was a new musical style for the piano, and was used exclusively in vocal literature until the Romantic composers saw it as another opportunity for greater free-form expression on the instrument. Traditionally the Ballade is used to tell a story, and in Chopin's case they can still be connected to poems written by his long-time friend Adam Mickiewicz. Though the usefulness of the actual tales themselves in interpreting the works is questionable, Chopin's Ballades retain a strong sense of narrative.

Chopin began early work on his first Ballade in the spring of 1831, before leaving Poland for a short stay in Vienna. However work on this ambitious piece was stopped for many months after Chopin learned of Warsaw's fall to the invading Russian army. The young and patriotic Chopin was highly distressed as he continued on to Paris; feelings which certainly pervade the *g*-minor Ballade and other works from the time. Of the four Ballades, Chopin worked hardest on the first – establishing the style and framework of his new form.



The second Ballade, in seeming contrast to the first, begins with a simple and tender melody in *F*, which rocks the listener into a false sense of security – until suddenly from both ends of the keyboard, violent passage work in the relative *a* minor disturbs the peace – at least most of the time. Apparently Chopin was reluctant to settle on a particular interpretation of the work, often performing different versions in public. The Ballade might sometimes finish in *F* and sometimes in *a* minor, and other times the fast passages might be completely missing – perhaps saving the Polish village maidens from the onslaught of Russian soldiers, if we are to believe the association with Mickiewicz's companion poem. In the published work, however, the Ballade is as much about the eventual synthesis of the two extremes as their juxtaposition.

The third Ballade, lighter and gentler in *A*-flat, provides an emotional break. With its grand climax, this Ballade exudes simple joy rather than the impassioned outpour that characterizes the others. The work presents beautiful Chopinesque harmonies and innuendo wrapped up in the most natural and pervasive 6/8 movement of any of the Ballades. Chopin takes us by the hand and leads us through the dance, with none of the emotional turmoil that might leave one exhausted. Perhaps this ease of appreciation is what allowed the third Ballade to receive disproportionate popularity early on with respect to the others.

In contrast, the fourth Ballade in *f*-minor initially received a lukewarm reception upon publication, but has since been appreciated as one of Chopin's greatest achievements and a principal example of his style. Like the *g*-minor ballade, the *f*-minor ballade begins in tonal ambiguity, or perhaps tonal distraction as the listener is misled to the dominant *C* Major, and only after two lines is introduced to the melancholy theme in *f*. What follows is a seemingly simple and circular theme and variations, but what first appears as delicate themes grow continually in strength and energy until the massive climax and unrelenting coda.



Lindy Blackburn is currently a third year graduate student at MIT where he is pursuing a PhD in Physics. He began with the piano at the age of five and studied for twelve years under the instruction of Inessa Litvin and Leonid Levitsky. This is his second year as an Emerson Fellowship recipient at MIT. He studies here with David Deveau, and is a member of the MIT Chamber Music Society.