

NOCTURNES

Michael Landrum, piano

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Disc 1 - 70:39

- 1. Nocturne No. 4 in A Major John Field 5:21
- 2. Nocturne in C-sharp minor, Op. 27, No. 1 Frédéric Chopin -5:24
- 3. Notturno, from Sei pezzi Ottorino Respighi 4:25 Published by G. Schirmer
- 4. Nocturne in D-flat Major for the Left Hand, Op. 9, No. 2 Alexander Scriabin 5:56
- 5. Nocturne in A-flat Major, Op. 33, No. 3 Gabriel Fauré 4:38
- 6. Nocturne Jean Francaix 3:21 Published by Schott
- 7. Nocturno in E minor, Op. 24, No. 8 Jean Sibelius 3:36 Published by Breitkopf and Härtel
- 8. Nocturne in D Major Georges Bizet 4:02
- 9. Nocturne No. 2 in B minor Mily Balakirev 7:58
- 10. Premier Nocturne, Op. 22 Charles-Valentin Alkan 6:09 Published by Gerard Billaudot
- 11. Premier Nocturne Erik Satie 2:49 Published by Salabert
- 12. Nocturne No. 1 in C Major Francis Poulenc 3:32 Published by Heugel/Leduc
- 13. Notturno, Op. 54, No. 5 Cyril Scott 3:20 Published by Elkin & Co. (London), G. Ricordi (New York)
- 14. Notturno, Op. 54, No. 4 Edvard Grieg -4:11
- 15. Nocturne in A minor, Op. 10, No. 1 Sergei Rachmaninoff 4:46 Published by Boosey & Hawkes
- 16. Nocturne, from Cinq Impressions Alexandre Tansman 1:18 Published my Max Eschig

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- 3. Notturno, Op. 6, No. 2 Clara Wieck-Schumann 5:21 Published by Henle
- 4. Nocturne No. 5 in F Major Alec Rowley 3:21 Published by Boosey & Hawkes
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- 7. Nocturne, Op. 33 Samuel Barber 3:27 Published by G. Schirmer
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- 9. Nocturne in C-sharp minor, Op.19, No. 4 Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky 3:19
- 10. Nocturne in E Major Norman Dello Joio 3:02 Published by Carl Fischer
- 11. Nocturne, from Petite Suite Alexander Borodin 2:55
- 12. Notturno in A-flat Major, Op. 6, No. 2 Charles Tomlinson Griffes 6:57 Published by G. Schirmer
- 13. Notturno in G minor Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel 5:00 Published by Henle
- 14. Notturno, from Poemetti Gian-Carlo Menotti 1:39 Published by Franco Colombo
- 15. Nocturne, from A Little Piano Book Ralph Vaughan Williams 1:31 Published by Oxford Univ. Press
- 16. Midsummer Nocturne Aaron Copland 1:50 Published by Boosey & Hawkes

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There is no single way to compose a nocturne.

The word conjures intimations of night, and this is translated musically into many different musical styles and procedures. One may think of a "night piece" as a lullaby, but that is rarely a possibility, for tumultuous or at least energetic furors are almost invariably present in the central sections of these preponderantly ABA works. With the exception of only a few pieces, anyone trying to sleep to them would have a rude awakening.

Although the title Nocturne is most closely allied with the twenty-one keyboard works of that name composed by Frédéric Chopin (1810-49), the genre should be discussed initially in connection with Irishman John Field (1782-1837), the true originator of the genre (c. 1807). A highly gifted pianist in his own right, it is realistic to posit that Field developed the nocturne for his own concert performances. He tended to explore chromatically-decorated melodic lines accompanied in the left-hand by patterns that were most commonly ostinati, although one work may contain various permutations of this style within it. He composed sixteen nocturnes in all, and two of these he was to rework as songs with piano accompaniment.



John Field (1782-1837)

Field's "Nocturne No. 4 in A Major" represents his style well. A finely decorated treble voice runs its course above patterns that constantly change. There are few harmonic surprises, and a certain constraint and the style of decoration hearken back to Mozart's era. Darker rumblings in the work's middle section are more akin to Romantic techniques and sensibilities. A facet that pertains to all the pieces recorded here is that of the piano's improved sustaining pedal and the harmonic extensions it allowed. Field made great use of this capability.

Two Chopin nocturnes are heard on this recording – the "Nocturne in B-flat Minor, Op. 9, No. 1", and "Nocturne in C-sharp minor, Op. 27, No. 1". These two works epitomize the quintessential level of achievement associated with the genre and are universally popular.

The B-flat minor work indeed depicts the nocturne as it was viewed in the early-nineteenth century. The broad, arpeggiated undulations in the left hand sometimes encompass a range of as much as a thirteenth. They continue throughout the entire piece, the right-hand singing above.

The piece as a whole exudes calmness and clarity. The lyricism of the composition no doubt helped fuel the contentious issue that Chopin was imitating Italian composer Vincenzo Bellini's operatic bel canto style.

The C-sharp minor Nocturne has a wildly undulating bass part with, at times, as much as four octaves between upper and lower voices. At the più mosso central section, the left-hand takes on a new, much tighter line, and little by little this new ostinato and right-hand octaves develop passionately to a climax of great drama. Considerable facility, nimble finger work, and precise utilization of the sustaining pedal are a necessity in the execution of this difficult piece.



Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)

On this recording, we will encounter a wide span of years – over 150, to be precise. During this time the form varied considerably, and some of the nocturnes we hear are more akin to the Field/ Chopin model than others. We shall examine these first.

Samuel Barber's (1910-81) "Nocturne, Op. 33", was written as an homage to John Field. It is a little-known "neo-Romantic" piece, which begins in 12/8 with a full measure of arpeggiations before the wistful, highly chromatic melody enters. This is similar to the opening measures of Chopin's two Op. 27 Nocturnes from 1835. Rapid octave passages and chromatic embellishments intercede before the wistful melody returns.

Franz Liszt's (1811-86) well beloved "Notturno No. 3 in A-flat Major" (from the Three Notturnos, *Liebesträume*) dates from 1843–50. Here the repeated pattern surrounds the melody in the treble voice. What begins as an affectionate little work begins to surge into a maelstrom as early as m. 25, where a three-voice quasi-cadenza shimmers up and down the keyboard. More passion comes into play as the original melody is surrounded by increasingly complex figurations until we come to a newly-defined quasi-cadenza. These "cadenzas" resemble those of Chopin's in Op. 62, No. 1. Although the dramatic tenor of the work begins to dissipate, the nocturne never attains the peace and sweetness with which it began.



Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

Manuel de Falla (1876-1946) was of a Spanish/Andalusian background. He wrote nocturnes not only for piano but also for orchestra (*Nights in the Gardens of Spain*, 1916). His "Nocturno in F minor" (c. 1896) takes us back to the Chopinesque, arpeggiated left-hand and single voice melodic line. The melody changes little, but the accompaniment grows continually in richness.



Erik Satie (1866-1925)

Erik Satie's (1866-1925) first nocturne dates from 1919 and is of particular interest because of the variety of styles and textures it exhibits. Satie was especially clear on the manner in which the work was to be performed, and instructions on tempo and timbre are abundant. At measure three, there are ominous rumblings in the bass, and these reappear in the recapitulation. In their gloom, they are reminiscent of Debussy's nocturne (see below), and they tend to undermine the charming, jaunty, central section, which is the focus of the piece.

Claude Debussy (1862-1918), who was frequently described as an Impressionist (which he deplored), composed his "Nocturne in D-flat

Major" in 1892. The nocturne begins ad libitum, and while it is to be played softly, there is something sinister about it. With this composition the arpeggiations wind only upwards. At m. 32, the pianist is extolled to play "in the character of a folk song," and a simple melody, with rich surroundings, ensues. There are quite a variety of pianistic styles in this work, from the menacing bass octaves to delicate filioree decoration.

Georges Bizet (1838-75), best known for his opera *Carmen*, wrote "Nocturne in D Major". Like many of the composers represented here, Bizet was a very fine pianist. In the nocturne, he sets up four measures of arpeggios, una corda, before the entrance of the melody. The challenges of this piece are taxing, and what initially looks like a simple, benign work becomes ever richer and more ferocious as it progresses.

Russian composer Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915) wrote many extraordinary compositions, and this work from *Deux Morceaux pour le main gauche, Op. 9*, is no exception. An extremely talented pianist as well as composer, Scriabin's earliest pieces resemble Chopin, and include music in forms that Chopin used himself – étude, prélude, nocturne and even mazurka.

The "Nocturne in D-flat Major, Op. 9, No. 2", is for the left hand alone. This presents a considerable challenge for both composer and pianist. As it covers the entire keyboard, the work requires great agility. Scriabin's virtuosic talents were up to the task. The pianist must have well-developed skills

both with arpeggiated decorative work and octave sequences in quick succession. The new, improved, sustaining pedal is invaluable here.

Nocturnes by two German women of the early Romantic period are represented on this recording. This is a victory of sorts, because the place of women in German society in the first half of the nineteenth century was not an enviable one. Subject to repression and discrimination, particularly by males in the upper echelons of society, it was the rare female who was able to rise above her indifferent status and achieve any form of positive recognition other than for being a good Hausfrau.



Fanny Hensel (1805-1847)

Fanny Hensel (née Mendelssohn, 1805-47) composed her "Notturno in G minor" in 1838. The almost unceasingly smooth, wavelike motion in the left hand pays homage to Chopin in its echoes of arpeggiation. A lilting melody in the right hand appears perhaps too continually, though occasionally it is adorned with chromatic embellishment. The instructions regarding performance indicate that the Notturno is to reflect much sentiment, and this indeed it achieves. One could go as far as to say that it sings of female decorum, which was essential in Hensel's social position. Her famous brother Felix helped ensure that she maintained the constraints of her high station in life and did not overstep her role as a woman

Unlike Hensel, whose good name depended upon her displaying her gifts only in the home or salon, Clara Schumann (née Wieck, 1819-96) was encouraged by her husband, the acclaimed

Robert Schumann, in both the areas of performance and composition. Wieck was a touring piano virtuoso, and the work heard here, a Notturno from her *Soirées musicales*, *Op. 6, No. 2* (1836), reveals its complexities and her facility. After a relatively docile opening with an arpeggiated left hand pattern, the right hand begins to go its own way with all manner of styles and embellishments of increasing difficulty. Performance directions are plentiful, and neither the performer nor the listener are ever at a loss as to what the composer intends expressively. The single measure before the A section of this ternary work returns at m. 90 is marked dolente and extremely soft. It is only a fleeting moment, but such nuances are very appealing to the ear.



Clara Schumann (1819-1896)

Sergei Rachmaninoff's (1873-1943) "Nocturne in A minor" comes from a pairing called *Morceaux de salon, Op. 10* (The second work is a Valse in A Major). The nocturne dates from 1893/94 and that it is a work of Rachmaninoff's juvenilia is often apparent.

The first thirty-four measures of the piece are relatively new, but the leaping octave style of the left-hand bears a keen resemblance to the commencement of Chopin's "Nocturne in C minor, Op. 48 No. 1". Section B of the nocturne contains twenty-five measures of thick, syncopated chords, which continue without cessation. At least in the beginning, these chords are reminiscent of the opening movement of Schubert's "Sonata in G Major, D. 894".



Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)

Alexander Borodin (1833-87) was well-respected in his native Russia for his skills both as a composer and as a chemist. He was a member of what became known as "The Five," a group of musicians who aimed at creating Russian music of a concentrated national ilk. Apart from Borodin, the group included Mily Balakirev (the leader), César Cui, Modest Mussorgsky and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov.

Borodin's Nocturne, from his *Petite Suite* of 1885, is a consistently gentle work. The accompaniment, to a lean melodic line, is perpetuated with hardly a pause. It is a series of alternating eighth-notes moving up and down with only a tone between them. This ostinato is generally in the right-hand, but it also appears in the left-hand, or even in both hands at once. It conveys a rocking motion that is both lyrical and soothing.



Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)

Although Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg (1843-1907) is best known for his orchestral suites he was also a fine pianist, one who was praised highly by none other than Franz Liszt. His "Notturno, Op. 54, No. 4" resonates to some degree with the Borodin nocturne discussed above. It, too, in the A section, has a moto perpetuo accompaniment. The central section is delicate and as light as a feather, with trills high in the right-hand tessitura conveying a conventional "warbling bird" quality. Of all the nocturnes we have encountered on this recording thus far, this is the most redolent of a lullaby.

Ottorino Respighi's (1879-1936) "Notturno from Sei pezzi" (1903) features a prominent and pervasive ostinato, generally in a middle voice and sometimes shared between the hands. The central section is the most interesting – there is considerable pianistic variety and stylistic invention. The ostinato seems to progress ad infinitum, but overall, like Borodin's nocturne, the effect is a soothing one.

The first nocturne of Alexander Tcherepnin (1899-1977) was a fledgling work published as his Op. 2, No. 1. A wild, unruly middle section consists almost exclusively of alternating, crashing octaves and sixths or sevenths, while the encompassing A sections perpetuate a dark, cold bass ostinato of octaves and fifths. The composer may be youthful, but his nocturne exudes a strange, ominous, fascinating atmosphere.

Charles Tomlinson Griffes's (1884-1920) "Notturno in A-flat Major, Op. 6 No. 2" (1915) offers small portions of all kinds of musical experiences. It commences tranquilly, with the two measures of lonely ostinato accompaniment we have encountered so frequently in the nocturne. Later on, other styles of ostinato, in different patterns, also occur.

There is an overall sense of delicacy in this work, and there are strong intimations of the French Impressionist style, which Griffes began to use around 1911. At the time Griffes was writing this was very much in vogue, and his forms became freer, both in shape and in harmony. Although his nocturne is enormously simpler in its execution, there are, from time to time, hints/echoes of Ondine from Maurice Ravel's fiendishly difficult *Gaspard de la nuit* (1908).



Charles Griffes (1884-1920)

Jean Sibelius (1865-1957) reveals a considerable degree of ingenuity in his "Nocturne in E minor, Op. 24, No. 8". He uses two ostinati simultaneously. At the beginning of this small piece, we find a single, syncopated B-natural in the left hand. In m. 3 the treble enters with syncopated thirds and the two hands play together. This relationship between the hands becomes fully engaged when the A section returns.

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924) wrote a vast amount of music for the piano. His "Nocturne in A-flat Major, Op. 33, No. 3" (1883) begins with a limpid melody over syncopated octave chords. Fauré is a master when it comes to conceiving melodic lines, and in the nocturne the fluid, tuneful



opening measures, with their harmonically rich accompaniment, belie many technical difficulties yet to come. The central section is brief, and one relishes the thought of the return of the original melody. It is broadened now with triplet-motion chords of great range. This triplet technique, in a variety of forms, pervades the remainder of the work.



Mily Balakirev (1837-1910)

Mily Balakirev (1837-1910) was known as a superlative pianist and therefore the lack of bravura in the "Nocturne No. 2 in B minor" (1901) is at first a trifle puzzling. Initially, a simple, single-line melody sounds over a syncopated, chordal pattern. Once it is firmly established, we move on to a considerably more taxing religioso section with rich broken chords, a bravura passage in octaves, and a two-handed melisma. The nocturne melody's next appearance, underscored by sixteenth-note triplets, is more agitated, although the triplets' burbling also has something of a soothing effect.

This piece is more a set of variations on a simple melody than a "traditional" nocturne. As we are seeing, the definition of a nocturne has evolved considerably since Field's day. The second version of Balakirev's devilishly difficult Islamey appeared just a year after the nocturne was composed.

We now move further away from the sonorous, slow-moving nocturne style and into a more luminous, more spartan, contrapuntal nocturne. Jean Françaix (1912-97) wrote his one nocturne as recently as 1994. The opening, angular theme occurs three times, and very nearly the entire work consists of two voices playing with or against one another. Its clarity and straightforward form are a delight. They reinforce the fact that a nocturne can assume all manner of musical types.

Charles-Valentin Alkan (1831-88) was, like Balakirev, a virtuoso of the first order at a time when the piano's expanding capabilities were being experimented with and exploited. Strangely, despite his extraordinary talent, Alkan's public performances were few. He had a vast knowledge of "historical" music, his transcriptions were bountiful, and in his more accomplished nocturnes we return to the influence of Chopin, whose harmonic phraseology he borrowed.

One always tends to associate Alkan with his virtuosic technique and stamina in playing lengthy, almost impossibly difficult works. Yet, the nocturne (1844) included here shows another side of

the composer – simplicity. For the most part, a single-voice melody adorns a continuous triplet-motion voice in the left hand. A central section presents a much thicker texture and the melody takes a turn in the left hand, but even an ad libitum cascade is really nothing that could be recognized as virtuosic. As we see, Alkan was a master whose exceptional skills allowed him to compose convincingly in more than one style.

A soft, angular section opens Norman Dello Joio's (1913-2008) "Nocturne in E Major". A very light texture soon leads us to richer cantabile phrases, which grow energetically in right hand and left. Clashing harmonies and cross relations take us from the opening to the B section, where the texture introduces fantastic, syncopated chords with brief flickers of sound high above. A very grand flourish brings the piece to a climax, and we return to a calmer conclusion.



Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

One work on this recording that initially transports us back to the nocturnes of the 1830's is Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky's (1840-93) "Nocturne in C-sharp minor, Op. 19, No. 4", from *Six morceaux* (1874). The nocturne begins with the leaping, left hand octaves to which we are now well accustomed. The right hand carries a simple, rather desolate tune. In a second section, più mosso, each hand has only one or two notes at a time, and the range of the music becomes much narrower. The voices remain close until a slightly more challenging final section, where the hands stretch to a much wider gamut and decorative elements become abundant.

In the 20th century, we come to a diverse group of seven ambitious nocturnes each individual in its own way. Musical references to Field and to Chopinesque forebears are few, and each work is a newly-conceived manifestation of "the night" piece. Many of these pieces bring us into a sphere of piano works suitable for the amateur or youthful player. This, naturally, does not preclude their superior rendition by the concert performer, and their perceived simplicity can be deceptive.

Francis Poulenc's (1899-1963) "Nocturne in C Major" from 1929 opens with a charming, diatonic treble over an arpeggiated left hand. It is not until measure sixteen that a chromatic tone is voiced. This moment is the prelude to broken chords which grow increasingly chromatic although not cloying in texture. The piece settles into a quiet ending, although the warm diatonicism of the opening never reappears.

Cvril Scott's (1879-1970) "Nocturne, Op. 54, No. 5" is somewhat akin to the Poulenc in that it opens with clear, diatonic chords and, initially, a sweet melody of constricted range. It is a comforting parlor piece, with some clear influence from Scott's friend Percy Grainger. The central section is a colored a little by chromaticism, but never ventures far from the home key of F Major. The piece concludes with a soft, poignant coda.



Aaron Copland (1900-1990)

Aaron Copland's (1900-90) Nocturne, a miniature work, provides very specific direction as to the mode of its performance: "Slowly, poetically (and somewhat thoughtful)." As with the two pieces discussed directly above, it too remains close to its home key of A Major. The nocturne is especially notable for subtle rhythmic twists and turns. The texture is spartan, although whimsical little embellishments add a welcome piquancy to the treble voice.

The Notturno by Gian-Carlo Menotti (1911-2007) is a piece from his Poemetti of 1937. It is created in a canon-like structure, with the left hand repeating the upper voices almost verbatim every two measures. The Nocturne has an appealing lilt, and its simple textures and style make it an ideal work for young people.

Ralph Vaughan Williams's (1872-1958) tiny Nocturne from A Little Piano Book is like nothing else we have heard. A mere seventeen measures long, it is most notable for its continuous sixteenthnote meandering in the left hand. There is a clear modal tinge to this line, and the clarity of the right hand material enhances this. The piece could easily be performed by an amateur, but the transparency of the single line and the light texture above create pitfalls for the inexperienced.

The "Nocturne in F Major" by Alec Rowley (1892–1958) is delightfully chromatic. It remains in F for fully three measures, but then it creates a lengthy, complex web of chromatic tones that flourish in both hands. The lushness and unpredictability of the musical style give a "blues" feel to the composition. The central portion of the work, with its cascading patterns, is truer to its key than the opening, and the return of the A section brings a welcome return to chromatic vitality and surprise.

We come to the final, and briefest, work on this program. This nocturne is No. 5 of Cing Impressions from 1934. It is a tranquil, smooth miniature by Polish/French composer Alexandre Tansman (1897-1986), Tansman, like so many composers, was a virtuoso pianist. He composed not only classical music but also jazz. He also wrote almost 100 works for solo piano, a large portion of them for amateurs and children.



This nocturne is a gem. In its ten measures it convevs a magical sense of "other worldliness," and from the fifth measure on it is marked to be played from a distance. The richly chromatic chords seem to come out of nowhere, and they are there for neither decoration nor pretension, but are integral to the concept and to the nocturne's forward motion. All but one measure begins with a rest. The piece reminds one of the popular early-19th century idea of the fragment, a way of looking at things as having neither a beginning nor an end, but being, instead, in an endless state of "becoming." The work ends in F-sharp Major, with intimations of more to come that we, the listener, will never encounter.

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MICHAEL LANDRUM

A native of Augusta, Georgia, Michael Landrum received the Bachelor of Music degree from Oberlin College and the Master of Fine Arts degree from California Institute of the Arts. After earning his Doctor of Musical Arts degree from Temple University, he became Professor of Music and Film Studies at Roberts Weslevan College in Rochester. New York.

In 1976, Mr. Landrum won first prize in the J.S. Bach International Competition for Pianists in Washington, D.C. In that region he has performed at the Phillips Collection, the Pan American Union and the Corcoran Art Gallery, as well as with the Baltimore Symphony.

In the Upstate New York area, Mr. Landrum has performed with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra and the Rochester Chamber Orchestra, as well as at numerous colleges and universities.

During his doctoral studies in Philadelphia, Michael Landrum was a student of Harvey Wedeen. He also studied for seven years with Edna Golandsky in New York City and was a frequent participant in master classes with Dorothy Taubman. In June of 2005, he presented a Nocturne Lecture/Recital at Columbia Artists Management Hall in New York.

The nocturne genre has long been a topic of interest to Mr. Landrum. He has had the opportunity to share his insights into this ever-evolving repertoire on many occasions throughout the country.



DSL-92158 - NOCTURNES - Michael Landrum

Dedicated to my parents- Whitfield and Faye Landrum

Recorded at Hale Auditorium, Cultural Life Center, Roberts Wesleyan College, Rochester, New York -

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