

Pavel Kolesnikov

Pittville Pump Room

Sat 11 July

Frédéric Chopin Nocturne Nos. 1-21

*Approximate total running time
175 minutes including intervals*

I. Dreams

Op. 9, Nos. 1-3

Op. 15, No. 3

Op. posth. in C minor

Op. 55, No. 1

Op. 15, No. 1

Op. 48, No. 1

15 minute interval

II. Memories

Op. 27, Nos. 1-2

Op. 37, No. 1

Op. 15, No. 2

Op. 32, Nos. 1-2

Op. posth. in C sharp minor

15 minute interval

III. Visions

Op. 55, No. 2

Op. 48, No. 2

Op. 37, No. 2

Op. 62, Nos. 1-2

Op. posth. in E minor

About the Programme

Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849) – 21 Nocturnes for Solo Piano (1827-1846)

Programme note by Will Fox

Musical reflecting pool, moonlit miniature, unsingable night-song: what actually is a Nocturne? They appear through the centuries in many guises - a steady trickle of Notturmi and Nachtstücken in vastly different compositional languages, from Mozart to Schumann to Fauré to Britten. In the 18th century, the title was pragmatic, designating social music to be performed at night. By the 19th, however, this pragmatism had slipped into Romantic abstraction: music of the night, bound not by form or purpose but by character, an ineffable quality of nocturnal experience.

Chopin's 21 Nocturnes for solo piano are totemic examples of the genre, forming perhaps the most intimate musical utterances of the piano's foremost poet. They were written over the course of the composer's short life - the first at 17, the last at 36, three years before his death - and are numbered mostly in chronological order. (The final three are the exception, since they were published posthumously: Nos. 19 and 20 are the earliest [1827-30], and No. 21 is of

uncertain date). In form and style they owe a great deal to the Irish composer John Field, whose own collection of Nocturnes for solo keyboard (written 1812-36) was known to and much admired by Chopin. Indeed it was Field who laid the template for the Romantic conception of the Nocturne as an expressive inward-looking character piece evocative of the night. As Liszt wrote in a preface to an 1859 edition of Field's first six Nocturnes:

"The title Nocturne aptly applies to the pieces so named by Field, for it bears our thoughts at the outset toward those hours wherein the soul, released from all the cares of the day, is lost in self-contemplation, and soars toward the regions of a starlit heaven."

Even if this description of rhapsodic nighttime contemplation borders on Romantic excess, it is certainly true that Field's Nocturnes provided concrete structural and textural inspiration to Chopin - specifically in their use of a bel canto melody over a gently dynamic left hand accompaniment. This texture underlies all of the 21 Nocturnes: they are essentially vocal in nature, though this singing quality is complicated by the ways in which Chopin departs from Field's simpler schemata. Among these is the widespread use of ornamentation, not only in terms of simple trills and mordants but also in the deployment of structural fiorituri - long quasi-improvisatory flourishes which necessitate a high degree of rhythmic freedom, or rubato.

Another important departure is the sheer depth of narrative and emotional complexity found in these Nocturnes. Anyone who has stayed up into the early hours will know that the night can bear witness to many states: not only contemplation but ecstasy, not only melancholy but visceral anger. Chopin's Nocturnes, while often serene, do at times expand to encompass these more energetic nocturnal emotions. (Listen for example to the playfulness of No. 3 [Op. 9 No. 3], or the aggression in the middle section of No. 4 [Op. 15 No. 1 in F Major], or the steady tautening of dramatic tension out of No. 9's [Op. 32 No. 1 in B major] innocent beginning.) An important feature of the later Nocturnes is Chopin's increasing use of counterpoint, marking a deep-rooted transfiguration of Field's style. The middle section of the E Major Nocturne (No. 18/Op. 62 No. 2) is the most profound example of this, weaving almost Bach-like imitative fragments amidst general turbulence. By the end of his life, Chopin's night has become truly polyphonic; it contains not only muted stasis or starbound rapture but all forms of darkness, all the dimensions and layers of shadow which appear after sundown.

How much does the night (or the Romantic idea of night) really run through these pieces? If they weren't labelled as Nocturnes, could a listener hear anything nocturnal in them? Music, especially classical instrumental music, is always slippery, resistant to the semantic pens into which we might want to corral it. Yet if we let them take hold, it is possible to hear things in these Nocturnes: perhaps just figments, shadows, fleeting impressions of pain or rapture but something that probably doesn't quite belong to daylight hours. Comparing Chopin's Nocturnes to Field's in the same 1859 introduction quoted above, Liszt wrote:

"Chopin, in his poetic Nocturnes, sang not only the harmonies which are the source of our most ineffable delights, but likewise the restless, agitating bewilderment to which they oft give rise. His flight is loftier, though his wing be more wounded; and his very suaveness grows heartrending, so thinly does it veil his despairful anguish."

Whether or not we feel our own modern 'ineffable delights' or their resulting bewilderments can be sung by some 200-year-old Nachtstücken, we can surely find some sympathy with many of the forms of suffering and enchantment which belong to the darkness of night.

Artist Biography

Pavel Kolesnikov *piano*

The 2025/26 season sees Pavel return to the London Philharmonic Orchestra and Yomiuri Nippon Symphony (both with Edward Gardner) and debut with Atlanta Symphony (Nathalie Stutzmann), Tampere Philharmonic (Gergely Madaras) and Orchestre Philharmonique Royal de Liège (Lionel Bringuier). He also gives solo and duo recitals at Wigmore Hall, New York's 92NY, the Edinburgh International Festival, Piano à Lyon and Klavier-Festival Ruhr. Highlights of the previous two seasons include concertos performances with the London Symphony Orchestra, Danish National Symphony, Cincinnati Symphony, Philharmonia Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Netherlands Philharmonic, The Hallé and Bournemouth Symphony, working with conductors Susanna Mälkki, Manfred Honeck, Sir Mark Elder, Alpesh Chauhan, Alexander Bloch and Vasily Petrenko.

Pavel is known for his curatorial approach and work across genres. His realisation of Bach's Goldberg Variations with dancer Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker has been staged over 50 times across Europe, while his residency at the 2023 Aldeburgh Festival saw collaborations with architect Sophie Hicks and playwright Martin Crimp. In 2025 David Hockney invited Pavel, along with his partner and fellow pianist Samson Tsoy, to curate a series of concerts inspired by the artist's life and work at the Fondation Louis Vuitton.

A former Honens Piano Competition winner and BBC New Generation Artist, Pavel was artist-in-residence at Wigmore Hall during the 2020/21 season. More recently, he has performed at Amsterdam's Concertgebouw and Muziekgebouw, Atlanta's Spivey Hall, London's Southbank Centre, Barbican Centre and at the BBC Proms,

Brussel's BOZAR, Atlanta's Spivey Hall and Severance Music Center as part of the Cleveland Orchestra's Piano Series.

