

Franz Schubert (January 31, 1727, Vienna – November 19, 1828, Vienna) is mostly known for composing 600 lieder. Amazingly, in his short life of 31 years, he wrote nearly 1,000 compositions in almost every musical genre. His symphonies and string quartets are on the par with Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, his works for piano influenced Schumann, Chopin, and Liszt. His music is lyrical without superficial sentimentality, pure, direct, and simple, spontaneously flowing, with incomparably beautiful melodic lines, many shades of sound color, and intricate polyphony. The theme of eternally searching wanderer, who never finds happiness, regularly occurs in Schubert's works. Another recurring related theme, especially in his later works, is that of death, hiding in asymmetrical forms and shifting harmonies--like in lieder 'Death and the Maiden' and 'Erlkönig', in the opening of the great *String Quartet in G major*, and in the first movement of the *Unfinished Symphony*.

Schubert wrote his *Fantasia in C major*, Op. 15, D. 760, known as the '*Wanderer Fantasia*', in November 1822, after taking a break from working on *Unfinished Symphony*. It is dedicated to Carl Emanuel Liebenberg von Zsittin, a pupil of Mozart's pupil Hummel, and is considered to be Schubert's most colossal and virtuosic composition for the piano. Schubert himself said "The devil may play it, for I cannot!" referring to young super virtuoso Franz Liszt. This four-movement work was conceived in its architecture as an unbroken whole, combining sonata form with theme-and-variations by ingenious use of "thematic transformation", and illustrating Schubert's conception of the piano as a surrogate orchestra. All of it inspired Liszt for his own *Sonata for Piano in B minor*. Each movement (or, more correctly, section) transitions into the next one without a definite ending cadence, and starts with a variation of the opening phrase of his lieder "Der Wanderer", set to the poem by Georg Philipp Schmidt von Lubeck. This is where *Fantasia*'s name is derived from. The first section of the *Fantasia*, "*Allegro con fuoco ma non troppo*," is in the monothematic sonata form. It starts in C major with a rhythmic figure based on the main melody and proceeds turbulently. Harmonious second theme is in E major. Both themes are developing and wandering through tonalities until the start of the C-sharp minor '*Adagio*' section. Here the first part of the heartrending melody from the Schubert's lieder 'Der Wanderer' is stated in its original form and continues as a series of variations. Further along, it is embellished with different voices, delicate scales, arpeggios, and tumultuous tremolandos. The effervescent third section, '*Presto*,' is in A-flat major. It is a scherzo in a dance style with a charismatic trio and thrilling transition to the virtuosic finale in C major, '*Allegro*,' which starts as a fugato, becoming increasingly demanding both technically and interpretatively, culminating with the dazzling coda.

Frédéric-François Chopin (February 22 or March 1, 1810, Zelazowa-Wola, Poland – October 17, 1849, Paris, France) introduced "ballade" to piano music during his mature creative period in 1836, with publishing of his *Ballade in g minor*. From around 12th century, ballades were dance-songs associated with the French poetry, and until the end of 18th/beginning of 19th century had appeared exclusively in literature and in vocal music. Chopin, as he told Robert Schumann in Leipzig, was inspired by the Lithuanian poems of his compatriot and friend in exile, Adam Mickiewicz. Chopin is called 'a poet of the piano', while Mickiewicz's poetry is full of references to music. One of the most prominent images in Romanticism - pilgrimage - is reflected in Mickiewicz's works. Chopin also saw himself as a pilgrim, according to Liszt. Parallels between specific poems and Chopin's ballades are vague. All four of his ballades follow their own dramatic narrative, unpredictable in its flexibility, and end with a tempestuous climax. These abstract large-scale works are profoundly expressive: lyrical, entrancing, dramatic, epic, heroic, mysterious, tragic, and nostalgic, with nationalistic overtones and incomparable

beauty of melodic lines. Written in triple time, 6/8 or 6/4, they combine some of the classical forms of sonata, variations, and rondo. The ballades are a pinnacle of Chopin's creativity and are among the best representations of Romantic music overall. Liszt, Brahms, and other composers were inspired by Chopin in writing ballades of their own.

Ballade No. 1, in G minor, Op. 23 (Polish), published in 1836, and dedicated to Baron Stockhausen, is considered to be inspired by "*Conrad Wallenrod*". The Largo introduction finishes with a chord D-G-Eb-Bb as a painful question, setting a mood for the whole piece. The first theme is a nostalgic waltz, developing into a stormy section, giving way to a 'bel canto' second theme in E-flat major. Both themes are developed in complicated variations, modulating through different keys, changing from grandeur of chords to coquettish waltz, then to cascading triplets, octaves, and scales, until a triumphant return of the second theme, and, finally, the poignant first theme, ending with breathtaking dramatic coda.

Ballade No. 2, in F major/A minor, Op. 38 (La gracieuse), was composed in 1839, when Chopin spent time with George Sand. Chopin dedicated it to Robert Schumann. This ballade is thought to be based on "*The pilgrim*". This ballade has a clear structure of two contrasting themes repeated twice and a coda. The first F major theme is peaceful and elegant, like a pastoral folk song, dying away with repetitive A notes. Stormy second theme suddenly intrudes with arpeggios and octaves in A minor, also dissolving away. The first theme sounds again, much more unsettled, followed by the second one with startling trills, leading to sweeping tornadoes of the coda. Suddenly, first theme reappears in A minor, like a sad sigh of memory.

Ballade No. 3, in A flat major, Op. 47 (Undine), 1841, was dedicated to Mademoiselle Pauline de Noailles. Schumann believed this ballade was a reference to "*Switez*". This is the most dance-like, sunny and charming of Chopin's ballades. The introduction and the first theme are stately and aristocratic. Second theme is a delightful waltz. Modulations into different tonalities – and the main theme, now in C-sharp minor, leads to a tumultuous section. It gradually fades into the background, main theme reappears, and a rich-sounding variation on the introduction with octaves and chords end with a shortened version of the second theme in the sparkling and jubilant coda.

Ballade No. 4, in F minor, Op. 52, 1843, dedicated to Madame la Baronne C. Nathaniel de Rothschild, and inspired by "*Budri*", is the most lyrical, tragic, passionate, mystical and complex of all four. By its significance, it is compared to 'Mona Lisa' in painting. It is saturated with emotional nuances and ingenious musical ideas, reflecting Chopin's creative mastery of the lifetime. Ballade starts in C major, evoking an idyllic scene. Then the main theme appears, typically Slavic in its haunting melancholy. It changes moods in variations, giving way to the second serene theme in B-flat major. Alluringly graceful A-flat major episode follows; main theme returns, imbued with exquisite harmonies, and rainbow of emotions, modulating through major and minor tonalities back to F minor. Multi-voice variations on both themes are getting more and more intense culminating in thrilling arpeggios and chords. An echo of initial idyllic calmness returns with six otherworldly chords in C major. After an abyss-like pause, the fiery coda overwhelms like a tornado, with furious passages of double notes and octaves, ending with cataclysmic chords.

~Sophia Agranovich