



Frédéric Chopin

(1810-1849)

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- ▶ Chopin was an important Romantic composer—originally from Poland, moved to Paris to escape political turmoil
- ▶ Chopin was a virtuoso pianist—nearly all of his compositions are for solo piano
- ▶ His Etudes, Preludes, Ballades, Polonaises, Nocturnes, Scherzos, Sonatas, Impromptus, Waltzes, and Mazurkas are among the most important pieces in piano literature
- ▶ Chopin performed in fashionable salons, gave lessons to the elite, and gave a small number of exclusive concerts
- ▶ He had a well-publicized affair with novelist George Sand
- ▶ Frail health prevented him from traveling much and led to his early death (at age 39) of pulmonary tuberculosis

Chopin's style

- ▶ Chopin's musical style is founded on songlike melodies, with intricate and varied accompanimental textures
- ▶ Chopin's harmonic language is rich—some of his slippery chords are created through chromatic linear dissonance
- ▶ Chopin's forms are basically simple, with the focus in his music being on improvisatory embellishment more than formal innovation or the working out of motivic ideas
- ▶ Unlike many of his contemporaries, Chopin did not write program music, although some of his music (such as the Mazurkas) exhibit strong Polish nationalistic sentiments

The 24 Preludes

- ▶ Like J.S. Bach (*The Well-Tempered Clavier*), Chopin wrote a prelude in each of the 24 keys
 - ▶ Both collections go around the circle of fifths—however, Bach groups parallel major and minor pieces (C major and c minor) while Chopin groups relative major and minor pieces (C major and a minor)
- ▶ Unlike Bach, Chopin's Preludes are not followed by a fugue or anything else—these pieces are not preludes to something more important, rather they are miniature tone-poems that stand on their own
- ▶ The 24 Preludes are often played as a complete set