

## Chopin – 4 Ballades 4 Scherzi (Ashkenazy) [2000]

Written by bluesever

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*1. Ballade No.1 in G minor, Op.23 9:00 2. Ballade No.2 in F, Op.38 7:59 3. Ballade No.3 in A flat, Op.47 7:35 4. Ballade No.4 in F minor, Op.52 11:22 5. Prélude No.25 in C sharp minor, Op.45 4:48 6. Scherzo No.1 in B minor, Op.20 10:07 7. Scherzo No.2 in B flat minor, Op.31 9:37 8. Scherzo No.3 in C sharp minor, Op.39 6:46 9. Scherzo No.4 in E, Op.54 10:36*  
Vladimir Ashkenazy - piano

Listening to these superb transfers of Ashkenazy's first complete cycles of the Ballades and Scherzos, which were recorded in the mid-1960s and have been out of the catalog for more than 20 years, is a startling reminder of why the Russian, then only in his 20s, became the dominant Chopin interpreter of his generation. While Ashkenazy's interpretive style had been anticipated by players such as Dinu Lipatti and Solomon, no one else had ever played so much Chopin with such selflessness. This is not to say that Ashkenazy's Chopin was bland, but that it eschewed histrionics and personal idiosyncrasies while missing none of the passion or emotional content of the music. His use of understatement in the G Minor Ballade brings the listener inside the work as more theatrical performances do not. In the F Minor Ballade, he creates an aura of mystery from the opening notes, sustains the labyrinthine narrative line with intensity and intimacy, and concludes with a passionate conquest of the coda. His equally inspired account of the other Ballades and all of the Scherzos make this one of the finest Chopin discs in the catalog. ---Stephen Wigler, amazon.com

These recordings show Ashkenazy at the height of his powers as a pianist. In the four Scherzos he takes Chopin's 'presto' markings at face value, and the virtuosity of his vertiginous performances is dazzling. The Ballades, by way of contrast, are lingering accounts: beautiful playing, in all conscience, though there are times when one might have wished the music to

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flow just a little more naturally. The piano tone in these pieces is a little hard at times, but don't let that worry you: this disc is an essential acquisition for anyone who loves Chopin – the more of a bargain in that it contains the essence of what was originally housed on two LPs. For an alternative view of the Ballades (and a particularly compelling view of the continual F major/A minor vacillations of No. 3), Murray Perahia's beautifully recorded 1994 version is warmly recommended.--- Misha Donat, BBC Music Magazine

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