

Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849)

Chopin was born in Poland but spent his twenty or so creative years based in Paris. Of the Romantic era, he was a master of the keyboard and a composer of genius. Afflicted early on by consumption, he worked with a tireless intensity to produce piano compositions both intricate and perfect, of every style and mood. Pears Cyclopaedia makes this discerning tribute: 'A Chopin melody, limpid, transparent, singing, can be recognised easily by anyone, but his style gradually developed into something more subtle, more satisfying than pure melody.'

Although music must ever remain ineffable, the etude 'Tristesse', meaning sadness, is subtly programmatic. Its charming theme moves into a section of diminished chords suggestive of turmoil before a *bravura* section and a seamless return to the theme. It can all be expressed well at a deliberate pace, given heed to score directions. I like to play it with the right hand over the guitar's soundhole to harness that sweet resonance, particularly for the thematic sections and the lovely coda.