
Ingrid Fliter
Frédéric Chopin
Preludes

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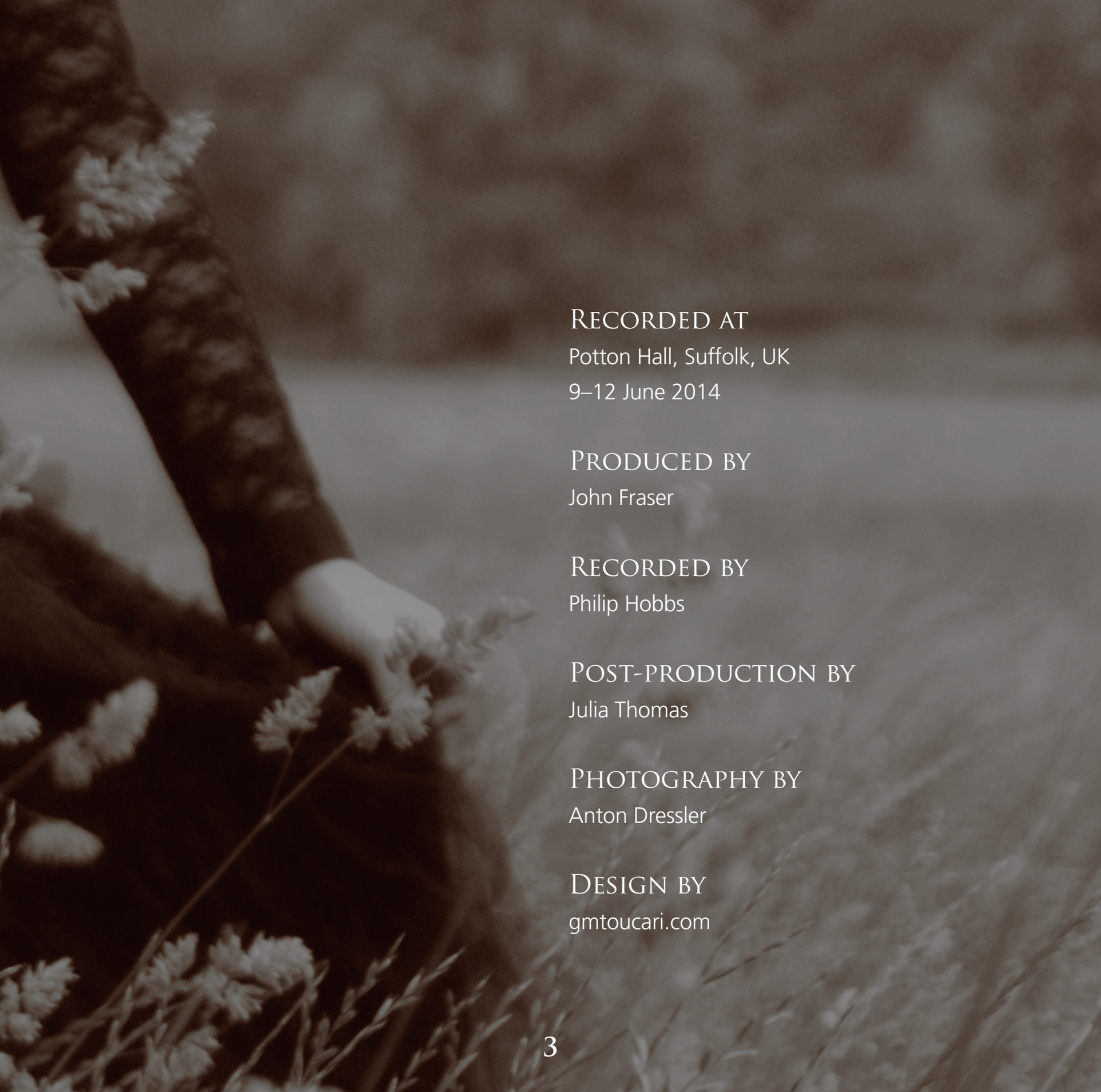
Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849)

24 Preludes, Op. 28

1. In C major (Agitato) 0:39
2. In A minor (Lento) 2:22
3. In G major (Vivace) 1:08
4. In E minor (Largo) 2:02
5. In D major (Molto allegro) 0:38
6. In B minor (Lento assai) 2:32
7. In A major (Andantino) 0:57
8. In F sharp minor (Molto agitato) 1:51
9. In E major (Largo) 1:31
10. In C sharp minor (Molto allegro) 0:35
11. In B major (Vivace) 0:41
12. In G sharp minor (Presto) 1:20
13. In F sharp major (Lento) 3:36
14. In E flat minor (Allegro) 0:31
15. In D flat major 'Raindrop' (Sostenuto) 5:59
16. In B flat minor (Presto con fuoco) 1:10
17. In A flat major (Allegretto) 3:12
18. In F minor (Molto allegro) 1:05
19. In E flat major (Vivace) 1:34
20. In C minor (Largo) 1:48
21. In B flat major (Cantabile) 2:00
22. In G minor (Molto agitato) 0:46
23. In F major (Moderato) 1:33
24. In D minor (Allegro appassionato) 2:35

25. Mazurka, Op. 17 No. 4 in A minor 4:45
26. Mazurka, Op. 17 No. 2 in E minor 2:03
27. Mazurka, Op. 63 No. 3 in C sharp minor 2:10
28. Mazurka, Op. 50 No. 3 in C sharp minor 6:12
29. Mazurka, Op. 6 No. 1 in F sharp minor 2:53
30. Nocturne, Op. 9 No. 3 in B major 6:56
31. Nocturne, Op. 27 No. 2 in D flat major 5:54

Total Running Time: 73 minutes



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Produced by

John Fraser

Recorded by

Philip Hobbs

Post-production by

Julia Thomas

Photography by

Anton Dressler

Design by

gmtoucari.com

In the early nineteenth century, preludes were associated above all with improvisation, and they often preceded works of more specific construction, such as fugues or suites. Traditionally, the improvised prelude was designed to test the instrument (especially its tuning), and to give practice in the key and mood of the piece to follow. Collections of composed preludes, usually ordered according to various principles of key sequence, were common at the time. However, we should note that such collections were designed as ready-made introductions to works rather than as cycles. They were above all for the use of musicians who were not especially fluent in improvised preluding. This also explains why the preludes in these collections were ordered according to key: so that a suitable prelude could always be found for any given work. This function is confirmed by the titles, as for example in Hummel's *Vorspiele vor Anfänge eines Stükes* [*sic*] *aus allen Dur und mol* [*sic*] *Tonarten*, Op. 67 (*c*.1814/15) or Cramer's *Twenty-Six Preludes or Short Introductions in the Principal Major & Minor Keys* (1818).

There is some evidence that Chopin may occasionally have used his own preludes as introductions to his larger compositions, but this was not his normal practice. Mainly he performed them as self-contained works, individually or in small groups, and for this reason we can reasonably claim that he re-defined the generic term. The Op. 28 cycle consists of a succession of miniatures of great emotional power and unrivalled artistic quality. They retain an outward similarity to traditional collections of preludes, in their tonal sequence, epigrammatic dimensions, monothematicism and openness of form, but they actually initiate a quite separate tradition of concert preludes that would be further developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Unlike their predecessors, Chopin's preludes demand to be treated as 'works' of weight and significance rather than as written-out improvisations, and they achieve something close to perfection of form within the framework of the

miniature, the relationship of substance to scale expertly gauged. Contemporaries were confused by this departure from tradition, and not only contemporaries: 'I must admit that I do not wholly understand the title that Chopin chose to give these short pieces', was André Gide's comment. 'Preludes to what?', he went on to ask.

As far as we can tell, most of the Op. 28 preludes were composed in Paris during 1838, and the cycle was completed during the ill-fated winter of 1838–9 that Chopin spent on Majorca with the novelist George Sand. A piano had been sent to the island expressly for the purpose, and on 22 January 1839 Chopin was able to write to Camille Pleyel: 'I am sending you my Préludes. I finished them on your little piano, which arrived in the best possible condition in spite of the sea, the bad weather and the Palma customs'. It is no doubt significant that Chopin took the *Well-Tempered Clavier* with him to Majorca, for that great work provides the most helpful context for his own cycle. Much of the figuration in Chopin's preludes has origins in J.S. Bach. There are *moto perpetuo* patterns, as in Nos. 11 (a kind of three-part invention), 14 and 19; subtly constructed figurations that allow linear elements to emerge through the pattern, as in the 'trill' motives of Nos. 1 and 5; characteristic contrapuntal figures made up of discrete though interactive particles, as in Nos. 1 and 8; and bolder contrapuntal polarities, as in the dialogue of melody and 'singing' bass in No. 9, or the dual function of the bass as harmonic support and melodic (polyphonic) line in No. 6. All this is part of a larger debt to Bach the contrapuntalist. But formally, too, the preludes evoke Baroque practice: by crystallizing a single *Affekt* in a single pattern and unfolding either in a ternary design (Nos. 15 and 17) or as a simple statement with conflated response (Nos. 3 and 12).

Each prelude of Op. 28 is itself a whole, with its own *Affekt*, its own melodic, harmonic and rhythmic profile, and even its own generic character: thus at various times Chopin invokes the nocturne (No. 13), étude (No. 16), mazurka (No. 7), funeral

march (No. 2) and elegy (No. 4). Yet at the same time, the individual preludes make up a single over-arching whole, a real cycle that is enriched by the complementary characters of its components and integrated by the special logic of their ordering. From a purely formal viewpoint, that ordering is determined above all by the tonal scheme. But arguments have been ventured for a deeper unity based on motivic links between the preludes, extensive enough to justify describing the work in its entirety as an extended, organically conceived cycle. Whatever the truth of that, Op. 28 remains an utterly unique achievement, albeit one with a legacy. Later composers were happy to follow Chopin's lead in broadening the generic meaning of the prelude, as in the sets by Scriabin, Fauré, Rachmaninov and Szymanowski. Of special significance are the two books of preludes by Debussy, the composer who, more than any other, translated Chopin's achievement into the language of twentieth-century pianism, just as Chopin himself had translated Bach's equal-voiced counterpoint into what Carl Schachter once aptly called a 'free, idiomatically pianistic counterpoint'.

The redefinition of genre in Op. 28 was not an isolated phenomenon in Chopin's output. It was his achievement to give generic authority to an emergent, early nineteenth-century piano repertory, crystallizing the meanings of some existing titles, and transforming the meanings of others. This was even true of the mazurka, the genre that appears to run most continuously right through Chopin's creative life. He himself signalled a break between the mazurkas composed in Warsaw and Op. 6, the first set he composed after leaving Poland in 1830, and the first he allowed to be published. By presenting Op. 6 as a set of four pieces, he consolidated the genre, and in a sense defined it for art music. He even spelt out that these pieces were 'not for dancing', which tells us something about how he viewed his earlier mazurkas. From Op. 6 onwards, Chopin thought of the mazurka not as a functional genre, but as an occasion both for sophisticated dialogues between so-called 'folk music' (note

the folk ornamentation in the trio of No. 1) and contemporary art music, and for compositional innovation and subjective expression. It is not far-fetched to view Op. 6 as the first canonic repertory of European nationalism.

From this set onwards, Chopin carved out for the mazurka a special corner within his output: it had a singular repertory of technical devices and a singular expressive content, one that linked (by implication) his inner emotional world to the spirit of the nation. His usual practice was to gather several mazurkas into a single opus, and the grouping is never arbitrary. If these are not fully integrated cycles, the pieces in an opus were at least conceived as mutually compatible. Op. 17, written in Paris in 1833, is a case in point. Folk models are especially apparent in the second and third pieces (note the high-tessitura 'piping' in Op. 17 No. 2), while the outer pieces act as a stabilizing frame. The expressive and structural weight of the fourth and final piece gives the set a real sense of closure. This is a *kujawiak* (a slow regional dance), and its expressive character derives from its tonal ambiguities and also from the nocturne-like ornamental variation of the main theme; only in the trio does the folk model emerge into the foreground.

The three mazurkas of Op. 50, a product of Chopin's second summer at George Sand's country manor in Nohant (1842), register a more general change of direction in his music in the early 1840s. Of course we can still identify the origins of these pieces in familiar regional dances, but Chopin's growing interest in contrapuntal methods in his later years often forced such models well into the background. Indeed, there can even be an apparent incongruity in the appearance of strict imitative counterpoint, as at the opening of Op. 50 No. 3, in the context of a dance piece. The complex harmonies of these later mazurkas are also easily relatable to Chopin's late style. Again Op. 50 No. 3 is a case in point, and especially in its impassioned development section, where the intensity is built up by means of a model and

sequence-technique whose chromatic part-movement within an enharmonic continuum foreshadows Wagner.

Following the ambition of Op. 50, and of the next two sets of mazurkas (Op. 56 and Op. 59), there is a marked change of direction in the evolution of Chopin's mazurkas. The last complete set, the three of Op. 63, was composed in 1846. Here he returned to the simpler outlines and more modest dimensions of his early mazurkas, as indeed he did again in the two mazurkas composed a year or two later and published posthumously as Op. 67 Nos. 2 and 4. Nor is this the only sign in Chopin's final compositions of a reflective glance back to the Warsaw period: along with their simpler outlines, these later mazurkas bring the folk model back a little closer to centre stage, as in the 'exotic' modality of the middle section of Op. 63 No. 3. There is an attractive symbolism about this return to Polish roots, as also about the fact that Chopin's last completed composition was almost certainly a mazurka, albeit not the one wrongly so described by a host of later commentators.

Chopin was certainly not the first to write piano nocturnes, but it is with his name that the genre title is most clearly associated. Indeed for some, it is in the nocturnes that we find the very essence of his style. The idea of vocal imitation, whether of the French romance or the Italian aria, is essential to the nocturne idiom, and the developing style was facilitated (indeed enabled) technically by the development of the sustaining pedal. This made possible that widespread accompaniment to a vocally inspired ornamental melody that we recognize today as the archetype of the style. At its best, it presents us with a kind of fusion of melody and ornamentation, a texture in which the melody is on the one hand entwined in ornaments but on the other seeking to free itself from them.

Although published in the early 1830s, the three nocturnes of Op. 9 were probably composed just after Chopin left Poland in 1830, and they defined and

formalized the genre for him, rather as Op. 6 and Op. 7 did for the mazurka. The alternation of an ornamental 'aria' and a sequentially developing 'theme', already present in Op. 9 No. 3, was to become one of the standard patterns, and we find it again in Op. 27 No. 2. In this great nocturne, composed in 1835, there are two alternating melodies, of which the first is aria-like, elaborated with an ever more expressive ornamentation but remaining essentially static (if music can ever be static). The energy and momentum is provided by the second, stanzaic melody, which is developmental in character. Here the ornamentation is not so much an expressive enhancement of the melody as a means of driving the music in a dynamic and evolutionary way towards its major tension points. Op. 27, incidentally, marked an intriguing change in how Chopin presented this genre to the world. From this point onwards, he published his nocturnes in contrasted pairs rather than in groups of three, giving greater weight to the individual pieces within an opus but at the same time preserving a sense of their mutual compatibility.

Ingrid Fliter Piano

Born in Buenos Aires, Ingrid Fliter began her piano studies in Argentina with Elizabeth Westerkamp and, after moving to Europe, continued her studies in Freiburg at the Musikhochschule with Vitaly Margulis, in Rome with Carlo Bruno, and in Imola, at the Academy 'Incontri col Maestro' with Franco Scala and Boris Petrushansky. She has also worked with and been mentored by Zoltán Kocsis, Louis Lortie, Alexander Lonquich and Alfred Brendel.

Fliter has established a reputation as a pre-eminent interpreter of Chopin, as her three all-Chopin albums on Linn and EMI Classics bear witness. Her recordings of the piano concertos (with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra) and of the waltzes were selected as 'Choice' recordings by *Gramophone* magazine, which commented: 'Fliter plays with such grace and heartfelt sincerity…by whatever magical means, [she] touches the heart'. The concerto recording was selected as 'Disc of the Week' by BBC Radio 3's 'CD Review' and 'Album of the Week' by Classic FM and her recording of the waltzes was named 'CD of the Week' by the *Daily Telegraph*. All three albums received numerous five-star reviews from various publications.

Winner of the Silver Medal in the 2000 International Chopin Piano Competition in Warsaw, Fliter was awarded the 2006 Gilmore Artist Award, one of only a handful of pianists to have received this honour. She now divides her time between Europe and the USA, where she works with orchestras such as the Cincinnati Symphony, Cleveland, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Minnesota, National Symphony, San Francisco Symphony, Seattle Symphony, St Louis Symphony and Toronto Symphony. Fliter has appeared with many European orchestras, including the Philharmonia, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, Rotterdam Philharmonic, Bergen Philharmonic, Monte

Carlo Philharmonic, Netherland Philharmonic, Danish National Symphony, City of Birmingham Symphony, Scottish Chamber, Deutsche Radio Philharmonie and Royal Flemish Philharmonic. She also returns regularly to Australia, where she works with the Sydney Symphony, Melbourne Symphony and West Australian Symphony orchestras.

In recital, Fliter has appeared at many of the great halls and festivals around the world: among them the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam; Suntory Hall, Tokyo; the Wigmore Hall and Southbank Centre, London; Carnegie Hall and the Metropolitan Museum, New York; the Cologne Philharmonic Hall; and the Salzburg Festspielhaus. She has also played in Fort Worth for the Van Cliburn Foundation and in Chicago, San Francisco, Montreal and Santa Barbara. Festival highlights include La Roque d'Anthéron, the Valdemossa Chopin Festival, the BBC Proms and the World Pianist Series in Tokyo. Fliter has also appeared at the Tivoli, Mostly Mozart, Grant Park, Aspen and Blossom festivals.

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