Considered to be the most accomplished of Chopin’s late lyrical pieces, this Berceuse – French for ‘Cradle Song’ or ‘Lullaby’ – is a well-known, and highly regarded romantic short piece in piano repertoire. Initially titled ‘Variantes’ by Chopin before publication, it was deemed to be too scholastic by the publisher who re-titled the piece Berceuse. Composed in 1843 the Berceuse is said to have been inspired by Chopin’s enchantment with Louise Héritte-Viardot, the eighteen-month-old daughter, of his friend, singer-soprano Pauline Viardot. Louise captured Chopin’s attention while on a visit to Nohant with George Sand. It is more than likely that the composer’s encounter with the infant, inspired a lullaby-style composition.

At its heart, this piece is a theme and set of variation based on the material that is presented to the listener in the opening phrase. That said, you can instantly hear the gentle rocking in the baseline accompanying the lullaby. Each variation is an extended embellishment of the last, becoming increasing more complex as the piece progresses. Though it is heavily disguised within the embellishments, the theme can always be heard, though it is sometimes implied within the textures. In the manner in which it began, the music almost seamlessly fades away with a reprise of the main theme, settling on the final cadence.
Sources


