

Heart Of Genius

by Janusz Ekiert

In the one hundred fifty years since Chopin's death, opinions on this great composer, his life, his works and their interpretation changed, sometimes even going from one extreme to the other. Despite of the admiration, worship and enchantment the audience felt for him both at his lifetime and now, his genius and personal affairs were seen differently by people, who met him, by fin-de-siècle people, by those living at the time between the two world wars and by contemporary people.

Despite the universal respect and love of his genius, for a long time the power of his originality remained unappreciated or was treated as eccentricity. At the time of withering Romanticism his works were often interpreted as if composed by a hysteric dying by

stages without end. The reaction that followed World War I, anti-subjective aesthetics, the search for the so-called faithfulness to the author, and for the original texts free of editorial insertions, performing only what's included in the schematic and limited musical notation, the maxims of not playing Chopin too loud, too low, too rapid, too slow, too lively or too dull, all these reduced the sensation, enchantment, style and imagination, and brought about stereotyped interpretations of his compositions.

In Romanticism people tended to insert some literary contents and true or concocted stories into his works and life. His later biographers and students earnestly and meticulously rid his music and life of those embellishments, making light of them and thus going to the other extreme of untruth. There appeared a type of scientific biography inclined to consider facts that were difficult to prove as if they never actually happened. Romanticism and even Post-Romanticism idealized and whitewashed Chopin's image.

In the cinema of the 1970s took root a movement depicting the world, even the most elegant and soulful part of it, from the vantage point of the dustbin and the gutter. As regards the biographies of geniuses, they tried to bring to light their weak and ridiculous points, their anomalies and the most embarrassing or immoral facts.

Misunderstandings

In Chopin's lifetime his revolutionary harmonies and tones characteristic of Polish folklore, but not going into the major-minor scale that was de rigueur at the time of Classicism and

Romanticism did not find appreciation. His rhythmical hyperbolas and the composition of his sonatas were brought in question. The finale of the Sonata in B Flat Minor seemed to be above the audience's understanding for nearly one hundred years. It was so much off the beaten track that it seemed to be an exotic, fleeting etude in which one could recognize no melody, no harmony and no rhythm. The briefness of the finale, which lasts hardly more than a minute, seemed to upset the sonata's proportions. The public needed almost a hundred years to realize that it was a vivid waft of tone, a projection of a tone of true color, that that finale was auguring an epoch when the form would be determined just by the tone color.

In Chopin's days the role of color in painting and in music was getting a fashionable topic. Berlioz was already working on *Traite d'instrumentation et d'orchestration modernes* which, published in 1844, became composers' gospel. In his own preludes, etudes and nocturnes Chopin transformed the treatment of the piano: the system

and concentration of tone. He provided foundations for modern tone color of the piano. He discovered the tone color of the piano in original canons of accompaniment, in rapid pianissimos which in his case, although they remained a melody, they already heralded wafts of tone color. The continuous irresolution and inconstancy of the key in his sonatas meant the new relation between the melody, harmony and construction. The evanescence of the key and endless modulations made Chopin unique. Several years later they became the rule with Wagner. Chopin was one of the strongest artistic personalities in the history of world culture, not just music. He confined himself to piano, he did not write operas or symphonies. Still, he turned piano music into a truly autonomous artistic power. Limitless diversity of melody, of harmony and tone color, of construction and perceptions associating all this together is often the cause of misunderstandings at the Chopin competitions in Warsaw: Which interpretation is in accord with the spirit of his music and which is not? The pianist must choose and bring into relief certain features at the expense of others. Otherwise, performing Chopin turns into the pedantically weighed aesthetic mean which contains a little bit of everything, that is actually nothing. You can't without any break develop a beautiful slur, its atmosphere, tension, the refinement of the draughtsmanship and en passant bring into relief the taste of all interesting consonances and concatenation of chords, a characteristic rhythmic or accompaniment figure, an interesting spot of color, to bring to light an interesting voice in the bass, to square dynamics and tempo with all this. There have turned up many pianists who bring out into relief how fascinating and original

this music is. Others delight in what is beautiful and natural. These differences, too, happen to be a root of controversies.

For some time even Chopin's birth date was a subject of controversy. If one were to believe documents, memorial plaques and encyclopedias, Chopin was born on 22 February 1810. Yet, he himself maintained that he was born on 1 March. His own mother confirmed the later date. He celebrated his birthday on 1 March. This is the date he put in his passport and this is the date he named, while in Paris, for the Fetis' biography of musicians. According to official documents, i.e. his birth and baptismal certificates, he was

born on 22 February. He was baptized late because the family wanted Fryderyk Skarbek to become his godfather. Skarbek was studying in Paris and the Chopins waited for his consent. Chopin's father had bad memory for dates; he could forget his own birth date. He remembered that his son was born on Thursday but, maybe, instead of eight he counted seven weeks back when he was complying with the necessary formalities. And this is how

the error appeared. After all is said and done, both the birth and baptismal certificates produce false spelling of the name "Chopin" (Chopyn, Choppen). No one corrected that.

Responses

Chopin was a sharp observer of the phenomena around him, of fad, artistic fad in particular, and of the arguments between Warsaw Classicists and Romantics.

Sometimes he tried to keep the artistic incentives by which he was driven secret, sometimes not. But

he could and very much in full consciousness wanted to leave his individual mark on his stimuli.

To be sure, Romanticism did not create the division into body and soul, but Romanticism certainly widened this division, or maybe only put it into relief.

Nunneries, on the one hand, and whorehouses, on the other, were the result,

complained George Sand. Chopin was yielding to this double vision of the world when he called, with a good deal of common sense, Warsaw's moonlighters "maids of charity" and Constantia Gladkowska - his ideal. (Inspired by the Platonic liaison with her, he wrote the larghetto for the Piano Concerto No. 2 in F Minor, the romance for the Piano Concerto No. 1 in E Minor, his first nocturnes and the waltz in D flat major op. 70 No. 3). When he was composing inspired harmonies and melodies, and when he was bargaining with publishers in Paris or Leipzig for the price. But he had no strong views on those matters. He only disliked when in his masterpieces people were trying to recognize a reflection of concrete realities or literary contents. He was incensed at George Sand when in Majorca she described as "imitative harmony" the repetitious A flat and then G sharp in his "rainy" prelude, imitating falling raindrops. Such opinions annoyed him because, unlike Schumann's, Mendelssohn's or Liszt's, his music did not emulate natural phenomena, did not transport plot lines, philosophical reflections or pictures to music. He did not succumb to the fad of the time and never entitled his compositions in a way that might hint at a specific situation, occurrence, person or landscape. He yielded to the atmosphere of his day, though. He confided to a friend that the romance from the Piano Concerto No. 1 in E Minor was a revocation of places and moments dear to him, that in the funeral march from the sonata in B flat minor one could hear the ringing of bells and the beating of drums. The eleven times repeated A flat in the prelude in A flat major sounds like the echo of eleven strokes of the tower clock, reminding of the moment of separation, and the trio from the polonaise in A flat Major-like hoof-beats of the Polish hussars, and in the etude in F minor (Opus 25) he allegedly gave a portrait of Maria Wodzinska. In the salons of Paris he was famous for his tone portraits. "It usually happened at about midnight, then he was most at ease," Berlioz remembers Chopin. "When gone already were all the salon big wigs, when all the up-to-date political issues were examined, when all gossip-mongers were concluding their slanders and stories about those absent, when all disloyalties and vile acts of friends and acquaintances were discussed, that is when everybody had enough of the humdrum, then he, obeying the silent request of a pair of beautiful and intelligent eyes, came to the piano." He improvised portraits of selected guests, making the gathering guess whom he was meaning.

Impulses

To play dance music in the salons of Warsaw, to improvise musical portraits were a part of a sophisticated social entertainment. But when he was composing, music was his own intense reaction to incidents and events around him. The series of concerts by Paganini in Warsaw in 1829 made a strong impression on him. Yet, the two series of twelve etudes each he composed were not a portrait of the superb violinist, a piano imitation of neither Paganini's Capricci nor a tribute to his virtuosity. Chopin's etudes were composed as a response to such phenomenon as Paganini and what an amazingly individual response! The pianist's finger acrobatics Chopin transformed into a poetry of tone colors and feelings. Original harmonies combined with a new substance of the sound of the piano, with new accompaniment structures, far from the stereotype, and those of arpeggios including notes not belonging to the chord, have been a revelation, which even today keeps the audience spellbound. Accompaniment often acquires here a melodic role. The revelation lies in the fact that with Chopin grace notes, arpeggios stopped being a mere melisma and fine virtuosity. They became a means of expression and of a tone color of the piano earlier unknown. The bold combination of chords, the chromatic scales of "thirds" in the Etude in G Sharp minor make a new epoch in the color of the piano. Later, critics wrote that Chopin's etudes were to the development of the piano color what Berlioz

and Wagner together were to the development of the orchestra color. Some scholars imply that

several motives in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* were patterned after the bass tune in Chopin's *Etude in E Flat minor Opus 10, No. 6*. Others observe that without Chopin's *etudes* several compositions of Debussy's and Ravel's would have been impossible. Chopin wrote the first series of his *etudes* in Warsaw, Vienna and Stuttgart when he was nineteen--twenty two, the second--in Paris when he was twenty--twenty six years of age. It is amazing that Chopin composed the *etudes*, which are included among his greatest masterpieces and breaking a new ground in the piano style, being so young. For the first time *etude*, while pursuing its educational purpose, became a fascinating work of art. Because of their unusually dramatic character, attempts were made to entitle as many as three of his *etudes* "revolutionary." Beside the most famous one, in C minor from *Opus 10*, the two last ones: in A minor and C minor from *Opus 25*, were called "revolutionary," too; for other contents or images were being invented.

On his way from Vienna to Paris, Chopin stopped over in Munich and Stuttgart. In the latter place, in September 1831, he learnt from newspapers that following a fierce struggle, Warsaw had fallen to the Russians and the November Insurrection in Poland had collapsed. One can hear his despair in the *Revolutionary Etude in C minor, Opus 10, No. 12* composed then in Stuttgart. This *etude*, however, expresses solely his frame of mind, not any incident, let alone story.

Maybe it was when he was very much worried about the fate of his close friends and relatives during the insurrection that he composed the *etude in C minor closing Opus 25*, and wrote a letter upon returning from a reception, "In a salon, I pretend to be cool-headed, but when I return home, I bang the keys of my piano." Chopin reportedly confided that upon composing the *etude in A minor*, which he included as No. 11 in *Opus 25*, during a sleepless night it occurred to him that he might add a four-bar prelude to precede a passionate fortissimo. Still, even this episode indicates that Chopin arranged a purely musical plot or, perhaps, a psychological drama but without any pictorial associations.

The Drama

His four ballads best illustrate that. He let slip some words once that he had been inspired by the Adam Mickiewicz's ballads, and next, second- and third-hand information spread that he had been induced by Mickiewicz's *Switez, Switezianka* and *Konrad Wallenrod*.

Chopin's ballads are indeed narrative in character, but the progress of the drama of the tone or the changes in the atmosphere of the second, third and first ballads do not correspond with the progress of events in Mickiewicz's works. In the ballads and the finale of the sonata in B minor Chopin very ingeniously transforms one and the same tune. When the same tune recurs for the second or third time, its character is sometimes changed completely. Now it is quiet and lyrical, then it is rough and full of drama; once it is veiled thinly, some other time it shines with virtuosity.

Liszt and Wagner, and then other Romantics, took over his methods of modifying the motif and made them their rule. With them, the motif or theme and its metamorphoses signifies the hero and his changing frame of mind, spiritual metamorphoses and new situations in which he has found himself. Chopin does not employ any literary scenario; no title of his suggests that. In his ballads or scherzos he produces as if adventures of pure feeling, pure states of mind, cut off from any definite person or events. And even if he does compose under the influence of his personal memories, history lessons at school, Poland's heroic past, the Carthusian monastery at

Valdemosa and bad weather in Majorca, the reading of a poem by Heine or Mickiewicz, even if he lets us suppose that his music tells us something, usually the relevant thread is thoroughly transformed and unrecognizable. Chopin creates a theatre where the only heroes are the tunes and harmonies in the setting of a manifold movement and volume of tones, their interesting structures, rhythmic overstatements and melismas. He displays the charm of mystery. Of four of his impromptus, the character and form of the one composed in F sharp Major differs from the others. The narrative progress of the phrase, and the reflective mood, make it close to the ballad. Certain sections create an illusion of a dialogue rather than of a contrast of themes. They leave an impression not of developing musical ideas, but of their arranging according to some mysterious logic.

More distinct are incidents and raptures; personal and artistic experiences, which left their trace primarily on his youthful works although they recall themselves in the later ones as well.

Chopin frequently visited music shops in Warsaw, particularly Brzezina's where he was eagerly drinking in all the novelties that were coming from abroad, the compositions by famous European pianists such as Hummel, Field, Moscheles, Weber, and where he was familiarizing himself with the popular brilliant style. He was enchanted by opera. He did not miss one performance. He rendered into piano the secrets of singing and singers, their fanciful embellishments of tunes, compared to strings of pearls, to lace, to ribbons or to fireworks, the beauty and seduction of bel canto. In Paris, he adored the god of Italian tune, Bellini. In some of Chopin's nocturnes one can feel the influence of the prayer of the Gallic priestess, Casta diva, from Bellini's Norma.

During every summer vacation in the countryside, Chopin drank in the singularities of Polish musical folklore, its coarse and hoarse archaisms, bourdons, old church scales, hollow quints, the Lydian fourth, the originality of metre and rhythm.

Warsaw

He was brought up in Warsaw, together with boys from wealthy families who lived in the boarding house run by his mother. His French father, Nicholas Chopin, an educated son of a Vosges farmer, a vineyard owner, arrived in Poland to avoid draft into Napoleon's army. He was a tutor to aristocratic families, and then he became a French teacher at the Warsaw Lyceum attended by his son Frederic.

Frederic's mother, Justyna Krzyzanowska, ran the house of Countess Ludwika Skarbek at Zelazowa Wola near Warsaw. The mother was the countess's distant cousin, an orphan coming from an impoverished family. Nicholas Chopin had been the tutor of the countess' daughters and son Fryderyk. For four years Nicholas Chopin and Justyna Krzyzanowska had been sharing the table, and finally they got married. Then they moved to Warsaw.

Frederic Chopin's youth consisted of the study of composition with Joseph Elsner, director of the Conservatory of Music, whom he loved as father, of fast progress in playing piano,

of private soirées in Warsaw, of concerts in elegant salons and of vacations in the country estates of his rich friends.

From his childhood he had been accustomed to wonder and admiration. At eight he made his first public appearance after which his name was a talk of the town.

Warsaw salons began to struggle for him and consequently, he performed in the palaces of Warsaw aristocrats. Among stuccoes and crystal chandeliers, the brilliant style rippled under his fingers. That style involved a maximum of tones in a minimum of time. It was the fashion of the period, but Chopin gave it a very intimate poetry of tone. Inasmuch as his rondos, his variations on a theme from Don Juan

harbinger an awakening of a personality, his Grande Polonaise Brilliant, Grande Valse Brilliant, Piano Concerto No. 2 in F minor and Piano Concerto No. 1 in E minor were the compositions in which the young genius found his very own language.

That slender, hardly medium-sized youth, initially shy, was later to fill the atmosphere of the salons with endless jokes. He saw the world as comedy; he roused up Warsaw tea parties and balls. Guests screamed with joy when he was demonstrating his "Punches," as he called parodies of well-known figures. He aped the countenance and gestures of an English teacher or put on a red wig and posed as an evangelical pastor. He did not like sentimentality and called high-strung young ladies "Romantic little bottoms." Wined and dined at friends', he vamped waltzes, mazurkas, ecossaises, he even played dances for them. He wrote letters sparkling with wit and drew cartoons. Vacationing in Szafarnia, when he was fourteen, he edited Kurier Szafarski [Szafarnia Daily], a parody of Kurier Warszawski [Warsaw Daily]. To the news of the imposition of censorship on press and books, he responded with some lines in his Kurier Szafarski:

"Prosze bardzo cenzora nie krepowac mi ozora." (Please, Mr Censor, don't tie up my tongue.)

History lessons left Chopin with a vision of Poland's mighty past, when she was a "safeguard of Christianity" in the east, defeating the Turks and Tartars, the armies of Russians, Swedes and Teutonic Knights. Of the great times of King John Sobieski III, when he with his army saved Vienna from a Turkish invasion and when the charge of the Polish hussars decided the future of Christendom. The death of Prince Józef Poniatowski during the Battle of Leipzig, when Poles were covering Napoleon's retreat, was a fresh memory. Reflections on Poland's fate and patriotism can be heard in Chopin's later heroic polonaises and some etudes. His nostalgia for Poland recurs in some of his mazurkas written in Majorca and Nohant.

Almost never did he quote folk tunes. In mazurkas he romanced and made them up so realistically that they seemed to be a sound document of the Polish countryside, both that of the nobility and of the peasants.

The country air was good for him: he played at the village weddings with local musicians, played Jewish religious songs, chased peasant girls, hunted partridges and hares, picked up mushrooms and wild strawberries, rode on horseback and had a good time. In a letter, he reported to a friend, "The horse goes where it wants, and I, like a monkey on a bear's back, sit on its back terrified." On another occasion he wrote, "My Most Beloved Parents

and You, Dear Sisters, my health serves me right, as if it were a trained dog."

His sense of observation registered details of a village wedding and harvest festival. Chopin watched the village make merry, with the help of vodka in particular. He remembered

Jewish innkeepers and a squabble among peasant girls, a country mazurka and oberek folk dance. He had also familiarized himself with the melancholy of another folk dance, kujawiak. Then, he adapted all those dances to his Mazurkas. At the balls in the manor house, until the break of dawn, he danced the noblemen's mazurka: fiery, too, but more elegant. Mazurkas were a memory of summer vacations.

He went to Berlin. He visited the musical amateur, cellist and composer, Prince Antoni Radziwill in his summer residence in Antonin near Poznan. Chopin wrote works for him, visited Antonin twice, gave lessons to the Prince's younger daughter, Wanda, and admired her beauty. Eliza, the older daughter, had drawn his portraits. He was sixteen when he went with his mother and sisters Louise and Emilka to Silesia, to undergo treatment in the spa of Duszniki, called Bad Reinerz at the time. Later he went through the death of his younger sister, Emilka, and for the first time heard the ominous word "tuberculosis."

As a reward for completing his study at the conservatory, Chopin's father sent him

off to Vienna. His two concerts in the theatre in the Carinthia Gate, the Kaertnerthortheater, and especially variations on a theme from Don Giovanni by Mozart, were an indisputable success. He was called many times even though at the beginning he had suffered from stage fright and drunk water with sugar to gather new strength. Still, he did not miss the chance to flirt with a young, plump pianist Leopoldina Blahetka.

His routes took him also to Kalisz and Breslau, Poznan and Cracow, Prague and Dresden, Thorn and Danzig.

His last Polish holidays started in Poturzyn, the estate of his closest friend, Tytus Woyciechowski. He interrupted them to hear the opera debut of the talented singer Constantia Gladkowska, whose blue eyes and blond hair he noticed earlier, at a concert of Conservatory students. She was eighteen at the time. Her father was the burgrave of Warsaw's royal castle. Her singing-master was Carlo Soliva, an Italian. She must have read in Kurier Warszawski, "Works by Mr. Chopin indisputably bear the stamp of a great genius."

Maybe she heard that director Elsner wrote "a musical genius" by his name in the class register. After months of silent adoration, Chopin made friends with her and even accompanied her for her singing. They kept their love secret as the unsettled young man, even extremely talented, could not rival rich candidates for a husband dreamt of by her mother.

To Constantia the aristocratic salons, where throngs of flirts surrounded Chopin, were not accessible. She was, however, courted by Russian officers of a certain social standing, aides-de-camp to the Tsar's brother Grand Duke Konstanty who ruled Poland. They were coming to the Conservatory to sing duets with her. Chopin and Constantia tormented each other with jealousy and experienced moments of despair, going through ups and downs of their love.

His parents and friends advised that Chopin should go to a great European metropolis, although they were not sure which one would serve better his exceptional talent to develop and to show itself.

Constantia took part in his parting concert in the National Theatre. She sang "Oh, quante lacrime per te versai" [Oh, how many tears I have wept because of you] from Rossini's La donna del lago [based on Sir Walter Scott's poem "The Lady of the Lake"]. She was wearing a white dress and had a rose in her hair.

Chopin composed the last bars of his Piano Concerto in E minor at Zelazowa Wola where he was born. There also, with his parents and two sisters, Louise and Izabela, he spent the final days of his last Polish summer holidays. He composed a few nocturnes as well. In their melody and embellishments one hears not just the enchantment with the opera bel canto. One hears in them the power of the individuality that transformed that Italian style.

With Chopin, a fluent movement of an arabesque is much more than merely an elegant ornament or a masterly passage. It has its own color and character and has the attributes of a fleeting tune of an exceptional originality. Even a rapid turn added to a longer tone is not a mere melisma or means to show off one's virtuosity, but it yields a higher quality and fulfils a definite task. In nocturnes it emphasizes a given tune's power of expression, the climax of the musical plan or a turn in the dramaturgy of the musical composition. That was exactly the aim of the extraordinary art of ornamentation Monteverdi had shown in his operas, before it became calculated for a pure virtuoso effect.

When on All Souls' Day in 1830 Chopin got into a coach, on his heart he was wearing a ribbon and on his finger - a ring from Constantia. (Two years later his sweetheart married one named Józef Grabowski, a landowner.) Six days after Chopin's arrival at Vienna, the November Insurrection broke in Poland.

Artistic plans and the outbreak of the insurrection divided his life. He spent his early

years in Warsaw, the later ones in Paris. In Vienna he spent half a year, then he decided to leave for Paris. The defeat of the insurgents and the Russian repression cut off his return home. He was twenty when he left Warsaw to which he was never to come back, and he was thirty-nine when dying in Paris.

Paris

With his sharp wit and genius with improvisation he quickly conquered the salons of Paris. He found himself among the artistic elite. His life was filled with soirees and lessons he taught to aristocratic lady-pianists for extravagant fees. He made friends with Liszt, with Mendelssohn who called him Chopinetto, with Meyerbeer, with Halevy and with Heine. He met Mickiewicz who unsuccessfully tried to get him to compose a Polish national opera.

He spent summers in Le Coteau in Touraine and in Enghien near Paris - as recommended by his doctors. Enghien was the place where Delfina Potocka, a beautiful Polish aristocrat and a dear friend of Chopin, often spent her summer; nearby, in Saint Gratien, marquis

de Custine had his palace where Chopin paid him visits. Chopin also visited Niemcewicz, a distinguished representative of the Polish émigré circles, in neighboring Montmorency. He got into the coach to give a surprise to his parents and met them in Carlsbad. Then he

decided to meet Robert Schumann in Leipzig. Schumann's opinion of Chopin reads, "Hut ab meine Herren, ein Genie" [Hats off, gentlemen, here's a genius].

He drove nine days from Paris to Marienbad to see Maria Wodzińska, his friend's sister. It was the happiest month in his life. When visitors learnt that Chopin was staying there, they

tried to make friends with the Pole whose fame spread there from Paris. Their efforts were futile, however. Chopin was preoccupied with Maria Wodzinska, chaperoned by her kindly mother. He played for Maria in the salon. Most willingly he played the two first etudes in A flat and F minor from Opus 25, the latter believed to be Maria's musical depiction. She called him carissimo maestro and painted a portrait of his in watercolor. They could talk for hours; they walked at quiet moonlight nights, exchanged tender looks, but Chopin proposed to her only later, in Dresden where they went together. Yet, her father firmly opposed their marriage, arguing that her family name predisposed her to live in a palace, something Chopin could not ensure for her. After the break-up of his relationship to Maria Wodzinska, that piano genius tied a bunch of letters from her with a ribbon and wrote "My misery" on top of it.

In the salons of Paris he continued to receive tributes and felt he was treated like an idol. One evening a lady distinguishable by her eccentric dress handed him a note reading On vous adore, i.e. "You are adored." This is how George Sand entered into friendly relationship with him. As a result, they spent holidays together, first in Majorca, and for the next seven years in her country house at Nohant. The lovers usually came to Nohant in May and stayed there until October. At Nohant Chopin composed a lot of his music. Far from lessons and salons, in the room upstairs he found peace allowing him to write. In the last three years of his life, where he no longer stayed there, he wrote almost nothing. At Nohant George Sand wrote her novels, candied fruits and confided, "In Paris, I gain in weight but lose in soul." When he left Nohant, he parted with his muse.

In the atmosphere of her country house, in the mild climate of central France, with the Indre River at hand, among her Paris friends who were regular visitors there, they spent their time on hunting, fishing, walking, driving a carriage, riding on horseback or donkey. When the donkey carrying Chopin did not want to go any

farther, George prodded the beast in its rump with her umbrella. Liszt, Eugene Delacroix, Pauline Viardot, Pierre Leroux, a founder of a new social theory, and Wojciech Grzymala, another Polish émigré, were often invited to stay. In the long rainy periods Chopin was composing. Sometimes he remained home alone, when the household and visitors went for an excursion. Here he wrote or polished up Sonata in B Flat minor and also in B minor, Fantaisie in F minor, Scherzo in C sharp minor and Scherzo in E Major, Ballad in A Flat Major and Ballad in F minor, Polonaises in F sharp minor, in A flat major and Polonaise-Fantaisie. Here he composed mazurkas Opus 56, nocturnes in C minor and F sharp minor Opus 48, and nocturnes Opus 55, the prelude in C sharp minor Opus 45, and Allegro de Concert.

The puppet theatre founded by George Sand became known in the neighborhood. The famous writer's puppets parodied many people from her environment, including servants. Alongside billiards, that theatre was her hobby. She herself made dresses for those improvised comedies and dramas. She devoted several pages of her memories to them:

"Everything started with a pantomime, which was Chopin's idea. He improvised on piano while the youth performed various scenes with comic dances. We had also designed costumes, which we then used for different roles. Chopin for his part, as soon as he saw the performing actor, very skillfully adjusted both the content as well as the form of his music to that actor's role."

Perhaps it was in such circumstances that Chopin composed at Nohant his tarantella about which he wrote to his friend Julian Fontana, "I hope I will not write anything worse any time soon."

Coddled, cared for and tended to in his frequent indispositions, the composer nevertheless could bear holidays at Nohant with increasing difficulty. He suffered from insomnia and grew increasingly irritable. The atmosphere became tense, spoiling their old idyll. As George Sand's children grew older, the mutual animosity between Chopin and her son Maurice and the reciprocated fondness for her plump daughter, Solange, known as Koko, attributed to that decay.

Epilogue

Last time Chopin visited Nohant in 1846. After they broke up, George Sand destroyed everything that had made up the decoration of his room, even the wallpaper. She defended her behavior saying she was afraid of TB germs. Pride prevented Chopin from resuming the broken-off relationship although the two met in Paris and George held out the olive branch to him. Upon their break-up he left for England and Scotland for several months (he was in London before, in 1837). He went there at the invitation of his adoring Scottish pupils, Miss Stirling, about whom he wrote in a letter to his

family, "They will choke me for the love of me, and I, as an act of politeness, will not refuse that to them." He returned a sick man. His death came on 17 October 1849. He was buried at Pere-Lachaise cemetery, but Chopin's heart was removed from the chest. His sister Louise smuggled the jar containing the heart in alcohol across the border of the Russian empire to Warsaw hiding it under her dress. Many years later, the heart of the genius was built into the wall of the Holy Cross Church in Warsaw. Should the present-day Chopin-playing pianists restrain their enchantment with the wealth of his sonorities and the immense scale of moods? With an unprecedented accumulation of details, origins and genetic ties of his music? With the opera-like tune? Chopin's works include all sorts of rubatos, this music-reading with a rhythmic irresolution dictated by feeling, but everything against a background of rigorously rhythmic accompaniment. One can hear all kinds of rubatos Italian singers had

devised and been polishing for the last three hundred years. Chopin's strong nationalist feeling emanates from his polonaises, mazurkas, some of the etudes, maybe even from the bitterness of his scherzos, and from the narrative character of his ballads.

His compositions epitomize Polish national spirit and also show some of French elegance and refinement, sometimes some French irony as well. In waltzes they preserve the atmosphere of the salons of Warsaw and Paris. His youthful rondos, variations, polonaises and concertos represent the brilliant style. They exemplify harmonies heralding Wagner, ideas announcing the autonomy of tone color in contemporary music, experiments from the worlds of acoustics and psychology of hearing (the beginning of the nocturne in C sharp minor Opus 27, No. 1, everything sealed by Chopin's unique personality. That personality which, nevertheless, neither stops nor forbids revealing its involved genesis and character.

About an Author

***Janusz Ekiert**, an acclaimed musicologist, is a graduate of the Krakow's Academy of Music and the Warsaw University in Poland. He became popular as an author and a host of such TV programs as "Penetrations", "Sentimental Traces" and "The History of the International Chopin Piano Competition". For many years he served as a chief expert at the National Public TV Quiz on classical music and in many radio programs; he has written a number of articles and essays and published books on classical music, such as "Landmarks with a Fetish," "A Ticket to Paradise," "A Mirror of an Époque" and "Closer Encounters with Music." Mr. Ekiert has cooperated with such international magazines as "Het Parool" in Netherlands, "Hufvudstadsbatdet" in Finland, "Die Presse" in Austria, "Telegram" and "Start" in Yugoslavia, and contributed to the German Music Encyclopedia "Die Music in Geschichte und Gegenwart." Janusz Ekiert has toured Europe with lectures for the conventions on musicology in Helsinki, Florence, Rome and Barcelona. Served as a juror in many international music competitions and festivals around the world. Mr. Ekiert has been interviewed by James Mitchener for PBC, and was invited by the U.S. Department of State to visit major music centers, including Washington, DC; Philadelphia, Baltimore, New York, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles. Presently, Mr. Ekiert works on various projects in Poland and abroad as an expert consultant, writer and jurors.*