

THE INTERNET REVIVAL
OF
JULIAN (JULES) FONTANA
BY
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The music is playing. The category for Final Jeopardy is "Romantic Era Composers." The answer is "Born in Poland in 1810, died in Paris, taught piano, composed music and performed in major concert halls of Paris. "You quickly write your response in the form of a question "Who is Chopin?". But your dreams of fame and fortune are shattered when the host says "Who is Julian Fontana?" You say to yourself - "Who is Julian Fontana? I'm a Romantic Era musical fanatic but I have never heard of him."

You are not alone. For the past eight years I have traveled in North and South America and Europe asking pianists, musicians, musicologists and orchestra directors if they are familiar with Julian Fontana and his musical accomplishments. I received but a single weak affirmative response. But why should anyone care about a relatively obscure Polish musician with a non-Polish sounding name?

Since childhood I have heard the name Julian (Jules) Fontana mentioned as a distant ancestor. I knew that my grandmother's maiden name was Marie Fontana and that somehow or other there was some kind of connection between a Jules Fontana and Frederick Chopin. But no one ever provided any answers. I knew that my grandmother gave a collection of Fontana's papers and documents to an aunt of mine who lived in Staten Island, New York. After a number of years my uncle grew tired of having these items clutter up the attic and he threw them in the garbage. A few documents survived which my mother and my aunt decided, with my encouragement, to put up for auction by Sotheby's in 1983. One of the documents sold was a letter dated October 15, 1853 from Justine Chopin, Frederick Chopin's mother, to Julian Fontana authorizing him to take charge of Chopin's unpublished manuscripts. The letter gave Fontana exclusive authorization for editing and publishing them. This task, upon which Fontana worked for many years without compensation and as a labor of love was completed with the publication of *Oeuvres Posthumes de Fred. Chopin* in 1855 and a collection of *Chopin's Songs* published in 1859. This effort resulted in the first publication of one impromptu, eight mazurkas, five waltzes, three polonaises, one nocturne, one funeral march, three ecossaises, a rondo for two pianos and seventeen vocal songs. We know and enjoy these today as Chopin's ops. 66 - 74.

So how is it that an obscure musician such as Julian Fontana was chosen to perform such an important undertaking while so many gifted musical talents of that era were not? Surely Fontana must have had some special knowledge or talent to be chosen for such an awesome undertaking.

Let me take you back about eight years to the day when a box arrived at my home from a cousin, who is the daughter of my aunt in Staten Island. The box included a few old family items. An item of special interest to me was a brochure published by the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America (PIASA) entitled *Early XIX Century American-Polish Music*. The brochure was issued in connection with a concert given at Hunter College in New York City on May 8th, 1960. The concert included original compositions by Julian Fontana and others, performed by pianist Jan Gorbaty. Included in the brochure was a brief biography of Julian Fontana describing his very close relationship with the immortal Chopin. It stated that both Chopin and Fontana were born in Warsaw in 1810 and that they were boyhood friends. They both attended the Warsaw Conservatory of Music and studied under Joseph Elsner. Further descriptions included how Fontana and Chopin met later in life in Paris where Fontana became Chopin's assistant, copying his music and transcribing his improvisations. Because of Chopin's poor health Fontana also managed his accounts, arranged concerts, worked out details with publishers and took care of myriad details of life for the famous composer. A high point was Chopin's dedication of his A-Major and C-Minor Polonaises (op. 40) to his faithful friend.

In addition to details of Fontana's life, the brochure included a listing of Fontana's own musical compositions. This inspired me to try to obtain some recordings of the music of my great-great-grandfather. Surely he must have been a superb musician and composer worthy of being in close company with the great Chopin. I searched all music stores to no avail. A search of internet music sites was also fruitless. No matter where I looked the result was always the same – nothing.

My quest then turned to the worldwide Internet for books or other information about Chopin and Fontana. There certainly was no shortage of Chopin information but nothing about Fontana except some occasional mention as a friend and copyist of Chopin. A letter from the noted Chopin scholar Prof. Jeffrey Kallberg of the Univ. of Chicago to my aunt in 1983 was also among the items I received from my cousin. It analyzed the Chopin documents in great detail and led me to search for him on the Internet. I was immediately successful and located him at the University of Pennsylvania. He made some valuable suggestions which led me to Teresa Czerwinska at the Chopin Society in Warsaw, Poland. She was somewhat familiar with Fontana and was very interested in any information that I had concerning him. Unfortunately I had very little but I did provide what I had including photographs that I had taken of Fontana's tomb in the Montmartre Cemetery in Paris. Ms. Czerwinska advised me that Prof. Jan Ekier of the Chopin Society had recently completed writing a

lengthy treatise detailing the life of Fontana, his connections with Chopin, his music and Fontana's musical contributions to the Chopin legacy. This was published in *Chopin Studies # 7* by the Chopin Society in the year 2000. I obtained a copy which turned out to be a treasury of information.

My sister, who lives in New York City, visited the office of PIASA and was able to contact the widow of author Alexander Janta. Janta had written the biographical material in the 1960 Hunter College concert brochure. Mrs. Janta provided my sister with a copy of *A History of Nineteenth Century American Polish Music* written by her husband and published by The Kosciuszko Foundation, New York City in 1982. More pieces of the puzzle were beginning to fall in place.

My major quest now became to find copies of Fontana's original compositions. A couple of short pieces were found in the references above.

My next break came when my sister did a computer search one day and found a person in California with a copy of Fontana's op. 8 *Douze Reveries au Piano*. I was able to obtain a copy, not the original, but this was still another big step. An Internet search of The Library of Congress turned up op. 19 *Rhapsodie a la Polka* which was published in New York City in 1849.

Trips to Europe and South America turned up nothing. I went to antiquarian book and music stores, conservatories, libraries, and antique markets in Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Düsseldorf, Brussels and various towns in France and Belgium without success. I decided that this was a very inefficient way to search for Fontana's music. I focused even more on the Internet.

Ebay searches became a daily event. Although I obtained a few pieces by Chopin and other well known composers, Fontana's compositions still eluded me. Finally by chance I found an antiquarian music website in Germany which had an original copy of the Chopin's op. 66 *Fantasie Impromptu* which was published by Fontana in 1855 as part of the *Oeuvres Posthumes*. I pounced on this and even though it was sent via airmail it took over 30 days to arrive due to the Christmas crunch and tightened security with overseas mail. When it arrived I was ecstatic. The hunt was on for more when events took an unexpected turn.

Searching the Internet one day I was taken to the website for Hyperion Records and to an album of piano music by the American composer Louis Moreau Gottschalk. The sleeve notes to an album by pianist Philip Martin included descriptions of two pieces written by Gottschalk and dedicated to Fontana. They were ops. 35 and 36. How strange. What connection could there be between Gottschalk and Fontana?

To be truthful, I had only vague recollections of having ever heard anything by Gottschalk so I went to a Gottschalk website to learn about him.

From there I learned of a book entitled *Bamboula* by S. Frederick Starr which I bought via the internet. It was a lengthy, detailed book about a truly amazing musician. In it I found the connection between the two composers. It seems that Nicolas Ruiz Espadero, who was to become a prominent Cuban composer, worked in a similar capacity for Gottschalk that Fontana was to Chopin. There was correspondence between Gottschalk and Fontana. The book also mentioned that Fontana had possibly met Espadero when he visited Cuba sometime in the mid to late 1840s. A relationship was established between Espadero, Gottschalk and Fontana which resulted in the two dedications.

Another link was established in the bibliography section of *Bamboula*. A reference to an article in *Revista de Musicologia*, Madrid, 1988 resulted in my procuring a copy of this document, again via the Internet, which contained the article *Julian Fontana: ¿1 Introdutor de Chopin en Cuba* by Prof. Cecilio Tiales, Cuban a musicologist and concert pianist residing in Spain. This article had many details of Fontana's years in Cuba and his eventual marriage to the daughter of wealthy French parents that had immigrated to Cuba. There was no music by Fontana but there was a great deal of biographical information of which I was previously unaware. There were descriptions of various concerts Fontana gave as well as his other musical endeavors.

Armed with all of this information that I had collected over the years I decided to go into the big time. I created my own website dedicated to Julian Fontana in March of 2004 (www.julianfontana.com). The website includes a biographical summary, all of Fontana's original music that I have to date, pictures of Fontana and his tomb in Paris, links to other related sites, cover pages of Fontana's publication of Chopin's posthumous works, a bibliography, and most of all a request for interested persons to contact me.

In the first eighteen months my website had over twelve hundred visitors. During this time I had two significant contacts. One was by a businessman who runs a music company in Warsaw, Poland. He was interested Polish composers and had never heard of Julian Fontana. His company produces compact discs and he is now hoping to produce the first one devoted exclusively to the music of Julian Fontana. Because I didn't have sufficient music he began to search for more during his travels all over Europe. He was successful in locating a copy of Fontana's op.10 *La Havanne, Fantasie des motifs Americains Espagnols pour le Piano* which is seventeen pages in length. He is continuing his search for Fontana compositions. Meanwhile I received an email from the director of the annual Chopin Festival in Valledemossa, Mallorca, Spain advising me that she had been searching the internet for information about Fontana and found my website. She is also the granddaughter of the founder of the Chopin-George Sand Museum of Valledemossa. This museum is located in the same convent that Chopin and George Sand lived in for a period of time in 1838. The museum contains several letters from Chopin to Fontana but as far as I know, no music by Fontana. There is a possibility that some Fontana compositions may be

performed in a future festival. I hope to attend the annual festival and visit the museum soon.

A short time later I purchased an antique album of music from England via Ebay which contained a secondary printing of Chopin's opus 70, *Trois Valses*, published by Fontana as part of *Oeuvres Posthumes* and printed in 1867. This was an unexpected find. I contacted Prof. Cecilio Tieleles and arranged a meeting with him the Fall of 2005 near Tarragona, Spain. He had copies of two additional Fontana original compositions which he provided to me. These were added to the website musical library. Prof. Tieleles made a trip to Cuba in August, prior to our meeting, to do more research about Fontana and the influence his music had on Cuban music of the middle 1800s. When I visited with Prof. Tieleles I finally had the opportunity to actually hear some of Fontana's music. The professor played excerpts from various Fontana compositions

Ebay was an unexpected source for some additional information. I bought some original editions by Louis Moreau Gottschalk. The seller is deeply involved with Gottschalk's music and has done a great deal of research about him. When he found out that I was interested in the two compositions Gottschalk dedicated to Fontana he sent copies of those compositions to me. He also sent the text of two letters written by Fontana to Gottschalk and Cuban composer Nicolas Ruiz Espadero in August of 1860.

Julian Fontana had many other talents outside of music. He was proficient in at least five languages, he had been a lawyer, a businessman, a military officer and an author. He translated Don Quixote from Spanish to Polish. He wrote a book on Polish orthography and a book on astronomy. The latter, *Astonomja Ludowa*, was published in Poland in 1869 shortly before his death. I have conducted many unsuccessful searches for an original edition of this book via the internet. Using the internet, I did however locate a copy in the Library of Congress. The Library provided me with a photocopy of the book which I transcribed to a compact disc. A copy was provided to the Chopin Society in Warsaw which expressed sincere gratitude and has added it to its library.

The weekend of November 4-6, 2005 was very productive. I located a copy of Fontana's *Ballade*, opus 17 in the Vassar College Music Library via the internet. I received a photocopy by mail. I also received an unexpected bonus as the original copy has a handwritten inscription and a signature of Julian Fontana. Additionally I received an email from a university student in Japan who was doing research for a dissertation about the Polish friends of Chopin. Julian Fontana is one of her focal points. She created a website (in Japanese) several years ago which has since been incorporated into another website. It contains a great deal of Fontana information, some of which might be repetitious. I did provide her with directions to Fontana's tomb in the *Cimetiere Montmartre de Paris* and requested that she try to get information about the

Fontana medal that is in the Polish Museum in Paris. She did not have a copy of *Astronomja Ludowa* so I sent her a CD copy along with copies of other references that she did not have. In exchange I received a photocopy of Fontana's *Caprice*, opus 1 which she had found in a library in Vienna. Additionally, she sent me an original copy of *Kilka Uwag Pisownia Polska* that Fontana published shortly before his death in 1869. At the time, this was the only original artifact I had from Fontana. Up until then everything I had was a reproduction. My internet colleague expects to complete her studies in 2007. I am grateful for her efforts and the help that she has given to me. I hope that my efforts in supporting her work will be equally useful

With the help of the Internet, I believe that a great deal of progress was made to revive the name and the music of Julian Fontana but there definitely was a long way to go. By the end of 2005 I had hoped to be able to report that all of his musical compositions would be on the website and that there would be definite plans to include Fontana's music in concerts here and abroad. Friday Musicale, a musical society in Jacksonville, Florida tried to schedule a concert for February 2006 to include a combination of works by Chopin and Fontana. Unfortunately this did not occur. The release of a compact disc of Fontana's music would be a major milestone which remains unfulfilled for a while.

Without a doubt I believe I can say that the year 2006 was a major period in the revival of Julian Fontana. Again the Internet proved to be a valuable tool. By means of a Google search, in March I located another descendant of Julian's wife Camila Dalcour and her first husband Stephen Cattley Tennant, who was killed in a train accident in 1848. Ros Chapman in Australia, an expert genealogist and the mother-in-law of the Fontana descendant, proved to be a most valuable contact in learning of the long history and many important facts about the Dalcour family. Since then Ros and I have worked closely to put many new pieces of the puzzle about the family history together.

It was not long after this that I decided the time had come to make a visit to Poland to see if I could learn more about Fontana and to make some personal contacts with the Chopin Society. Also it would be an opportunity to meet with the head of the music company and discuss the possibility of a Fontana CD. The trip was made in May 2006 and it proved to be most valuable. Not only did I see and experience the soul of Warsaw but I actually saw some of Fontana's original works. Original copies of his music, a signed copy of *Astronomja Ludowa*, and original hand-written proofs of Chopin's compositions made for music publishers. My meeting with the head of the music company was most fruitful and I got the impression that he was serious about producing recordings of Fontana compositions. But more music was needed and that was a major obstacle. Also there were no pianists familiar with Fontana's music. He would have to find a pianist who was willing to undertake learning music about a virtually unknown composer.

After returning home I had another unexpected event. A distant cousin living in New Orleans located several original documents related to Julian Fontana including an original copy of his baptismal certificate from 1833, a copy of a baptismal certificate for his son Jules, a college diploma, and a history of important events in the Fontana family history. The latter showed that the Fontanas immigrated to Poland from Italy in the 16th century. They were descendants of Domenico Fontana, one of the Vatican architects, and had been invited by the King of Poland to design royal palaces and churches. A short while later while looking through my items I collected on the trip to Poland. I discovered that I had a concert program given to me by the Chopin Society which included a concert by a Polish pianist who performed music by Fontana. This was a real find as once again I was able to trace this pianist via the Internet Lodz and Warsaw and then to New York City. After several telephone conversations I arranged a visit to New York City to meet with him. He generously gave of his time to discuss Fontana and to play many of his compositions for my sister and I. As a result I began to truly appreciate the music and I was more inspired than ever before because now I had a good feel for Fontana's musical talents and knowledge. My pianist friend provided me with information about some of Fontana's compositions that I did not have and I provided him with a copy of *Ballade* which I had found in the Vassar College Music Library. He was very interested in the Fontana documents I had and used them in furthering his own research.

In September I decided to make a visit to Paris where Fontana lived for many years before and after his association with Chopin. I spent a fruitful week in Paris. I had also arranged to meet with my Japanese colleague in Paris and we spent time together in the Paris Archive and visited the Cimetiere Pere Lachaise, where Chopin is buried. The visit to the archive proved very valuable. I found the death certificate for Fontana's wife and the birth certificate for his son. Unfortunately I did not have enough time to locate Fontana's death certificate. A visit to the Paris Conservatory eventually resulted in the location of five more Fontana scores which I did not have. Eventually I obtained photocopies of these. After I returned home I received information from Pere Lachaise giving the exact location of Camila's grave. It was unfortunate that I had not received this earlier. Months later I received pictures of the grave of Fontana's wife Camila which were taken by a member of the staff of the Polish Library in Paris.

In July 2006 I had been contacted via the Internet by a young Polish pianist named Hubert Rutkowski who was interested in the music of Fontana. He was interested in obtaining as many scores as possible because he wanted to enter a competition for a recording by the music company in Warsaw. We became very close correspondents and he obtained copies of all the Fontana scores, including those I located in Paris. He won the competition and the recording of Fontana's music was completed in March 2007. Release of the first CD will take place in June. Rutkowski was a student at the Hochschule Fur

Musik in Hamburg, Germany. In November 2006 he gave two concerts featuring music by Fontana. The in January 2007 he won a piano competition sponsored by the Hanover (Germany) Chopin Society. In addition he was invited back to give a concert of music by Fontana in 2008. Fontana's music was now definitely coming back to life.

While traveling in France one day I checked my email and found an advisory from a music company in Germany that had an item for sale that I had been searching for many years. It was an original copy of Fontana's *Oeuvres Posthumes de Fred. Chopin*, published by Schlesinger in 1855. I immediately ordered this rare and valuable volume of music which contains a major legacy of Fontana to the world of music. Once again the Internet proved its value as a source of real time information.

By the end of 2006 the website had over 3700 visitors. Several requests were made for information about Julian Fontana including one that intends to include him in a video game to be played on the web. The website has been invaluable to my research. I have established hyper links with many other classical music websites and related organizations.

The year 2010 year will be the 200th anniversary of the births of both Fontana and Chopin. Without a doubt there will be numerous worldwide tributes to Chopin. My goal is to see that the name of Julian Fontana will be remembered not as just a footnote in the life of Chopin but be recognized for his significant contributions to the musical legacy of the immortal Frederick Chopin. Should this come to pass then it can be said that the internet truly was instrumental in the revival of Julian Fontana.

Should anyone have any music or information about Julian Fontana, no matter how seemingly insignificant, please contact me at 1-904-7721608 or billrod1937@comcast.net