

Godefroy Engelmann after Pierre-Roche Vigneron
Portrait of Fryderyk Chopin, 1833
litograph on paper
Fryderyk Chopin Museum

Fryderyk Chopin

1810-1849

The Fryderyk Chopin Institute

Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Poland

Fryderyk Chopin was born in **Żelazowa Wola** on 1 March (or 22 February) **1810**, in an annexe of the manor house belonging to Count and Countess Skarbek, where his father, **Mikołaj** [Nicolas] Chopin was employed as governor to the Skarbeks' children.

The Birthplace of Fryderyk Chopin in Żelazowa Wola
current view, 2010
photo: Marcin Czechowicz
The Fryderyk Chopin Institute





Stanisław Lentz
Annexe of the manor house in Żelazowa Wola
Tygodnik Ilustrowany, 14 November 1891

Fryderyk was the second of four children born to Mikołaj (a Frenchman who moved to Poland as a young man) and **Tekla Justyna, née Krzyżanowska**. He had three sisters: Ludwika, Izabella and Emilia, who died in her teens. In 1810 the Chopin family moved to **Warsaw**, where Mikołaj obtained a position teaching French at the Warsaw Lyceum.



Alojzy Misierowicz after Napoleon Orda
Żelazowa Wola, 1882-1883
lithograph on paper
Fryderyk Chopin Museum

Fryderyk began regular piano lessons with Wojciech Żywny at the age of six, and he soon began composing as well. He made guest appearances in the salons of the Warsaw aristocracy, and his musical talent developed incredibly quickly. He was regarded as a **child prodigy** and compared to the little Mozart. In 1817 his first published work appeared: a Polonaise in G minor. At the age of twelve, Chopin began taking **composition lessons with Józef Elsner**.

Ambroży Mieroszewski
(reconstruction by Jadwiga Kunicka-Bogacka)
Portrait of Wojciech Żywny, 1969, original 1829
oil on canvas
Fryderyk Chopin Museum



Marcin Zaleski
View of Kazimierz Palace from Powiśle, before 1836
oil on canvas
National Museum in Warsaw





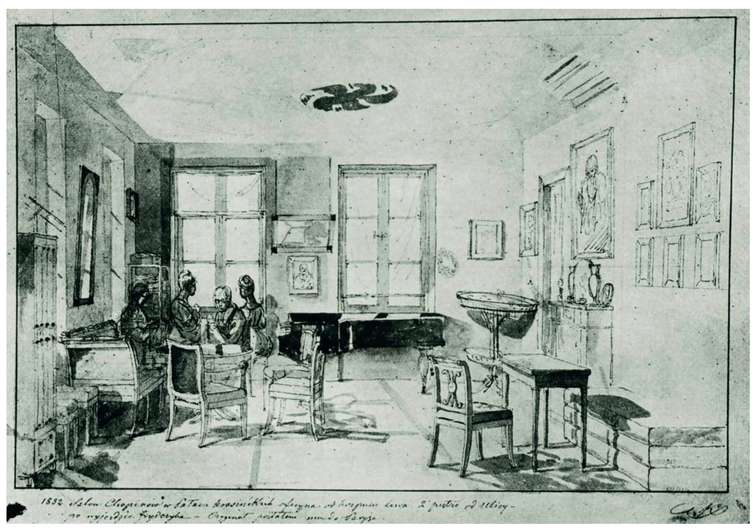
Ambroży Mieroszewski
Portrait of Justyna and Mikołaj (Nicolas) Chopin, n.d.
reproduction, original lost



Michał Stachowicz
***Dożynki* [Harvest festiwal]**, 1821
oil on canvas
National Museum in Warsaw



Artist unknown
Portrait of Józef Elsner, 1803-1805
oil on canvas
Fryderyk Chopin Museum



Antoni Kolberg
Chopin's salon in Warsaw, 1832
reproduction, original lost

Fryderyk gained an all-round education at the Warsaw Lyceum, which he attended from 1823. During that period, he regularly spent the summer holidays outside Warsaw, most often on estates belonging to the families of his schoolfriends in Mazovia, Wielkopolska, Pomerania and Silesia. Those travels allowed the teenage Chopin to acquaint himself with the **treasures of Polish culture and with traditional folk music**, which he would remember to the end of his days.

In 1826 he entered the **Main School of Music** attached to Warsaw University. He left three years later with a glowing reference: '**special ability, musical genius**'. At that time, his first serious compositions were written: the Sonata in C minor, Op. 4, *Fantasy on Polish Airs*, Op. 13 and his breakthrough work – the Variations in B flat major on 'Là ci darem la mano' from Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*, Op. 2.



Fryderyk Chopin
Variations in B flat major, Op. 2 on 'Là ci darem la mano'
from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*, 1827-1829
autograph manuscript of the solo piano part (fragment)
Fryderyk Chopin Museum

In 1829 Chopin travelled to **Vienna**, where he made himself known as a pianist and composer. His performances were greeted enthusiastically by Viennese audiences, and his variations on a theme from Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni* received an enthusiastic review from Robert Schumann, ending with the famous words: **'Hats off, gentleman: a genius'**. Soon after that success, within a short space of time, he composed his two piano concertos, in E minor, Op. 11 and in F minor, Op. 21, which are still in the core repertoire of outstanding pianists today. Genuine prospects for an international career had opened up before Chopin.



Buchholtz grand piano
Copy made by Paul McNulty, 2017
Warsaw (Buchholtz) / Divišov, Czech Republic (McNulty)
photo: Wojciech Grzędziński / The Fryderyk Chopin Institute


ZA POZWOLENIEM ZWIERZCHNOŚCI.

w Teatrze Narodowym

Dziś we ŚRODĘ dnia 17 Marca 1830

JPAN FRYDERYK CHOPIN

BĘDZIE MIAŁ ZASZCZYT DAĆ

KONCERT

Instrumentalny i Wokalny.

CZĘŚĆ PIERWSZA.

1mo. *UWERTURA Elsnera* z Opery *LESZEK BIAŁY.*
2do. *ALLEGRO* z *KONCERTU* F. minor, skomponowane i wykonane na Fortepianie przez JPana *Chopin.*
3tio. *DIVERTISSEMENT na Waltornie*, skomponowane i wykonane przez JPana *Gosrner.*
4to. *ADAGIO i RONDO* z Koncertu F. minor, skomponowane przez JPana *Chopin* i przez nieguż wykonane.

CZĘŚĆ DRUGA.

1mo. *UWERTURA Kurpińskiego*, z Opery *CECYLIA PIASECZYŃSKA.*
2do. *WARYACYE Paera*, śpiewane przez JPanią *Mejerowę.*
3tio. *POT - POURRI* z tematów polskich, kompozycyi JPana *Chopin* i przez nieguż wykonane.

CENA MIEJSC

Loża pierwszego piętra	Zł. 24 gr. 20.	Krzesło	Zł. 6 gr. 5.
Loża drugiego piętra	— 20 — 20.	Parter	— 5 — 5
Loża parterowa	— 18 — 20.	Galerya	— 3 — —
Loża trzeciego piętra	— 15 — 20.	Paradys	— 1 — 15.

ZACZNIE SIĘ O GODZINIE wpół do 8mej.

Bill of Fryderyk Chopin's first public concert
at the National Theatre in Warsaw, 17 March 1830
print on paper
Jagiellonian Library in Kraków



View of the Castle Square in Warsaw, 1829
Fryderyk Chopin's souvenir album photocopy
original lost (1939-1945)
Fryderyk Chopin Museum



Marcin Zaleski
***Wzięcie Arsenału* [Capture of the Arsenal]**, 1831
oil on canvas
National Museum in Warsaw

In 1830 Chopin planned to return to Vienna, counting on organising a tour of Italy. Before leaving, he played what proved to be two farewell concerts; **he would never return to Poland.**

After crossing the Austrian border, he learned of the outbreak in Poland of an uprising against imperial Russia. In the role of a political émigré, with no chance of organising serious concerts in Austria, in July 1831 he set off via Germany for Paris. In Stuttgart he learned of the **defeat of the November Uprising**, which triggered a nervous breakdown. His emotions were vented in dramatic compositions.



Artist unknown (Circle of Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller)
Portrait of Fryderyk Chopin, 1830-1831
pastel and gouache on parchment
Fryderyk Chopin Museum



Artist unknown
Portrait of Friedrich Wilhelm Kalkbrenner, 1st half of the 19th c.
lithograph on paper
Fryderyk Chopin Museum

Chopin's early months in **Paris** were rather difficult, but towards the end of February 1832, in the **concert hall of the piano maker Ignace Pleyel**, he displayed his talent to the cream of the musical world at that time, led by Ferenc Liszt and François-Joseph Fétis. One account read as follows: 'He slaughtered all the pianists here; the whole of Paris has gone crazy'.



Charles-Claude Bachelier
***Vue du Louvre et des Tuileries, prise du Pont-Neuf* [View of the Louvre and the Tuileries, taken from the Pont Neuf]**, *c.*1860
coloured lithograph on paper
Fryderyk Chopin Museum

He received numerous requests from bourgeois and aristocratic circles for piano lessons, which henceforth would represent, alongside the publication of his works, his main source of income. In 1833 his cycle of 12 Etudes, Op. 10 was published, and three years later the famous Ballade in G minor, Op. 23.



Fryderyk Chopin
Etude in F minor, Op. 10, No. 9 autograph manuscript, before 1833
Fryderyk Chopin Museum



John Robinson after Eugène Louis Lami
Interior of an Opera Box, 1845–1847
steel engraving on paper
Fryderyk Chopin Museum

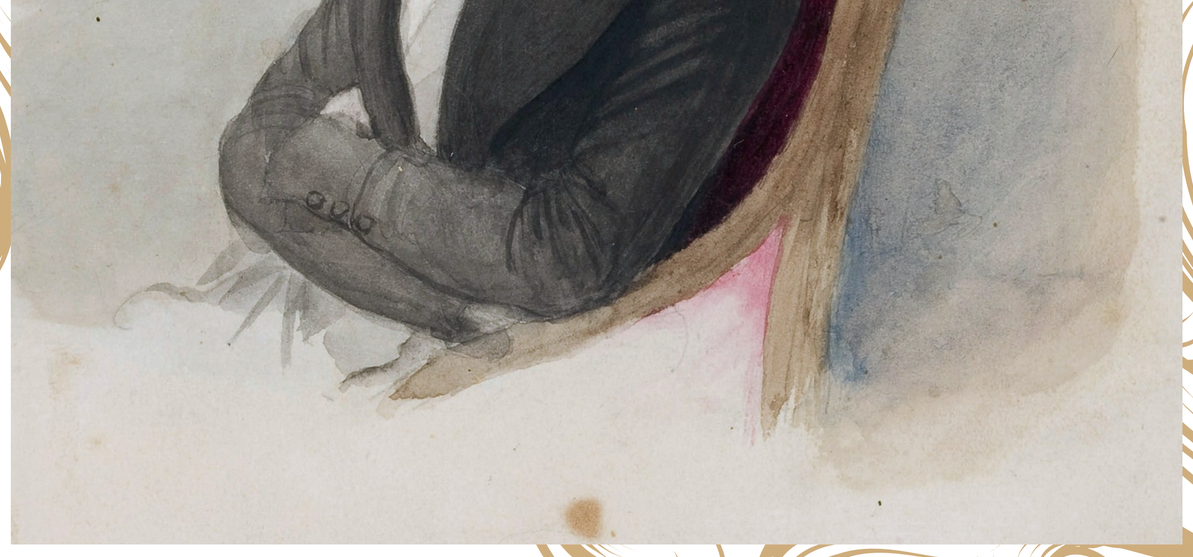


Louis Grégoire et Deneux after Nicolas-Eustache Maurin
Pianistes Célèbres (Jeune Ecole): Jacob (Jacques) Rosenhain, Edward Wolff, Theodor Döhler, Fryderyk Chopin, Adolf von Henselt, Ferenc Liszt, Alexander Dreyschock, Sigismund Thalberg, 1842
lithograph on paper
Fryderyk Chopin Museum

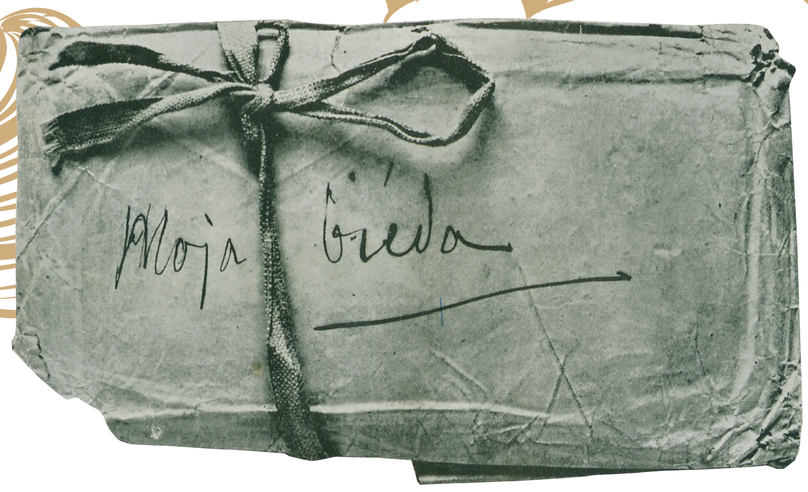


Fryderyk Chopin's pocket diary from 1834
with handwritten entries including the names of pupils and unidentified musical sketches
Fryderyk Chopin Museum

After his public success, Chopin enjoyed a lightning elevation into the **circle of the most outstanding artists** of the day. He became friends with Liszt, Berlioz, Hiller, Heine, Mickiewicz, Delacroix and many others. He frequented the most important salons of the French capital and with time was able to relinquish large public concerts in favour of playing in front of a group of friends. He made contact with the **Great Emigration of Poles** and became friendly with Prince Adam Czartoryski and Delfina Potocka.



Maria Wodzińska
Portrait of Fryderyk Chopin, 1836
watercolour on paper, album of Maria Wodzińska
National Museum in Warsaw



The envelope “Moja bieda” [My misery]
included letters from Maria Wodzińska and her family to Chopin
reproduction, original lost

At the time of his greatest successes in Paris, he sought to stabilise his personal life. In 1835 he grew closer to the Wodziński family, and his increasing fondness for the artistically gifted, piano-playing Maria Wodzińska gave rise to stronger feelings. In 1836, in Dresden, **Chopin and the seventeen-year-old Maria became engaged**. Ultimately, however, the marriage did not come about, and the circumstances surrounding the fiasco of his matrimonial plans remain unclear still today. Yet **Chopin met the French writer George Sand [Aurore Dudevant],** who was to change his life forever.



Maria Wodzińska
Self-portrait, n.d.
reproduction, original lost



Narcisse Edmond Joseph Desmadryl
after Auguste Charpentier
Portrait of George Sand, 1839
mezzotint
Fryderyk Chopin Museum



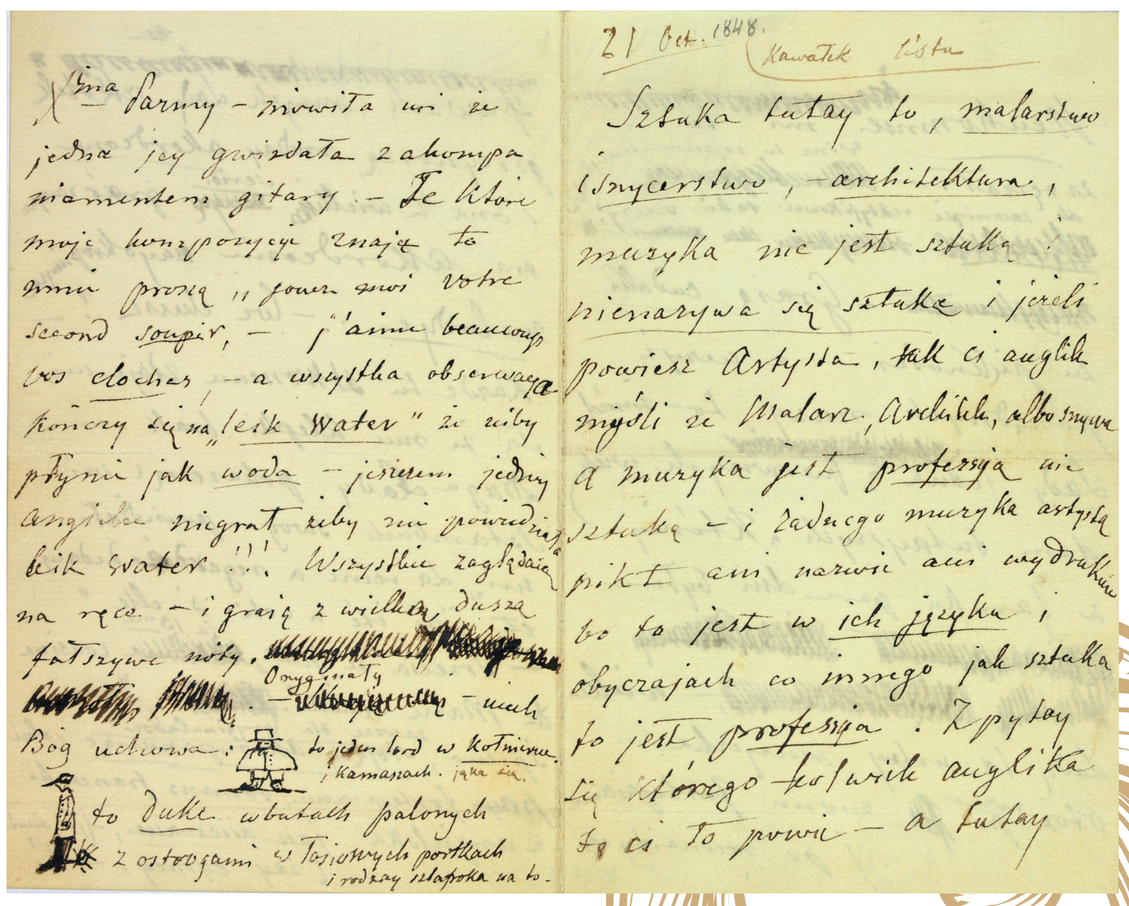
Eugène Delacroix (reconstruction by Ludwik Wawrynkiewicz)
Portrait of George Sand and Fryderyk Chopin,
1985-1989, original 1838
oil on canvas
Fryderyk Chopin Museum

George Sand, fascinated by Chopin and his music, succeeded in winning Fryderyk's heart, and his planned marriage to Maria Wodzińska was abandoned. The writer's fiery romance with Chopin soon turned into friendship, intimacy and attachment, and during the composer's health crises, Sand also took care of him. The liaison between Chopin and George Sand lasted almost till the last years of the composer's life, ending in 1847. The summer periods, which they **spent together on her Nohant estate**, were undoubtedly among the happiest moments in Chopin's life since he left his homeland. That was a time of stability in his life and of **intense creative work.** It was then that he wrote a number of his most outstanding works, such as the 24 Preludes, Op. 28, Sonata in B flat minor, Op. 35 and Polonaise in A flat major, Op. 53.



George Sand
***Chopin montant quatre à quatre l'escalier à Mme Marliani* [Chopin climbing the stairs to Mrs Marliani's four at a time]**, 1842-1844
quill drawing on paper
Fryderyk Chopin Museum

After splitting with George Sand, in 1848, the seriously ill Chopin gave his last concert in Paris, after which, at the urging of his Scottish pupil Jane Stirling, he embarked on a long concert tour of **Great Britain**. There, despite his physical weakness, he played in front of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert at Stafford House, and he also gave a concert in aid of Polish emigrants at the **Guildhall in London. That performance was his last ever public concert**, and the journey ultimately ruined his health.



Fryderyk Chopin
Letter to Wojciech Grzymała in Paris
Hamilton, 21 October 1848
Fryderyk Chopin Museum



Philipp Hermann Eichens
Portrait of Jane Stirling, 1842
lithograph on paper
Fryderyk Chopin Museum



Jiří Döbler
Edinburgh Castle from the Grassmarket
1st half of 19th c.
steel engraving on paper
Fryderyk Chopin Museum



Dried flowers from the death bed of Fryderyk Chopin, 1849
Fryderyk Chopin Museum

On returning to France, the composer spent the last months of his life under the care of his sister Ludwika, who had travelled from Warsaw to be with him. Surrounded by his nearest and dearest, **he died on 17 October 1849 at 2 a.m.** His body lies in Paris, but Ludwika secretly brought his **heart back to Poland**, in accordance with the composer's last wishes. At his funeral, Mozart's *Requiem* in D minor was performed.

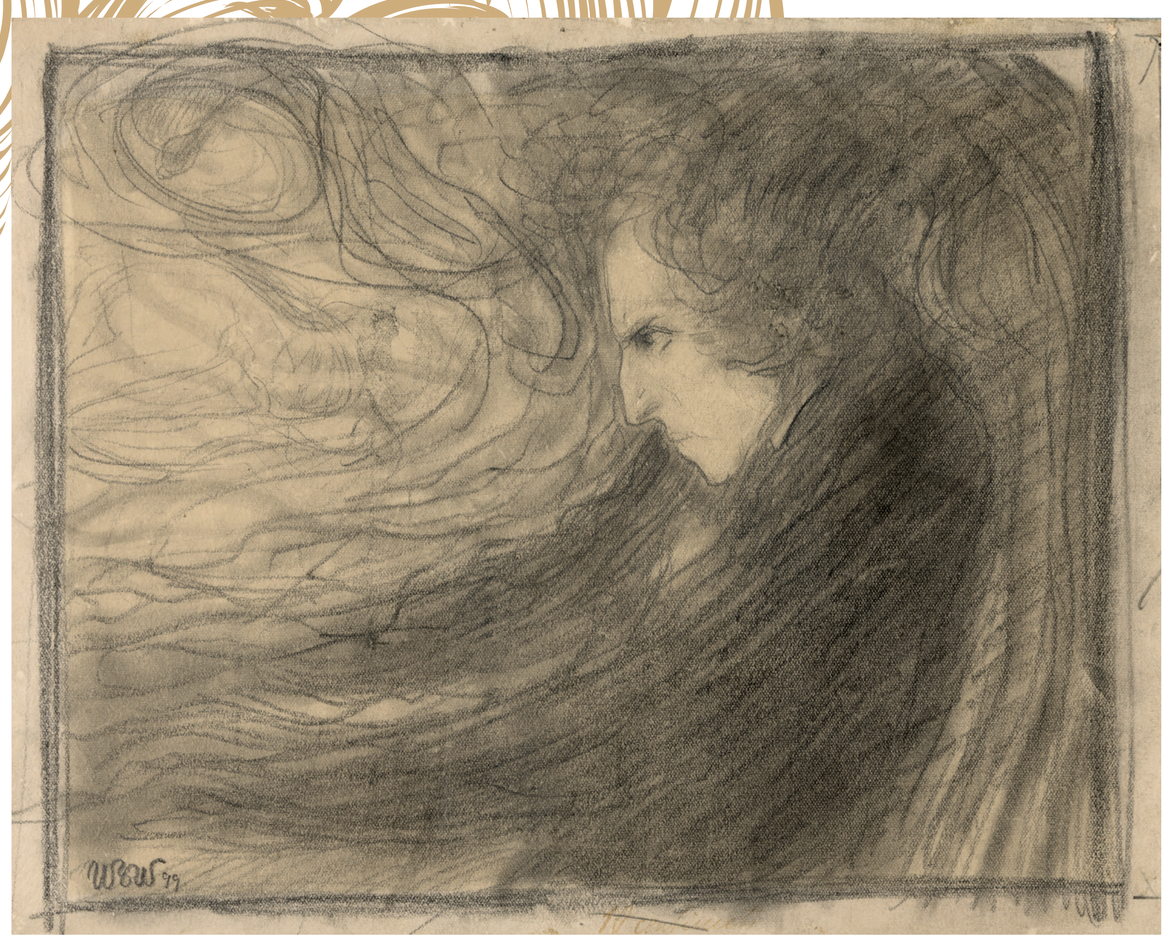


Jean-Baptiste Clésinger (cast by Tadeusz Łopieński)
Cast of the left hand of Fryderyk Chopin, 1968,
original 1849
bronze
Fryderyk Chopin Museum



Teofil Kwiatkowski
Fryderyk Chopin's last moments of life, 1849
oil on cardstock
Fryderyk Chopin Museum

'Mr Fr. Chopin, the famous pianist, died this morning from a chest illness, from which he had been suffering for a long time. Mr Chopin was aged just thirty-nine. It is a huge loss for the art of music, which he cultivated with the utmost devotion and of which he was one of the most prominent pillars.' (*Le National*, 1849)



Wojciech Weiss
Preparatory study for the painting *Chopin*, 1899
pencil drawing on paper
Fryderyk Chopin Museum

Fryderyk Chopin's oeuvre is focussed primarily on **piano music**. Compared to other composers of the day, he is distinguished by the unique way he treated the elements of the musical work (melody, harmony, rhythm, metre) and by his **original approach** to nineteenth-century musical genres. Chopin combined innovativeness with a continuation of the traditions of classicism and a universal attitude with an attachment to his native Polish culture. He initially turned to popular Classical and dance genres, such as the polonaise, mazurka, variations, rondo and concerto, with time concentrating on redefining existing genres (sonata, prelude, nocturne and scherzo) or establishing new genres, such as the ballade, fantasy and barcarolle.

The essence of Chopin's music was improvisation – often presented during musical soirées in salons in front of a small, intimate audience. His creative process was characterised by a similar spontaneity – Chopin composed at the piano, altering and polishing even published works many times over. Thanks to a **synthesis** between creative **invention**, allusion to **tradition** (a Classical sense of beauty, proportion, national elements) and **innovation** (shocking harmonies, bold confrontations of genres, new ways of shaping form), Chopin influenced the whole perception of piano music during the nineteenth century, and his inimitable style situated him among the most highly rated and **most recognisable composers of all time**. ■

ETUDES

‘His etudes for piano are masterpieces’
– Hector Berlioz

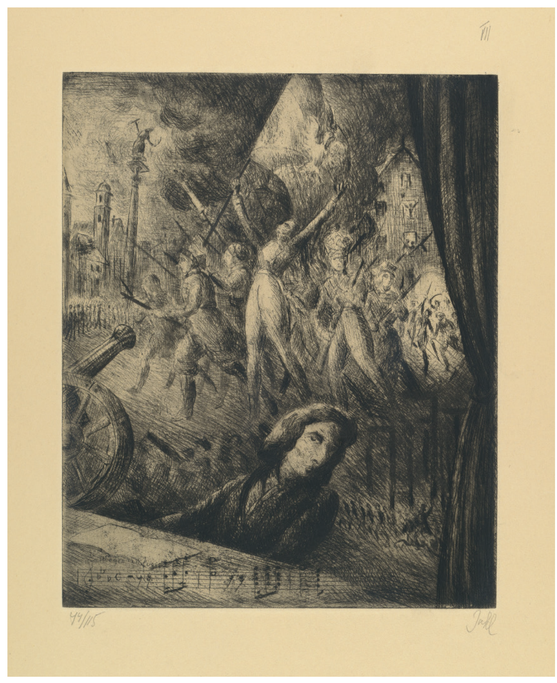
Chopin’s twenty-four Etudes contained in opuses 10 and 25, gathered into cohesively composed cycles of twelve pieces, and the *Trois nouvelles études* constitute a new chapter in our understanding of the genre. They impressed their stamp on the output of his contemporaries and of later composers.



Fryderyk Chopin
Etude in C sharp minor, Op. 10 No. 4
autograph manuscript, dated Paris,
6 August 1832
Fryderyk Chopin Museum

Before Chopin, the etude (usually called an ‘exercise’) served mainly to improve technical proficiency, although compositions of greater artistic value did occasionally appear. Chopin’s etudes went beyond the convention of the genre – its strictly practical, didactic function. As self-contained miniatures, each of Chopin’s etudes gained its own distinctive character. Common technical formulas such as scales, passages and figurations became means of musical expression. Each of the etudes was devoted on one hand to practising a specific technical problem and on the other bore a separate category of expression.

Chopin dedicated the 12 Etudes, Op. 10 to Ferenc Liszt, who was the first to perform them. Liszt confessed with regard to the Etude, Op. 10 No. 4: ‘I’d give up four years of my life to have composed this etude’.

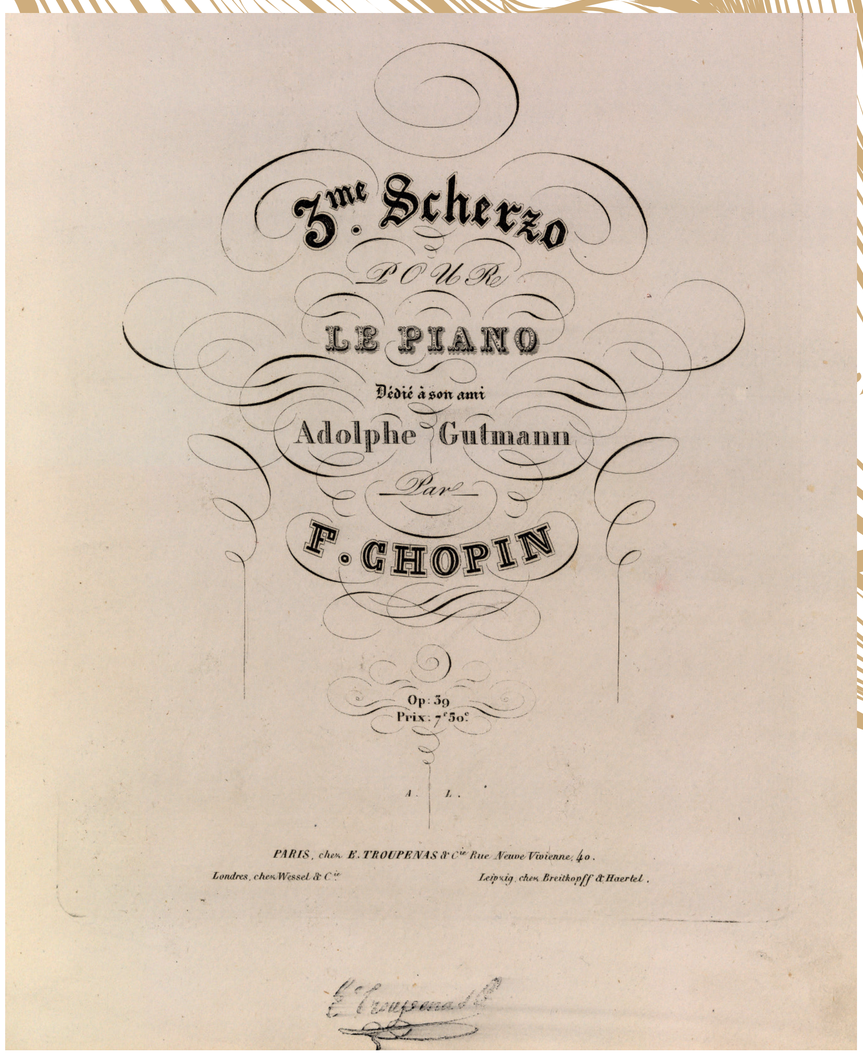


Władysław Jahl
Etude en do mineur, Op. 10 No 12
[Etude in C minor, Op. 10 No. 12], 1949
etching on paper
Fryderyk Chopin Museum

SCHERZOS

‘How should gravity array itself when jest is already darkly robed?’
– Robert Schumann

In the tradition of the genre, the scherzo, which in Italian means ‘joke’, altered in terms of form and function, although it retained its light and cheerful mood. Only in the output of Beethoven did it acquire expression full of restlessness. Chopin adopted that model, isolated the scherzo from the sonata cycle and turned it into an elaborate, independent work in one movement. Previously associated with lightness and humour, the genre changed its character entirely, becoming a virtuosic and dramatic work.



Fryderyk Chopin
Scherzo in C sharp minor, Op. 39
Breitkopf & Härtel edition, 1840
Fryderyk Chopin Museum



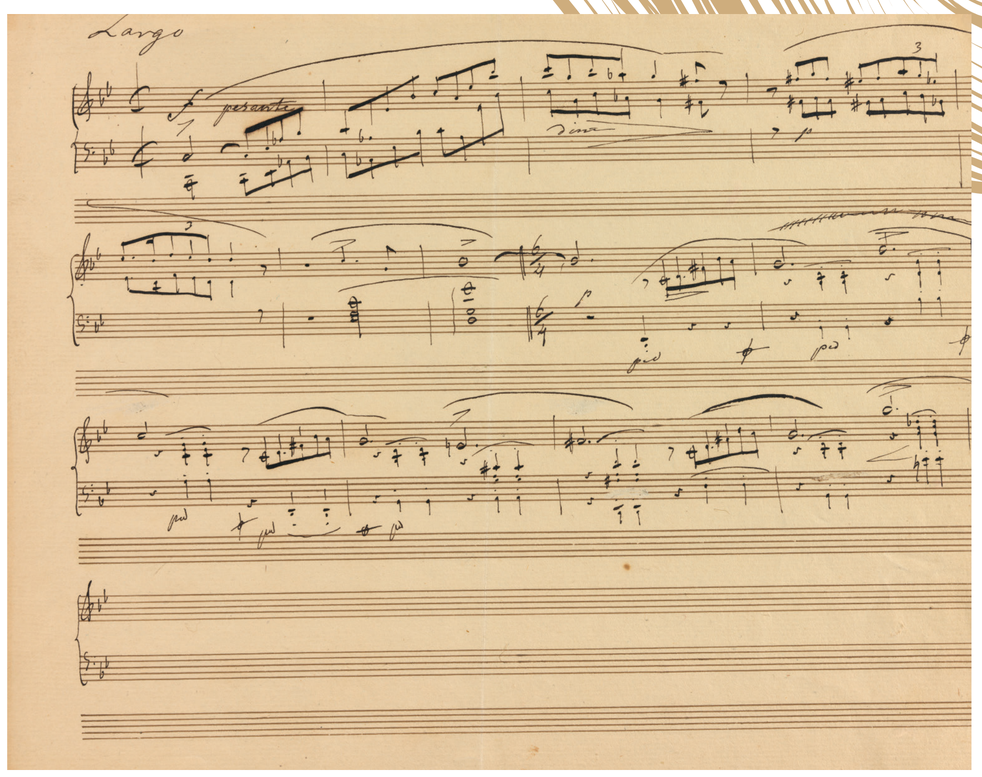
Eugeniusz Pichell
Scherzo in B minor, 1965
woodcut on paper
Fryderyk Chopin Museum

In Chopin’s scherzos, the unbridled Romantic emotionality – ‘thundering over the piano’ – in the outer sections is contrasted with deeply moving lyrical middle sections. In the Scherzo in B minor, Op. 20, Chopin quotes the carol-lullaby ‘Lulajże Jezuniu’, which brings a nostalgic soothing.

BALLADES

‘Everyone saw in this music, as in the clouds, something different for himself’ – Félicien Mallefille

Chopin created the genre of the piano ballade. Before Chopin, the name ballad referred in music not to works for solo piano, but to vocal-instrumental pieces determined by a poetical text, singing of love or heroic deeds. Ballads appeared, for example, in mediaeval France in the repertoire of the troubadours and trouvères. In literature, mainly thanks to the poets Johann Wolfgang Goethe and Friedrich Schiller, the ballad became one of the more characteristic genres of romanticism, combining features of the lyric, epic and dramatic.



Fryderyk Chopin
Ballade in G minor, Op. 23
incomplete autograph manuscript, n.d.
Fryderyk Chopin Museum

Despite the lack of any documented evidence from Chopin himself, commentators have sought extra-musical references in his ballades, especially to the works of the Polish bard Adam Mickiewicz. That is because they appear to tell the listener a musical story.

Chopin’s four ballades are among the most important works in his oeuvre, and the Ballade in G minor, Op. 23 is often cited as being a ground-breaking work, on account of the shift away from the brillant style and the internal drama.



Aubrey Beardsley
Chopin’s Ballade, 1895
print on paper
University of Warsaw Library

POLONAISES

‘They enclose the noblest traditional sentiments of Old Poland. […] They mainly contain a combative element, but the courage and valour are tinged with serenity – a characteristic property of this knightly nation’ – Ferenc Liszt



Teofil Kwiatkowski
Chopin’s Polonaise – a Ball in Hôtel Lambert in Paris, 1849-60
watercolour and gouache on paper
National Museum in Poznań

The polonaise is one of the most important dances present in Polish lands since the turn of the eighteenth century. From that time on, it was both a formal, stately dance and a dance for amusement at the courts of royalty, magnates and landed gentry, and also among the middle strata of society, sometimes acquiring a sung form. Before Chopin, it was primarily a functional genre, and it gained importance as a stylised genre (in concert repertoire) shortly before Chopin’s birth in the output of Michał Kleofas Ogiński.

Over the sixteen known piano polonaises left by Chopin, there occurs an easily discernible evolution of the genre. The conventional pieces that he wrote as a child were replaced by ornamental and virtuosic polonaises in the brillant style. In the mid 30s, a dramatic style appears, presaged by the bellicose octaves that open the first of Chopin’s ‘mature’ polonaises, Op. 26 No. 1, in the key of C sharp minor.
The last polonaises are elaborate epic poems, such as the ‘Heroic’ Polonaise in A flat major, Op. 53 and the subsequent work constituting a hybrid of two genres: the Polonaise-Fantasy in A flat major, Op. 61. The expression in these compositions, and also their national lineage, reflect the turbulent history of Poland.



Fryderyk Chopin
Polonaise in F minor, Op. 71 No. 3
autograph manuscript, Stuttgart, 1836
Fryderyk Chopin Museum

MAZURKAS

‘Remarkable details reside in his mazurkas, and he also found a way to render them doubly interesting, performing them with a supreme degree of softness, in a superlative piano, barely feathering the strings with the hammers’
– Hector Berlioz



Edward Okuń
Chopin’s Mazurka, 1911, artist’s replica of painting from 1905-1906
oil on canvas



Fryderyk Chopin
Mazurka in E major, Op. 6 No. 3
autograph manuscript, Vienna, 1830-1831
Fryderyk Chopin Museum

The art mazurka is a stylisation of traditional Polish dances: the lively oberek, measured mazur and slow kujawiak. The mazurkas represent the largest group in Chopin’s oeuvre (more than fifty works), written at various times in his life, dubbed the most Polish of his works and the most strongly associated with his personality. Apart from the last ‘dance poems’, they betray distinct features of their three prototype dances, such as a triple metre, characteristic rhythmic patterns and changing accentuation of the second and third beats in the bar. The traditional folk colouring is underscored by the harmonic writing and the elasticity of the tempo, linked to the rubato manner of playing, giving the impression of rhythmic instability. Chopin did not use musical quotations, but folk elements were a direct source of artistic inspiration for him.

WALTZES

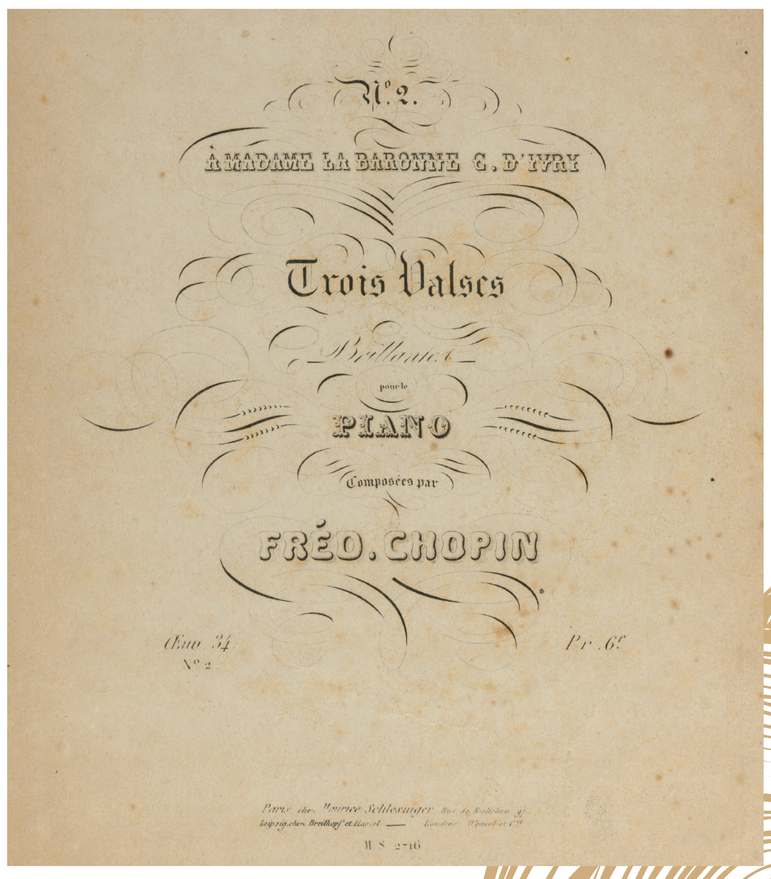
‘Aristocratic from the first note to the last’ – Robert Schumann



Alwin Freund-Beliani
Fryderyk Chopin at the piano surrounded by four people, 2nd quarter of the 20th c.
print on paper
Fryderyk Chopin Museum

Only eight Chopin waltzes were intended by the composer for publication. They include both striking concert waltzes of the *brillant* type and also sentimental waltzes. Yet they were not composed ‘for dancing’. They were often written into the albums of his friends, admirers and pupils and functioned mainly in the private domain.

Although they are certainly not among the compositions with the greatest emotional charge or formal refinement, they cannot be belittled. Some of them venture well beyond convention in their length and variety. Despite the name of the genre, we sometimes hear in them an affinity with Polish folklore and with the mazurkas. Chopin readily introduces waltz elements into other compositions, e.g. the Scherzo in B flat minor and the ballades.



Fryderyk Chopin
Waltz in A minor, Op. 34 No. 2
Maurice Schlesinger edition, 1839-1842
Fryderyk Chopin Museum

SONATAS

‘Music it is not’ – Robert Schumann on the finale of the Sonata in B flat minor

Chopin composed four sonatas over the course of twenty years. They differ in both musical language and forces (the first three are for solo piano, while the last is scored for piano and cello). All of Chopin’s sonatas are in four movements, in keeping with the model developed during the Classical era. Chopin treated the Classical framework as a point of departure, lending these works – especially the three mature sonatas – an original character.



Aleksander Sołtan
Sonata in B minor, before 1975
lithograph on paper
Fryderyk Chopin Museum



Fryderyk Chopin
Sonata in B minor, Op. 58
sketch of fragments of the work,
autograph manuscript, 1844[?]
Fryderyk Chopin Museum

Chopin’s sonatas were often received by contemporary reviewers with a degree of distance. They surprised listeners with their innovation, were regarded as incohesive and too distant from the Classical formal prototype. The epoch-making significance of these works was only appreciated by posterity. The timeless expression which Chopin imparted to the third movement of the Sonata in B flat minor, Op. 35 (*Marche funèbre*) meant that it acquired in the general awareness the status of an almost independent work. The Sonata in B minor, Op. 58, meanwhile, is perceived as a synthesis of the mature period in the composer’s oeuvre.

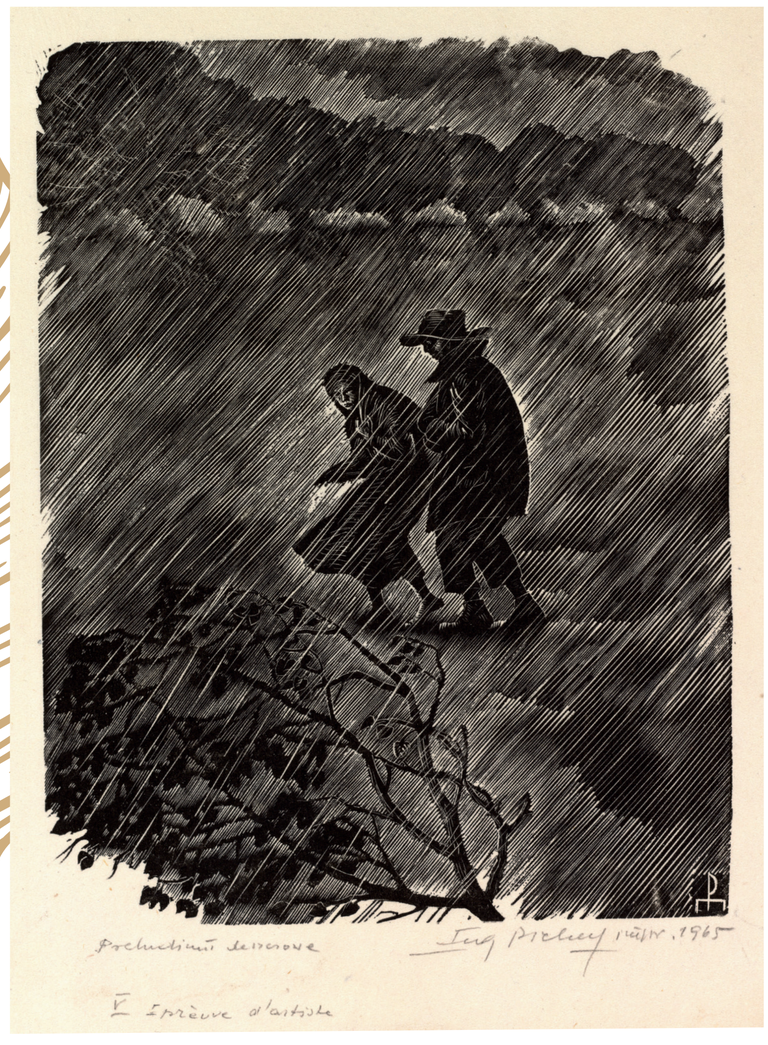
PRELUDES

‘If Chopin had composed nothing but the preludes, he would still deserve immortality’ – Anton Rubinstein

Chopin completed his 24 Preludes, Op. 28 in the years 1838–1839, but the ideas probably date back to earlier years, possibly even to 1831. The final stage in his work on these compositions coincided with the start of his liaison with George Sand, the period of his journey with her and her children to Majorca. The model for Chopin’s cycle of preludes was Johann Sebastian Bach’s *Das Wohltemperierte Klavier* – two famous sets of 24 preludes and fugues in all the keys.



Robert Spies
Title page of the graphic portfolio *Frédéric Chopin, Les 24 Préludes. Illustrés par Robert Spies* [Fryderyk Chopin, the 24 Preludes. Illustrated by Robert Spies], 1912
collotype on paper
Fryderyk Chopin Museum



Eugeniusz Pichell
The ‘Raindrop’ Prelude, 1965
woodcut on paper
Fryderyk Chopin Museum

Yet Chopin’s preludes do not serve as introductions to other compositions. They are ordered according to successive keys around the circle of fifths, and the cycle is fused by a motif of a second. Yet individual preludes represent separate compositions, each of its own character, and the cycle, when performed as a whole, reveals the precision with which the composer chose the moods and employed a sense of contrast. Although Chopin did not give titles to his preludes, they began to be ascribed poetical or illustrative content, as in the case of the famous Prelude in D flat major, known as the ‘Raindrop’.

NOCTURNES

‘unlike anything else in their overall character, backed by the name of the works, nocturne, not admitting of tones in any colours other than dreamy, dark.’ – Gottfried Wilhelm Fink

The nocturne is a genre often identified with Chopin’s aesthetic. It is distinguished by an intimate mood and a beauty of lyrical utterance, modelled on song – on Italian bel canto. The melodic line is embellished in the top voice with numerous ornaments. The accompaniment is based on chords or arpeggios (modelled on the serenade).



Maria Łuszczkiewicz-Jastrzębska
Nocturne, 1960
drypoint on paper
Fryderyk Chopin Museum



Fryderyk Chopin
Nocturne in C minor, Op. posth.
sketch of the entire work, autograph manuscript, n.d.
Fryderyk Chopin Museum

In Chopin’s times, nocturnes were popular repertoire among the middle classes and the aristocracy making music in their drawing-rooms, and they remain among the most frequently performed of Chopin’s works. When interpreting them himself, Chopin often added improvised ornaments, not written in the published version of the work, and employed *rubato* playing.

There are nineteen extant Chopin nocturnes, eighteen of which were published by the composer between 1832 and 1846. His poetical nocturnes are sometimes interpreted as a reflection of Chopin’s sentimental or introverted personality.

IMPROMPTUS

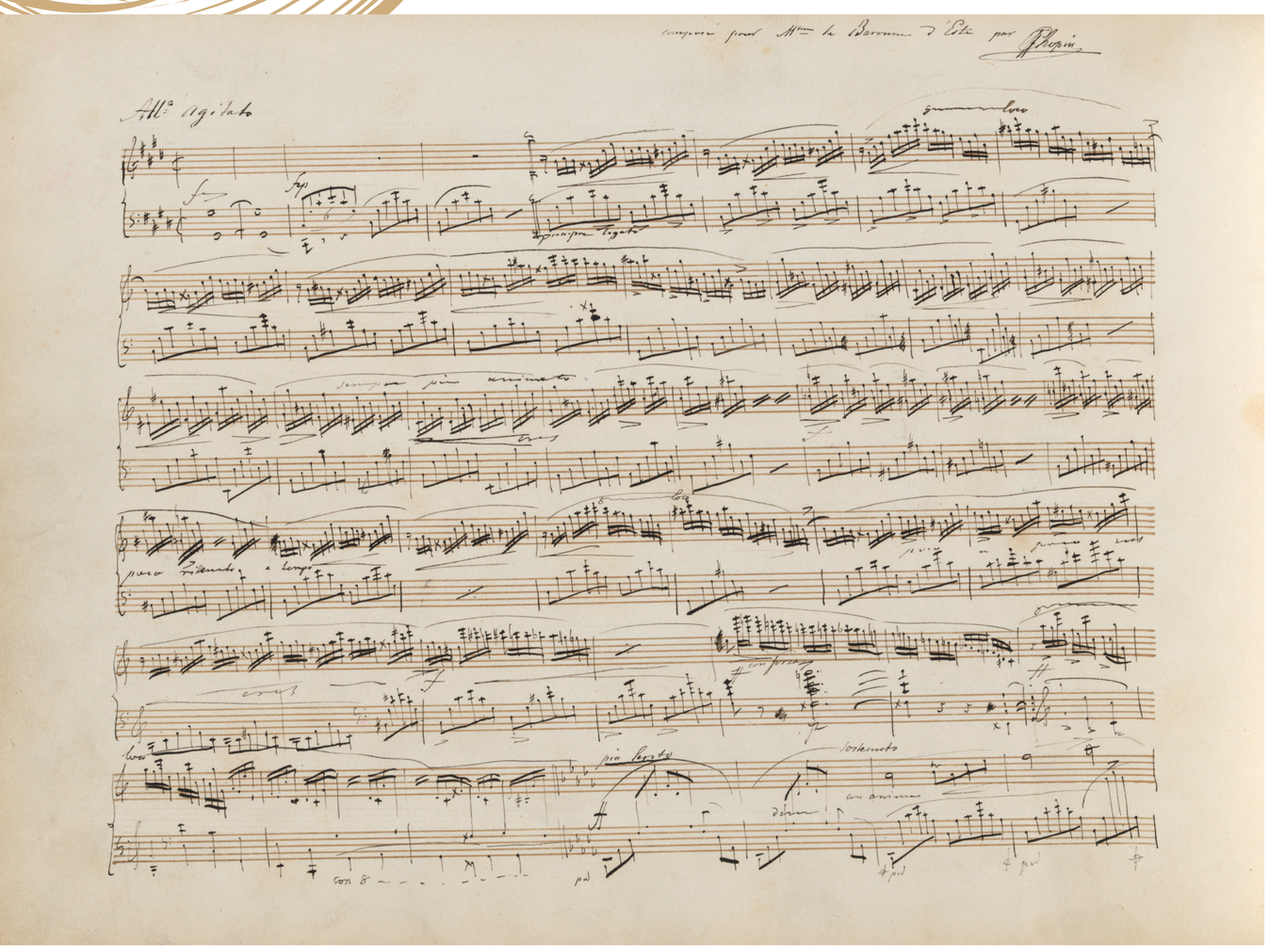
‘The airy mood of a moment assumes a shape and form – although it becomes but a trifle, it conceals the most delicate feelings in such cheerful, playful attire’
– Ferdinand Hiller on the Impromptu in A flat major, Op. 29

Paradoxically, the greatest renown was gained by the Impromptu in C sharp minor, Op. 66, published after Chopin’s death by Julian Fontana under the title Fantasy-Impromptu – a composition which the composer wished to be destroyed after his death, together with other unpublished works.

Chopin’s impromptus are quite elaborate works: slightly longer than the nocturnes, shorter than the ballades and scherzos. Compared to the rest of his oeuvre, they stand out as particularly cheerful, motoric works of moderate dramatic effect. They enchant listeners with their airy and poetical aura.



Teofil Kwiatkowski
Fryderyk Chopin at the piano, *c.*1847
watercolour and pencil on paper
National Library of Poland



The impromptus are sometimes burdened with the stereotypical opinion of being ‘music for the ladies’. As short and uncomplicated works, they were often intended for amateur pianists from good homes. They do not form a large chapter in Chopin’s oeuvre – of the four extant compositions, three of them were intended by the composer for publication.

Fryderyk Chopin
Impromptu in C sharp minor, Op. 66
entry in the album of Baroness Frances Sarah d’Est, autograph manuscript, 1835
Fryderyk Chopin Museum

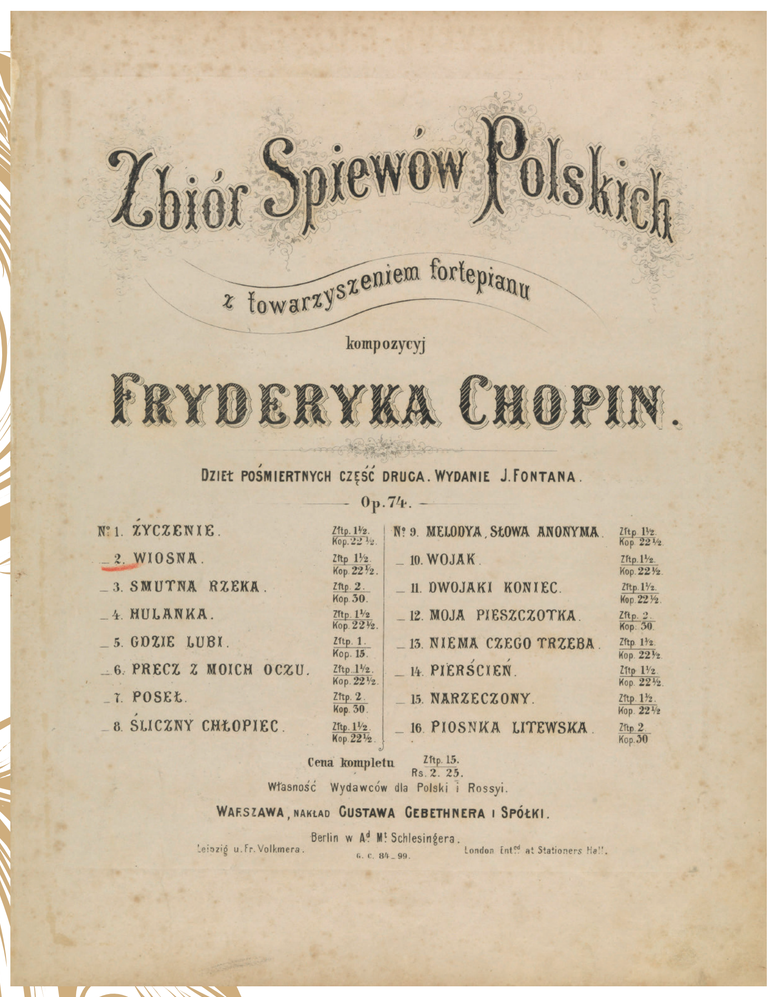
SONGS

‘Now the little songster,
Lost to vision mortal,
Earth’s lament unending
Bears to Heav’n’s bright portal’
– Stefan Witwicki, excerpt from the song ‘Wiosna’ (‘Spring’)

Chopin invested his nineteen extant songs for voice and piano with comments on contemporary events. They represented a bridge between exile and home, where they were widely sung and distributed in unofficial editions. Hugely popular were the love lyrics to poetry by Stefan Witwicki and Adam Mickiewicz. The song ‘Wojak’ (‘Before the battle’), to words by Witwicki, was composed within the context of Chopin’s departure from home and the looming tragic events that brought the November Uprising to an end.



Fryderyk Chopin
Song Wiosna [Spring], Op. 74, No. 2
piano transcription, presentation autograph manuscript with dedication:
‘To Dear Teofil Kwiatkowski FChopin 4.Sept. 1847. Paris’
Fryderyk Chopin Museum


Zbiór Śpiewów Polskich
z towarzyszeniem fortepianu
kompozycyj
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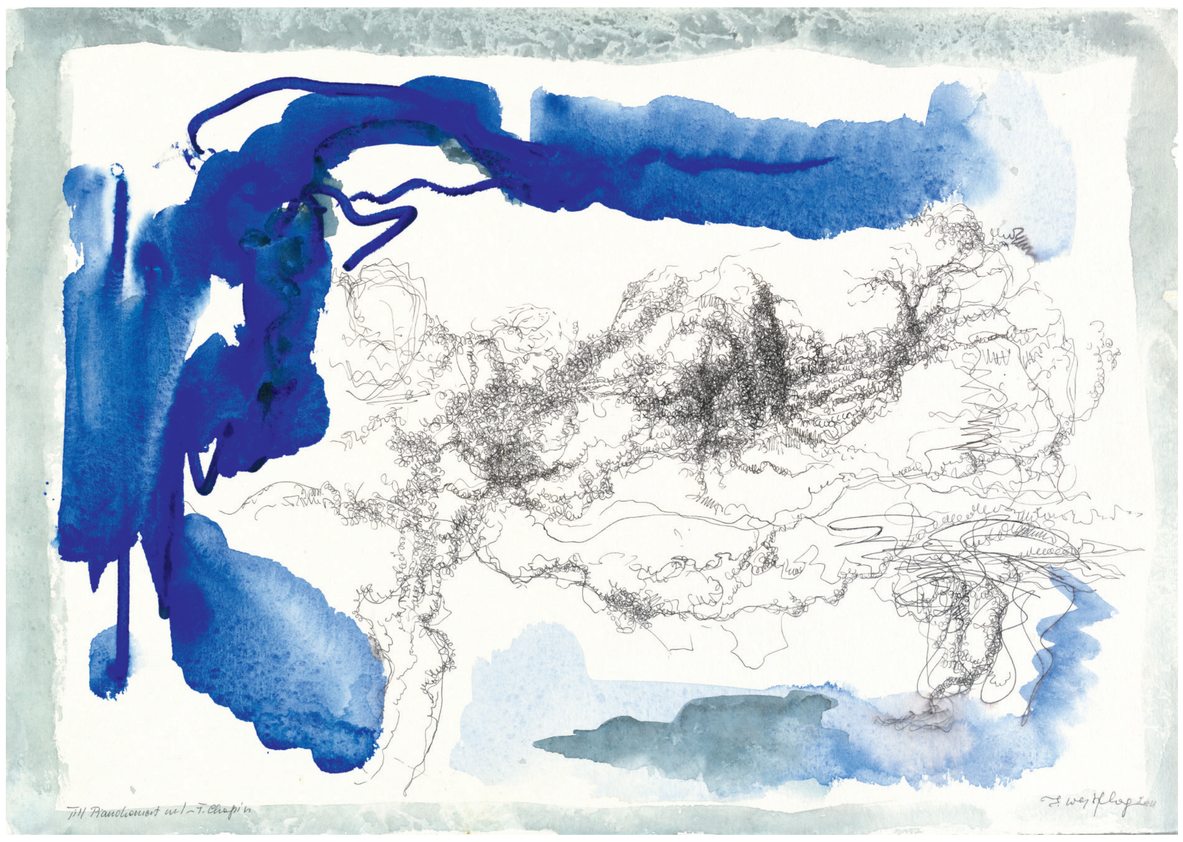
Chopin, keenly interested in Polish poetry, composed his songs solely to texts by Polish poets of his own generation. They were written occasionally and remained on the margins of his main artistic output, not included on the programmes of his official concerts and not published during his lifetime. Gathered together by Julian Fontana, they were published in the posthumous opus 74.

Fryderyk Chopin
Collection of Polish Songs with piano accompaniment. Posthumous Works, Part Two, ed. J. Fontana, Op. 74
G. Gebethner i Spółka edition, 1859
National Library of Poland

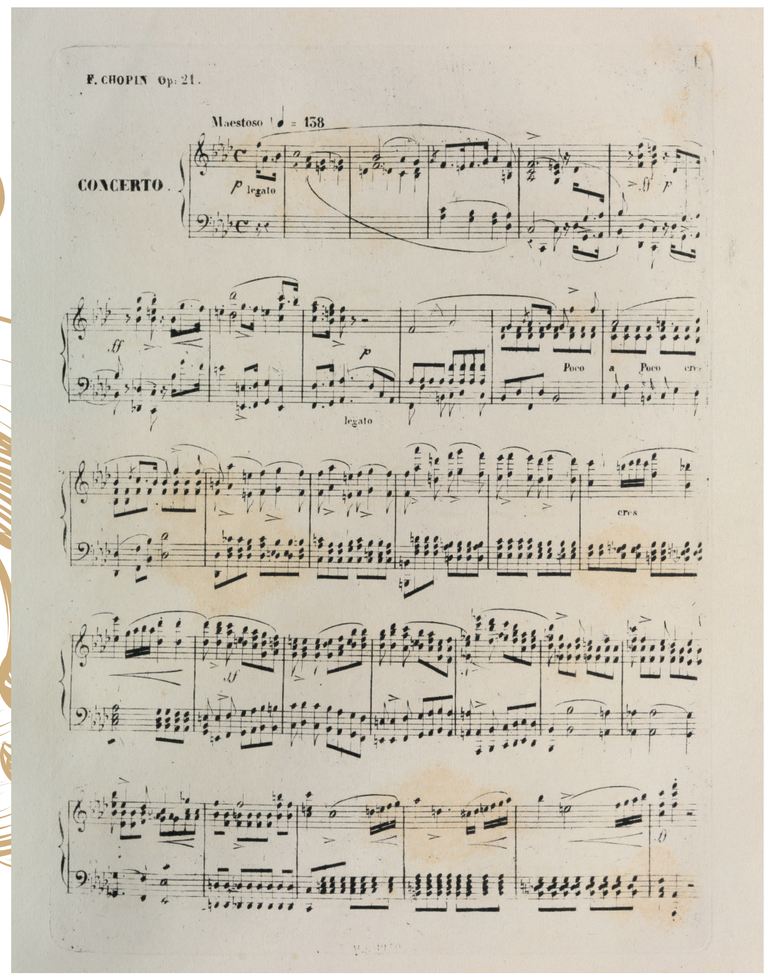
WORKS FOR PIANO AND ORCHESTRA

‘Among his new works is to be a Concerto in F minor, worthy of standing alongside works by the foremost musicians of Europe’ – Eugeniusz Koźmian

All of Chopin’s works with orchestra represented a sort of portfolio accompanying him on his European debut as a pianist-composer – he wrote them with his own performances in mind (virtuosos were required to perform their own works). They are the Variations in B flat major on ‘Là ci darem la mano’ from Mozart’s opera *Don Giovanni*, Op. 2, *Fantasy on Polish Airs*, Op. 13, *Rondo à la krakowiak*, Op. 14, two concertos in F minor, Op. 21 and E minor, Op. 11 and *Grand Polonaise brillante* in E flat major, Op. 22, preceded by an *Andante spianato*.



Elżbieta Wejsflog
Piano Concerto No. 1, 2011
watercolour and ink on paper
Fryderyk Chopin Museum



Fryderyk Chopin
Piano Concerto in F minor, Op. 21, piano part
Brandus et Cie edition, 1874-1875
Fryderyk Chopin Museum

Chopin’s concertos for piano and orchestra were written in Warsaw, shortly before he left home forever. They were modelled on the Classical template and the virtuosic brillant style, and the power of their expression can be ascribed largely to the catchy melodies, like the nocturne cantilena in the second movement of the F minor Concerto, inspired by the young composer’s feelings for the singer Konstancja Gładkowska. The use of a stylised dance in the final movement was characteristic of concertos in the *style brillant*. In Chopin’s concertos, we find allusions to traditional Polish dances, which lend them an original, national character: a mazurka in the F minor and a krakowiak in the E minor. ■