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## **FRYDERYK CHOPIN IN BRITAIN**

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## **ФРІДЕРІК ШОПЕН У БРИТАНІЇ**

Fryderyk Chopin was born in Zelazowa Wola (1.03.1810, Mazovia, Poland). His father Nicholas was born in France (1771) in Marainville, a village in Lorraine – an area which at that time was ruled over by the Polish King Stanislas Leszczyński [4].

In Poland, he is regarded as a national hero. His heart is even interred in one of the pillars of the Holy Cross church in Warsaw: as stipulated by his will, his sister took the organ home, pickled in cognac.

This was a great pianist, still in possession of his musical and mental faculties with his fingers perfectly under control, giving a large number of people the opportunity to hear for the very last time an extraordinary and unique performer [1, 6].

The Chopin that Poland celebrates is the opposite of this listless Paris consumptive: he's a lion of the keyboard, a compositional revolutionary, the symbol of a national identity that resounds through pieces such as the barnstorming Revolutionary Etude, or the two piano concertos Chopin composed and played in Warsaw just before he left the country for ever. Chopin's music is a tapestry of poetic paradoxes. He never wrote a work of "programme music" in his life, a piece that sets out to tell a story or invoke an image [3].

One of the last book about by A.Cobbe [2] recounts the story of three pianos Chopin lived with and used in his concerts in 1848. On two of them, in an exceptional burst of musical activity, he endowed English audiences with the final performances of his life – his swansong. He third belonged to his close friend and pupil Jane Stirling who organized his visit to Britain and whom, at this time, he was seeing almost every day. The author discusses Chopin's relationship and opinions concerning Jane Stirling and the three piano makers.

Jane Stirling, and her elderly sister Mrs. Katherine Erskine, who proposed that Chopin should come to London, where they promised to find him both pupils and engagements. Jane was the daughter of a wealthy Scottish landowner. She and her

sister spent much time in Europe. She became a pupil of Chopin in 1842 and he dedicated two nocturnes to her in 1844. Chopin took up the sisters' proposal, arriving in London on April 21st 1848 armed with letters of introduction, and lost no time in going to Richmond to visit the French Royal Family.

Chopin was to give a concert in Edinburgh during the Caledonian Rout and this took place at the Hopetown Rooms on October 4th. It was a unique occasion as not only was he the only artist in the concert, but it would seem that he played for nearly two hours, an extraordinary feat for a dying man. One can say that this Edinburgh concert was his last real performance in public. He left London for Paris on November 23rd, and died a year later, on October 17th 1849, aged 39 [5].

Chopin was in Britain seven months in all.

The British visit is seen as a rather depressing mistake at the end of Chopin's life, with the dying man being dragged around an unsympathetic country and forced to play to earn his living. Out of a total of around 30 public or semi-public concerts during the whole of his life, Chopin gave 5 of these in the British Isles in 1848: 2 in London, 1 in Manchester, 1 in Glasgow and 1 in Edinburgh. Amongst these 5 there were 2 personal firsts. Chopin never played to more than 3 or 400 people, except in Manchester where he had an audience of over 1,000 at the Gentlemen's Concert Hall [1, 1].

Anyone who has made it to grade four or five on the piano will, almost certainly, have encountered a piece by Chopin. Certainly, no compilation of "classics for beginners" is complete without his E minor Prelude. It's got everything the fledgling pianist needs to feel good about their technique: it's short, it's in a gratifyingly slow speed and it has a superficially straightforward left-hand part, with a sad, singing melody line in the right [3].

Chopin is a miniaturist, but he also created forms and structures – the ballade, the scherzo, the hybrid fantasie – that are models of innovative musical architecture.

It is interesting to read a report of Chopin playing incognito at the home of James Broadwood back in 1837. "Was Chopin not the most retiring and unambitious of all living musicians, he would before this time have been celebrated as the inventor of a new style or school of piano composition .... He is perhaps par excellence the most delightful of pianists in the drawing room. The animation of his style is so subdued, his tenderness so refined, its melancholy so gentle, its niceties so studied and systematic, the *toute* ensemble so perfect and evidently the result of an accurate judgement and most finished taste, that when exhibited in the large concert hall or the thronged saloon it fails to impress itself on the mass" [1, 5–6].

Berlioz, writing about Chopin's power to encompass so much experience in a musical grain of Sand, said: "Chopin has written two wonderful mazurkas which are worth more than 40 novels, and are more eloquent than the entire century's literature" [3] and later made a famous remark that "Chopin has been dying all his life" [1, 5].

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