

Classical Music in Poland and the Europe of Chopin - From the Reviewer's Notebook

The Pianist on Square d'Orléans. The Rediscovered Chopin Pleyel piano, Factory No.13214 (1847) Fryderyk Chopin's penultimate instrument



December 19, 2021



Pleyel Factory Number 13214 (1847)



The great English painter J. M. W. Turner once remarked '*always take advantage of an accident*'. In this case I am attempting to take advantage of a coincidence. The consideration is of two *Pleyel* Petit Patron grand pianos used by Fryderyk Chopin. These instruments followed each other to the same address in Paris as if in the manner of a metaphysical destiny.

I have already covered in detail the restoration in Warsaw of Chopin's last piano in Paris, *Pleyel* No. 14810 of 1848, and will follow this with an examination of the history and review a performance on the recently rediscovered penultimate *Pleyel* used by Chopin in Paris, Factory No. 13214 of 1847.

The award-winning pianist and pedagogue Professor Hubert Rutkowski of

the *Hochschule für Musik und Theater* in Hamburg explained the fascination *Pleyel* had for the Polish composer:

'Chopin was a Pleyel pianist. He was very connected to this company and particularly appreciated the sound. Because of the nuances, the intimate tones and the sound design, he preferred Pleyel.'

There is a famous quote where Chopin said that if he felt poorly, then he played on an Erard. The mechanics were simpler, and you get the finished note, so to speak. With the Pleyel you really have to fight for the note, you have to work to create the beautiful sound. But the sound quality and the possibilities for the design, the colors, were the decisive factors for Chopin.'

There was a great rivalry between the pianos of Sebastian Erard favoured by Franz Liszt and those of Camille Pleyel favoured by Fryderyk Chopin.

Many models of *Pleyel* grand pianos (*Grand Patron* and *Petit Patron*) and pianinos (upright *Pleyels*) were made available to Chopin during his lifetime by Camille for his use teaching in Paris, composing at Nohant and even a pianino was sent to Valldemossa. It has been estimated as many as a dozen instruments were selected in this way by Chopin himself. After a winter or summer season they were then leased or sold on at the composer's recommendation. Chopin also received a 10 % commission on any sales he arranged of *Pleyel* pianos for his students.

After six months in residence during an exceptionally hot summer at Nohant (where he feared he may have been actually sweating), Chopin returned to Paris in November 1846, the seventh summer he had spent in this enchanted place since 1839. By this time the so creative love affair between Chopin and George Sand had begun to unravel. He would not travel to that magical domain ever again, that Arcadia where he had composed many major works:

Barcarolle in F sharp major Op. 60

Polonaise-Fantaisie in A flat major Op. 61

2 Nocturnes in B major and E major Op. 62

3 Mazurkas in B major, F minor, and C sharp minor Op. 63

His *Sonata for Cello and Piano* Op.65 begun at Nohant was also nearing completion there.

Unbeknownst to Chopin when he set off for Paris in November 1846, the atmosphere at Nohant, previously so idyllic, was about to collapse during 1847 into toxicity and violence. A domestic typhoon would erupt around Maurice, George Sand's son and the marriage of her daughter Solange to the rough-hewn, violent, mendacious sculptor Jean-Baptiste Clésinger. Chopin's relationship of nine years with George Sand would be permanently sundered by this *tremblement de terre*. In unconstrained fury she even altered his room at Nohant to the smaller arrangement we see today and dispatched this *Pleyel* back to Paris.



George Sand (1804-1876) cir. 1835 by Charles Louis Gratia (1815-1911)

But that episode is for another chapter of this greatest of love stories and does not intimately concern the physical destiny of *Pleyel* 13214. However, one cannot close one's heart to the profound significance of this famous and historic instrument which became his spiritual and musical conduit, the repository of his anguish and suffering. It became the medium for the expression of the intense grief and depression that clambered through the agonies of terminal illness, disintegration of love and political exile that had inexorably settled over the composer like a poisonous miasma. In 1847 Chopin would not set off as usual for an Arcadian and creative summer of Nohant. He spent the entire year and the first three months of 1848 in his apartment at Square d'Orléans with this instrument.



Le maison de George Sand at Nohant



The Drawing Room



Chopin's Room (inhabited from 1839-1846). Actually we view only half of it but at least the original entrance doors remain. After his departure and rupture of the relationship, George Sand divided it into two and re-papered it. The other half became a domestic library. The furniture is not original.

Chopin used *Pleyel* 13214 for many private concerts in his apartment at 9 Square d'Orléans (now 80 Rue Taitbout) from March 1847. The *Sonata for cello and Piano* was performed there on *Pleyel* 13214 with his favourite cellist and friend August Franchomme. The concert, including this sonata, took place on 23 March 1847 and was held in honour of Delfina Potocka and the arrival of this new *Pleyel*. Among the glitterati were Prince Adam Czartoryski and his wife Anna, as well as George Sand, who had just travelled from Nohant to Paris. On this instrument Chopin also composed three of his most beloved waltzes, those in *D flat major* (the Minute Waltz), *C sharp minor*, and *A flat major* that make up his Op. 64.

Financial pressures galvanized Chopin into teaching despite his depression. Advanced musical instruction was his main source of income and his fees were high enough to reflect his formidable reputation as a pianist and composer. He would demonstrate finer points and illuminate musical transformations on a small *Pleyel* pianino (a model of which he was immensely fond) whilst the student would perform on 'our' grand *Pleyel* 13214.



Pleyel pianino No. 15025 at Nohant, similar to the one owned by Chopin, but purchased by George Sand through the intermediary Pauline Viardot 25 May 1849

(I must acknowledge the invaluable factual assistance of an article entitled *Pleyel No. 13214 in the Context of Chopin's Life* written by Adam Wibrowski, Président de l'Association '*Chopin à Nohant*').

Chopin acquired new aristocratic students in 1847 such as the immensely talented Maria Aleksandrovna von Harder (1833-1880), a precocious 14-year-old Russian-German pianist from Saint Petersburg. She took lessons from Chopin almost every day during 1847 and up to his departure for England in April 1848.

She wrote '*...when he was in pain, Chopin often gave lessons by listening in the office adjacent to the drawing-room his hearing, sensitive to the subtlest shadings, immediately recognized which finger was on a given key.*' In 1853 Hans von Bülow described her playing to Liszt, an approach that she surely must have partly imbibed from Chopin '*...one of a kind . . . full of all the whispers . . . phenomenal, transient and sudden changes in tempo, unlike what you usually hear in concert halls. Luminous, interwoven, wonderful melodies emerged like miraculous swan songs.*'

Another was Marie Roubaud de Courmand (1822-1917). In the winter of late 1847 and early 1848 she took possibly 18 lessons with Chopin. Untypically, he allowed her to copy an autograph manuscript of the *Fantaisie-Impromptu in C sharp minor* for her own pleasure. This famous work may well have been first performed on the Pleyel 13214 possibly by the most celebrated of Chopin's Polish students, Princess Marcelina Czartoryska, who had also taken lessons with Chopin at that time.

The Alsatian-French student, Joseph Schiffmacher (1825-1888) studied with Chopin in 1847. He was described by the painter and friend of Chopin Eugene Delacroix: '*Only he reminds me of Chopin.* This former student of Schulhoff, Gottschalk, and Thalberg was also a piano pedagogue to the young André Gide who wrote the illuminating *Notes sur Chopin*, published in 1938.

Many past students also visited Chopin for lessons at this time and undoubtedly played on this Pleyel. Thomas Tellefsen (1823-1874), a highly distinguished, outstanding Norwegian pianist and composer from Trondheim, studied with Chopin for four years. Chopin immediately recognized his Norwegian pupil's talent and unusually met with him three times a week for the price of a single lesson. He became as close a friend as was possible with this emotionally complex composer and was considered to have absorbed his *rubato* to perfection. After the death of Chopin, Tellefsen adopted most of his students and prepared the first comprehensive edition of the Polish composer's works.

Paris 1847
Chopin
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A sketch in 1847 by the great Polish poet Cyprian Norwid of Chopin listening to Thomas Tellefsen at the Hôtel Lambert Paris during an evening soirée with the Duchess Marcelina Czartoryska, a favourite Polish pupil of Chopin and an outstanding pianist

Of major importance was the German German pianist and composer, Adolphe Gutmann (1819-1882). He had lived in Paris from 1834 and developed a close personal and professional friendship with Chopin until the composer's death on October 17, 1849 when he claimed Chopin died in his arms. He sometimes assisted Chopin with students on both *Pleyels* we have examined and was also a copyist. The two families were acquainted, Gutmann even addressing Chopin with the intimate 'tu' in French. Chopin rather unaccountably was partial to Gutmann's strongly

muscular approach to performing his works, this characteristic at times becoming the butt of poor witticisms among contemporary musicians. However, it is rather a testament to the strength of the dynamic range of this *Pleyel*, moving effortlessly from whisper to thunder.



Adolphe Gutmann (1819-1882)

Whoever was granted the opportunity to spend time with him in this inner sanctum, to admire his playing, to receive his instruction in his home on his Pleyel—when often a single word or vivid allusion would dispel a thousand doubts and in a single flash of insight illuminate the essence of an interpretation—would retain this light in his soul forever.

(Letter from Frederique Streicher to Karol Mikuli of November 28, 1864, as quoted in M.

Paule Rambeau, *Chopin - L'enchanteur autoritaire*. trans. Adam Wibrowski).

Among his Polish pupils, Karol Mikuli (1821-1897), took lessons from Chopin continuously from 1844-1848 and *'became not only a distinguished but also a trusted student of Chopin, with whom the Master discussed his compositional problems and revealed his artistic intentions.'*(T. Zielinski: *Chopin*). He became Chopin's assistant

and was granted the singular privilege to observe lessons on this *Pleyel*.



Karol Mikuli (1821-1897)

Kistner published a definitive 14-volume edition of Chopin's works by Mikuli in Leipzig in 1879. The introduction to this edition is an important source of Chopin's pedagogical approach and aesthetics. Mikuli together with Marcelina Czartoryska are considered the outstanding authorities on interpretation of these accessible yet tantalizingly inaccessible works. In Lviv, Mikuli taught an entire generation of formidable pianists such as Maurice Rosenthal (1862-1946), Alexander Michalowski (1851-1938), Albert Tadlewski (1892-1945), and the great Raul Koczalski (1884-1938). He also influenced the great Polish pedagogue Theodor Leschetizky, who had an incalculable influence on modern pianism,

Henry Peru (1829-1922), a pupil of Thalberg, took lessons from Chopin in 1847 and then late in 1849 on *Pleyel* 14810, claiming to be the composer's last pupil. He noted how Chopin seldom played the same piece in the same way more than once. *He first instructed me to practice in various ways of striking the key and showed me how he was able to extract various colors of sound from one key by hitting it twenty times and each time differently*



A photograph of the pianist Maria Kalergis against the background of her magazine and the artist's portrait by Cyprian Kamil Norwid

Another outstanding Polish pupil Chopin who exerted a profound influence on the development of Polish musical life at this time was Maria Kalergis (1822-1874) in Warsaw. Chopin appreciated her expressiveness and performance abilities, finessed on *Pleyel* 13214. She continued as Chopin's student even after his return from England in 1849, during the last months of his life but on *Pleyel* 14810 of previous note. She was the muse of the immortal Polish poet Cyprian Norwid, author of a famous poem entitled *Chopin's Piano*. She broke his heart. Among other luminaries, she befriended Franz Liszt, Richard Wagner, Alfred de Musset and Heinrich Heine.



Portrait of Marcelina Czarzoryska by Jan Matejko (1874)

Princess Marcelina Czarzoryska (1817-1894), was an outstanding pianist who carried the flaming torch of Chopin inspiration and became a close personal friend of the composer. She spoke in an arresting phrase of the necessity of creating and inhabiting *le climat de Chopin* if one was to be absolutely true to his intentions. According to accounts of her playing by Chopin himself and many contemporary witnesses, she was the most faithful to his ideals of expression and tone. In his teaching Chopin emphasized the cultivation of a beautiful, expressive and poetic sound above all else, an alluring tone and touch as the initial, predominant step in mastering the piano.



One of three photographs of a clearly ill Fryderyk Chopin taken in 1849 by Louis-Auguste Bisson (1814–1876) a 19th-century French photographer. The picture was taken as a daguerreotype or by the Collodion process



The first known photograph of Fryderyk Chopin taken in 1847. Unknown photographer and process

His final Paris concert, possibly performed on this *Pleyel*, was given on 16th February 1848 at the Salle Pleyel (20, rue Rochechouard, in the 9th *arrondissement*). He may have used the new replacement *Pleyel* No 13819 that took its place and travelled with him to London where he gave his first recital on it. Details of the Parisian programme remain somewhat uncertain. The best I can do is to cite that printed in *Fryderyk Chopin: A Life and Times* by the authoritative Alan Walker (London 2018) p. 546

PART ONE

Mozart Piano Trio K 542 in E major for piano, violin and violoncello

played by MM.Chopin, Alard and Franchomme

Aria sung by Mlle Antonia Molina de Mendi

Nocturne and *Barcarolle* composed and performed by M. Chopin

Aria sung by Mlle Antonia Molina de Mendi

Etudes and *Berceuse* composed and performed by M. Chopin

PART TWO

Scherzo, Adagio and Finale from the Sonata in G minor for piano and violoncello,
composed by M. Chopin and played by the composer and M. Franchomme

A new *Aria from Robert le Diable* composed by M. Meyerbeer and sung by M. Roger

Preludes, Mazurkas and Waltzes composed and performed by M. Chopin

Accompanists : MM. Alary and de Garaudé

These concerts of mixed instrumentalist and vocal numbers were extraordinarily popular at the time and should be reinstated. The reviews of this concert were full of poetry and hyperbole. The *Gazette* wrote '...*the mysteries of a performance that has no parallel in our terrestrial sphere....[...] the infinite number of nuances of an exceptional genius.*' *Le Ménestrel* described his playing as '*the sigh of a flower, the whisper of clouds, or the murmur of stars*'. Clearly, even with the modern distrust of hyperbolic language, something exceptional and sensual was occurring during this concert at the Salle Pleyel.

Of particular relevance to lovers of Chopin in 2021, mired as we are in the midst of a ghastly world pandemic, the remarks of the Marquis de Custine seem singularly appropriate: '*...it is not a piano that speaks but a soul. And what a soul! Preserve your life for your friends. It is a consolation to be able to listen to you sometimes, in the dark days that threaten us....*' He meant the violent political revolution of 1848 and the cholera pandemic afflicting Paris. With recordings we can listen to finely played Chopin as often as we wish - a technological treasure of modern times.

To conclude this short list, let us consider the Calvinist Scots aristocratic spinster Jane Stirling (1804-1859). She took lessons with Chopin from 1842 until his death in 1849. She was deeply in love with Chopin and worshiped him with complete devotion. She persuaded him to leave Paris in April 1848 to go to England and Scotland. He spent more than seven long, often boring and spiritually suffocating months there with her and her sister Katherine Erskine, giving numerous concerts for the aristocracy yet benefiting greatly from her wealth and social connections.

Jane was dedicated to what might be considered a developing 'Chopin cult' whilst tirelessly collecting, annotating and preserving his work. Solange Clésinger described Stirling as a woman '*... tall, thin, pale, of indefinite age, serious, dressed in black without imagination. However, under this rather gloomy surface lay a great heart, full of devotion and nobility.*' (Solange Clésinger, *Notes sur Chopin*, as quoted in M. P. Rambeau, *Chopin, L'enchanteur autoritaire*. Trans. by Adam Wibrowski). Audrey Evelyn Bone, who wrote the first biography of Jane Stirling, described her as '*a hoarse-voiced, restless, invalid Scotch lady of some rank, mostly wandering about on the Continent*'. The celebrated Swedish soprano Jenny Lind (the 'Swedish Nightingale') played a more significantly mysterious role in Chopin's life at this time,

affecting the composer greatly.

One can read of her efforts to preserve Chopin's last Parisian *Pleyel* No. 14810 and also of its recent restoration by Paul McNulty in Warsaw:

<http://www.michael-moran.com/2021/12/the-renovation-of-chopins-last-piano.html>

For a fascinatingly detailed, recent account (February 2019) of Chopin's last solo public recital, which took place in Edinburgh on 4 October 1848, written by the great pianist Tobias Koch:

<https://www.earlymusic.bc.ca/events/chopin-last-concert-tobias-koch/>



Jane Stirling (1804-1859)

Her love was never returned by Chopin but her own never faded into the touching oblivion of nostalgia. His music would have sustained and exacerbated the constantly wounded feelings of unrequited love. She had in many ways replaced the feminine, part mothering, role abandoned so irritably and opportunistically by George Sand. After his departure *aldi la*, in the time-honoured Polish manner, she constantly tended his grave in Pere Lachaise cemetery in Paris. She dutifully and possibly affectionately maintained contact with his sister Ludwika in Warsaw. She

bequeathed to her the most valuable letters and items given to her by Chopin; she purchased many items offered at auction after Chopin's death, including his last piano, *Pleyel* No 14810 which had stood so briefly and forlorn in the artist's last apartment on Place Vendome.

Pleyel Factory No 13214 that we are considering here was returned to the company in February 1848 to to be sold on shortly before Chopin departed for England. This instrument which had felt the refined fingers of Chopin and so many other accomplished pianists, was returned to the company after more than a year in a Paris filled with tumultuous political events and a growing cholera pandemic. Revolution had lead to the exile of King Louis-Philippe who was forced to abdicate in 1848. He fled in disguise under the imaginative moniker 'Mr. Smith' and lived in exile at Claremont House, Esher, in England, until he died in 1850.

***Pleyel* 13214 rediscovery in 2021**

This Parisian instrument miraculously survived war and conflagration, carrying within its subconscious sound world, indelible memories until being raised from the dead as a musical Lazarus, sounding into the vibrating air of the present day.

A World Premiere recital on the instrument was arranged to mark Chopin's birthday on March 1st. 2021, the 211th anniversary of his birth. This was given by the award-winning pianist and pedagogue Professor Hubert Rutkowski of the *Hochschule für Musik und Theater* in Hamburg and President of the Chopin Gesellschaft Hamburg & Sachsenwald. He is also artistic director of the International Leschetizky Piano Competition at the Hamburg University of Music and Drama. His pupil Thomas Ritter, winner of the remarkable 1st Fryderyk Chopin International Piano Competition in Warsaw on period instruments in September 2018, also performs a selection of Chopin works.

The *Pleyel* grand piano is privately owned and was only recently rediscovered. The online concert was the first and only time it will be presented to the public. The two pianists told the legendary story of the piano. In addition, music enthusiasts learned how Chopin made music and composed on the instrument and which famous composers were taught by Chopin.

The concert took place in the Hall of Mirrors, designed in an architectural style

known as 'Historicism', situated in the City Hall in the Hamburg district of Bergedorf. It was an appropriate place being a rather small salon with decoration from a similar era to that of Chopin with an interior suited to his restrained sound palette. This recorded concert was presented by both pianists in an engaging and entertaining manner, both having rather naturally pleasant, humorous presentation skills. I will briefly review each piece and then post a link to the concert. You will be able to watch and listen to the remarkable sound spectrum of *Pleyel* 13214 as well as appreciate their understanding of period instruments with perceptive musical interpretations.

The Programme Review

Tomasz Ritter, Pleyel 13214 (1847)

Chopin

Nocturne in E flat Major Op. 9 No. 2

From the very beginning, Thomas Ritter opened a window on a completely different landscape of sound and tone to that of a modern instrument. His introductions to each work he performed were instructive. Ritter improvised period embellishments to the melodic line which immediately captured my attention and reminded me they were part of the performance practice of the day. The singing *cantabile* of fine legato, depth of timbre and variety of colour were immediately obvious. His refined touch expressed the subtle nuances that lie at the heart of the Chopin Nocturne.

The 'inefficient' damping on these instruments gives an alluring and atmospheric wash of background sound and colour, perfect for the nocturne, rather like that on a fine watercolour painting.



Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), Moonlit landscape, c. 1808, Watercolour on paper

The Morgan Library and Museum

A superb pictorial representation of many Chopin Nocturnes as they sound to me pictorially on a *Pleyel*

Etude in E Major Op. 10 No. 3

Again the singing *cantabile* legato line was much in evidence. Ritter gave much attention to meaningful phrasing, carefully avoiding any hints of sentimentality in his rather 'classical' yet warm detachment. He 'carried' the upper singing voice affectingly with expressive *rubato* and the eloquent tone for which this etude begs.

Waltz in A minor Op. 34 No. 2

This is a melancholic waltz with an intimate atmosphere of nostalgic recall. The contrast in colour, timbre and character brought about on the *Pleyel* with Chopin's suggested 'expressive fingering' in the L H bars 1-16, the long *cantabile* legato lines of the minims, is one of the great expressive strengths of this instrument which Chopin composed for and which Ritter exploited beautifully. These waves of emotion were gracefully and elegantly carried on a lilting waltz rhythm, attractively presented with a variety of articulation.

Nocturne in F Dur Op. 15 No. 1

Again the *aria* sang as the melodic line most affectingly. The agitated blur of emotion was perfectly captured on the *Pleyel* by Ritter. One does not wish to hear the internal tumult of an emotion too clearly delineated without modification as may be the case on a modern piano. Emotional agitation is an indescribable feeling and never experienced clearly, despite the assurances of analytical psychology. The balance of registers on the *Pleyel* allows what one might term a conversational counterpoint for the LH. I felt an unaccustomed aristocratic majesty, a type of classical restraint in Ritter's emotional expressiveness.

Ballade in F Minor Op. 52

Penetrating the expressive core of the Chopin *Ballades* requires an understanding of the influence of a generalized view of the literary, musical and operatic balladic genres of the time. In the structure there are parallels with sonata form but Chopin basically invented an entirely new musical material. I have always felt it helpful to consider the Chopin *Ballades* as miniature operas being played out in absolute music, forever exercising one's musical imagination.

The brilliant Polish musicologist Mieczysław Tomaszewski describes the musical landscape of this work far more graphically than I ever could.

The narration is marked, to an incomparably higher degree than in the previous ballades, with lyrical expression and reflectiveness [...] Its plot grows entangled, turns back and stops. As in the tale of Odysseus, mysterious, weird and fascinating episodes appear [...] at the climactic point in the balladic narration, it is impossible to find the right words. This explosion of passion and emotion, expressed through swaying passages and chords steeped in harmonic content, is unparalleled. Here, Chopin seems to surpass even himself. This is expression of ultimate power, without a hint of emphasis or pathos [...] For anyone who listens intently to this music, it becomes clear that there is no question of any anecdote, be it original or borrowed from literature. The music of this Ballade imitates nothing, illustrates nothing. It expresses a world that is experienced and represents a world that is possible, ideal and imagined.



Il Cantastorie (The Ballad Singer) by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1696-1770)

I felt Ritter achieved all of these Tomaszewski and 'operatic' perceptions and qualities of the work exceptionally well. He built the drama successfully with tension and relaxations much assisted by the kaleidoscopic range of colour, texture and timbre possible on the balanced registers of the *Pleyel*. The only interpretative reservation I had was that there could have been more 'innocence' and sense of as yet untrammelled infancy in the opening of this life drama. The disillusionments of life then begin to accumulate rendering the contrast with the simple opening as heartbreaking as they are unavoidable. As the 'life' progressed the polyphony became deeply expressive and the increasing emotional agitation most effective. I liked his phrasing a great deal, sense of rubato and pregnant use of silence - an affecting quality young pianists often fail to feel.

Hubert Rutkowski, Pleyel 13214 (1847)

Chopin

Nocturne in D flat Major Op. 27 No. 2

Karol Mikuli gave many outstanding pianists advice and description on the interpretation and performance of Chopin's works, all derived from his uniquely close personal contact with the composer. This included musical thoughts given to the great Polish pedagogue Theodor Leschetizky. Hubert Rutkowski performed this Nocturne

prepared by Leschetizky according to the guidance on Chopin's vision of it given him by Mikuli.

This was a particularly unsentimental view of the Nocturne presented with pianistic authority, broadly expressive with a glowing *cantabile* legato melodic line. Leschetizky embodied the principle of framing the individuality of each pupil within a full understanding of the work and absolute soundness of technique. The improvised embellishments I presumed were by Leschetizky himself. I encountered a type of nervous energy here usually not encountered in Nocturnes that too often fall prey to indulgent, excessive sentiment.

Fantasie-Improptu in C sharp Minor Op. 66

Rutkowski then spoke of the sundered relationship between Chopin and George Sand and the romantic anguish it caused him. He then launched immediately into a passionate and expressive account of this work. I had never associated this piece with the emotional disturbance and resentment that afflicts the heart and soul when a love relationship reaches its cold terminus. The *cantabile* central section, an operatic Bellini *aria* in essence, was full of heartfelt yearning and remembrance of past romance made all the more affecting by the refined and fragile, restrained tone of the *Pleyel*. Rutkowsky made the turbulent, stormy emotions even more sensory and disturbing with his skillful pedalling.

Ballade in G Minor op. 23

Jane Stirling studied music with Chopin on this very instrument, even enumerating in her notes the works they had examined together. She studied this *Ballade* with him. She noted:

I played the following works with Chopin: op. 7, 9, 10, 15, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 47, 48, 49, 51, 55, 56, 58, 64, 65. The fingering written in pencil above the songs was marked with his hand, as well as everything else written in pencil.

(Collections of the Bibliotheque Nationale de France, as noted in J. J. Eigeldinger *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher, As Seen by his Pupils*, pp. 62, 139, 179-181)

I have received from Chopin a Ballade', Schumann informed his friend Heinrich

Dorn in the autumn of 1836. *'It seems to me to be the work closest to his genius (though not the most brilliant). I told him that of everything he has created thus far it appeals to my heart the most. After a lengthy silence, Chopin replied with emphasis: "I am glad, because I too like it the best, it is my dearest work".'*

The great Polish musicologist and authority on Chopin Mieczysław Tomaszewski paints the background to this work best:

'It was during those two years that what was original, individual and distinctive in Chopin spoke through his music with great urgency and violence, expressing the composer's inner world spontaneously and without constraint – a world of real experiences and traumas, sentimental memories and dreams, romantic notions and fancies. Life did not spare him such experiences and traumas in those years, be it in the sphere of patriotic or of intimate feelings. [...] For everyone, the ballad was an epic work, in which what had been rejected in Classical high poetry now came to the fore: a world of extraordinary, inexplicable, mysterious, fantastical and irrational events inspired by the popular imagination.

In Romantic poetry, the ballad became a 'programmatic' genre. It was here that the real met the surreal. Mickiewicz gave his own definition: 'The ballad is a tale spun from the incidents of everyday (that is, real) life or from chivalrous stories, animated by the strangeness of the Romantic world, sung in a melancholy tone, in a serious style, simple and natural in its expressions'. And there is no doubt that in creating the first of his piano ballades, Chopin allowed himself to be inspired by just such a vision of this highly Romantic genre. What he produced was an epic work telling of something that once occurred, 'animated by strangeness', suffused with a 'melancholy tone', couched in a serious style, expressed in a natural way, and so closer to an instrumental song than to an elaborate aria.'

The spiritual, even physical meaning and reference of the sound and musical narration embedded within the music of the *Ballade* would have been obvious to the contemporaries of Chopin who had suffered profoundly from occupation, those deeply familiar with the fraught history of Poland.

Rutkowski gave us a dramatic view of the work which utilized the colour contrasts of the different *Pleyel* registers to heighten the Romantic landscape sound painting to a high degree. The articulated sound on this instrument and the emotional urgency of his view of the work was rather exciting. However, the excitement and drama came not from dynamic inflation, as is too often the case on modern instruments, but from a variation in tone, touch, texture and timbre. The overall effect was satisfyingly

operatic and theatrical.

Mazurka in B flat Major Op. 7 No. 1

Rutkowski in this work was spirited, rustic and suitably bucolic with moments of reflective nostalgia. The register difference in colour and texture were pronounced and gave great variety and interest. At times the perfumes of Sarmatia and the Orient unmistakably entered the sound frame and adventurous harmonic modulations of Chopin.

Mazurka in A Minor Op. 17 No. 4

Mazurka in C Major Op. 24 No. 2

These two Mazurkas may well have been part of the programme offered by Chopin at his last Paris concert at the Salle Pleyel on 16th February 1848 (see above).

The *A minor* mazurka is most untypical of Chopin's mazurkas. Certainly it is my favourite mazurka, a work of the greatest tenderness. The work is poetic and deeply moving, a sublime and deeply nostalgic work, replete with the pain of loss. Rutkowski performed it with great rhythmical refinement, perhaps even with echoes of South American dance rhythms, but perhaps with more emotional involvement.

In the Jan Ekier National Edition, the last eight chords in the left hand are *staccato*, under a legato slur and marked *perdendosi* (dying away) without pedal. I have never heard any pianist, even the greatest, observe this notation at the conclusion of this romantic, profoundly emotional masterpiece, a sublime expressive gesture by Chopin of the breathless despair of a faded love that can never return or regenerate its sensuality.

The *C major* was joyful in its *detaché* articulation and *cantabile* dreams. Many moods especially those inspired by dance made themselves felt. One must never forget Chopin as a young man was rather a 'party animal' and played dance music possibly on a *Pleyel* pianino into the small hours of the morning. He even needed, as a result, to go into rehab at the Silesian spa of Bad Reinerz (now Duszniki Zdroj in Poland).

Waltz in D flat Major Op. 64 No. 1

This is arguably one of the most famous piano pieces in the world first performed in

public to great acclaim at the Paris concert of 1848, possibly composed on this particular *Pleyel* piano and dedicated to the Chopin pupil, Madame la Comtesse Delphine Potocka.

There is a possibly apocryphal story that he wrote it to imitate a little dog named *Marquis* (and another named *Dib*) owned by George Sand that was in the habit of chasing its own tail and spinning in circles. A musically outstanding pupil of Chopin, one Camille O'Meara, always referred to the waltz as '*la valse au petit chien*'.

George Sand and her children were passionately fond of theatricals and had begun putting on plays at Nohant (there was a small stage with painted scenery). Sand's son Maurice also began to create puppet theatre. Chopin provided some of the music.



George Sand built a fully equipped private theater in the mansion at Nohant for the performance of the plays she wrote



In 1854 the *castelet des marionettes* or full puppet theater was added with hundreds of glove puppets and a battery of enormously varied sound effects



An extraordinary violinist puppet sculpted and painted by Maurice Sand

The dogs adored the theatricals and often took an active part! (Quotations with

grateful acknowledgement to the dog lover and outstanding British pianist Jack Gibbons).

"Marquis is acting too. The costumes get him tremendously excited. He takes part in the action, jumps to the arms of people being murdered, weeps at the feet of those singing romances and at the end dances a 'pas de deux' with Lambert. He takes the play seriously and feels all the emotions of the audience." [George Sand: letter to Emanuel Arago, Nohant, 9 December 1846]



Louis-Eugène Lambert: Bichon Frise, 1854, possibly George Sand's dog *Marquis*

"Did yesterday's pantomime induce Dib to dance?" [Chopin: letter to George Sand, Paris, 15 December 1846]

"I can well imagine the excitement of Marquis and Dib. Lucky spectators, simple-minded and untaught!" [Chopin: letter to George Sand, Paris, 17 January 1847]

"The little dog Marquis (you remember) is staying with me and is lying on my sofa. He is an extraordinary creature: he has a soft fluffy white coat which Mme Sand herself brushes every day, and he is as intelligent as can be. I can't begin to tell you all his original tricks. For example, he will neither eat nor drink from a gilt vessel: he pushes it away with his nose and upsets it if he can." [Chopin: letter to his family in Warsaw, Nohant, 11 October 1846]

"Please thank Marquis for missing me and for sniffing at my door." [Chopin: letter to George Sand, Paris, 25 November 1846]

Hubert Rutkowski, Tomasz Ritter, Pleyel 13214 (1847)

Adolf Gutmann

Nocturne in A flat Major Op. 8 No. 1 for four hands

This piece makes the influence of Chopin on his compositions obvious with its unashamedly *cantabile* right hand and Chopinesque harmonies and *fiorituras*. Rutkowski and Ritter presented the work as a pleasant, mellifluous, affectingly melodic piece.

Here is a link to the concert

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=EGwNj7fas5I&feature=youtu.be>

