

Chopin, who has not been heard in public for several years; Chopin, who imprisons his charming genius in an audience of five or six persons; Chopin, who resembles those enchanted isles where so many marvels are said to abound that one regards them as fabulous; Chopin, whom one can never forget after having once heard him...Forward then, Chopin! Forward! let this triumph decide you; do not be selfish, give your beautiful talent to all; consent to pass for what you are...and when it shall be asked who is the first pianist of Europe, Liszt or Thalberg, let all the world reply, like those who have heard you... 'It is Chopin.'<sup>1</sup>

This report, written in 1838, shows the extent of Chopin's reputation as a pianist; it also reveals the frustration Chopin's devotees must have felt at his reclusive habits. They considered him to be superior to all other pianists: by his example he could have unmasked the excesses of the virtuoso movement and instigated a completely new style of piano playing. Yet Chopin disliked playing in public concerts and encouraged his students to perform, as he preferred to do, in more intimate environments where there were fewer distractions from the music. A recent study by Janet Ritterman suggests he gave around fifty concerts in all, only about half of which were given in Paris, and many of the others given in his youth, prior to his arrival there.<sup>2</sup> Several of these Paris events were benefit concerts at which he played only a minor role, and later in his life, where he was the prominent artist, he carefully vetted attendance lists.

From the outset, critics marvelled at the idiosyncratic quality of Chopin's playing. Reviewers of his concerts in Vienna in 1829 were uniformly generous in their praise. The notice in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* spoke of

...[t]he exquisite delicacy of his touch, his indescribable mechanical dexterity, his finished shading and *portamento*, which reflect the deepest feeling; the lucidity of his interpretation, and his compositions which bear the stamp of great genius...reveal a virtuoso most liberally endowed by nature, who, without previous blasts of trumpets, appears on the horizon like one of the most brilliant meteors.<sup>3</sup>

The main point of criticism appears to have been that his playing was too delicate; as one critic put it, '[h]is touch has little of that brilliance by which our virtuosos

announce themselves in the first bars'.<sup>4</sup>

The tone of this early review is echoed in many later accounts of Chopin's playing, his peers paying tribute in glowing terms to his artistry. Berlioz, for instance, described him as 'an artist apart, bearing no point of resemblance to any other musician I know'; for Liszt, he was 'a God amongst musicians', and according to Mendelssohn 'he may truly be called a perfect virtuoso'.<sup>5</sup> References to the delicacy of his playing are repeated throughout Chopin's career, although once his reputation was established, it was intended as a description of his unique style, rather than as a point of correction, as seems to be implied by some of the earlier critics.

There must have been many to whom Chopin's success as a pianist seemed more than a little unfair. Here was a virtuoso acknowledged to be at the pinnacle of his profession, yet he had no ambition and no liking for the profession. When so many were trying so desperately hard to achieve a reputation as a virtuoso, he seems to have achieved it almost by accident. At a time when the career pathway for pianists was becoming increasingly standardised, Chopin bypassed much of this mechanism in his early years, and even later at the height of his reputation remained strangely aloof from it all. An examination of Chopin's life prior to his success in Paris perhaps accounts for some aspects of his unique style as a pianist, and might also offer an explanation for his somewhat jaundiced view of the profession.

### *Poland, 1810-31*

What is known of Chopin's formal musical education suggests that it was directed towards a career in opera composition, rather than that of pianist-composer. There was a clear distinction at this time between 'composers', who wrote symphonic works, 'opera composers', and 'pianist-composers', whose works were an essential adjunct to their career as a virtuoso, but were generally regarded as less artistically significant than, say, an opera or a symphony. Opera was enormously popular and its practitioners were highly regarded. For smaller nations wishing to assert their voice in this Italian- and German-dominated field, the genre was of particular significance. As a composer of Polish opera then, Chopin would have the added distinction of asserting Poland's musical identity, and his

parents and teachers seem to have had no doubt about his ability to realise that goal.

From 1816 until 1822<sup>6</sup> Chopin had music lessons with Wojciech Adalbert Zywny. He was tutored at home until he was thirteen, when he entered high school and began lessons with Józef Elsner. In 1826 he left that institution and entered the Warsaw Conservatory as a full-time student, where he studied harmony and counterpoint with Elsner for two years, and composition with him for one year. In 1829 he graduated from that institution with distinction. The letters and biographical sources give the impression of a young man—the only boy in the family—whose talent was recognised and fostered by his adoring family, and for whose education no expense or trouble was spared. After his graduation from the Conservatory, Chopin's studies were at an end; while there are references in the letters to the possibility of further study in Vienna, Berlin, Italy and Paris, there is no evidence to suggest that this study took place.<sup>7</sup>

Little is known about the nature of Chopin's study with Zywny and Elsner. According to Niecks, Wojciech Zywny had been pianist at the court of Prince Casimir Sapieha before settling down to teaching and composing in Warsaw.<sup>8</sup> To what extent Chopin's lessons with him were piano lessons, as opposed to instruction in general musicianship, is unclear. According to Chopin's childhood friend, Julius Fontana, Zywny was Chopin's only piano teacher; he taught him only the first principles of piano playing, and Chopin's piano lessons ended when he was twelve.<sup>9</sup> This information is corroborated in a letter from Elsner to Chopin, where Elsner writes 'you have the style of playing of Field although you took lessons from Zywny'.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, Niecks supplies the following information:

Now imagine my astonishment when on asking the well-known pianoforte player and composer Edouard Wolff, a native of Warsaw, what kind of pianist Zywny was, I received the answer that he was a violinist and not a pianist.<sup>11</sup>

Nicholas Temperley describes Zywny as 'a violinist of modest accomplishment' and goes on to suggest that 'Chopin seems to have taught himself how to play the piano'.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps Zywny was both pianist and violinist, in which case it seems unlikely that his lessons with Chopin dealt exclusively with piano-playing, and less likely still that he was concerned with the new virtuoso style of pianism.

If Chopin gained only the 'first principles' of piano playing from Zywny, then it might be assumed that his training at the Warsaw Conservatory involved further piano study. It seems that this is not the case. Niecks claims that the newly founded Conservatory had a

strong bias towards training in opera:

The department of instrumental music not only comprised sections for the usual keyed, stringed and wind-instruments, but also one for instruments of percussion. Solo and choral singing were to be taught with special regard to dramatic expression. Besides these and the theoretical branches of music, the curriculum included dancing, Polish literature, French, and Italian. After reading the programme it is superfluous to be informed that the institution was chiefly intended for the training of dramatic artists.<sup>13</sup>

Chopin's mentor there was Józef Elsner, who was appointed rector of the conservatory in 1821, taught composition, and was director of the music section until it was dissolved after the 1831 uprising. He was well known in his time as a composer and as one of the first exponents of Polish nationalism in music. Chopin thought very highly of him, and he had enormous influence on Chopin's musical education, both in Warsaw and in the early years in Paris. Elsner's commitment to the cause of a Polish national style in music no doubt shaped the ambition he harboured for his talented pupil.<sup>14</sup> While Chopin was studying with him in Warsaw, Elsner did everything he could to encourage Chopin's originality, but nevertheless insisted on a rigorous training in counterpoint—perhaps because he himself had been accused of not following the rules.<sup>15</sup> A rare insight into Chopin's studies at this time is offered in his letter to Jan Bialoblocki, in October, 1826:

I go to Elsner for lessons in strict counterpoint six hours a week. I follow lectures by Brodzinski, Bentkowski and others—in fact, anything to do with music.<sup>16</sup>

Whatever curriculum Chopin had studied at the Conservatory, it is quite clear that his studies were not centred on the piano—indeed it seems he did not take piano lessons at all. Piano studies were offered there, and Warsaw was certainly not lacking in virtuoso pianists.<sup>17</sup> If Chopin took piano lessons however, neither he nor his acquaintances ever made any reference to a piano teacher, a surprising omission in view of the subsequent interest in Chopin's unique pianistic style. In addition, the technical training of pianists was by this time a significant field of music pedagogy. The virtuoso feats of Hummel, Moscheles, Herz, Kalkbrenner and others were admired all over Europe, and 'methods' and volumes of studies offered the secrets of the virtuoso techniques to those who were willing to spend endless hours on what was often pianistic drudgery. Chopin had opportunities to consult experts during his travels to Berlin and Vienna, and Elsner had plenty of contacts in western Europe.

One of the most sought-after piano pedagogues of the time was Carl Czerny (1791-1857), who had been a pupil of Beethoven; in addition to this undeniable drawback, he had developed a reputation as a teacher capable of systematically developing in his pupils a solid technique, suited to the virtuoso style of pianism. Among those who flocked to him was the eleven-year-old Franz Liszt, whose family suffered considerable financial hardship and disruption in order to provide him with this training.<sup>18</sup>

Chopin visited Czerny in Vienna during his first trip there in 1829, but it seems that there was no question of Chopin having lessons with him; in fact, Chopin seems more than a little off-hand in his references to Czerny in letters home to Warsaw. Regarding his introduction to Count Morlacchi, Chopin refers to him as 'a splendid acquaintance which I value far above poor old Czerny's (hush!)',<sup>19</sup> and in a letter to Titus Woyciechowski, he reports: 'I am close friends with Czerny and have often played duets at his house. He is a kind fellow but nothing more.'<sup>20</sup> Admittedly, Chopin was by now in his nineteenth year, somewhat older than Liszt was on his introduction to Czerny, but had there been any intention of Chopin having a career as a virtuoso pianist, his family would surely have organised such an introduction earlier. Then, as now, the way to success in this field was most assured through affiliation with a piano teacher whose reputation was well established.

Elsner's high ambitions for Chopin as a composer of Polish national opera explain several other oddities in Chopin's musical education. In 1827, in addition to his studies at the Conservatory, Chopin was apparently having private lessons in Italian.<sup>21</sup> His letters written during his travels of 1829-31 are full of his accounts of operas and singers that he heard, and in one from Vienna to his parents, he notes: 'I spend most money on theatre visits'.<sup>22</sup> If he were aiming for a career as a piano virtuoso, it is strange that his father voiced no complaint about his time being spent in this way, rather than practising, and consulting the famous pianists he could have sought out—particularly as the Chopins were by no means wealthy and had received no financial assistance for these trips; Chopin's father was constantly reminding him to be careful with money. Furthermore, there are several references in Chopin's letters to introductions in Paris to the best-known opera composers of the day. In May 1831, he wrote from Vienna to his parents:

I was up early today and played until two, then I went to lunch where I met my good friend Kandler, who, as you know, has promised me letters for Cherubini and Paer [in Paris]<sup>23</sup>

and on his arrival in Paris he wrote: 'Thanks to Paer who is Court Conductor I got to know Rossini, Cherubini, etc., Baillot, etc.'<sup>24</sup> Throughout these letters, Chopin refers to the established composers and performers of Vienna and Paris as friends and acquaintances, rather than as potential teachers.

Although Chopin performed with considerable success in Vienna and Munich, as well as Warsaw, there are no references in his letters to his practising for these events. In a letter to Titus Woyciechowski describing his time in Vienna in 1829, he writes:

Three piano makers offered to send an instrument to my lodging. I declined, for my room was too small and those few hours of practice would not have been much use, especially as I was due to play in two days' time.<sup>25</sup>

This attitude is echoed in a report of his friend Ferdinand Hiller, recalling a later time in Paris:

He disliked being without company—something that seldom occurred. In the morning he liked to spend an hour by himself at his grand piano; but even when he practised—or how should I describe it?—when he stayed at home to play in the evenings, he needed to have at least one of his friends close at hand.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the success he received as a pianist prior to his arrival in Paris, it is clear from references in his letters that Chopin considered himself rather as a composer. In a letter from Vienna to his family, he spoke of the contacts he had made in the musical establishment there, Haslinger (the publisher), the piano makers Stein and Graff, Blahetka (a journalist) and Schuppanzigh (violinist) among others. Of their opinion of him he wrote:

They find it surprising that people like Kessler, Ernemann and Czapek can remain in Warsaw while I am there. But I have explained that I play merely for the pure love of music and do not give lessons.<sup>27</sup>

and, recounting to Titus a Warsaw concert where he played the E minor concerto and *Pot-pourri on Polish Airs*, he talks about how successful his compositions were, then says, as if by the way, '[t]he audience enjoyed my piano-playing'.<sup>28</sup> When he passed through Wroclaw, he was persuaded to play at a rehearsal:

At the rehearsal the Germans were surprised by my playing 'Was für ein leichtes Spiel hat er!'...but about the composition itself, not a word. Titus actually heard somebody say that I could play but not compose...As my reputation is not yet fully established, they are surprised at me, but are afraid to show it. They don't know whether the composition was really good or whether it only appeared to be so.<sup>29</sup>

Regardless of Chopin's own intentions regarding his future career, it seems that he was considered to be a "finished musician" even before he reached Paris, a fact which must surely have influenced his later decision to abandon the prospect of opera composition in favour of a career as a pianist-composer. In a letter from Vienna on 12 August 1829, he told his family that Blahetka considered him 'a virtuoso of the first rank, to be counted in with Moscheles, Herz and Kalkbrenner',<sup>30</sup> and on 19 August he wrote:

Yesterday Schuppanzigh reminded me that as I am leaving Vienna after such a brief stay I must return very shortly. I answered that I will come back here to study, whereupon the baron retorted, 'In that case there is no reason at all why you should come': an idea which others confirmed....They all refuse to look upon me as a pupil.<sup>31</sup>

Chopin's training, then, seems to have been first and foremost in composition. The possibility of a career as a virtuoso seems to have occurred to him only after his arrival in Paris; indeed circumstances suggest that the proposal was more for the sake of keeping his parents and friends happy, rather than any deeply felt motivation on Chopin's part. The cool response of his family and friends in Warsaw to the suggestion is recorded in the correspondence that ensued.

#### *Paris, 1831–32*

Upon his arrival in Paris in the autumn of 1831, Chopin was faced with a dilemma. His family, and particularly his former teacher in Warsaw, Józef Elsner, were eagerly anticipating news of the advancement of his career as a composer of operas. The 21-year-old Chopin had as yet no income of his own and was well aware of the financial burden his travels were placing on the family purse. He was also uncomfortably aware of the high expectations his friends and family had of him; to play the piano and to compose for it was expected of a talented young student, but in Paris—the hub of musical Europe—his true destiny as the great composer of Polish opera was to be set in motion. His education thus far had all been directed to that end, and it could surely be only a matter of time before the genius of the young Pole would be recognised and fostered.

Chopin's attitude towards the career so carefully planned for him seems to have been, at best, ambivalent. Though he took every opportunity in his travels to attend the opera, seemed to genuinely enjoy the experience and wrote detailed reports of his impressions in his letters home, there is no evidence of his own work in the genre, not even so much as a reference by

him to a plot or libretto. Furthermore, unlike Berlioz or Wagner, Chopin had little inclination for self-promotion, and throughout his life relied on others to organise details of his relatively few public appearances. Even for his debut performance in Vienna, Chopin seems to have taken little trouble over his dealings with the orchestra; when the orchestral accompaniment of the *Rondo Krakowiak* went 'badly' at rehearsal he simply substituted a solo piece. It was only after revision of the parts by Nidecki (another pupil of Elsner, who was working in Vienna) that they could be used for the second concert.<sup>32</sup> To compose large-scale operatic works, to fight for their acceptance, and to supervise their production would have required a degree of energy and enterprise that was, apparently, beyond him. On the other hand, although he had already met with considerable success as a pianist, he had little or no formal training on the instrument and showed no inclination for practice. His solution to the dilemma was to explain to his family and Elsner as best he could the extreme difficulties of entering the field of opera composition, and to offer them instead the promise of rigorous training as a virtuoso, with the famous Kalkbrenner as his teacher.<sup>33</sup>

Chopin's letter home announcing his intention provoked a flurry of letters from Warsaw on 27 November 1831; his father, sister, and Józef Elsner all wrote on that day, expressing the same concern.<sup>34</sup> Nicholas Chopin wrote to his son:

...you know...that the mechanics of piano-playing occupied little of your time, and that your mind was busier than your fingers. If others have spent whole days working at the keyboard you rarely spent an hour playing other men's music...You have only just arrived; you say yourself that you can't yet hold your head up and show what you have in you. So wait a while—genius may reveal itself immediately to those who understand, but they may not perceive its lofty intention; so give them time to know you better and do not take upon yourself something which might only hold back your progress. I will say no more on the subject; I hope that as I write you will have already received the little extra allowance which I have sent...

and Elsner:

It was with great pleasure that I learnt that the leading pianist...Kalkbrenner, received you so kindly....All the more then do I rejoice to hear that he has promised to reveal to you the secrets of his art. Nevertheless I am surprised that he fixes a period of three years in which to do it. Could he possibly decide, immediately after seeing and hearing you for the first time, how long you will require in order to absorb his method? Or that you

must devote your musical genius simply to piano-playing, and your artistic endowment to the same species of composition?

Chopin's sister Louise was less circumspect. She reported Elsner as saying:

'They've recognised genius in Fryderyk and are already scared that he will outstrip them, so they want to keep their hands on him for three years in order to hold back something of that which Nature herself might push forward...' ...Elsner does not want you to imitate anyone, and he expressed a correct opinion when he said: 'All imitation is as nothing when compared with originality. Once you imitate you will cease to be original. Although you may still be young your ideas may be superior to those of more experienced writers. You have inborn genius and your compositions are fresher and better: you have the style of playing of Field, although you took lessons from Zywny—so what does it all prove?' Besides, Mr Elsner doesn't wish to see you merely as a concert-giver, a composer for piano and a famous executant—that is the easy way and is far less significant than writing operas. He wants to see you in the role Nature intended and fitted you for. Your place must be with Rossini, Mozart, etc. Your genius should not cling to the piano and to concert-giving; operas must make you immortal.

Chopin's reply to Józef Elsner on 14 December reveals the extent of his discomfort with the situation. He flatters his teacher, puts the blame entirely on circumstances outside his control, stresses his own disappointment, and offers hope for some unspecified time in the future:

In 1830...I dared to think to myself: 'I will approach his [Elsner's] achievement, in however small a measure, and if I cannot produce an opera like his *Lokietek*, perhaps some *Laskonogi* will come from my brain.' But today, seeing all my hopes in that direction dashed, I am forced to think of making my way in the world as a pianist, postponing only to a later period the loftier artistic aims which you rightly put before me in your letter. To be a *great composer* requires enormous experience...<sup>35</sup>

In addition to their disappointment in their son's decision to pursue a lesser artistic goal, it seems likely that Chopin's parents were concerned at the prospect of their son entering an already overcrowded profession: Paris was swarming with pianists.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, the profession had become somewhat tainted with the accusations of charlatanism that had been levelled against so many of these virtuosos. No parent would wish their talented child to be subjected to the

malicious gossip of the public: Paganini's private life was the subject of bizarre speculation, and the miserable and degrading end of John Field's career must have worried Chopin's parents, particularly as comparisons were so often made between the two.

Chopin's family and teacher were not convinced by Chopin's argument, and Elsner in particular was not fooled by the carefully worded flattery. Chopin offered him a final reassurance in this letter before turning to more trivial news:

I am firmly convinced that I shall not be an imitation of Kalkbrenner: *he* has not the power to extinguish my perhaps too audacious but noble wish and intention to create for myself a new world. And if I do work it will be in order to stand more firmly on my own two feet. It was easier for Ries, since he was known as a pianist, to achieve fame in Berlin and Frankfort with his opera *The Robber's Bride*; and Spohr too was long known as a violinist before he wrote his *Jessonda* and *Faust*. I am sure you will not refuse me your blessing when you know on what basis and with what enterprise I shall proceed.<sup>37</sup>

This was the only time in his life that Chopin showed any apparent interest in becoming a virtuoso; the enthusiasm was short-lived, and undoubtedly strongly influenced by the atmosphere in Paris and Kalkbrenner's powers of persuasion. Predictably the idea of lessons with Kalkbrenner came to nothing, and by April 1833 the two had finally fallen out, for his father wrote:

I am also interested by what you say of Kalkbrenner's obvious insincerity—I see he has been the cause of your migraine and I am anxious for your sake. I feel it was very good-natured of you to give him a dedication [of the E minor concerto]. If he comes here I shall have very little desire to see him—I cannot hide my feelings.<sup>38</sup>

One suspects it was a relief to Chopin when, after initial problems, his virtuoso career began to develop, and the whole matter of opera composition was dropped altogether by his family. Elsner persisted for another three years before apparently giving in. His final reminder to Chopin has an air of desperation about it in its somewhat pathetic appeal to Chopin's sense of duty. In abandoning opera composition, Chopin was not only failing to realise his talent, he was betraying his responsibility to his homeland:

Everything I read or hear about our dear Fryderyk fills my heart with joy, but forgive my frankness—it is still not enough for me...As I journey through this 'vale of tears' I would like to live to see an opera of your composition, which would not only increase

your fame but benefit the art of music in general, especially if the subject of such an opera were drawn from Polish national history....As the critic of your Mazurkas stated, only an opera can show your talent in a true light and win for it eternal life. 'A piano work', says Urban [a German critic] 'is to a vocal or other instrumental composition as an engraving is to a painted picture.' This view is as correct as ever, although certain piano works, especially your own when performed by yourself, may be regarded as illuminated engravings.<sup>39</sup>

It is difficult to discern how Chopin felt about the career his family and Elsner had mapped out for him. Despite his obvious enjoyment of opera, and the obvious influence of *bel canto* in many of his piano works, there is nowhere any mention of his having plans to compose an opera. But it seems also that, apart from a short-lived enthusiasm for Kalkbrenner—which may in any case have been exaggerated for the sake of his parents—Chopin never intended a career as a virtuoso pianist, and was in many ways ill-equipped for the profession. Indeed, he was at times quite scathing about the practice and teaching methods of the virtuoso pianists of his time, referring to 'methods that are tedious and useless and have nothing to do with the study of this instrument'.<sup>40</sup>

Chopin's lack of formal training as a pianist set him apart from his contemporaries, not only as a pianist, but also as a composer. In the course of their training, other pianists inevitably absorbed not only the repertoire, but also the familiar keyboard patterns and all their common variants; they became acquainted too with a new mode of musical thought that was emerging and developing alongside the instrument that gave it expression. If, as his father claims, Chopin 'rarely spent an hour playing other men's music', his acquaintance with the standard piano repertoire of the day must have been at best superficial. If he spent time improvising rather than practising the scales and arpeggios that saturated the 'brilliant' music of the time, it is hardly surprising that his fingers and his mind should eventually find their own, highly original mode of expression on the instrument.

A reputation as a virtuoso was absolutely essential if Chopin were to procure the publication and dissemination of his compositions. There can be no doubt that he achieved such a reputation, despite his unconventional training and lack of respect for the profession.<sup>41</sup> According to contemporary reports, Chopin's piano playing and his teaching were as distinctive in style as were his compositions, but even in his own time there was not a Chopin 'school'—the highly individualised approach he employed in his teaching militated against

this. Except for the fragmentary 'Method', Chopin himself did not systematically record details of his approach for posterity, and the reports of his colleagues and students are by their nature incomplete and at times inconclusive and contradictory. Frequently apparent in descriptions of his playing is the writers' frustration with the inadequacy of language to do justice to the phenomenon; even those experienced wordsmiths, Berlioz and Schumann, were struggling.

By the middle of the century Chopin was dead, leaving only a few students to perpetuate his ideas. The 'virtuoso' school, on the other hand, was in full swing. Liszt, for example, was to continue teaching in Weimar until 1884, and his many pupils extended the Liszt tradition well into the twentieth century: indeed, the phenomenon is perpetuated by the descendants of Liszt's pupils in many conservatoria today. It seems likely, then, that aspects of Chopin's style, particularly where he differed markedly from his contemporaries, might have been, to at least some extent, subsumed by the larger and stronger tradition, the perpetuation of which has significant consequences for the Chopin performer and scholar.

In a letter quoted earlier, Chopin referred to his 'perhaps too audacious but noble wish to create [for himself] a new world'.<sup>42</sup> His initial success as a pianist was, for him, incidental to his aspirations as a composer, and appears to have been based largely on the highly original style of both his playing and his compositions. If, in 1831 this career was proposed largely in order to placate Elsner and his parents, he nevertheless fulfilled his stated wish, and in a manner that was as idiosyncratic as his musical style. Paradoxically, it was his very lack of pianistic training, his training in another field altogether, and his failure to fulfil his destiny as an opera composer that enabled him to achieve this goal. While others were swept along in the enthusiasm for the new virtuosity, Chopin alone resisted the trend. He created his own style which, by placing musical values above all else, remained true to an older, perhaps ultimately more durable concept of virtuosity.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Report by M. Legouvé of a benefit concert at which Chopin appeared in March, 1838; *Gazette musicale*, 25 March 1838; quoted in F. Niecks, *The life of Chopin*, vol.2 (London: Novello, 1902), p.16.

<sup>2</sup> Janet Ritterman, 'Piano music and the public concert', in *The Cambridge companion to Chopin*, ed. Jim Samson (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), pp.11–31. Ritterman's chapter offers a refreshingly clear analysis of this complex subject, giving a chronology for the numerous changes in convention over the period and clarifying many points that have long been the subject of confusion.

- <sup>3</sup> Quoted in Niecks, *Chopin*, vol.1, p.102; translation presumably by Niecks of the original source, *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, no. 46 (18 Nov. 1829). Niecks suggests F.A. Kanne as the probable author of this review. In this chapter, Niecks quotes long passages of reviews from a variety of sources: the *Wiener Theaterzeitung* (reviews of both concerts), *Der Sammler*, the *Wiener Zeitschrift für Kunst, Literatur, Theater und Mode* (reviews of both concerts) and the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*. The substance of these reviews is precisely echoed in Chopin's reports of them to his family and friends in Warsaw; see letters of 12, 13 and 19 Aug., 12 Sept. and 3 Oct. 1829 in *Selected correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, trans. and ed. Arthur Hedley (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979). The original language of all Chopin's correspondence quoted in this article is Polish, with the exception of letters from his father, Nicholas Chopin, who wrote to his son in French.
- <sup>4</sup> Niecks, *Chopin*, vol.1, p.100; again presumably Niecks' translation of an item in the *Wiener Theaterzeitung*, 20 Aug. 1829.
- <sup>5</sup> All cited in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and teacher as seen by his pupils*, ed. Roy Howat, trans. Naomi Shohet with Krystia Osostowicz and Roy Howat (Cambridge: CUP, 1986), pp.272, 273 and 268; original sources are as follows: Berlioz, *Le Rénovateur*, 2.345 (15 Dec. 1833); Liszt, conversation quoted in Strelezki (pseudonym of the English pianist Arthur Bransby Burnand), *Personal recollections of chats with Liszt* (London, 1887; rpt. New York: Musical Scope Publishers, c.1970), pp.12–13; Mendelssohn, letter to his family (Leipzig, 6 Oct. 1835).
- <sup>6</sup> According to Nicholas Temperley, *Fryderyk Chopin*, *The new Grove early romantic masters 1* (London: Macmillan, 1985) and Zofia Chechlinska, 'Zywny', *The new Grove*, vol.20, p.727; in his monograph *Chopin* (London: Dent, 1974), Arthur Hedley claims it was 1817.
- <sup>7</sup> Chopin indirectly confirms that his formal study ended at this time in a letter written to his family on 19 Aug. 1829, following his successful debut in Vienna: 'Blahetka said that nothing surprised so much as to find that I had learnt all that in Warsaw. My answer was that with Messrs Zywny and Elsner the greatest ass would learn'; *Chopin correspondence*, p.27.
- <sup>8</sup> Niecks, *Chopin*, vol.1, p.29.
- <sup>9</sup> Niecks, *Chopin*, vol.1, p.31.
- <sup>10</sup> Letter from Elsner in Warsaw to Chopin in Paris, 27 Nov. 1831, *Chopin correspondence*, p.96.
- <sup>11</sup> Niecks, *Chopin*, vol.1, p.30. According to Niecks, Wolff died in Paris on 16 Oct. 1880.
- <sup>12</sup> Temperley, *Chopin*, p.4.
- <sup>13</sup> Niecks, *Chopin*, vol.1, p.72. The history of the Warsaw Conservatory in the period 1815–30 is rather complex. It is possible that Niecks is referring to the conservatory during the time of its affiliation with the Dramatic School from 1815–1817. From 1821–31 the Institute for Music and Elocution was attached to the Faculty of Sciences and Arts of Warsaw University; Elzbieta Gluszczyńska-Zwolinska, 'Warsaw', *The new Grove*, vol.20, p.220.
- <sup>14</sup> As early as 1814 Elsner had founded the Society for Religious and National Music, and had attempted to develop a Polish national style of opera. He composed 19 dramatic works in Polish, the last of which, composed significantly in 1831, was entitled *The insurrection of a nation* (Alina Nowak-Romanowicz, 'Elsner', *The new Grove*, vol.6, p.144).
- <sup>15</sup> For instance, Hedley, *Chopin*, p.16: 'Fétis did not consider that Elsner paid enough respect to the "rules"... Whether or not he observed the strict rules in his own work, there is no doubt that he was perfectly competent to teach them; but his greatest merit lies in the fact that he made no attempt to force Chopin to conform in these matters.'
- <sup>16</sup> Letter of 2 Oct. 1826; *Chopin correspondence*, p.10. Chopin is being ironic here: Brodzinski was a writer, and lectured in literature. I have been unable to discover Bentkowski's field, but it does not seem to have been music.
- <sup>17</sup> Niecks, *Chopin*, vol.1, pp.73–74) lists Carl Arnold, Wenzel W. Würfel, Franz Lessel and Heinrich Gerhard Lentz, all of whom were well known throughout Europe.
- <sup>18</sup> Liszt's father had been employed on the Esterházy estate at Raiding. He took over a week off work in August 1819, to look for employment for himself in Vienna and to introduce his son to Carl Czerny with a view to Liszt's future study with him. Czerny was impressed with the boy's playing, but Adam Liszt's search for work was apparently unsuccessful, for, on his return to Raiding, he petitioned the prince repeatedly for a transfer to Vienna. He was finally given a year's leave of absence and the Liszt family lived in Vienna in considerable poverty and financial uncertainty; Walker, *Liszt: The virtuoso years* (New York: Knopf, 1983), p.72.
- <sup>19</sup> Letter written by Chopin in Dresden to his family in Warsaw; *Chopin correspondence*, pp.29–30.
- <sup>20</sup> Written in Warsaw, 12 Oct. 1830; *Chopin correspondence*, p.33.
- <sup>21</sup> In a letter to Jan Bialoblocki (Warsaw, 12 Mar. 1827; *Chopin correspondence*, p.12), Chopin refers to his Italian master coming to the house, but Chopin had one of his headaches, so the lesson was cancelled.
- <sup>22</sup> Letter dated 1 Dec. 1830; *Chopin correspondence*, p.69.
- <sup>23</sup> *Chopin correspondence*, p.82.
- <sup>24</sup> Letter to Titus Woyciechowski, dated 12 Dec. 1831; *Chopin correspondence*, p.98.
- <sup>25</sup> Letter dated 12 Sept. 1829; *Chopin correspondence*, p.32. The rather laconic tone of Chopin's letters stands in sharp contrast to Liszt's flamboyant enthusiasm. In a letter to Pierre Wolff, Liszt claimed that he practised technical exercises for four to five hours a day (Walker, *Liszt*, pp.173–74).
- <sup>26</sup> Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and teacher*, p.270. Original source: Hiller, *Briefe an eine Ungenannte* (Köln, 1877). Hiller is referring to the years 1831–36; he left Paris in 1836 and lost contact with his friend.
- <sup>27</sup> Letter of 8 Aug. 1829; *Chopin correspondence*, p.23. Blahetka was a prominent music critic and father of the pianist Leopoldine Blahetka; the violinist Schuppanzigh had been a friend of Beethoven's, and leader of the quartet that first performed his string quartets. Once he moved to Paris in 1831, of course Chopin did give lessons.
- <sup>28</sup> Letter of 12 Oct. 1830; *Chopin correspondence*, p.60.
- <sup>29</sup> Letter to his family of 9 Nov. 1830; *Chopin correspondence*, p.62. The composition in question was the Romance and Rondo from the second piano concerto.
- <sup>30</sup> *Chopin correspondence*, p.23.
- <sup>31</sup> Letter to his family; *Chopin correspondence*, p.27.
- <sup>32</sup> It is unclear from Chopin's account whether Nidecki volunteered his services, or whether Chopin asked for his

help. The former seems the most probable, as Chopin did not seem to be unduly concerned about the matter (letter to his family, 12 Aug. 1829). In a later letter to Titus Woyciechowski, Chopin explains that 'The cause of the confusion was that the rests were written differently above and below the stave, but it was agreed that only the top ones should count.' (letter written in Warsaw, 12 Sept. 1829).

33 Kalkbrenner seems to have been an astute businessman; in the same year his *Méthode* was published, he started a three-year training course for young teachers, and it was this course of study which he offered to Chopin; Paul Dekeyser, 'Kalkbrenner', *The new Grove*, vol.9, p.778.

34 *Chopin correspondence*, pp. 94–97 for these three consecutive letters. The one from his father was, as usual, in French, the others were in Polish.

35 *Chopin correspondence*, pp. 102–103. Elsner's *Lokietek* (a Polish king) was first performed in Warsaw in 1818; *Laskonogi* (skinny-legs) is the nickname of another Polish king.

36 Heinrich Heine referred to the large number of pianists as 'a plague of locusts swarming to pick Paris clean'; *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 9 (Leipzig, Insel-Verlag), p.275.

37 Letter to Elsner in Warsaw, 14 Dec. 1831; *Chopin Correspondence*, pp.103–104.

38 Letter to Chopin in Paris (original language French), dated 13 Apr. 1833; *Chopin correspondence*, p.116.

39 Letter dated 14 Sept. 1834; *Chopin correspondence*, p.124. See also Elsner's letter of 13 Nov. 1832 (p.113), and a letter from the poet Witwicki of 6 July 1831 (p.84).

40 Details of Chopin's own teaching methods are comprehensively recorded in Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger's *Chopin: Pianist and teacher*. Eigeldinger records several instances of Chopin's scornful attitude towards other methods; the quoted example comes from the fragmentary 'Sketch for a Method' (Appendix 1, pp.190–97): 'People have tried out all kinds of methods...methods that are tedious and useless and have nothing to do with the study of this instrument. It's like learning, for example, to walk on one's hands in order to go for a stroll. Eventually one is no longer able to walk properly on one's feet, and not very well on one's hands either...'. A detailed study of Chopin's 'Method' is to be found in J.-J. Eigeldinger's *Frédéric Chopin: Esquisses pour une méthode de piano* (Paris: Flammarion, 1993).

41 In addition to examples cited in this article, many others are to be found in Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger's *Chopin: Pianist and teacher*, an invaluable anthology of contemporary reports of Chopin's playing and teaching.

42 Letter to Elsner, 14 Dec. 1831; *Chopin correspondence*, p.103.

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