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Hearing the Nations in Chopin*

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1. Agendas

Among the many Chopin celebrations of 1960 (his 150th anniversary), one passed virtually unnoticed. On March 12th, the Academy of Athens honoured the occasion with a lecture followed by a concert. Interestingly, the concert included several of the songs. It was not the first time they had been given in Athens. Forty years earlier, in 1920, a group of them had been performed by the soprano Spéranza Calo. One of those in the audience at that earlier concert was Manolis Kalomiris, then aged 37, and acknowledged as the leading composer of the so-called Greek national school. And before the Academy concert in 1960, it was Kalomiris who delivered a lecture on Chopin. It has particular interest, I think, because it presents a moment of continuity with ideas of romantic nationalism that were by then largely outmoded in Europe. We might even view it as a kind of end point in a story of musical nationalism that began, at least symbolically, with Chopin himself. Now Kalomiris was in his late seventies in 1960. He was the senior figure in Greek music, even if his moment had in a sense already passed. So, I suppose he was the obvious choice to deliver the lecture. Its title might have been my title today. It has been translated as "The National Vibration in Chopin's Music" (Kalomiris 1961).

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Implausible though it may seem, Kalomiris began his lecture by comparing Chopin to *Digenes Akritas*, the hero of Byzantine epics, whose double origins (Arab-Greek; East-West) might be thought to epitomize the double-descendedness that commentators like to take as a determining factor of modern Greek cultural identity. It is hard not to spot the rather crude symbolic mapping. Chopin's double origins (Polish-French) are read as East-West, and thus as a kind of validation of Kalomiris's project for Greek music, including what he himself called a "Greek-oriental colour", whatever that may mean. Let us try to ignore the false modesty at the end of the lecture:

> I am neither a musicologist nor a music historian; not even a music critic, although I have been writing reviews for many years. I am simply a composer, a singer who has also dreamt, however unsuccessfully, of writing music born of the legends, traditions and sufferings of our fatherland. Of course, in comparison to the magnificent song of the Polish troubadour, which reaches to the heavens, mine seems coarse, feeble, and unworthy of discussion. (Kalomiris 1961: 36)

Needless-to-say, the real message is exactly the opposite. The genius of Chopin, we are being told, was born of just the same symbiosis as that of Kalomiris himself. In describing and praising Chopin, Kalomiris was describing and praising himself.

Even so, there is a grain of truth in his assessment of Chopin's significance for the national element in music, even down to the east-west orientations. After all, Chopin was instrumental for two major traditions – I hesitate to say "schools" – in the later 19th century. He was formative of Russian and Polish constructions of a modern national music (looking east, if you like), but also of *fin de siècle* French pianism (looking west). I will come to all that later. It takes us to issues of Chopin reception that will form the third part of this three-part paper, where I will discuss various national responses to Chopin after his death. If this represents the "aesthesic" level, in Jean-Jacques Nattiez's disarmingly simple schema (Nattiez 1990), then the first part of my talk will look at the "poietic" level, the level of intention: of the composer's own agendas for a national music. In the second part of the talk I will look at Nattiez's so-called "neutral" level, the level of musical materials. All three levels, I contend, are relevant to constructions of nationhood in music.

As to agendas, my premise is that in Vienna in 1830 Chopin composed the music that we might consider the first canonical repertory of European

nationalism. I am referring here to his Op. 6 and Op. 7 mazurkas. These were the earliest mazurkas he himself chose to send to a publisher, and we should note that in a letter to Warsaw he insisted that they were "not for dancing" (Sydow 1955: 161). That is a very significant remark. There is already a whiff of an agenda about it. And the agenda firms up a bit in a letter written a year later in Paris when he speaks of trying to feel and understand "our national music" – his phrase (Sydow 1955: 210). It is entirely typical of Chopin that the agenda should have been understated. It was not about investing in ambitious projects – opera or programme music – but about transforming two simple dance pieces: giving them weight and modernizing them. In the case of the mazurka this could be done without any real break in continuity; this was a dance that had not yet been appropriated by European music. But the polonaise was a different matter. Polonaises were everywhere, and had been for the better part of two centuries. This was a cosmopolitan genre, albeit with *couleur locale*, and there is really very little to distinguish Chopin's early polonaises stylistically from those of, for example, Hummel or Weber. So, Chopin did not transform polonaises in 1830. He actually stopped composing them. And when he returned to them some four or five years later, he effectively created an entirely new genre, cleansed of earlier cosmopolitan associations.

I think there may be some new things to say about the impulses that lay behind this step change in 1830. Everyone knows that Herder's thoughts on folk culture and the nation bore fruit in the Slavonic lands. But not everyone appreciates the genealogy here, and in particular the intersection of Slavonic, eastern Hanseatic and circum-Baltic traditions that came together in the work of a small group of writers in the early 19th century. It is enough for our purposes to know that one of the key figures was Kazimierz Brodziński, a Professor of Literature at Warsaw University, while Chopin was a student there. To cut a long story short, Brodziński was asked by Jósef Elsner, Chopin's teacher, to translate into Polish some of Forkel's seminal *Allgemeine Geschichte der Musik* of 1788, including the part dealing with the rhythmic and melodic characteristics of national musics, bearing in mind that Forkel's history doesn't extend into the modern era (Forkel 1788). Anyway, shortly after that, actually in late 1829, Brodziński published a short article "O tańcach polskich" [On Polish Dances], where he discussed at length the deeper meaning of Polish national dances (Brodziński 1829).

This takes a considerable step beyond Forkel, and actually the whole sequence is an interesting example of intellectual transfer, of how ideas are transformed as they are transferred. Chopin claimed that he actually attended Brodziński's lectures at the University (Sydow 1955: 37). I have

some doubts about that claim. According to the published lists of lectures in *Kurier Warszawski*, together with timetables, he could only have attended those lectures if he had skipped some of his composition classes with Elsner. There was a timetable clash! Well, who knows what really happened? What is certain is that he would have been familiar with Brodziński's ideas, especially given the importance attached to them by Elsner. And it seems to me entirely possible that they played a part in shaping his understanding of what he called "our national music". The date of Brodziński's pamphlet (1829) is especially crucial.

Now all this is part of a larger question about the shaping influences on Chopin's aesthetic, and about what really constitutes his uniqueness as a composer. This is something I have been interested in over the years, and I want to advance the thought that the explanatory value of his musical education has been greatly underestimated in the past. Actually, I think pedagogy is underrated more generally in 19th-century studies, mainly because a canonical view of music history fosters the notion that genius is set apart and will somehow find its own path. The truth is that if we look closely at Chopin's education, we learn a great deal not just about where he came from as a composer but about where ideas of nationhood fitted in.

I have written a separate article on Chopin's education, so I will not go into detail here (see Samson 2009). The key point is that for Chopin, as for Mendelssohn but not for Liszt or Berlioz, technical training was firmly rooted in late-18th-century theory, associated with Berlin in particular. The key text for both Chopin and Mendelssohn was Kirnberger's *Die Kunst des reinen Satzes*, a very famous text, of course (Kirnberger 1774-79). Now it is obvious that on one level Chopin and Mendelssohn drew very different conclusions from this common pedagogical background (just think of how they each processed the influence of Bach). But on another level, it was precisely that common background that set them both apart from Liszt and Berlioz, both of whom represented a kind of generational or cohort thinking – the Romantic generation, if you like. In contrast, Chopin and Mendelssohn represented genealogical thinking (they were sons of their fathers, metaphorically speaking), and as such committed to an essentially classical view of the musical work, rooted in the immanent, the real, even the rule-bound.

In later life Chopin continued to work more-or-less exclusively on that level, and at a time when a contrary, idealist view of music prevailed. But we should note that this idealist view was also represented in his Warsaw schooling, albeit as a subordinate presence. Elsner introduced his students to Grétry's memoires (Grétry 1829) (he called it a "beautiful book"), to

Marpurg's letters (Marpurg 1760), to Rousseau's dictionary (Rousseau 1768), and, as already noted, to Brodziński. I want to suggest that all this helped to shape the kind of composer Chopin would become, a composer who rejected an idealist view of the musical work, but who admitted compositional criteria derived unmistakably from idealist values (this is perhaps where he differed from Mendelssohn). I include among those idealist values notions of originality and subjectivity, but also of nationality.

I should add that choosing to express Poland by transforming simple dance pieces rather than investing in programme music and opera was entirely typical of Chopin, who stayed with the basic elements of popular concert music from the 1820s, but transformed those elements until they could contribute to a "project of greatness". In an age that increasingly separated out the popular and the significant, his achievement was to transform the popular into the significant, effectively creating a unique synthesis of classical and post-classical idioms. But it is perhaps worth adding that contemporary audiences sometimes heard Poland in more than just the mazurkas and polonaises. Indeed, I suspect that some aspects of a nationalist agenda in his music may be hidden from us today. One of the most significant things ever said of a Chopin ballade was by an anonymous British critic in 1848. After a concert given by Chopin himself, the critic wrote the following: "The last piece was also national: a ballade" (*Edinburgh Evening Courant*, October 7th, 1848). In other words, the title "ballade" carried connotative values of nationhood that were deemed to be so obvious in the 1840s that they did not need explaining. What we easily miss today is the association of this genre title with what is sometimes called a vernacular turn in literature, and by way of that, with the nation.

2. Musical Materials

I have tried to say something here about Chopin's agenda for a national music, however understated it may have been. It is important because in some ways it was to become the agenda for 19th- and early 20th-century nationalisms more generally, and it was given a belated articulation by Manolis Kalomiris. An authentic national school, Kalomiris claimed, should be "based on the music of our unspoiled, authentic folksongs . . . embellished with all the technical means . . . of the musically advanced peoples" (Kalomiris 1988). The rhetoric here might have been recognised by Chopin, even if the reality was removed from the rhetoric in both cases, as I will hope to demonstrate. Note the relation between "base" and "embellishment" in the quotation. In practice, I submit, it should be inverted. But in any event Kalomiris's reference to

"our unspoiled, authentic folksongs" takes us into the territory of the second part of my talk, musical materials.

It is hardly necessary after Dahlhaus to emphasize that musical materials are nationalised rather than national. Dahlhaus's famous essay may have been only partially successful in refuting a Marxist understanding of cultural history, which was its unspoken objective, but its central insight still stands (Dahlhaus 1980). I mean here his contention that nationalism in music may be understood through a poetics of intention and reception, but seldom as an immanent material category. For long enough, Polish musicologists milked dry the few references we have to Chopin's direct contact with traditional agrarian repertories in Mazovia (it really amounted to a couple of summer holidays in the country) in order to argue for some kind of authenticity in his use of traditional music ("our unspoiled, authentic folksongs"). This is a lost cause as an argument. Chopin's knowledge of mazurkas was based on the salons of Warsaw, not the singing and dancing of peasants, and the musical markers he adopted to signify the nation were really rather generalised: a handful of formulae, including Lydian and other modes, bourdon fifths, a standard rhythmic genus, and certain types of ornamentation: the same formulae that were adopted by 19th-century nationalists everywhere, beginning with the Russian school that was his most immediate inheritance.

What really distinguished the Chopin mazurkas was not their links to "unspoiled, authentic folksongs" but rather their symbiosis of generalised formulae from traditional music and advanced contemporary harmonies. And that was to set the tone for national schools everywhere. The essential character of 19th-century musical nationalism, at least as a category of compositional history, is actually fairly easily described. The nation presents a variant on a uniform contemporary idiom, while at the same time competitively elevating, asserting and promoting its uniqueness within an ethos of exceptionalism. In practice this means we have a repertory of generalised folk idioms serving as all-purpose musical signifiers, inflecting what Philip Bohlman calls the "aesthetic centre", while specificity resides, and I repeat this, in a poetics of intention and reception (Bohlman 2007). The musical materials themselves, like the liquids in Zygmunt Bauman's "liquid modernities", flow freely across the boundaries (Baumann 2000). Actually, if you want a very precise parallel, unlikely though it may seem, turn to the formulaic songs of present-day ethno-pop. They work in exactly the same way. Herein lies the paradox of musical nationalism: that markers designed to singularize national traditions, far from generating multiple divergent cultures, succeeded only in generating a unitary convergent culture.

If we want to see how the formula worked in the context of a so-called national school, we could do worse than return to Greece, which was unabashed about using the label "national school". The Greek national school, probably the last in the line of such movements, was a chimera in stylistic terms. It was really a kind of club, and once you signed up, you could do pretty much what you liked. Of course, if you failed to sign up, you could be in trouble (witness the career of Nikos Skalkottas). Stylistically, the only real entrance test for the national school, it seems to me, was to admit the right sort of foreign influences. Positioning oneself correctly in relation to contemporary music elsewhere was in practice far more important than turning to "our unspoiled, authentic folksongs". What we have in the national school, then, is a cluster of sparingly used, mainly East-orientated idioms serving as all-purpose musical signifiers, their function to inflect what I called earlier the "aesthetic centre", and note that the aesthetic centre is decidedly West-orientated.

Of course, in the early 20th century a number of composers around the edges of Europe really did invest in "our unspoiled, authentic folksongs" (Bartók is the paradigmatic case). However, I do think it is essential to recognise that in these cases – certainly in the case of Bartók – traditional music serves a quite different, essentially modernist, purpose, and is not primarily about nationalism, even if that was its initial cover story. It did not much matter if Bartók's source was Hungarian, Romanian, Turkish or North African. What really counted was that it was a pre-modern music that had been bypassed by the progressive rationality spearheading European art music. When appropriated by art music, it could acquire critical acumen. It could critique from within: a critical but also a regenerative force.

But back to Chopin! I want to demonstrate by looking at manuscript sources just how slippery musical materials actually are; or to put it another way, just how illusory Nattiez's "neutral level" actually is. To do this I will scrutinise the space that exists between intention and reception. Let me present two familiar narratives, one about the mazurkas and one about the polonaises. The first describes the return to Poland that is embodied in Chopin's late mazurkas and that culminates in the so-called "last mazurka" in F minor, Op. 68 No. 4. This supposedly represents Chopin's final musical thoughts in the form of a semi-coherent sketch (see Fig. 1). The chromaticism of the mazurka acquires then a very special poignancy in the context of what we might call the myth of the last work. This is Cornel Wilde territory – blood on the keyboard – and it gives special meaning to the common association of the mazurkas with Chopin's most private thoughts about Poland. It should be

stressed that this sketch is the only source for the piece. The key point is that, apart from the fact that close scrutiny reveals it to be a much more expansive work than previously thought, paper research tells us that it was not written at the end of Chopin's life at all, but several years earlier, probably as an initial attempt at Op. 63 No. 2, which is also in F minor. Chopin abandoned this mazurka, in other words, not because he was about to expire, but because he was not satisfied with it.

My second narrative describes the ever-increasing complexity of the polonaises, culminating in the so-called last polonaise, the great Polonaise-Fantasy, Op. 61, which, so it is argued, is really a kind of extended dance poem, the apotheosis of all those associations with Poland's heroic past that are embodied in the polonaises (and the narrative is reinforced by publishing practices, where Op. 61 is invariably included with the polonaises in collected editions). The piece begins with a slow introduction before the polonaise rhythm appears. However, if we scrutinise the sketch of this opening (see Fig. 2), we will see that the polonaise rhythm was actually an afterthought. Chopin added the semiquaver of the polonaise rhythm to the regular quavers that originally formed the accompaniment, and then supplied additional bars of accompaniment to establish the generic type. In other words, it occurred to him only after the piece was complete that this theme would work quite well with a polonaise accompaniment. And after the first theme, the polonaise rhythm largely disappears from the piece. Chopin was composing a Fantasy here (it has much in common with the Fantasy, Op. 49), and he only turned the first theme into a polonaise as a spontaneous afterthought. Among other things, it is an interesting case study in the suggestive power of titles.

It is important to undertake such de-mythologizing exercises, to get the history right. But we should also recognise that the myths are of value in their own terms as constitutive of what Hans-Georg Gadamer called the "effective history" of artworks, and as cyphers to the tastes of particular receptional communities (Gadamer 1975 [1960]). Thus, the two narratives I have presented transparently belong within a much more widespread construction of Chopin as a national composer, and that was a process that began already during his lifetime. And with this I come to the third part of my talk, dealing with reception.

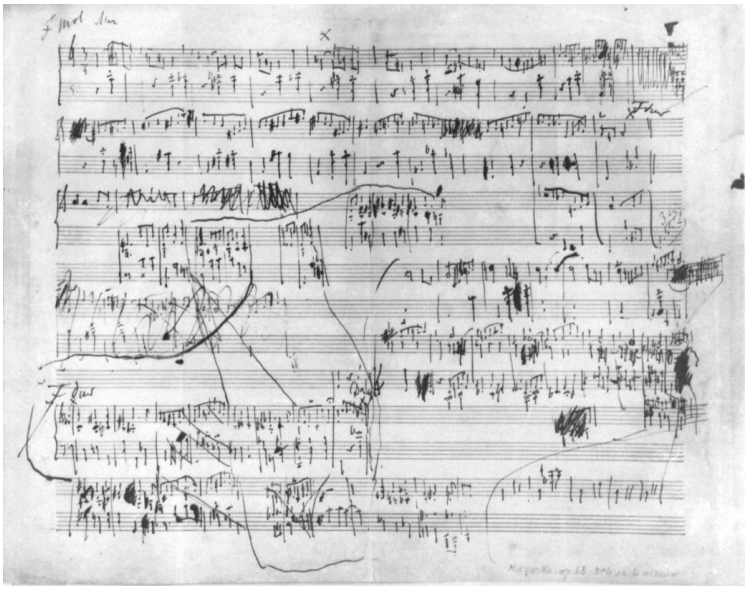

Fig. 1. *The sketch for Chopin's Mazurka in F Minor, Op. 68 No. 4.*

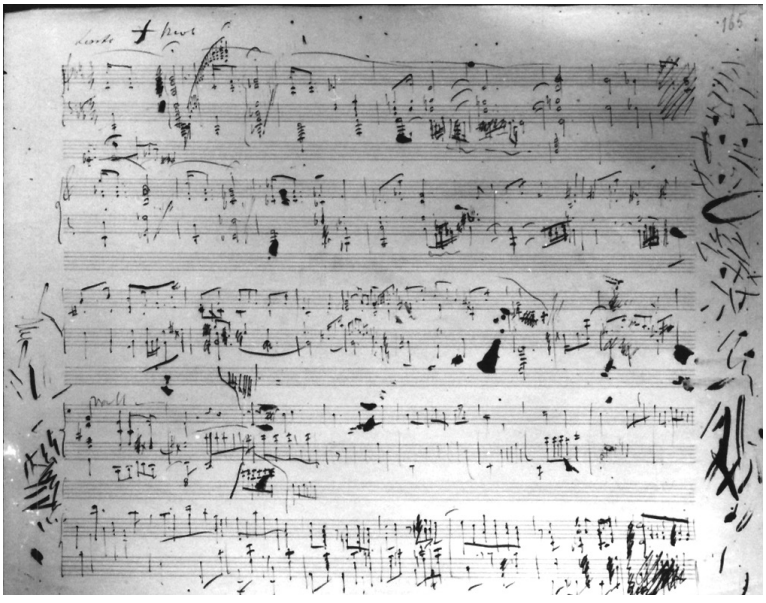

Fig. 2. *Part of the Sketch for Chopin's Polonaise-Fantaisie, Op. 61.*

3. Reception

> The land that stirred him to life with its song affected his musical temperament, and on occasion it is still discernible in his pieces: many a tone seems to be a felicitous reflection of our native harmonies. Under his touch, the simple mazurka gladly yields to transformations and modulations, retaining all the while its proper accent and expression. It takes a special kind of feeling to combine, as Chopin does, music of genius with a refined performing style and that beautiful simplicity of Polish song; for that, one has to know the echoes of our fields and forests – one has to be able to hear the song of the Polish peasant. (Mochnacki 1830)

> He studied folk music at its very source, and became so taken up with it – he had drawn so much of it into his soul – that it lasted him for a lifetime, and everything he composed reflected that music most faithfully, like a looking-glass held up to its spirit, that is to say its melodies, and to its body, that is to say its rhythms. (Karasowski 1862)

In these extracts we see from Polish criticism two of the three major signifiers of romantic nationalism: folk music (so-called) and landscape, both of which were mystified and essentialised in 19th-century criticism. As to Chopin and landscape, the reality could hardly be further removed from what you read there ("echoes of our fields and forests"). The fact is that Chopin was a man of the city. George Sand writes amusingly of her attempts to take him out for a picnic to the countryside, where he would wander about for a bit, idly kick a few stones around and then ask if it was time to go home. As to folk music ("he studied folk music at its very source"), I hope I have already engaged with that. But it is worth noting that even such a distinguished critic as Jósef Sikorski, who was alive to the cosmopolitanism of Chopin's music, felt the need to pay lip service to the shaping influence of traditional music.

> In his vision, Chopin was too much of a world citizen to remain exclusively bound by the Polish influence on his outlook, if not on his spirit. . . . But there is folk music present in his work, and that not merely in his mazurkas, krakowiaks or polonaises . . . Polish song is there to be found even if it is concealed and intertwined

> with passages of a more universal tone. . . . How can it be identified? Well, who can define the smell of a violet? (Sikorski 1849)

I spoke about mystifying and essentialising folk music; well, this is a clear example ("who can define the smell of a violet?"). I might add, by the way, that the claims of Polish critics had a bearing on editors, and on performers too. There is a story to tell there, notably about an idea beginning to circulate that only Poles could really understand and perform Chopin.

But Polish critics did not confine themselves to the national element in Chopin. They presented a number of images of the composer that would later be taken up and developed all over Europe. Chopin may have been primarily a "Polish composer", but he was also a "Romantic composer", as these extracts suggest:

> He had resolved to become a musician-poet, and now he is one; and there is no telling if what he composes is musical poetry or poetic music. (Jełowicki 1839)

> He deserves the appellation of a *maestro nonpareil*, both for his playing, which borders on the miraculous, and for his truly original, beautiful and complex pieces; the readers of *Przyjaciel Ludu* will be pleased to read this brief report on that musical Romantic – that Shakespeare, Byron and Mickiewicz of pianism. (Woykowski 1836)

Those critics who were anxious to stress his Romantic credentials did so above all by forging a link with literature; he was a "poet of the piano". Note by the way, another dimension of nationalism in that second extract, a kind of iconism, where Chopin is represented as the fourth bard. This literary trope would be picked up especially in France, as I will show presently. But again, we need a reality check. It is perfectly true that a defining aim of the early romantic generation was, as Thomas Mann put it in *Doctor Faustus*, "to emancipate [music] from the sphere of a small-town specialism . . . and bring her into contact with the great world of the mind"; a bit later Mann, or rather Adrian Leverkühn, speaks of "progress from the solely musical into the universal intellectual sphere" (Mann 2015 [1947]: 205). This was indeed the agenda of the Romantic generation, Liszt included, but it is telling that Chopin was entirely out of step with it. Actually, he had very little interest in the music of his contemporaries (Italian opera aside), and he studiously

resisted all efforts to associate his music with literature and ideas; he was even unhappy with the title "marche funèbre" in Op. 35, removing "funèbre" from the second impression of the first French edition and adding instead the tempo marking "Lento".

Polish critics also noted two subsets of this image of Chopin as a romantic composer. One stressed connotations of the feminine. This extract is typical:

> In most of Chopin's pieces, the relationship between the emotion and the stimulus that triggered it evokes the pure femininity of his emotional life. . . . Knowing Chopin, we have every right to suppose that many of his works do indeed reflect such feminine emotions – those melancholy complaints about life's most trifling inconveniences, those fits of coquettish swooning, those eruptions of nervous exasperation. (Chlebowski 1891: 22)

For some influential critics, ideal performers had to be not just Polish, but women as well, which narrowed the field considerably, leaving us basically with Marcellina Czartoryska. Another subtext emphasized the romantic composer's alleged incapacity to master classical forms and genres, a theme that would be developed in English and German criticism in particular.

> He was more successful in those pieces containing a romantic content. The outcome was less felicitous in the classical forms, such as his three sonatas, the piano trio and the sonata for cello and piano. For all their delightful ideas, the execution of those pieces is at times excessively cumbersome and convoluted. (Kleczyński 1870: 106)

Finally, some Polish critics, especially at the turn of the century, chose to foreground Chopin's modernity, his avant-garde qualities.

> Chopin did not compose for his contemporaries; he was a man ahead of his time, and his talent was only recognised and revered by posterity. In order for that to happen, the musical trends of his day had to decline and fall into oblivion to make way for new, deeper currents. (Noskowski 1902)

This culminated in the work of early 20th-century critics such as Ladisław Jachimecki and Adolf Chybinński, and of course in Karol Szymanowski, both

his writings and his music. When Szymanowski wrote his own Mazurkas Op. 50, based on the music of the Tatra highlands, not the Mazovian plains, he was not just paying homage to Chopin; he was also establishing in a way a narrative of Polish music history. And historical musicologists in Poland have gone much further since. A whole school of so-called "sonoristics" has worked to draw a continuous thread through a very discontinuous Polish music history from the Renaissance through Chopin to Penderecki.

Now in stressing Chopin's modernism, these critics were picking up on a trope that had already been developed extensively by Russian critics. And it is to Russia I will turn very briefly and reductively now. Russian critics were quick to acknowledge Chopin's importance for their own national traditions, and they even managed to stake a claim on Chopin by invoking ethnicity.

> Through Chopin's works, Europe became well acquainted with peculiarly Slavic melodic shapes and modulations. Although his music was ridden with anguish and limited to the narrow confines of the piano, with many of his pieces composed in the minor genres, the "Slavic" nature of his works gave them major artistic importance on a par with such qualities as the genius of his inspiration, his profound honesty, and his inner strength. . . . Chopin's originality and independence set him apart from other composers. (Serov 1858: 72)

Chopin was not just a "Polish composer", in other words; he was a "Slavonic composer", a claim that was very much in the spirit of a pan-Slavic ideology in the late 19th century. In the extract from Serov, this is linked with the image of Chopin as a modernist. Alexander Serov was of course a key figure in Russian music, even if his relationship to leading composers was somewhat problematical. This was especially the case with César Cui, who himself had this to say about Chopin.

> Idolized by the public, he constituted a step towards the understanding of modern music in its highest forms. In particular, we should not overlook the Polish and Ukrainian elements which are present in nearly all of his works, and which imbue them with a particular original grace. Nor should we forget the composer's influence on many works by Schumann, Glinka, Moniuszko. (Cui 1865)

Then we have Vladimir Stasov, the major theorist of Russian national music, who leaves us in no doubt about Chopin's place in the genealogy.

> To Glinka, Chopin was the first harbinger of the possibility if not the necessity of coming up with new forms to express those mysterious and passionate stirrings of the soul which are a unique quality of our century, and have not been expressed (or possibly experienced) ever before. Chopin was Glinka's guide to new artistic forms, the equal to Beethoven in his capacity to express this newly opened world of the soul and to give it an artistic embodiment. (Stasov 1974: 224)

And finally, I will add that Russian Chopin criticism culminated in a major essay of the 1920s by Boris Asafiev, one of the most original of all Russian theorists.

> In his brilliant synthesis, Chopin discovered an organic system of melodic gestures (intonations) which are not confined within any default schemata or otherwise conditioned by the dynamics, tone progressions or malleability of a given piece. Chopin's achievements expand the limits of pianism and deepen our understanding of tonality; they introduce a whole new sphere of pianistic reflections and chiaroscuro effects, and as such they take on a heroic stature and should be considered as nothing short of extraordinary. . . . The prioritising of colour in the organization of voices is no less important for realising the importance of Chopin's music today than my reflections on his melody and harmony (intonations), or on the organic structure of musical form in his works. (Asafiev 1922)

This is an important text, depicting Chopin as modernist, and it deals in concrete particulars. What this extract really highlights, when you decode it, is first the transformative role of modality, and second the enhanced structural importance of texture and/or timbre. And it is not hard to see that these two aspects of Chopin's compositional praxes were indeed drawn right into the substance of Russian music of the late 19th century. There are other stories to tell here, notably about chromatic symmetries, but space does not permit a fuller exposition.

I noted at the outset of this article that Chopin was formative of two major traditions, Russian and French. He lived half his life in Paris, of course.

His reputation was created there, and it was preserved and enhanced after his death by French journals, by the Conservatoire, and by music publishers. Yet from the start, even during his lifetime, a very particular view was presented, one that highlighted the notion of expression. A cluster of images gathered around this central notion, notably the poet of the piano, which we encountered earlier. This affected repertory, with the nocturnes especially favoured in France, and also marketing, with editions of individual nocturnes appearing accompanied by romantic nature scenes, and so on and so forth. In these extracts, which include the wonderful description of a Chopin melody by Proust, remarkable not just for its literary qualities but for the precision of its analytical insight, the link with literature is emphasized.

> To listen to Chopin is to read a strophe of Lamartine.
>
> (*Le Ménestrel* 1841)

> Chopin is a poet, and above all a tender one.
>
> (Escudier 1842)

> He is an elegiac, profound and dreamy poet of tones.
>
> (*Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* 1841)

> It is poetry in translation, but a superior translation made through sounds alone.
>
> (*Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* 1842)

> . . . long, sinuous phrases . . . so free, so flexible, so tactile, which begin by reaching out and exploring far beyond the point which one might have expected their notes to reach, and which divert themselves in those byways of fantasy, only to return more deliberately – with a more premeditated reprise, with more precision, as on a crystal bowl that reverberates to the point of making you cry out – to strike at your heart. (Proust 1982: 361)

This was the story in France, and it is a well-known story, until close to the end of the 19th century, when we begin to find subtle attempts to claim Chopin for the nation. I will not elaborate on this beyond saying that after 1870 France needed a national music. And there were considerable difficulties in meeting that need. Grand Opera was too cosmopolitan to serve, Opéra Comique too lightweight. Appropriating folk music would not suffice; in nation states, as

distinct from would-be nation states, folk music tends to signify regionalism, not nationalism. And if the instrumental music associated with the Société Nationale exhibited any kind of national quality at all it was of the kind characterised by Ernest Gellner as "hostile imitation". The answer in the end was to turn to the third most important source tapped by musical nationalisms. There is folk music, and there is landscape. But there is also the national past, a revived or invented tradition. What in the end would define France musically was to be a mode of neo-classicism. And Chopin could be accommodated within this narrative as a kind of missing link connecting the late 18th-century *clavecinistes* to the pianist-composers of the *fin de siècle*, Fauré, Debussy and Ravel. There is considerable symbolic potency in the double homage of Debussy's later music: to the late 18th-century masters in his sonatas, with their title page, "Claude Debussy, musicien français", and to the memory of Chopin in the dedication of his late études.

In some ways the most interesting cases of all are England and Germany. For much of the 19th century English and German criticism saw Chopin in much the same way, as a "salon composer" in the negative sense of that term. For English critics, the very term "romantic" actually carried pejorative connotations in the sense of anti-classical, meaning basically incompetent.

> Romantic compositions have beginnings and ends, but for the most part [they contain] nothing between their extremes save scraps of themes uncouthly intermingled, and long streams of passages of which the difficulty is pretty generally understood to be the chief recommendation. (*The Musical World* 1840: 45)

Hence the focus on Chopin as a miniaturist, one who was incapable of extended classical forms.

> Chopin does not want for ideas, but they never extend beyond eight or sixteen bars at the utmost, and then he is invariably *in nubibus*. (Macfarren 1841: 276)

> He was great in small things, but small in great ones.
> (Haweis 1866: 101)

I will stay clear of those Victorian attitudes that ensured that women were the main consumers and practitioners of piano music in England. It is enough to highlight the outcome of this – a flood of music by Victorian composers

inspired by the external features of Chopin's nocturnes and mazurkas. And in due course Chopin's own music was drawn into the fold, dragged down, we might say, to surrounding lowlands of mediocrity. The preludes become "pearls"; the etudes are "tuneful gems". The British Library even holds a simplified version of the G-minor ballade. If Chopin's influence on Russian composers promoted a kind of modernism, his influence on Victorian composers amounted to the reduction of a complex idiom to a handful of easy gestures.

Now initially the view in Germany was very similar, and as you can see it persisted in some quarters well into the 20th century.

> [Chopin] can only be imagined indoors, never in the open air . . . His scenery is not the wood and the field, but the salon of sophisticated society. The rustling [in Chopin's music] comes from the gowns of beautiful women, the whispering from the conversation of lovers. No-one knows better than he the enticement of social pleasures and beautiful proportions. (Ehlert 1877: 286)

> In contrast to Beethoven and Schubert, whose most essential inspirations, as we know, came from direct contact with nature, we find no evidence in Chopin's case that he fled to the loneliness of the forest or plain or that he was moved to deeper impressions by looking at a landscape . . . He was a man of the salon through and through, and he longed for its atmosphere. (Scharlitt 1919: 73)

Compare this with the earlier Polish reference to the "echoes of our fields and forests". Here we have precisely the opposite: "his scenery is not the wood and the field, but the salon of sophisticated society"; "he was a man of the salon through and through". Interestingly, all that began to change at the end of the century. One factor of enormous significance was the complete edition prepared by Breitkopf & Härtel. From the 1850s onwards Breitkopf engaged in a remarkable exercise in national canon formation through collected editions. Now the inclusion of Chopin in this series was of the utmost importance for his standing in Germany. It was almost a symbolic moment of resolution in German Chopin reception. And following it we have not just serious biographies but major analytical studies. The huge two-volume study by Hugo Leichtentritt was a remarkable venture for its time; essentially an analysis of formal design (inspired by Riemann), and truly a monument to the recently established and increasingly specialised discipline of *Musikwissenschaft* (Leichtentritt 1921-22).

This new science of music in Germany effectively distanced the unworthy art of the present from the perfection of a classical canon, and note that Chopin is now part of that classical canon. Moreover, he was so considered by the most influential of all 20th-century theorists, Heinrich Schenker. Indeed, Schenker spelt it out in the following, breathtakingly chauvinistic terms:

> If the writer elevates the name of Frederic Chopin for inclusion in the roll of great German masters, this is because, despite the fact that his masterworks do not stem directly from Germanity but are indirectly bound to it, he wishes them, too, to be accessible as a source of the highest operation of genius, and in this most exalted sense also to place them newly at the service of the German youth. (Schenker 2004: 21)

> For the profundity with which nature has endowed him, Chopin belongs more to Germany than to Poland. (Schenker 1925: 147-8)

Chopin, then, is not just in the canon; he is in the German canon. And this change in status was even documented in a series of popular guides for music lovers published in Leipzig at the turn of the century by Echmann and Ruthardt. Chopin was initially classified as a "salon composer" in these guides. Then, in later editions, he was actually re-classified as a "classical composer": remarkable, but true (Ballstaedt 1994). And by the way, it was much the same classification that allowed the Third Reich to embrace Chopin within the Aryan fold.

So, Chopin is a Polish composer, a Slavonic composer, a romantic composer, a modernist composer, a salon composer, and a classical composer. His music, in other words, has occupied the social landscape in many different ways; it has been heard "with different ears". And for that reason, the stability of its meaning naturally comes into question. Ever since Hans-Robert Jauss, Roland Barthes and Stanley Fish, commentators have been speaking about a receding, even a vanishing, text. If the text is multiply claimed and multiply interpreted, they ask, how can it possibly exhibit a stable profile? Maybe this is the wrong question. Maybe we should be asking why it is multiply claimed in the first place. The answer to that question is of course very simple: because it is worth claiming. That simple answer also gets us, I think, to an essential point about music and nationalism. At a workshop on music and nationalism in Amsterdam in 2013 I listened to a discussion of Sibelius and Nielsen (some of the proceedings are published in *Nations and Nationalism* 20/4, 2014).

There were numerous references to an elusive "Nordic tone", accompanied by paintings of Nordic landscapes, extracts from Nordic runes, and so on and so forth. I am not dismissive of this, but what was not discussed was the fact that these two composers, like Chopin, wrote music that was both distinct and distinctive (these are not synonyms). They wrote music worth claiming; and therefore worth nationalising.

There are, in other words, chicken and egg arguments to rehearse here. The point is that significant composers from what we might call peripheral sites often made their mark by taking a step to the side of their immediate musical environment, initially perhaps colluding with so-called mainstreams, but in the end favouring a ground-clearing critique. What distinguished such composers was not that they were representative of something we might want to call their national music, but rather that they were *un*representative of it.

Let me close with a question: a rhetorical question. In truth, it is a rather anarchic question to pose in a discussion of the national element in music, but it does, I think, follow naturally from what I have argued about Chopin and nationhood. In his controversial but important book, *The Invention of the Jewish People*, Schlomo Sand set out to undermine the claims of Zionist historiography as to the ethnic integrity of the Jews (Sand 2009). His mission was to question their status as "a people". However, in the course of his argument, Sand made a much broader plea, quoting Marcel Dutienne: "How can we denationalise national histories?" was his question. My question is this: "Is it not time to give serious thought to de-nationalising music histories?"

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