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SOURCE READINGS IN MUSIC HISTORY

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The Nineteenth Century

Edited by RUTH A. SOLIE

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8 François-Joseph Fétis

Frédéric Chopin, at the time completely unknown in Paris, gave his first concert there on February 26, 1832, in the piano-maker Camille Pleyel's showrooms, then located at 9, rue Cadet. The concert was a grand success and led to his immediate celebrity in the French capital.

The varied offerings of the concert that are discussed here are typical of the period and remind us of the importance of the soirée as a musical institution. Reviews at the time rarely identify programs with precision, of course, and François-Joseph Fétis's is no exception. Though it is unsigned, the authoritative tone, the historical perspective (far more informative than Schumann's famous review of Chopin's Op. 2 [see pp. 102–3]), and the vocabulary—including the use of such a characteristic phrase as "autant d'étonnement que de plaisir," which he elsewhere applied to Berlioz—suggest that the author of the column is indeed the editor of the *Revue Musicale.*

In addition to the intrinsic interest both of the information offered here and of Fétis's recognition of Chopin's talent, students of the cultural history of music will also be struck by this very early positing of a spiritual opposition between Chopin and Beethoven that became a commonplace later in the century. Chopin himself would have been bemused by the cliché; he told Eugène Delacroix that Beethoven's music is obscure because "he turns his back on eternal principles" (*The Journal of Eugène Delacroix,* trans. Walter Pach [New York, 1948], p. 195; diary entry for 7 April 1849).

The Concert of Monsieur Chopin from Warsaw

(1832)

These days, to say of a pianist that he is highly talented, or even, if you wish, that he is *supremely talented,* is simply to say that he is the rival or the enemy of a few other artists of the first rank whose names come immediately to mind. To add that his compositions are very good is merely to suggest that they fall into a category analogous to that of the works of Hummel, for example, and of a small number of other celebrated composers. But with such praises it is difficult to give an idea of novelty or of originality because, except for a few nuances of style and niceties of structure, music by pianists is generally written in certain conventional forms that one may consider fundamental, forms that have been used again and again for more than thirty years. This is the great shortcoming of piano music, and even our most accomplished artists have been unable to eliminate it from their works.

TEXT: *Revue Musicale* (March 3, 1832): 38–39, translated by Peter Bloom, who also provided most of the introduction and the information in the notes.

But here we have a young man who, giving himself over to his natural inclinations and following no models whatsoever, has effected, if not a total resuscitation of piano music, at least a part of what we have so long been searching for in vain—that is, a plethora of original ideas of a sort nowhere else to be found. This is not by any means to say that M. Chopin is gifted with the powerful spirit of a Beethoven, nor that there is in Chopin's music anything of the majestic force that one finds in the music of that great man: Beethoven wrote music *for piano,* but here I am speaking of music *for pianists*—and it is in this realm that I find in M. Chopin's inspirations the sign of a formal renaissance that could eventually exercise enormous influence upon this branch of art.

At the concert he gave on the 26th of this [*recte* last] month in the salons of MM. Pleyel and Company, M. Chopin played a concerto that surprised listeners as much as it pleased them both because of the novelty of its melodic ideas and because of its virtuoso passages, its modulations, and its larger structural organization.[1] There is vitality in his melody, fantasy in his passage-work, and originality in everything. Too many colorful modulations, so much confusion in linking phrases that it sometimes seems as though one is hearing an improvisation rather than a written composition—these are the imperfections that are found intermingled with the virtues I have just mentioned. But they are the imperfections of the youthful artist, and they will disappear as he gains greater experience. Indeed, if M. Chopin's subsequent works fulfill the promise of his debut, we can be sure that he will enjoy a brilliant and well-deserved reputation.

As a performer, this young artist also merits great praise. His playing is elegant, relaxed, and graceful; it is marked by both brilliance and clarity. He draws little sound from the instrument and resembles in this respect the majority of the German pianists. But the study of this aspect of his art, which he has undertaken with M. Kalkbrenner, cannot fail to provide him with that important quality upon which the confidence to perform depends, and without which one cannot shape the natural sounds of the instrument.

Apart from the concerto I have just spoken about, two further, quite remarkable works were heard on the same evening. One was a string quintet, performed with the emotional energy and kaleidoscopic inspiration that distinguish the playing of M. Baillot. The other was a piece for six pianos written by M. Kalkbrenner and performed by the composer along with MM. Chopin, Stammati, Hiller, Osborne, and Sowinski.[2] This piece, in which the instruments are deployed with great artifice and whose style is eminently graceful and elegant, had already been heard several years ago, and with great success, in the

1. The E-Minor Concerto, the future Op. 11 (dedicated to Kalkbrenner). [Tr.]
2. The string quintet was Beethoven's in C Major, Op. 29 (Fétis, following contemporary usage, refers to the work as "un quintetto pour le violon"). The work for six pianos, originally scored for two, plus two violins, viola, cello, and double bass *ad libitum,* was an arrangement of Kalkbrenner's *Grande Polonaise, précédée d'une Introduction et d'une marche,* Op. 92. [Tr.]

salons of MM. Pleyel and Company. It gave no less pleasure this second time around.

A solo for oboe, performed by M. Brod with the aplomb for which he is justly renowned, and several works sung by M. Boulanger and Mlles Isambert and Toméoni, completed this musical soirée, one of the most agreeable that we have heard this year.[3]

3. Chopin also played his Variations on Mozart's *Là ci darem la mano,* Op. 2, with quintet or second-piano accompaniment, and, solo, selected Mazurkas and Nocturnes. Among the artists who contributed to the concert were the members of the Baillot Quintet (Pierre Baillot and Jean-Joseph Vidal, violin, Chrétien Urhan and Théophile Tilmant, viola, and Louis Norblin, cello), the oboist Henri Brod, and the pianists Friedrich Kalkbrenner, Ferdinand Hiller, George Osborne, Camille Stamaty, and Albert Sowinski, as well as the singers Ernest Boulanger (Nadia's and Lili's father) and Mesdemoiselles Toméoni and Isambert (whose first names are not recorded in the literature). For further information, see Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, "Les Premiers Concerts de Chopin à Paris," in *Music in Paris in the Eighteen-Thirties,* ed. Peter Bloom (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1987), pp. 251–297; and Joel-Marie Fauquet, *Les Sociétés de musique de chambre à Paris de la Restauration à 1870* (Paris: Aux Amateurs de livres, 1986). [Tr.]

9 Hector Berlioz

In 1856, on Hector Berlioz's election to the Institute, his friends were outraged and his enemies consoled by a malicious bon mot put into circulation by the music critic of the *Revue des deux mondes:* "Instead of a musician, the Institute has chosen a journalist." Yet a casual reader of the Parisian press of those days might almost have believed this true. Since 1823, Berlioz had been a regular contributor to one musical or literary review after another; by 1863, when he gave up his long-standing association with the *Journal des débats,* he had published more than 900 separate pieces—leading articles, letters from abroad, humorous sketches, fictitious anecdotes, imaginary conversations, *causeries* and *feuilletons* of every sort and description. Only a small part of this enormous production is assembled in his three volumes of collected writings—*Les soirées de l'orchestre* (1852), *Les grotesques de la musique* (1859), and *A travers chants* (1862); other pieces were salvaged in his *Voyage musical* (1844) and in the two volumes of his memoirs, printed in 1865 but not published until after his death.

→ "Music is not made for everyone, nor everyone for music"—this is perhaps the central article of Berlioz's critical creed, and in the essay translated below it recurs again and again with the persistence of an *idée fixe.* But in writing on *William Tell,* Berlioz also reveals many of the other facets of his critical personality—his preoccupation with the poetic and the picturesque, his capacity for enthusiasm and for indignation, his horror of the mediocre and his impatience with all that fails to measure up to the very highest standards, his contempt for