

Impromptu

DREAMS
COME
TRUE

at the 17th
International
Chopin Piano
Competition



ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

- *New Directions in Chopin Biography* - A book review by Dr. Alan Walker
- Looking back on the Fourth Canadian Chopin Competition

Message from the Artistic Director

When the Canadian Chopin Society was established less than five years ago, our mission - to celebrate the legacy of Fryderyk Chopin by promoting his music, while nurturing the development of young artists – was articulated. Our dream was that one day a winner of the Canadian Chopin Piano Competition would become a finalist, or perhaps even a laureate of the prestigious International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition held in Poland every five years. But even the most optimistic and hopeful amongst us could not have anticipated the tremendous outcome of the 17th International Chopin Competition: Three Canadians qualifying for the competition, and all three progressing to the second stage; the second prize winner of the Fourth Canadian Chopin Competition, Tony Yike Yang, emerging as an audience favorite in Warsaw, and finishing as a fifth prize laureate and as the youngest prize-winner in the history of the competition; and Canadian pianist Charles Richard-Hamelin, capturing the second prize and the Krystian Zimmerman prize for the best sonata performance.

Indeed, many hopes and dreams came true in Warsaw for the Canadian Chopin Society, and for these young pianists whose talent and artistry were recognized not only by the competition jury, but by millions of listeners around the world who heard their performances on the Internet, either live-streamed, or later on the competition YouTube channel.

As an organization, we celebrate this incredible moment in our history, and the achievements of our national competition winner on the international stage. Building on this excitement and energy, we are moving forward to the next steps in continuing to grow our organization and to realize our mission. We are delighted to announce the launch of the Canadian Chopin Society Scholarship Program, which will encourage young pianists to prepare for the next national and international competitions, and provide opportunities to acknowledge outstanding accomplishments in the years between competitions.

We are grateful for the unwavering commitment and dedication of our members, sponsors and partner organizations, and look forward to your continued support.

Dr. Janet Lopinski
Artistic Director

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE **CANADIAN CHOPIN SOCIETY**

FEBRUARY 2016

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THE 17TH INTERNATIONAL CHOPIN COMPETITION

Founded in 1927, the International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition is one of the oldest and most prestigious events of its kind. Held every five years, the competition attracts accomplished young pianists from around the world. Winners have included Maurizio Pollini (1960), Martha Argerich (1965), Garrick Ohlsson (1970), Krystian Zimerman (1975), Yundi Li (2000) and Rafal Blechacz (2005),

The 17th International Chopin Competition began with the Preliminary Round, held in Warsaw, Poland from April 13 – 24, 2015. Canadian Chopin Competition winners Tony Yike Yang and Victoria Wong were amongst the 160 pianists vying for spots in the first round, held in October. The 90 pianists selected included three Canadians: Tony Yike Yang; Annie Zhou, Third Prize Winner of the Junior Division of the Third Canadian Chopin Competition in 2010; and Charles Richard-Hamelin.

As the competition unfolded, listeners around the world were able to follow each stage, thanks to the Chopin Institute's new Chopin App and You Tube channel. The Canadian Chopin Society hosted an evening at the Polish Cultural Centre in Mississauga to view the first round performances of the three Canadians, and to celebrate their advancement to the second round.

At the Warsaw Philharmonic Hall, the excitement mounted, and for the first time in the history of the International Competition, two Canadians were amongst the ten finalists. Both performed with the Warsaw Philharmonic on the last night of the competition, to a full hall and thousands of listeners around the world. Critic Andrzej Sulek, in the Goniec Chopinowski, described second movement of Charles Richard-Hamelin's F Minor Concerto as "...phenomenal, with a beautiful, though intimately conceived stormy culmination of the trio." About Tony Yang's performance of the E Minor Concerto, he wrote "His music developed like a living being subjected to metamorphoses, accompanied by a refined intentionality of every move – the hand, the arm, the whole body was subordinated to the sound quality."

For those interested, the Chopin Institute's daily newsletter, "Goniec Chopinowski / Chopin Courier" is available online and contains photographs, reviews, and interviews with both competitors, jurors and audience members.

To experience the competition performances, visit the Chopin Institute website: chopincompetition2015.com.

THE WINNERS OF THE 17TH INTERNATIONAL FRYDERYK CHOPIN PIANO COMPETITION

FIRST PRIZE

Seong-Jin Cho (South Korea)

SECOND PRIZE

Charles Richard-Hamelin (Canada)

THIRD PRIZE

Kate Liu (United States)

FOURTH PRIZE

Eric Lu (United States)

FIFTH PRIZE

Tony Yike Yang (Canada)

SIXTH PRIZE

Dmitry Shishkin (Russia)



DREAMS COME TRUE IN WARSAW



At the Third Canadian Chopin Piano Competition in 2010, Tony Yike Yang, was amongst the youngest competitors of the Junior Division, impressing the audience and the jury with remarkable technique and musicianship. Five years later, Tony emerged as an audience favorite at the International Competition in Warsaw, revealing artistry and maturity far beyond his sixteen years.



In the months preceding the International Competition, The Canadian Chopin Society was pleased to present a series of concerts in collaboration with The Royal Conservatory, Yamaha Canada, and The Consulate of the Republic of Poland in Toronto. In each successive performance of the competition repertoire, the depth of Tony's connection with the music of Chopin became more apparent. Particularly noteworthy were his performances of the Barcarolle, Impromptu in F sharp major, and Sonata in B-flat minor.



Canadian pianist Charles Richard-Hamelin made a strong impression early in the competition. After his first round performance, Roza Swiatczynska of Polish Radio 2 wrote "I had been waiting for such a performance since the beginning of the competition. This man is every inch an artist, an extraordinarily mature musician who focuses on the beauty of Chopin's works, which he performs with a high degree of consciousness. He is one of the few who can find a wise balance between the spirit of Chopin and his own individuality..."



The Canadian Chopin Society extends warmest congratulations and best wishes to Tony Yike Yang, youngest laureate of the International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition, and Fifth Prize Winner of the 17th Competition; and to Charles Richard-Hamelin, Second Prize Winner of the 17th International Chopin Competition, and winner of the Prize for the Best Performance of a Sonata. We look forward to following their musical journeys as their careers unfold in the years to come.

CANADIAN CHOPIN SOCIETY - MILESTONES AND HIGHLIGHTS

2012

- Incorporation of the Canadian Chopin Society
- Participation in Polish Heritage Day at the ROM



Artistic Director Janet Lopinski with pianist Jan Lisiecki.

2013

- Canadian Chopin Society website launched
- Canadian Chopin Society becomes a registered charity
- Dr. Alan Walker recognized as the first Honorary Fellow of the Canadian Chopin Society
- Jan Lisiecki presented with the Canadian Chopin Society Artist Recognition Award
- The Canadian Chopin Society Founders Circle reaches 100 members



Dr. Alan Walker, Honorary Fellow of the Canadian Chopin Society.

2014

- The Fourth Canadian Chopin Competition and Festival
- Krzysztof Jablonski recognized as Honorary Fellow of the Canadian Chopin Society



Jim Welter, Yamaha Canada Music, Janet Lopinski, Tony Yike Yang, Charles Richard-Hamelin, and Kenichi Matsushiro, President, Yamaha Canada Music, after a stunning Chopin recital by the two laureates at The Royal Conservatory.

2015

- Participation in Polish Day in Mississauga
- The 17th International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition: Canadian Chopin Competition laureate Tony Yike Yang awarded Fifth prize as youngest laureate in the history of the competition.

2016

- Celebratory concert at The Royal Conservatory featuring Tony Yike Yang and Charles Richard-Hamelin
- Canadian Chopin Society Scholarship Program launched

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Chopin Committee Members with Tony Yike-Yang

NEW DIRECTIONS IN CHOPIN BIOGRAPHY

A BOOK REVIEW BY DR. ALAN WALKER

Fryderyk Chopin: The Origins, by Piotr Mysłakowski and Andrzej Sikorski. Translated by Zygmunt Nowak-Soliński and Sandra Jacobson. The Fryderyk Chopin Institute, Warsaw 2010. 357pp.

The Chopins' Warsaw. The Chopins' Addresses in Warsaw Established from Sources, by Piotr Mysłakowski.

Translated by John Comber. The Fryderyk Chopin Institute, Warsaw 2013. 222pp.

Somerset Maugham once famously declared: “There are three rules for writing biography, and nobody knows what they are.” Behind the joke lies something profound, and it is revealed in the sort of chaos that has prevailed in the field of Chopin biography for the past 150 years. Every time you pick up a book on Chopin (particularly a biography) you may be forgiven for supposing that you have been placed inside an echo chamber, where the same information bounces from one wall to another, in an endless series of reverberations. Has any composer been called upon to carry a greater weight of mythology, fantasy, and pure invention, repeated *ad infinitum*, than Fryderyk Chopin?

Piotr Mysłakowski has been described as the Great Saboteur among Chopin scholars. He spends much of his professional time behind enemy lines, so to say, exploding many of the myths and legends with which Chopin’s story has for years been encumbered, leaving the field a bit safer for the rest of us. As you put down his books you realize that few biographers of the past have been spared, even the most distinguished, although they are rarely mentioned by name. Casimir Wierzyński, Arthur Hedley, Adam Zamoyski, Iwo Załuski, and Tad Szulc, are among those who are shown the error of their ways. I myself have had to do penance for following too slavishly the siren song of these and other writers, in which fiction is transmuted into fact with a simple wave of the wand. In an interesting conversation that I had with Mr. Mysłakowski in Warsaw earlier last year, he told me that it was not his intention to damage the work of his musician colleagues, but simply to go where the evidence leads him. And if the evidence does not support the legends, then the legends must be jettisoned. A year or two ago Mr. Mysłakowski was engaged in a public dispute with the University of Warsaw, which claimed that Fryderyk Chopin was one of its graduates. This could not have been possible because of the way in which the curriculum of the High School for Music (from which Chopin *did* graduate) had been set up under its director Józef Elsner. But such is the posthumous prestige attached to Chopin’s name that everyone in Poland now wants to claim him as their own. (Even the national airport is named after him.) For those readers who speak Polish and wish to follow the details of this discussion, it may be found in three recent issues of the journal *Ruch Muzyczny*, July 24, September 19 and October 16, 2014.

Mr. Mysłakowski appears not to like purple prose and he is critical of those who use it to obfuscate the issues. He reminds me of something that F.L. Lucas once wrote in his masterly book on Style. “I have been told that when the late Sir Edward Marsh, composing his memoir of Rupert Brooke, wrote: ‘Rupert left Rugby in a blaze of glory,’ his mother, a lady of firm character, changed ‘a blaze of glory’ to ‘July’. It is the sort of response that stops a conversation in its tracks. There should be more of it in books about Chopin. The emphasis that Mr.

Mysłakowski places on the plain facts of the composer’s life is a welcome antidote to the perfumed poetry that has passed for informed commentary on him in the past.

One of the excellent features of *Fryderyk Chopin: The Origins* (which Mysłakowski wrote in collaboration with his colleague Andrzej Sikorski) is the widely comprehensive Preface by Chopin scholar Jim Samson: “Reflections on a Family History”. It is difficult to disagree with his statement, “I know of no study that goes so far in making the world that produced Chopin ‘real’ for us.” The book is nothing less than a social history of the Poland which nurtured Chopin and his family, and in which they grew up. We learn of daily life in the great manor houses and estates of Szafarnia, Sanniki, and Sokołowo where the boy spent his holidays and became familiar with Polish folk-music, and above all of Żelazowa Wola where he was born. Lavishly illustrated with pictures of the places in question, *The Origins* is a veritable “Baedeker’s Guide” to Chopin and his circle.

With the more recent publication of *The Chopins' Warsaw*, Piotr Mysłakowski confirms his position as one of the leading Chopin scholars of his time. I imagine that I am not the only person who, after reading this book, regretted that it had not been published fifty years earlier. The error and confusion that were ever Chopin’s portion might have been avoided, or at any rate reduced. The key players in the story of Chopin’s life are well known, for they turn up in all the standard biographies. Aside from his parents and siblings, Chopin’s wide circle of Polish friends during his youth and adolescence in Warsaw included his classmates at the Warsaw Lyceum, Jan Matuszyński, Dominik Dziewanowski, ‘Jasio’ Białobłocki, and above all Tytus Woyciechowski, the dedicatee of his early *Là ci darem* Variations, op. 2. But how much do we actually know about these young men? Hardly anything, it seems, as we turn the pages of one Chopin biography after another. Then there were Chopin’s teachers at the Lyceum, above all its Rector Dr. Samuel Linde. And after the Lyceum came the High School for Music with composer Józef Elsner, organist Wilhelm Würfel, and singing teacher Carlo Soliva among the luminaries. These people form part of the cavalcade of characters who regularly crowd their way into Chopin’s biography. They make their entrances and their exits, but they never linger long enough for us to make their firm acquaintance. We generally have to delve into arcane sources, beyond the reach of the average reader, to find out more about them. Mr. Mysłakowski more than obliges us on that score. He explores the family backgrounds of these people in unprecedented detail, tracing their Polish roots, their perambulations in and out of Warsaw (following a paper trail of mortgage deeds and employment records along the way) as they move from one address to another; he invites us to share in their joys and their sorrows, and even explores the graveyards in the towns and villages around Warsaw, places in which they lived out their lives and died.

Mr. Mysłakowski, in brief, knows where the bodies are buried. The result is a biographer's dream, a veritable lexicon of all the information that he is likely to require in the reconstruction of Chopin's early years. And 'reconstruction' is not too strong a word to use in this context. The author reveals to us a world with which Chopin would have been entirely familiar but one which has hardly yet begun to penetrate the received narrative. The amount of research involved in such pioneering work is massive and it is a pleasure to acknowledge it here.

One or two examples will serve to illustrate the forensic nature of the book. Every Chopin biography tells the story of the fifteen-year-old youth's accident as he was skating on the ice-rink near the Church of the Holy Cross in the winter of 1825/26. The boy fell and cut his head which bled so profusely that a doctor had to be summoned. There was a happy ending and Chopin went to school as usual the following morning. Do you know the name of the doctor who treated Chopin? Neither did I until I read Mr. Mysłakowski on the topic. His identity is revealed here as Dr. Fryderyk Szwenczki (1774-1860), a local surgeon who was called in by neighbours who had witnessed the accident, and who will surely enjoy a modest celebrity in any future story of the composer's life.

Then there is the well-worn legend that Chopin's father Mikołaj rose to the rank of Captain in the Polish army during the Kościuszko Uprising of 1794, and fought in the Battle of Maciejowice. Neither fact is true, and Mr. Mysłakowski shows that it could not have been possible, although Mikołaj did join the civilian militia, like many other ordinary Polish citizens, and fought behind the barricades in defence of Warsaw, before the Russians overwhelmed the city and wiped sovereign Poland from the map.

All Lisztians will welcome the next example. In the spring of 1843 Liszt gave a series of widely acclaimed recitals in Warsaw's National Theatre, en route to Moscow. No Liszt biography known to me goes further than that. But Piotr Mysłakowski's book does. He tells us that in the middle of the Warsaw concerts, in which Liszt also played some works of Chopin, Liszt took time to visit Chopin's parents Mikołaj and Justyna. That meeting took place on April 5, 1843, at house number 47 Nowy Świat Street, where Mikołaj and Justyna were living with their daughter Izabella and her husband, the mathematics professor Antoni Barciński. This is the kind of precision that biographers require and rarely get.

One of the valuable features of the book is the series of maps featuring Old Warsaw, the largest of which folds away into a slipcase inside the back cover. The rest reveal the city locations associated with the Chopin family, to which Mr. Mysłakowski has provided a series of keyed texts within the volume itself. Of additional interest is the inclusion of pictures, ranging in scope from some rare early photographs of the old city to reproductions of iconic oil-paintings, which help to bring the narrative vividly to life. One example can stand for the others. On September 19 1863 the Tsarist viceroy General Fyodor Berg was riding at the head of a detachment of Russian soldiers along Nowy Świat Street. As they passed the Zamoyski Palace, where Izabella and Antoni Barciński now lived, there was an attempt to assassinate the General. A bomb was thrown from one of the upper floors. It missed its target but injured an aide and one of the horses. In reprisal Berg ordered his troops to ransack the building. All the males were arrested and taken to the Warsaw Citadel where they were severely beaten, including Chopin's brother-in-law the 60-year-old Antoni Barciński. Meanwhile Berg's troops

worked their way through the palace with a will, plundering everything in sight. When they came to the Barciński apartment, containing one of the finest collections of Chopiniana inherited by Izabella following the deaths of her mother and her older sister Ludwika – letters, manuscripts, diaries, family heirlooms – everything was thrown onto the street below and put to the torch. According to one eye-witness, "the flames reached as high as the bell-tower of the Holy Cross church." This dramatic scene was captured in Albert Lessel's famous oil-painting which Mr. Mysłakowski reproduces to illustrate the story which he tells on pp. 190-91 of his book. Among the items consumed by the conflagration was the young Chopin's Buchholz grand piano, on which he had composed most of his early pieces, including the two piano concertos and the *Là ci darem* Variations. The poet Cyprian Kamil Norwid immortalized the destruction of the instrument in his well-known poem "Chopin's Piano".

A final thought. The only reason to publish books on Chopin today is to say something new, to escape from that "echo chamber" I referred to earlier. Piotr Mysłakowski and Andrzej Sikorski have done just that and their work should find a permanent place on the bookshelves of all those of us who are interested in the Polish master.



Eminent musicologist Dr. Alan Walker is best known for his internationally recognized, monumental three-volume biography of Franz Liszt, a project to which he devoted twenty-five years. He is the recipient of numerous honours including the Hungarian Liszt Society Medal, the American Liszt Society Medal, the Pro Cultura Hungarica Medal, and the Knight's Cross of Merit of the Republic of Hungary. Dr. Walker has broadcast for the BBC, CBC and for CJRT, and gives frequent public lectures on the music of the Romantic era. Dr. Walker is the recipient of the Music Teachers National Association Achievement Award, and is the first Honorary Fellow of the Canadian Chopin Society.

LOOKING BACK ON THE CANADIAN CHOPIN FESTIVAL 2014

The Canadian Chopin Festival 2014 was held at the John Paul II Polish Cultural Centre from October 17 – 26. The opening concert featured past winners of the Canadian Chopin Piano Competition, pianists Leonard Gilbert, Anastasia Rizikov and Li Wang, setting the stage for an exciting week of rich musical offerings. A full week of concerts, workshops, lectures and master classes provided the opportunity for audiences to become immersed in the music of the master.



FESTIVAL EVENTS

OPENING CONCERT

Featuring pianists Leonard Gilbert,
Anastasia Rizikov and Li Wang

PERFORMANCE SHOWCASES

Dr. Janet Lopinski and Dr. Kent McWilliams

MASTER CLASS

James Anagnoson

DISCOVER THE DANCES

Lecture-Demonstration

Dr. Kent McWilliams, Dr. Janet Lopinski,
Richard Schmidt and the Lechowia Polish Dance
Ensemble

FOUNDING MEMBERS RECEPTION

Featuring a concert by Krzysztof Jablonski
Jury Chair

CHOPIN'S THIRD PIANO SONATA

Lecture-recital by Adam Zukiewicz

LISZT AND THE KEYBOARD

Lecture by Dr. Alan Walker

CHOPIN AND FRIENDS

A 19th Century Salon Recital

Featuring Krzysztof Jablonski, William Aide,
Bernadene Blaha, Kent McWilliams, Lisa Yui
and special guests

MASTER CLASS WITH CANADIAN CHOPIN

COMPETITION WINNERS
Krzysztof Jablonski



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THE FOURTH CANADIAN CHOPIN PIANO COMPETITION

The highlight of the Festival was the Fourth Canadian Chopin Piano Competition. A total of 26 accomplished young Canadian pianists competed in the Junior and Senior divisions. The competition unfolded over a five day period, with enthusiastic audiences applauding the outstanding performances while the distinguished jury selected prize winners in both categories.

THE JURY OF THE FOURTH CANADIAN CHOPIN COMPETITION

KRZYSZTOF JABLONSKI, CHAIR
WILLIAM AIDE
BERNADENE BLAHA
KENT MCWILLIAMS
LISA YUI



The Gala Winners Concert in the magnificent Koerner Hall served as a brilliant finale to the week of festivities. The presentation of awards and prizes was followed by performances by the First, Second and Third prize winners of the Junior and Senior divisions. The audience included representatives of our partner organizations and the musical community.



Tokai String Quartet with First Prize winner Alexander Seredenko in the final round of the Senior Competition.



THE FOURTH CANADIAN CHOPIN COMPETITION WINNERS

The Canadian Chopin Society is very proud of the accomplishments of the winners of The Fourth Canadian Chopin Piano Competition and wishes them all the best as they pursue their musical dreams.

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First Prize \$10,000

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ALEXANDER SEREDENKO

Second Prize \$7,500

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TONY YIKE YANG

Third Prize \$ 5,000

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Best Mazurka Performance \$500

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First Prize \$3000

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GEORGE HUA

Second Prize \$2000

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CHRISTOPHER YEUNG

Third Prize \$1000

Sponsored by

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COCO MA

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In Memory of Endre Gaal

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canadianchopinsociety.com/membership

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