

Inja Stanović (University of Huddersfield, UK)

Love me, Love me not (Part I): Chopin's reception in Great Britain, 1830–1849

1. Introduction

Great Britain occupies a unique position in Chopin's reception history: while it was one of the three locations for publication of his first editions, it initially witnessed polarised reactions to his music that greatly influenced the reception and performances of his works after his death, ultimately revealing a different set of attitudes to those exhibited in France and Germany. This article considers the reception of Frédéric Chopin, both as a pianist and composer, in Great Britain during his lifetime.

Section 2 begins with a brief overview of social and cultural changes and events occurring in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; the rise of audiences, and the increasing availability of pianos coincided with the publication of musical scores and, ultimately, with music journalism. These developments provide a backdrop for what follows, underpinning our understanding of Chopin's reception in Great Britain. Section 3 considers the period between 1834 and 1839, in which Chopin's name, and indeed his music, are greeted positively, if tentatively, by the British press. An apparent rise of nationalism, however, appears responsible for a staunch defence of home-grown composers and, as we discover in Sections 4 and 5, reception is highly polarised in the years between 1840 and 1843. Chopin's second arrival in Great Britain does

little to change such reception; although the British press applaud his pianistic talents, his compositions again divide opinion, as discussed in Section 6 which covers the period from 1844 until his death in 1849. A key theme that emerges throughout the article concerns the balance between Classicism and Romanticism found in Chopin's music; for some, his music was an affront to established notions of musical form and sensibility, whilst for others he is a central figure in the emergence of a new musical school. Section 7 concludes this article by surveying several obituaries published immediately after Chopin's death, setting the scene for what follows after his death, and thus preempting an increasingly turbulent reception of his music for the rest of the nineteenth-century in Great Britain.

2. The Industrial Revolution and Changes in Music in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century: a short overview

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the industrial revolution brought profound socio-economic and cultural changes, particularly in Great Britain. These changes were partially responsible for the establishment of a new social class that, in many respects, seemed to have little affiliation with traditions of the past.¹ This had a direct and immediate impact on the various ways that music was received and perceived both during and after that period, transforming the role and status of musicians. This short overview considers such changes, focusing upon the loss of patronage within the arts, the rise of published music and music journalism during the period.

As the days of dependence on aristocratic patrons became numbered, the market for musicians moved away from composing for special events or to specific orders. Instead, composers became increasingly reliant on sales of published works, which they were required to promote through their performances. As purchasing power spread into the middle classes, public opinion and taste became more influential: success no longer rested on the opinion of the few but rather on the response of the many. This, as noted by David Punter,

¹ David PUNTER, "Romantics to Early Victorians" in *The Cambridge Cultural History of Britain*, ed. Boris Ford; Volume six: The Romantic Age in Britain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3–21. Importantly, this social class, as observed by Rink, was not socially and aesthetically uniform. See: John RINK, "The Profession of Music" in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music*, ed. Jim Samson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 55–88.

caused musicians to be much more responsive to the demands of public taste and opinion.² The requirement for performance and public approval understandably placed considerable strain on the composers and performers of the time; although no longer tied to patrons, and thus granted more creative freedom, there were many composers in the nineteenth century who simply failed to find an appropriate audience for their music.

Great Britain, as an industrial power, offered many opportunities to musicians who sought to tap into its wealth and publishing industry. This social phenomenon was, of course, not limited to Britain; the whole of Europe was transformed by industrialisation and, as better transport possibilities emerged, this enabled virtuoso careers to flourish.³ As we shall discover, such opportunities account for the visits of Chopin to Great Britain, and also the visits of many of his contemporaries.⁴ According to Rink, the concert scene in the first half of the nineteenth century combined institutional concerts (those of the Philharmonic Society in London, for example), individual concerts (which usually featured multiple players, with or without the accompaniment of the orchestra), alongside amateur musical organisations.⁵ Beyond the concert hall, music of the time was often heard in salons, of which some were, as noted by Derek Carew, semi-public and varied in the acclaim of the performers. Domestic music-making had various audience sizes, as one might expect from performances in drawing-rooms of middle classes or working-class artisans.⁶ Together with Vienna and Paris, nineteenth-century London was one of the leading centres of modern piano-making and, at least for an increasingly wealthy section of society, pianos were now more affordable; even so, the price

² *Ibid.*, 14.

³ Colin LAWSON, "Performing through history" in *Musical Performance: A Guide to Understanding*, ed. John Rink (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3–17.

⁴ Some information about this we can find in musicians' testimonies, such as Charles Hallé (1819–1895): "I have been here in London for three weeks, striving hard to make a new position, and I hope I shall succeed; pupils I already have, although as yet they are not many. The competition is very keen, for, besides the native musicians, there are at present here – Thalberg, Chopin, Kalkbrenner, Pixis, Osborne, Prudent, Pillet [i. e., Billet], and a lot of other pianists besides myself who have all, through necessity, been driven to England, and we shall probably end by devouring one another." See: Charles HALLÉ, *Life and Letters of Sir Charles Hallé: Being an Autobiography 1819–1860* (London: Forgotten Books, 2013), 229.

⁵ RINK, "The Profession of Music", 59.

⁶ Derek CAREW, "Victorian Attitudes to Chopin" in *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin*, ed. Jim Samson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 222.

of an upright piano by 1851 was, according to Cyril Ehrlich, roughly equivalent to the salary of a “clerk or school teacher”.⁷ Despite this substantial cost, the popularity of the piano was certainly on the rise, which goes hand-in-hand with the production of published music, enabling certain sections of the population to access music in ways that were previously inaccessible. During the same period, an ever-increasing number of publications, appearing in newspapers and periodicals, transformed music’s role in society from a mere art-form into a social and cultural phenomenon, indicating status, fashion and class.⁸

Unsurprisingly, such changes resulted in press attention to music, which sought to appeal to the purchasing public, bolstering the gradual transformation of music as an elite art into a form of entertainment for a much broader audience. The first musical journals started appearing from 1830, but the daily and weekly newspapers also had regular columns on music. Charles Lamb Kenney was appointed as a music critic for *The Times* in 1843; prior to this date, reviews were written by Barron Field, a theatre critic, and Tom Alsager, the manager of the paper.⁹ In 1846 *The Times* appointed the first professionally trained music critic, James William Davison, who was previously editing *The Musical World*. On the whole, the reception of a particular composer, through the journals and newspaper, was an indicator of zeitgeist, fashion and trends of a particular era, presenting “the code of realism that affected the way readers conceived and perceived the world.”¹⁰ Even though music journalism was in its infancy, reviews of both performance and compositions were fairly common.

Although introduced briefly, the above changes provide a partial context for the many reviews of Chopin’s music during his lifetime; the nature of these reviews does not simply shed light on aspects of Chopin’s performances and compositions, but also reflects and projects the prevailing social, cultural and aesthetic tendencies of the age. As a consequence, we must consider the early press coverage in context, as shall be demonstrated in the section that follows.

⁷ Cyril EHRlich, *The Piano: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 9–10.

⁸ Kate FLINT, “Literature, music, and the theatre” in *The Nineteenth Century, The British Isles: 1815–1901*, ed. Colin Matthew (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 229–231.

⁹ Raymond MONELLE, “The criticism of musical performance” in *Musical Performance: A Guide to Understanding*, 215.

¹⁰ Christopher A. KENT, “Victorian Periodicals and the construction of Victorian Reality”, in *Victorian Periodicals: A Guide to Research – Volume 2*, ed. J. Don Vann and Rosemary T. Van Arsdel (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1989), 4.

3. British Reception and Early Press Coverage: 1834 to 1839

In the first half of the nineteenth century a composer's reputation was created mostly through public performance and reviews of published works. Chopin, however, played most of his recitals in Britain in 1848 (not counting a short and unplanned incognito performance in 1837) and made relatively few public appearances elsewhere, playing only around fifty recitals between 1818 and 1848.¹¹ As a result, critical reception of his work in Britain was mostly based on three main sources: 1) editions published by Wessel (the other active publishing companies being Boosey, Chappell, Clementi, Cramer and Novello); 2) commentary from other pianists' performances of his music; 3) his own performances during his final visit, and associated recollections of his playing. Since Chopin prioritised his own compositions when performing, all of these factors played a crucial role in the reception of both his music and his playing.

Chopin was discussed in the Viennese press from 1829¹² onwards, before later appearances in the French and German press. By 1834, his name appeared in British newspapers. At this time, Chopin was relatively new on the musical scene, at a time when the most popular figures were Mendelssohn and Berlioz. While European composers were relatively well-established in the British consciousness, relatively few home-grown composers were assigned a similar status; figures such as William Sterndale Bennett, Michael Balfe and Edward Loder were, of course, well-known. However, the most popular works encountered in Britain during the early part of the nineteenth century were written by non-natives¹³ and, as a result, the Society of British Musicians was founded in 1834 to promote native composers and performers. As such, Chopin's arrival in some respects followed a precedent: pianist-composers were common in the nineteenth century and, since Chopin's reputation continued to grow abroad, he was described as an established pianist-composer, despite their being relatively little knowledge of him and his music in Britain.

The first published articles about Chopin tend to foreground the difficulties of performing his compositions. A case in point is a short article from *The*

¹¹ Janet RITTERMAN, "Piano music and the public concert, 1800–1850" in *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin*, ed. Jim Samson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 12.

¹² Jim SAMSON, *Chopin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 26.

¹³ Kate FLINT, "Literature, music, and the theatre" in *The Nineteenth Century, The British Isles: 1815–1901*, ed. Colin Matthew (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 250.

Morning Post in 1834, which discusses a piece presented during a concert given for the benefit of Polish exiles in the Concert Room of the King's Theatre. The review makes reference to low attendance, but offers the view that Chopin's piece is "exceedingly ingenious and abounds with intricate passages, which must be very troublesome to the best pianist", suggesting that it is good as an exercise, but requires a master to be played.¹⁴ Another example from the same year offers a similar view of Chopin's music:

The Album des Pianistes de Premiere Force is a collection of the most difficult pieces of music, indeed only for those players who have obtained the greatest facility of execution. Let such pianists [...] attempt *Hommage à Mozart*, by Frederick Chopin; and then when they can play the latter nothing ought to intimidate them. Chopin is the most ingenious composer that ever wrote, but with his compositions he ought to send us hands with which to play them, for we have met many passages we could not execute with our own. His *Trois Nocturnes*, written in imitation of the Murmurs of the Seine, and his *Variations Brillantes*, on the air "*Je vends des Scapulaires*"¹⁵, are a trifle easier. Yet even these require considerable application for their performance.¹⁶

It was usual at the time to describe both the performance and the composition in relatively simple terms but, more significantly, early press coverage highlights two prominent perspectives; firstly, Chopin's reputation as a gifted pianist and, secondly, the difficulty of performing his pieces. Since the first half of the century bore witness to an increase in piano virtuosity, leading to demand from audiences for new music and for more concerts, it is perhaps not surprising to discover that the British press focused on such issues. In the following years, a few brief articles about Chopin's work were published, again mentioning the difficulty of his music. For instance, *The Musical World* stated that:

It will require a player of the "première force" to scramble through this piece. To such, therefore, and the fagger of nine hours a day, and the solitary prisoner – if any there be, indulged with piano – we recommend it for practice; and when their task is ac-

¹⁴ ANONYMOUS, "King's Theatre", *The Morning Post*, 19781 (2 May 1834), 5.

¹⁵ The Variations on "Là ci darem", Op. 2, published by Wessel in 1833; Nocturnes Op. 15, published by Wessel in January 1834 under the title *Les Zephirs*; Nocturnes Op. 9, published by Wessel in June 1833 under the title *Les Murmures de la Seine*; The Variations on "Je vends des Scapulaires", Op. 12. Published by Cramer, Addison & Beale in January 1834.

¹⁶ ANONYMOUS, "New Music", *The Court Magazine and Belle Assemblée*, 4 (February 1834), 89. Review of *Album des pianistes de première force*, published by Wessel.

completed, they will be in a condition to play an uncommon number of notes in a short time.¹⁷

Another entry from *The Musical World* reveals that “the first movement of the Concerto in E minor by Chopin, [...] although very difficult is too small in feature, and indistinct in outline, to prove very attractive.”¹⁸ Texts such as these played a significant role in the establishment of Chopin’s reputation, and had a direct impact upon sales of his music; one of the major challenges that faced publishers and composers of the time was the enormous gap in talent and musical education between the professionals and the newly purchasing public. The major artists at the time were pianist-composers, who demonstrated considerable talent and musical education and were often intimately involved with the technical development of their instrument. It is therefore unsurprising that the musical public found it difficult to keep up, resulting in, as Arthur Loesser (1954) explains, a favoured tactic for promoting music in catalogues and journals; promotion of that which was “brilliant but not difficult.”¹⁹ In this respect, Chopin faced something of a problem, as was clearly demonstrated by the breakdown of his first publishing agreement; in 1832, soon after his debut in Paris, he was approached by Aristide Farrenc who offered to publish his work. The alliance between the two men broke down early on, without any works published; Farrenc thought that the technical passages in some compositions were too difficult to publish.²⁰

Few articles on Chopin were written between 1834 and 1837. The situation changed after his visit to London in July 1837. However, one cannot assume that this change was a direct consequence of the visit which was, between 11th to 22nd July, mostly for leisure, and included sightseeing and visits to the opera with his friends Camille Pleyel and Stanisław Kózmian. Even so, Chopin signed three new publishing contracts with Wessel, all witnessed by Pleyel;

¹⁷ ANONYMOUS, “Album des pianistes de première force. No.35. Grande Polonaise Brillante, précédée d’un Andante Spianato pour le Piano forte; dédiée à Mad. D’Est, par Frederick Chopin (De Varsovie). Wessel”, *The Musical World*, 49 (17 February 1837), 38.

¹⁸ ANONYMOUS, “Metropolitan Concerts. Mr. Wessel’s soirees”, *The Musical World*, 117 (7 June 1838), 97.

¹⁹ Arthur LOESSER, *Men Women and Pianos* (London: Constable and Company, 1954), 291.

²⁰ Jeffrey KALLBERG, “Chopin in the Marketplace: Aspects of the International Music Publishing Industry in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century: Part I: France and England”, *Notes*, Second Series, Vol. 39, No. 3 (March, 1983), 541.

two of the contracts were for Opp. 25, 29 and 30 and the third for Opp. 31 and 32. Even though Chopin wished to keep out of the public eye in London, he obviously prepared for the trip. After all, he brought the manuscripts for these five works. This may be because, as is clear from the work of Jeffrey Kallberg, Chopin had signed contracts with Wessel as early as 1833; based on surviving contracts and receipts, advertisements in journals, and Hummel's letter to the same publisher,²¹ we can assume that Chopin's connections to England predate his first visit to the country.

While in London, Chopin played an unplanned and anonymous, short recital but was recognised soon after he started to play in the house of James Schudi Broadwood; unfortunately, the programme that he performed has not been identified. Chopin probably met Broadwood whilst in Paris, through Pleyel, and thereafter maintained cordial relations with the family. Prior to Chopin's departure from Paris, Julian Fontana wrote to Kózmian to let him know of his arrival in Britain, and to ask to keep this a secret.²²

When Chopin arrived in London in July 1837 a few press releases appeared. *The Musical World* announced his visit twice. On the first occasion, he was described as a "celebrated pianist, whose compositions are so highly appreciated in France and Germany"²³ The second occasion echoed the same sentiment, again using the phrase "celebrated composer".²⁴ One of the first articles of any significant length appeared in *The Musical World*, and was understandably influenced by his first visit to the country as well as his new publications. This substantial review considered the compositions *Il Lamento, e la Consolazione* *Deux Nocturnes, pour le Pianoforte* and *Le Meditation*. The pieces concerned are the *Nocturnes* Op. 32 and *Scherzo* Op. 31, for which Chopin had signed contracts with Wessel a year earlier. In the article Chopin is described as both a pianist and composer of salon music, which may be attributed to the circumstances around his performance at the Broadwood house. Many of Chopin's compositions (especially mazurkas and nocturnes) ultimately wore a stigma of salon pieces, as they were published in drawing room music collections, while some pieces were published as modified easier versions. This review in

²¹ *Ibid.*, 555.

²² Peter WILLIS, *Chopin in Britain: Chopin's visits to England and Scotland in 1837 and 1848: people, places and activities*. Doctoral thesis (Durham: Durham University, 2009), 31.

²³ ANONYMOUS, "Miscellaneous", *The Musical World*, 60 (5 May 1837), 126.

²⁴ ANONYMOUS, "Miscellaneous", *The Musical World*, 71 (21 July 1837), 93.

The Musical World was significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, the author compared Chopin's works with works of Bach, Beethoven, Weber, Mendelssohn, and Dussek. These positive comparisons with composers of the "classical school" are both rare and noteworthy, referring to Chopin as "a pupil of Field's, and a follower of Beethoven." A flavour of the positive review is captured in the following extract and, since it also demonstrates the writing-style of the time, is worth quoting at length:

Frederic Chopin is a pianiste of the highest order of merit.[...] If M. Chopin was not the most retiring and unambitious of all living musicians, he would, before his time, have been celebrated as the inventor of a new style, or school of pianoforte composition. During his short visit to the metropolis, last season, but few had the high gratification of hearing his extemporaneous performance. Those who experienced this pleasure will not readily lose its remembrance. He is, perhaps, par excellence, the most delightful of pianists for the drawing room. The animation of his style is so subdued, its tenderness so refined, its melancholy so gentle, its niceties so studied and systematic, the tout ensemble so perfect, and evidently the result of an accurate judgment and most finished taste, that when exhibited in the large concert room, or the thronged saloon, it fails to impress itself on the mass. [...] His works are far less known than they deserve; but the startling passages with which they abound, and which are of a nature to call forth the skill of the most consummate, have doubtless contributed, in a great degree, to keep the musical public in ignorance of the numerous beauties interspersed among them.²⁵

By 1841, Chopin had published more than thirty opuses with Wessel, under the titles *Murmures de la Seine* (Nocturnes, Op. 9), *Le Banquet Infernal* (Scherzo, Op. 20), *Les Plaintives* (Nocturnes, Op. 27), *Les Soupirs* (Nocturnes, Op. 37), and *La Gracieuse* (Ballade, Op. 38). Chopin was extremely displeased with the publisher's choice of flowery titles which, as he explained in a number of his letters, were added to increase sales; in a letter to Fontana, Chopin writes: "Wessel is a rogue; I will never send him anything more after the: 'Agréments au Salon'. Perhaps you don't know that he has given that title to my second Impromptu, or one of the Waltzes."²⁶ To make matters worse, Chopin was unhappy about inaction over payments, and to avoid having to deal with Wessel himself, asked Fontana to communicate with the publisher on his behalf, claiming that "he's a windbag and a cheat."²⁷ The relationship between the

²⁵ ANONYMOUS, *The Musical World*, 102 (23 February 1838), 121.

²⁶ Undated letter, CHOPIN, *Chopin's Letters*; collected by Henryk Opieński, translated by E. L. Voynich, (New York: Knopf, 1931), 240.

²⁷ Undated letter, *Chopin's Letters*, 248.

composer and the publisher was tumultuous, requiring considerable mediation from others on Chopin's behalf.

Within the next couple of years Chopin's name had become more common in the British press. Furthermore, reviews were more lengthy, detailed and incisive. This increased scrutiny resulted from his works being publicised in Great Britain and his increased fame in France. His *Etudes* received acclaim, being regarded as a considerable accomplishment, while critics described his harmonic language as solid and excellent, and his musical structures as elegant and novel.²⁸ Chopin's pianistic school was praised and considered finer than the schools of Liszt, Thalberg and Henselt.²⁹ While his compositions were receiving such good reviews Chopin was also benefiting from positive press for his role as a pianist, being described as the "first pianoforte player in Europe."³⁰ In the same month, a review of his *Etudes* appeared, this time focussing upon Op. 25., claiming that Chopin's etudes exemplify elements of the modern school of pianoforte and insisting that they should be crucial for every pianist's development.³¹ While the new musical methods would be the "Romantic school" ("the new school has arisen"³²) this term should be read in the context of the time when it was written; as Rosalba Agresta observed (further developing a position held by Friedrich Blume³³) the term 'Romantic' does not have a precise meaning in the English press, but was commonly used as a synonym for the 'new' piano school – namely the opposite of the 'old' one, the 'Classical'.³⁴ The division between two piano schools is worth highlighting here, since it later becomes a polemical issue in the press.

²⁸ ANONYMOUS, "Douze Grandes Etudes pour le Piano, par F. Chopin. Op. 10, Book II. Wessel & Co.", *The Musical World*, 114 (2 August 1838), 231–232.

²⁹ ANONYMOUS, "Douze Grand Études, en Deux Livraisons pour le Pianoforte dédiées à ses amis J. Liszt et Fred. Hiller, par Fred. Chopin. Edited with additional fingering by his pupil J. Fontana. Book I. Wessel & Co", *The Musical World*, 113 (10 May 1838), 34. This is an example of unapproved dedication to Hiller.

³⁰ ANONYMOUS, "Chit-chat from the Continent", *The Musical World*, 116 (31 May 1838), 84.

³¹ ANONYMOUS, "Douze Grand Etudes pour le Piano, par F. Chopin, Op.25, Book III – Wessel & Co.", *The Musical World*, 128 (23 August 1838), 275.

³² *Ibid.*, 278.

³³ Friedrich BLUME, *Classic and Romantic Music: A Comprehensive Survey* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1972).

³⁴ Rosalba AGRESTA, "Chopin in music criticism in nineteenth-century England", *Chopin and his Critics: An Anthology (up to World War I)*, ed. Irena Poniatowska (Warsaw: The Fryderyk Chopin Institute, 2011), 451.

With these articles, one may observe a gradual evolution of Chopin's public image; earlier writings typically described his music as difficult, whereas later articles positively acknowledge his style and originality, a trend no doubt accentuated by his growing reputation abroad. The press and the public were interested in him as an inventor of a new style, and hardly anything was written about him that was not a glorification of his style and its novelties. It would appear, at least at this point, as though Chopin was in a class of his own. This would, as discussed below, gradually change in the years ahead.

4. The Diversification of British Reception of Chopin: 1840 to 1843

The year 1840 witnessed a significant change in Chopin's reception in Great Britain. *The Musical World*, started to criticise his music, on the grounds that it avoids "regular forms of composition" and that the forms used, such as fantasia or impromptu, "lack [...] the attributes of scholarship [...] excused by the undefined nature of the work."³⁵ Such comments are, to an extent, counterbalanced elsewhere in the review; the author ultimately recommends the piece, on account of the "many points of imaginative beauty." Comments in *The Musical World* soon assume a much more critical tone:

Chopin's waltz is very well in its way, but were any English writer of one half the reputation of M. Chopin to publish any affair of the like kind, it would unquestionably have at least twice the amount of merit to recommend it.³⁶

The following year saw publication of a much more hostile article in the same journal, initiating a lengthy polemic in the British press. The anonymous writer criticises Chopin's music for a lack of form; the claim that his musical ideas rarely exceed sixteen bars is used to fuel speculation that Chopin's enormous reputation is without foundation and, in many cases, denied to composers of substantially more value:

The works of this author invariably give us the idea of an enthusiastic schoolboy, whose parts are by no means on a par with his enthusiasm, who will be original whether he can or not. There is a clumsiness about his harmonies in the midst of their affected strangeness, a sickliness about his melodies despite their evidently forced unlikeness to

³⁵ ANONYMOUS, "Impromptu pour le Pianoforte, compose par Frederic Chopin", *The Musical World*, 225 (16 July 1840), 45.

³⁶ ANONYMOUS, "Trois Grandes Valses brillantes, pour pianoforte, par Frederic Chopin", *The Musical World*, 230 (20 August 1840), 126.

familiar phrases, an utter ignorance of design everywhere apparent in his lengthened works, a striving and straining after an originality which, when obtained, only appears knotty, crude, and ill-digested, which wholly forbid the possibility of M. Chopin being a skilled or even a moderately proficient artist. It is all very well for a feverish enthusiast, like M. Liszt, to talk poetical nothings in “La France Musicale”, about the philosophical tendency of M. Chopin’s music; but, for our parts we [...] witness that the entire works of M. Chopin present a motley surface of ranting hyperbole and excruciating cacophony.³⁷

This article was probably written by George Macfarren, then editor of *The Musical World*.³⁸ It is, in many ways, quite surprising to discover such a dramatic shift in attitude, particular since the journal had by that time praised Chopin’s work for years. Upon close inspection, however, one may note that the article is, in fact, a response to comments ostensibly attributed to Liszt; there are no articles by Liszt in *La France Musicale*³⁹ in 1841, but a translation of Liszt’s text *M. Chopin the Pianiste* was published in *The Musical World* on the 10th of June, and gives high praise to Chopin.⁴⁰ Macfarren goes on to quote Liszt, who apparently refers to “an aristocracy of *mediocrity* in England, at the head of which was William Sterndale Bennett”. In response, Macfarren argues that Liszt “[...] might, with a vast deal more of truth, have asserted, that there is an aristocracy of hyperbole and nonsense in Paris, of which himself and his friend, the *philosophic* Chopin, are the summit. If Messrs. Sterndale Bennett and George [Alexander] Macfarren be *mediocre* [...]”⁴¹ These various comments may well have upset Macfarren who was, after all, the father of George Alexander Macfarren. This might, to some extent, explain his sudden change of opinion about the music of Chopin, allowing a personal grievance, and an apparent opposition between ‘Classical’ and ‘Romantic’ schools, to take centre-stage.

The Musical World had to deal with some strong reactions from their readers. Amongst these, a letter from Christian Rudolph Wessel offered an explanation for the celebrity status of the composer on the continent.⁴² Despite such reactions from their readership, the magazine retained its opinion, again

³⁷ ANONYMOUS [George MACFARREN], “Souvenir de la Pologne. Seventh set of Mazurkas. Frederic Chopin. Wessel and Stapleton”, *The Musical World*, 292 (28 October 1841), 276–277.

³⁸ AGRESTA, “Chopin in music criticism”, 451.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 470.

⁴⁰ Franz LISZT, “M. Chopin the pianiste”, *The Musical World*, 272 (10 June 1841), 373.

⁴¹ ANONYMOUS [George Macfarren], “Souvenir de la Pologne”, 276.

⁴² WESSEL and STAPLETON, “Correspondence. M. Frederic Chopin. To the Editor of Musical World”, *The Musical World*, 293 (4 November 1841), 293–294.

stating that there was no justification for Chopin's fashionably high ranking; a subsequent issue of the journal suggests that Chopin's innovations entitled him to his high musical status as much as "the contriver of a Dutch toy is entitled to a place beside the inventor of the steam engine [...] Messrs. Wessel and Stapleton have misinterpreted their counsellors, and have mistaken their author's popularity for his artistical value."⁴³ Unsurprisingly, such comments generated strong reactions from readers:

I certainly disagree with you entirely in your opinion of the merits of M. Chopin's music. To me he appears an eminently poetical thinker, and, what is more, fully capable of developing his ideas in the happiest, if not in the profoundest manner.⁴⁴ My opinion of M. Chopin is so high, that I think it nothing short of desecration to speak of his compositions without the utmost reverence. I know no composer of the present day at all equal to him in depth of feeling, fascination of style, and abundance of melodic and harmonic resources – and none of the past epoch – Beethoven alone excepted – fit to hold a candle to him.⁴⁵

The Musical World published a selection of such letters, each accompanied by a response from the editor. In each case, the same editorial perspective was articulated, again serving to agitate the readers. In this respect, one might suggest a split between views of the *The Musical World* and its readership; the *vox populi*, however, demonstrates that Chopin's reputation had actually gained ground during this period. The quantity of correspondence to the magazine was so overwhelming that the editor asked readers to kindly stop writing to him on the topic.

Matters were brought to a close when a couple of incorrect assertions by an anonymous *Professor of Music*, were exposed by another anonymous writer, published under the pseudonym *Vindex*:

To my knowledge, Mr. Bennett was not only never at any time a pupil of M. Chopin, but NEVER EVEN SAW HIM; and, were I at liberty to offer an opinion on the subject of Mr. Bennett's taste, I should say, instead of admiring the works of that composer, he highly disapproves of them.⁴⁶

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 293.

⁴⁴ AN AMATEUR, "Correspondence. M. Frederic Chopin. To the Editor of the Musical World", *The Musical World*, 294 (11 November 1841), 309.

⁴⁵ PROFESSOR OF MUSIC, "Correspondence. M. Frederic Chopin. To the Editor of the Musical World", *The Musical World*, 295 (18 November 1841), 323.

⁴⁶ VINDEKX, "M. Frederic Chopin ad Mr. W. Sterndale Bennett. To the Editor of the Musical World", *The Musical World*, 297 (2 December 1841), 356.

Following the publication of this letter, *The Musical World* closed the discussion, explaining that there would be no further communication on the subject. Comments about the public correspondence did, however, appear in the French press; regarding Chopin as a celebrity, they seemed bemused as to why he was causing such a stir in Britain. A correspondent from Paris, for example, wrote that people “have a good deal of fun here about the Chopin controversy. M. Chopin is said to be highly incensed at being compared to Bennett and Macfarren, of neither of whom does he know anything whatever, having been heard to say that the only musician of any pretension in England was young Henry Brinley Richards.”⁴⁷

Turbulent exchanges between Wessel and Chopin continued; discontent with aforementioned sloppy payments and flowery titles, resulted in Chopin selling his rights for the English market to Schlesinger, who then re-sold them back to Wessel.⁴⁸ In 1841, Wessel published *An Essay on the Works of Frederic Chopin* by James William Davison. It is unclear whether this essay was connected to the public correspondence and controversy discussed above. However, it presented Chopin as a poetic composer, whose music involves “a large degree of the transcendental and mystic – is essentially and invariably of passionate tendency, of melancholy impression, and metaphysical colouring.”⁴⁹ Davison put Chopin on a pedestal relative to piano music, where he “reigns pre-eminently without a rival.”⁵⁰ This publication both helped and hindered Chopin’s reputation. Written solely to express admiration for Chopin’s music and persona, it was one of the first texts to glorify him as a genius and a poetic composer whose works are unloved only by those for whom the music itself is too profound. Davison’s text is of particular interest because the author soon ceased to be a supporter of Chopin’s music. At that time, Davison edited *The Musical Examiner*, a magazine that existed only for a short period, it was published by Wessel from 1842 to 1844.⁵¹

Other articles from the same period indicate that the British press relied too much on hearsay and gossip from Europe. Examples include Chopin’s de-

⁴⁷ P. F. M., “Foreign”, *The Musical World*, 300 (23 December 1841), 412.

⁴⁸ Jeffrey KALLBERG, *Chopin at the Boundaries: Sex, History and Musical Genre* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1998), 209–210.

⁴⁹ J. W. DAVISON, *An Essay on the Works of Frederic Chopin* (London: Wessel, 1842–1843). Cited in: Agresta, “Chopin in music criticism”, 479.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 480.

⁵¹ AGRESTA, “Chopin in music criticism”, 452.

scription as a Polish refugee⁵² and the unfounded rumour about his death.⁵³ In 1843, regardless of gossip, Davison continued his glorification of Chopin's compositions and pianistic style:

[Chopin] stands at the head of the modern Romantic school [...] His very touch alone is ravishing; and when he brings out the tone of the instrument, and makes it sing as a forlorn maiden, weep as a rejected lover, mourn as an unappreciated poet, shout as a reeling bacchanal, sport as a young lion, stalk as a fierce giant, gambol as an innocent child, howl as a famished wolf, declaim as an inspired orator, –all this, and more than all this, and all in infinite diversity, and yet in exquisitely symmetrical form– you are ready to fall at his feet, and worship to be, and to whom you pray that he may not destroy you; but a glance at his mild expressive countenance, as he turns his head, pleased that he should have given such unfeigned delight– and your awe for his genius is melted into love for his humility, and you are tempted to exclaim, HERE INDEED IS A POET AND A MAN!⁵⁴

In the same year, Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 2 in F minor was presented to a London audience, on 31 March 1843.⁵⁵ The concert was organised by the Philharmonic Society, and performed by Madame Dulcken, who received excellent reviews for her playing. The press, however, were divided about Chopin's work, describing it as “fine and masterly” but with “little of originality,”⁵⁶ “dry and unattractive,”⁵⁷ and “crowded with subjects,” but “one of the loveliest *larghettos* ever penned.”⁵⁸ One review simply declared that “we do not like it”.⁵⁹ The concert itself created quite a stir in the press, resulting in the publication of a long biography of Chopin in *The Morning Post*, together with comments on the performance itself. *The Musical Examiner* stated that “the press have

⁵² ANONYMOUS, “Prince Czartorsky”, *The Morning Post*, 22211 (25 March 1842), 1.

⁵³ J. S., “Foreign Intelligence. From our own Correspondent”, *The Musical Examiner* (3 December 1842), 26.

⁵⁴ J. W. DAVISON, “Chopin”, *The Musical Examiner*, 14 (4 February 1843), 93–94.

⁵⁵ A number of sources refer to this concert happening on 3 April 1834; however the first review is published in *The Musical Examiner* on 1st April 1834, commenting on the concert taking place “last night”. (ANONYMOUS, “The Impartial Weekly Record of Music and Musical Events”, *The Musical Examiner*, 22 (1 April 1843), 158.

⁵⁶ ANONYMOUS, “Philharmonic Concerts”, *The Standard*, 5837 (4 April 1843), 1.

⁵⁷ ANONYMOUS, “Philharmonic Society”, *The Times*, 18261 (4 April 1843), 4.

⁵⁸ ANONYMOUS, “The Impartial Weekly Record of Music and Musical Events”, *The Musical Examiner*, 22 (1 April 1843), 158.

⁵⁹ ATLAS, “Fudge”, *The Musical Examiner*, 24 (15 April 1843), 166.

been in an absolute ferment ever since”⁶⁰ and decided to publish comments on the performance at the Philharmonic, looking at criticisms from other sources.

For a while after the concert, reviews of his works began to appear almost every day, such as the review of the Scherzo Op. 31, with its “wild and melancholy nature – its sweet and fresh turns of the melody – its strange and unearthly harmonies – its novel and frequently rhapsodical – one and all bespeak it the music of a poet, which appeals to affectionate and sensitive natures, rather than to the cold worldling for appreciation.”⁶¹ The fact that Chopin had both a biography and a review of his complete works published simultaneously during this period is, once again, a testament to his growing reputation in Great Britain. Even so, a review of his complete works in *The Musical World*, criticises Chopin’s “defective education”, calling him a “little better than an impostor”.⁶² Just below this review, an editor’s note reveals different attitudes:

We insert the above, though we dissent, in a great degree, from the estimate it presents of the genius of Chopin, one of the most remarkable pianoforte composers of any age or country. It is from the pen of a talented and frequent correspondent of the “Musical World” who has, evidently, never heard the music of Chopin interpreted, either by the author himself, or his gifted pupil, little Filtsch⁶³ – otherwise, we give him the credit to think that his opinion on the subject would considerably differ from what he now expresses. We promise our readers our own ideas concerning the merits of Chopin, in a short time, and in the meanwhile, beg of them to study him.⁶⁴

The topic continued throughout August 1843, creating considerable reaction. According to a writer for *The Musical World*, the whole problem in the perception of Chopin’s music was that he was both overrated (by Liszt and Schumann) and underrated, while pointing out Chopin’s apparent fault of not

⁶⁰ ANONYMOUS, “The second concerto of Frederic Chopin”, *The Musical Examiner*, 24 (15 April 1843), 165–166.

⁶¹ ANONYMOUS, “Review. Second Scherzo in B flat Minor. Frederic Chopin. Wessel and Stapleton.”, *The Musical World*, 31 (3 August 1843), 262.

⁶² ANONYMOUS, “Review. Complete Collection of the Works of Frederic Chopin. Nos. 44 to 46 – Wessel and Stapleton.”, *The Musical World*, 32 (10 August 1843), 271.

⁶³ The mention of Chopin’s pupil Carl Filtsch (1830–1845) is significant because of the comparison to his teacher. We know from other sources about this child prodigy’s pianistic capabilities. However, it is uncommon to find a direct comparison of his playing with Chopin’s. For more information on Filtsch’s playing, please see: Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, *Chopin vu par ses élèves* (Neuchâtel, France, Baconniere: 1970); trans. Naomi Shohet, Kyrisa Osostowicz, and Roy Howat as *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher – As Seen by His Pupils*, 3rd ed., ed. Roy Howat (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 66–67; 140–142.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 271.

being able to produce a lengthy piece of work, referring to Sonata Op. 35 as a “formless, capricious, vague and disconnected fantasy”, but still has no equal amongst the living composers.⁶⁵ An important piece of information is hidden behind these articles published in *The Musical World*: Davison had become the editor of the magazine in May 1843, succeeding Macfarren.⁶⁶

The arguments used by respective parties in debates such as those mentioned above are of particular interest when considering valuations of Chopin. For instance, the same arguments used by one party to justify a criticism were repeated by the other to justify praise. In this way, one may observe that musical interests within Great Britain were undergoing a period of transformation, but they retained a strong classical presence in social and cultural terms. In this respect, an argument, advanced by David Punter, suggesting that Romantic art stood in opposition to the Classicism of the earlier eighteenth century,⁶⁷ applies just as much to music. The admiration of a tradition and its values is often present during periods of change from one stylistic period to another. In this case, advocates of Classicism upheld tradition, placing great importance on an artist's public duty, and implying that present artistic endeavours would be unable to match achievements of the past. Romanticism, however, was far more focused on the personal expression of the artist, and extolled artistic integrity rather than duty. It was a movement that looked forward to new ages, rather than admiring achievements of the past. Punter's observations are, in a sense, a continuation of what Gustav Schilling wrote about Chopin and his contemporaries: “these romantics have discarded as shackles the forms and textures of which the old school was so proud.”⁶⁸

Antagonism towards Chopin who, as a Romantic composer, did not base his music on Classical foundations is thought-provoking, particularly when the very first reviews offered an entirely opposing perspective. The view that Mendelssohn and Schumann shared, when writing a music history syllabus for newly opened conservatoire in Leipzig, was that Chopin should be situated alongside Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and Mendels-

⁶⁵ ANONYMOUS, *The Musical World*, 33 (17 August 1843), 275–276.

⁶⁶ AGRESTA, “Chopin in music criticism”, 452.

⁶⁷ PUNTER, “Romantics to Early Victorians”, 18.

⁶⁸ Gustav SCHILLING, “Romanticism and the romantic”, *Music and Aesthetics in the Eighteenth and Early-Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Peter le Huray and James Day (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 469–472.

sohn.⁶⁹ Chopin's views of Mozart and Bach's music are, as is well-known, highly favourable; in the words of Karl Mikuli, Chopin "prized Bach [above all], and between Bach and Mozart it is hard to say whom he loved more."⁷⁰ The nature of Chopin's writing is contrapuntal, especially in later works, perhaps reflecting the influence of his famous musical forefathers. However, the English press failed to recognise this, focusing instead on his exploration of form, dissonances and key relations.

The fact that Chopin generated lengthy and polarised debate is an indication of the impact that he had on the British musical scene and, along with the rich nature of the discussion, a factor contributing significantly to his posthumous reputation. Having a particularly personal and unique style of writing (or, in Jonathan Dunsby's words, a "restlessly experimental approach to all aspect of musical language"⁷¹) it is no wonder that Chopin was often put on a pedestal. It is even less surprising that those who adopted a more classical orientation objected to his unconventionality.

5. A Continuation of Diversification: 1844 to 1848

Critical discussion in 1844 continued in a similar vein to those found in 1843. *The Morning Post*, for example, wrote that "the works of the great Polish pianist have given rise to much discussion in this country. And in this country only, for the fame of the composer Chopin is supreme in France and Germany. Here is a considerable diversity of opinion as to his merits."⁷² At the same time, this article addresses the difficulty of performing Chopin's music and is, as a result, reminiscent of comments in the early British press: "[A] combination of the difficult with beautiful requires mind for its proper development; and players who do not choose to think and feel, and regard the poetry of the art, will do well to leave Chopin alone in his glory."

Throughout 1844, Chopin's works continued to receive highly polarised reviews, including one in *The Times*, which stated that Chopin "has too often

⁶⁹ Jim SAMSON, "The great composer", *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-century Music*, 276.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 276.

⁷¹ Jonathan DUNSBY, "Chamber music and piano", *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-century Music*, 508.

⁷² ANONYMOUS, "Musical review. The Complete Collection of the Compositions of Chopin", *The Morning Post* 22780 (17 January 1844), 8.

been murdered by incompetent players, and then abused by their hearers,”⁷³ and another in *The Musical Examiner*, which claimed that one is “not inclined to allow him that amount of genius which some foreign critics have ascribed to him. From all that we know of his compositions – though certainly we have heard but few of them – we cannot give him credit for being more than an ingenious imitator.”⁷⁴ This latter comment is particularly interesting, since Wessel had published most of Chopin’s works by 1840, presumably following the demands of the market.

It is possible, of course, that *The Musical Examiner* was highlighting the lack of performances of Chopin’s music. This is certainly supported by evidence from elsewhere. Liszt, for example, mentioned in a letter to Marie d’Agoult that Wessel asked him to come and play some Chopin’s pieces in London to make them more famous; Wessel claimed that he was losing money on them, and Liszt did include two Mazurkas in his London concert programme of 1840, as mentioned by *The Athenaeum*.⁷⁵ Other sources support this view, implying that general awareness of Chopin’s music in Great Britain was relatively low. For instance, Alfred Hipkins’ remark that “his compositions were almost unknown. Every time I heard him play, the pieces were strange to me, and I had to rush across Regent Street to Wessel, his English publisher, to discover what I had been hearing.”⁷⁶ There is certainly inconsistency in the perception of general knowledge about Chopin’s music in Great Britain, which leaves doubt about the commercial wisdom of Wessel, who decided to publish his works with regularity. By 1847, however, Wessel had discontinued cooperation with Chopin, apparently on account of inadequate demand for his music.⁷⁷

In December 1844, *The Morning Post* published another lengthy article as a review of the complete works. In this article, the anonymous journalist highlights three major faults with Chopin’s music: “he has not studied the resources of his art with efficient ardour to develop that which is within him”; “he is morbid and affected”; and he “avoids the primal requisite of the highest order

⁷³ ANONYMOUS, “Philharmonic Society”, *The Musical World*, 13 (28 March 1844), p. 10.

⁷⁴ ANONYMOUS, *The Musical Examiner*, 1887 (30 March 1844), 197.

⁷⁵ WILLIS, *Chopin in Britain*, 88.

⁷⁶ Edith J. HIPKINS, *How Chopin played. From contemporary impressions collected from the diaries and note-books of the late A. J. Hipkins*, (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1937), 7.

⁷⁷ Frederick NIECKS, *Frederick Chopin As a Man and Musician* (London: Novello, 1890), Vol. II, 117.

of music – fellowship of his brother artists.” Despite these seemingly negative comments, the author maintains that Chopin is still “the greatest pianist that ever lived, and the profoundest composer for his instrument.”⁷⁸

Besides articles written about his compositions, the press still had a major interest in Chopin as a pianist. It seems that, on this particular topic, there was no room for ambiguity:

Chopin, the only one of the modern school whose very defects assume a graceful appearance. He is one of the best pianists in point of mechanical dexterity; and the deep and intense feeling he unites with energy, calm melancholy, fertile imagination, original rhythm, and progressive harmonies, abundantly redeem the odd, harsh, and shocking passages of the new school to which he adheres.⁷⁹

Similar debates over Chopin’s music continued for a number of years. On account of its nature, focus and energy, similar views appeared in all of the major journals, and even surfaced abroad. *The Musical Examiner* continued to ignore Chopin, with only a couple of articles on him published over a period of several years. Between 1844 and 1847 the reviews of his works were published mostly in *The Morning Post* and *The Musical World*, with none at all appearing in *The Musical Times*. Chopin had a strong supporter in Henry Chorley; writing for *The Athenaeum* Chorley states that: “there is a library of graceful, delicate, and original compositions, – difficult enough to boot, to satisfy the most ambitious person – in the writings of Chopin; totally unknown to English public”;⁸⁰ and “there is an elegance in M. Chopin’s music – an occasional grandeur – a sort of speaking expressiveness different from that of any other composer.”⁸¹

Curiously, Davison changed his mind about supporting the composer, signalling an abrupt change to his previously complimentary comments; Davison refers to Chopin as “a Polish piano-forte player who has composed some rondos and dance-tunes (*mazurkas*) for the instrument.”⁸² As with Macfarren, however, personal grievances may well have played a part in this change of

⁷⁸ ANONYMOUS, “Frederic Chopin’s Complete Works for the Pianoforte. Wessel and Stapleton”, *The Morning Post* 23056 (5 December 1844), 6.

⁷⁹ ANONYMOUS, “Music in Germany”, *The British Minstrel*, 3 (January 1845), 11.

⁸⁰ H. F. CHORLEY, “Concerts of the week”, *The Athenaeum*, 968 (16 May 1846), 507.

⁸¹ H. F. CHORLEY, “New Publications”, *The Athenaeum*, 996 (28 November 1846), 1224.

⁸² J. W. DAVISON, “Letters from Paris, No.11, To Desmond Ryan, Esq.”, *The Musical World*, 22 (4 December 1847), 767.

support. Davison took offence when Chopin did not sign the manifesto of mourning for the recently deceased Mendelssohn:

I have been reproached by some persons for the *bitterness* which dictated my observations, last week, *apropos* of M. Chopin and the late Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy. The reproach is unjust; no bitterness gave birth to those remarks, but respect to the departed master, in whose single person was the concentrated essence of all music, and whose death is as thought from now to a century forward were to be a blank in the progress of art. The musician who fails in respect where respect is so manifestly due – nay, I will go further, the musician who does not merely respect, but revere, worship, idolize the name of Mendelssohn, I do not, I *cannot* consider a worthy follower in his art, and therefore, owing him no respect, I pay him none.⁸³

In a letter from 1848, Chopin wrote about Davison, describing him as a “creature of poor Mendelssohn’s; he does not know me, and imagines, I am told, that I am an antagonist of Mendelssohn. It does not matter to me. Only, you see, everywhere in the world people are actuated by something else than truth.”⁸⁴ Not being a German, Chopin thought it best not to sign the manifesto, but many mistook this gesture of humility as a sign of arrogance. This could, however, be viewed in line with the political situation of the age in which anti-Polish sentiment was present in the media; *The Times*, for example, presented an anti-Polish view, disparagingly describing the refugees of Polish origin as economic migrants. Perhaps Davison’s criticisms of Chopin merely bolstered the pro-German stand of the paper as, in a sense, in line with contemporary sentiment.⁸⁵ Either way, one may observe from such attitudes the lack of consistency amongst journalists and writers of the time and, moreover, the fragility of the overall reception of Chopin’s music. Once again, Chopin finds himself caught between highly polarised views in the British media, which, despite his celebrated position abroad, continue to debate the merits of his music-making.

6. Chopin in England and Scotland: 1848 to 1849

Chopin’s journey to London was announced by Chorley, writing in *The Athenaeum*, on 8th April 1848. Chopin arrived on the 20th April, leaving Paris and

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 767.

⁸⁴ Letter to his family (19 August 1848), *Chopin's Letters*, 370.

⁸⁵ Iwo and Pamela ZAEUSKI, “Chopin in London”, *The Musical Times*, Vol. 133, No. 1791 (May, 1992), 226–230.

the February revolution behind.⁸⁶ A number of people tried to make him feel welcome upon his arrival, including Henry Fowler Broadwood, James Broadwood's son, whom he met during his first visit to London in 1837. It is clear, from Chopin's letters, that he enjoyed Broadwood pianos and that he used them for most of his performances in England.

Soon after his arrival in London, Chopin caused a degree of consternation by turning down an invitation to play at the famous Philharmonic concerts. He explained, in a letter to his family, that he did not like the offered conditions, as he would have to perform one of his concerts, with one rehearsal which was public. Even though his public reason was his illness, this ruffled some feathers, and Chopin writes that one "newspaper took offence at this; but that does not matter. After my matinees many papers had good criticisms, excepting *The Times*, in which a certain Davison writes."⁸⁷

Despite this difficult beginning to his time in London, Chopin organised private concerts through his Paris and Polish connections: these included Lady Gainsborough's home, in late April, the Marquis of Douglas' home, in early May, and a number of performances later on in that month, including: Stafford house, the home of Duchess of Sutherland, and Lady Blessington's home. Public performances followed at Sartoris house, in late June, and Earl Falmouth's, in early July, thanks mostly to Broadwood.⁸⁸ Chopin was clearly grateful for the help and support of Broadwood, referring to him as the "real Pleyel here, [who] has been the kindest and most genuine of friends."⁸⁹ Besides these performances, Chopin had informal recitals in the houses of Mrs Grote, Henry Chorley, Thomas Carlyle and Sir Edward Antrobus.⁹⁰

In comparison to previous years, relatively little attention was paid to Chopin during this period. The Stafford House concert was briefly mentioned in *The Morning Post*, which stated that Chopin had the honour of performing in the presence of the Queen, as well as that his Mazurkas created a great sensa-

⁸⁶ King Louis Phillipe's government was overthrown in February 1848, and the royal family fled to England. Chopin's living revolved around teaching wealthy students, and because most of them had fled, he was forced to leave for a while and wait until the situation improved. With revolution spreading across Europe, the stable government in England seemed like a good choice.

⁸⁷ Letter to his family (19 August 1848), *Chopin's Letters*, 370.

⁸⁸ SAMSON, *Chopin*, 255.

⁸⁹ Letter to his family (19 August 1848), *Chopin's Letters*, 374.

⁹⁰ WILLIS, *Chopin in Britain*, 141.

tion;⁹¹ *The Illustrated London News* reported that the performance was “a great sensation.”⁹² Other concerts preceding the Sartoris event were not mentioned in the press, but were announced and written about later. The Sartoris concert, however, was mentioned in *The Musical World*, and reviews appeared in *The Athenaeum* and *The Musical Examiner*:

Chopin's matinee musicale took place, at the residence of Mrs Sartoris [...] and it is not too much to say that it forms an era in the history of the pianoforte in this country. [...] It is almost as rare a thing to hear his music justly rendered by another player. It is difficult in a mechanical sense – and with many this is a presumption against it, at the time when so many composers want only to multiply mechanical difficulties, or seem to make them the end of the art. But you may find ten whose fingers are competent for Chopin's compositions for one who can feel and understand what they are meant to utter. The characterisation of Chopin as a performer is the entire subordination of the mechanical to the spiritual. Many mechanise the man, make him a part of the instrument; he spiritualises the instrument, makes it a part of the man.⁹³

The concert in the Sartoris house was the first during Chopin's visit for which the public could purchase tickets (from Cramer, Beale & Co.), as announced in *The Athenaeum* and *The Times*.⁹⁴ The review from *The Athenaeum* is of considerable value for giving descriptions of Chopin's playing, written by Henry Chorley in whose house Chopin played on a couple of occasions:⁹⁵

We have had by turns this great player and the other great composer, – we have been treated to the smooths, the splendid, the sentimental, the severe in style, upon the pianoforte, one after the other: M. Chopin has proved to us that the instrument is capable of yet another “mode” – one in which delicacy, picturesqueness, elegance, humour may be blended so as to produce that rare thing, a new delight. [...] Whereas other pianists have proceeded on the intention of equalizing the power of the fingers, M. Chopin's plans are arranged so as to utilize their natural inequality of power, – and if carried out, provide varieties of expression not to be attained by those with whom evenness is the first excellence. [...] He makes a free use of *tempo rubato*; leaning about within his bars more than any player we recollect, but still subject to a presiding sentiment measure such as presently habituates the ear to the liberties taken.⁹⁶

⁹¹ ANONYMOUS, “French Plays”, *The Morning Post*, 23228 (18 May 1848), 6.

⁹² ANONYMOUS, “The Court”, *The Illustrated London News* (20 May 1848), 6.

⁹³ ANONYMOUS, “M. Chopin's Matinee Musicale”, *The Musical Examiner* 2109 (1 July 1848), 1.

⁹⁴ *The Athenaeum* 1077 (17 June 1848), 613.

⁹⁵ HALLÉ, *Life and Letters of Sir Charles Hallé*, 56.

⁹⁶ H. F. CHORLEY, “M. Chopin's Matinee”, *The Athenaeum*, 1079 (1 July 1848), 660.

Besides being of value as a statement about this particular concert, Chorley's remark is also thought-provoking, as it echoes Chopin's words from his "Sketch for a Method". Chopin observed that "each finger is differently formed, it's better not to attempt to destroy the particular charm of each one's touch but on the contrary to develop it"⁹⁷ and it is curious to read that this is exactly what Chorley heard in his playing. In relation to the concert, Chopin reported to Solange Clesinger that he gave an afternoon concert which "was a great success and [that he] got a hundred and fifty guineas. There were a hundred and fifty seats and every one was taken on the previous evening."⁹⁸ Davison did not write about the Sartoris concert, even though he was present, in the company of Walter Macfarren.⁹⁹

It is, perhaps, surprising that Chopin's visit did not cause a bigger stir in the press. However, the fact that most of his concerts were private, or only partially open to the public, probably explains his infrequent presence in the press. Even so, the smattering of comments in the press bring to mind those from a decade earlier. For example, the second *matinée musicale* in the home of the Earl of Falmouth, was announced in *The Times*. Being a fashionable event, this performance was covered by *The Athenaeum*, *The Illustrated London News* and *The London Daily News* as well as *The Manchester Times*¹⁰⁰:

When we hear Chopin himself, these difficulties vanish; everything is executed with such absence of effort; and everything sounds so plain and simple, to a cultivated ear, that we cannot imagine where the difficulties lay. In truth, to Chopin they are not difficulties at all, they are the most obvious modes of execution, which have naturally suggested themselves to him in order to give utterance and expression to his characteristic and original modes of his musical thought and feeling. Hence Chopin's music has a mechanism peculiar to itself: and if this mechanism, reduced to principles, were studied and understood, the peculiar difficulties of his music would vanish.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ EIGELDINGER, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, 195.

⁹⁸ Alfred CORTOT, *In Search of Chopin* (London: Peter Nevill Limited, 1951), 138.

⁹⁹ Walter MACFARREN, *Memories: An Autobiography* (The Walter Scott Publishing Co., London, 1905), 58.

¹⁰⁰ *The Athenaeum* 1081 (15 July 1848), p. 708; *The Illustrated London News* (15 July 1848); George Hogarth, *The London Daily News* (10 July 1848), Anonymous, "Classified Advertising", *The Times*, 19908 (6 July 1848), 1.

¹⁰¹ SPECTATOR, "The Music of Chopin", *The Manchester Times*, 199 (29 August 1848), 7.

All the reviews were very positive relative to both composition and performance, even though most of them were fairly short.

With his reputation increasing, Chopin could now command a respectable sum from teaching and from public performances. After the London concerts, when the season was at its end, Chopin set off to Scotland, departing on 5th August at the invitation of his student Jane Stirling and her sister Mrs Erskine. This period of the stay was intended as a rest for him, but soon changed after his Manchester recital in late August. He performed at one of the Gentlemen's Concerts and was quite pleased with the performance saying that "they received me very well; I had to sit down to the pianoforte 3 times."¹⁰² Besides stating that Chopin was well-known both as a composer and a pianist, *The Manchester Times and Manchester and Salford Advertiser and Chronicle* commented on the performance, stating that it was disappointing¹⁰³, while *The Musical World*, whose anonymous writer had very little to say about his playing, identified his performance as neither surprising nor pleasing.¹⁰⁴ *The Manchester Examiner* stated that Chopin did not quite come up to their idea of a first-rate pianist; he played difficult compositions delicately, but without meaning.¹⁰⁵ Communicating a very different sentiment, *The Manchester Courier* published a review of the concert, glorifying Chopin's "purity of style" and "delicate sensibility of expression"¹⁰⁶.

After the concert, Chopin returned to Scotland where he performed in Glasgow, in September, and Edinburgh, in October. The concert in Glasgow, held at the Merchant's Hall, did not receive much praise, as is apparent from a review in *The Glasgow Herald*:

His style is unique, and his compositions are very frequently unintelligible from the strange and novel harmonies he introduces. In the pieces he gave on Wednesday, we were particularly struck with eccentric and original manner in which he chose to adorn the subject. He frequently took for a theme a few notes which were little else than the common notes of the scale. [...] This simple theme ran through the whole piece, and he heaped on it the strangest series of harmonies, discords, and modulations that can

¹⁰² Letter of 4 September 1848, *Chopin's letters*, 381.

¹⁰³ ANONYMOUS, "Concert Hall, Aug. 28", *The Manchester Times and Manchester and Salford Advertiser and Chronicle*, 1036 (2 September 1848), 5.

¹⁰⁴ ANONYMOUS, "Music in Manchester", *The Musical World*, 37 (9 September 1848), 577.

¹⁰⁵ WILLIS, *Chopin in Britain*, 252.

¹⁰⁶ NIECKS, *Frederick Chopin*, Vol. II, 295.

well be imagined. [...] if we would chose to characterise his pieces in three words, we would call them novel, pathetic, and difficult to be understood.¹⁰⁷

According to Niecks, *The Glasgow Courier* was more positive about the concert, declaring that Chopin's "treatment of the piano-forte is peculiar to himself, and his style blends in beautiful harmony and perfection the elegant, the picturesque and the humorous."¹⁰⁸

After the Glasgow concert, Chopin returned to Edinburgh, where he performed at the Hopetoun Rooms on 4th October. This concert differed from those in Manchester and Glasgow as it was a solo recital, a none-too-common occurrence at that time. It was not particularly well attended, perhaps because the tickets were expensive, but the concert received good reviews, describing the "delicacy of his touch, and the consequent beauty of tone."¹⁰⁹ In fact, numerous journals reported positively on it, including *The Scotsman*, *The Edinburgh Evening Courant*, *The Caledonian Mercury* and *The Edinburgh Advertiser*.¹¹⁰ *The Edinburgh Courier* claimed that "His execution is the most delicate that one could possibly hear. He does not, however possess the power or the brilliant technique of a Mendelssohn or a Liszt. In consequence his playing has less effect in a hall of considerable size. But as a performer of chamber music he has no equal."¹¹¹

Following the concert, Chopin returned to London, where he gave his last performance in Britain, in the Guildhall on the 16th November 1848. The concert was part of the Annual Grand Dress and Fancy Ball and Concert in aid of the funds of the Literary Association of the Friends of Poland. The review from *The Theatrical Examiner* deemed the concert a success, although the venue "was not indeed the most suitable scene for the exercise of powers which, more than those of any other great artist, require stillness and sympathy for their development and for enjoyment of them."¹¹² *The Illustrated London News* reported that "Chopin performed some of his beautiful compositions with much ap-

¹⁰⁷ ANONYMOUS, "M. Chopin's Concert", *The Glasgow Herald*, 4765 (29 September 1848), n/a.

¹⁰⁸ NIECKS, *Frederick Chopin*, Vol. II, 297.

¹⁰⁹ M., "Chopin at Edinburgh", *The Musical World*, 42 (14 October 1848), 669.

¹¹⁰ WILLIS, *Chopin in Britain*, 285–287.

¹¹¹ Quoted in: CORTOT, *In Search of Chopin*, 143–144.

¹¹² ANONYMOUS, "M. Chopin at Guildhall", *The Theatrical Examiner* 2129 (18 November 1848), 742.

plause.”¹¹³ Remarks about the concert were rare, as most of the press discussed details of the event without mentioning the concert. Chopin returned to Paris on 23rd November leaving, in a letter, a whimsical account on his reception in Britain:

I am introduced, and I don't know to whom, and am not in London at all. 20 years in Poland, 17 in Paris; no wonder I'm not brilliant here, especially as I don't know the language. They don't talk when I play, and they speak well of my music everywhere; but my little colleagues, whom they are used to shoving aside here; it is that they consider me some sort of amateur, and that I shall soon be a *grand seigneur*, because I wear clean shoes and don't carry a visiting card stating that *I give home lessons, play at evening parties*, etc.¹¹⁴

The Musical Examiner published a notice about his departure, stating that “there are those among us who appreciate his genius and admire his character.”¹¹⁵

Ultimately, although many of Chopin's concerts in Great Britain were well-received, they remained, on the whole, small-scale and few of them received significant degrees of critical attention from the British press. The picture that emerges from the various comments discussed above is, on the whole, positive. Even so, reception of his music continued to present a similarly mixed picture, including both positive and negative comments, consistent with the various press reports discussed above.

7. Obituaries

Chopin died on 17th October 1849, and many obituaries in the British press both praised his work and lamented his death. Such obituaries presented interesting views about his work, both as a pianist and as a composer, with opinions once again polarised; Chorley, for example, wrote a long and heart-warming obituary where he expressed his admiration for the composer (he even wrote a poem about Chopin soon after his death),¹¹⁶ while Davison in *The Musical*

¹¹³ ANONYMOUS, *The Illustrated London News* (18 November 1848), n/a.

¹¹⁴ Letter to Wojciech Grzymała, 2 June 1848, *Chopin's Letters*, 357.

¹¹⁵ Anonymous, “Musical notices and exhibitions”, *The Examiner* 2131 (2 December 1848), 774.

¹¹⁶ CHORLEY, *The Athenaeum* 1148 (27 October 1849), p. 1090. Also: Henry Gay Hewlett, *Henry Fothergill Chorley: Autobiography, Memoir, and Letters* (London: R. Bently, 1873), 95.

World took a different line, commenting about him never having been a popular name or talent, and suggesting that most were indifferent to him and his music:

This is not the place to criticise the merits of Chopin as a pianist and composer. Time will show, when the influence of his presence amongst us has faded away, whether the high reputation he enjoyed as a composer (of his peculiar merits as a pianist there cannot be a question) was wholly or partially merited, or whether, as some insist, his genius and influence have been greatly overrated by his immediate circle of admirers, and only tacitly admitted by the mass, who, knowing little or nothing of his writings, were too apathetic, or too indifferent, to examine them on their own account.¹¹⁷

This obituary was an extension to one published a few weeks earlier where it was stated that “although he had for some time ceased to take any active part in musical matters, and had almost entirely abandoned both playing and composing, the death of M. Chopin cannot but be lamented by all the lovers and followers of art.”¹¹⁸

A writer for the *Glasgow Herald* lamented the great loss and praised Chopin’s genius. However, it also mentioned that his Concerto and Sonata (without specifying the specific works) are “apt to become vague and vaporous.”¹¹⁹ *The Morning Post* published an elaborated story on his death, as the “social world has not recovered the shock occasioned by the death of poor Chopin.” Interestingly, the title of the report was “Chopin, the Pianist”, and the same story was delivered by *Glasgow Herald* and *The Lady’s Newspaper* days later, but with a different title.¹²⁰ *The Era* published a short entry on the death of Chopin, the pianist,¹²¹ while the *Daily News* delivered a piece on Chopin in which he was acknowledged both as a pianist and composer; the unknown author

¹¹⁷ J. W. DAVISON, “Chopin”, *The Musical World*, 45 (10 November 1849), 705–706.

¹¹⁸ J. W. DAVISON, “Music in Paris. (From our Correspondent)”, *The Musical World*, 24/42 (20 October 1849), 657.

¹¹⁹ ANONYMOUS, “Frederick Chopin”, *Glasgow Herald*, 4880 (12 November 1849), n/a.

¹²⁰ ATLAS, “Chopin, the Pianist” *The Morning Post*, 23693 (14 November 1849), 7. Also: ATLAS, “The Last Moments of Chopin”, *Glasgow Herald* 4884 (19 November 1849), n/a. ATLAS, “The Paris and London Fashions”, *The Lady’s Newspaper*, 151 (17 November 1849), 270.

¹²¹ ANONYMOUS, “Foreign Theatrical and Musical Intelligence. Paris”, *The Era*, 579 (28 October 1849), 11.

pointed out that Chopin had a brilliant but uneventful career, even though he was “unrivalled in some of the highest qualities of an artist.”¹²²

Other obituaries praised Chopin and his work. For example, *The Literary Gazette* stated that the void he left would not be filled by any of his contemporaries.¹²³ A lengthy discussion of Chopin was also published in *Musical Traits and Memorials*:

I believe that in London his Mazurkas, Scherzi, Ballades, Polonaises, Notturmi, or Studies, if then put forth, would have been wasted on the empty air. In Paris they became the high fashion and their composer the favourite master of the most refined and poetically disposed pianoforte players. [...] His death leaves us almost without a composer for his instrument meriting the name.¹²⁴

The author of an obituary published in *John Bull*, addressed Chopin as a pianist and composer, having witnessed his funeral and general solemnity in Paris:

Chopin is much less known in England than in Germany and France, but even in England his reputation is rapidly rising. On the Continent, and especially in Paris, he is placed on a level, in some important respects, with the most illustrious musicians of the age. His works, in regards to originality, consummate artistic skill, exquisite refinement, and the romantic melancholy which they breathe, have never been surpassed nor perhaps equalled. But they are lost if not played in a congenial style and with the most delicate and finished execution; on this account their progress to popularity in England will be slow, though, I believe it to be sure. It required, indeed, the composer himself to interpret them, and this means of understanding them being lost for ever.¹²⁵

This obituary is of particular interest, since it pre-empts much of what was discussed, particularly in the British press, following Chopin's death.

8. Conclusion

This article presented a swinging pendulum of responses to Chopin's music during his lifetime, painting a colourful picture of reception in the British press. Varying considerably throughout the period, reception of Chopin in-

¹²² ANONYMOUS, “Funeral of Chopin – Performance of Mozart's Requiem”, *Daily News*, 1073 (2 November 1849), 7.

¹²³ ANONYMOUS, *The Literary Gazette* (15 December 1849), 912.

¹²⁴ ANONYMOUS, “Musical Traits and Memorials, by Tartini's Familiar. Frederic Chopin”, *Bentley's Miscellany*, 27 (January 1850), 185–191.

¹²⁵ ANONYMOUS, “From a Correspondent”, *John Bull*, 1508 (5 November 1849), 696.

volved wide-ranging debate and conflicts of opinion. Initially tentative reception gave way to adulation and, subsequently, a tug-of-war between opposing views within the British press. On the one hand, Chopin was embraced as a composer and pianist, ranking amongst the greatest contributors to music. On the other hand, strong resentment was expressed.

Unsurprisingly, numerous subtexts underlie respective positions, and this article demonstrated how an understanding, and appreciation, of broader social, cultural and political contexts is ultimately crucial in the understanding of an artist's reputation. In this particular context, a rise of nationalism, seeing a defense of British composers, seems particularly significant. More importantly, in the broader span of time, was the acceptance of Romanticism, closely identified with Chopin's music, which were viewed with a degree of skepticism within the British press. Despite comments from the press, however, Chopin was becoming increasingly popular with the British public.

At the same time, journalists and listeners were clearly concerned with the balance between Classicism and Romanticism, as found in Chopin's music, and it is clear that some of Chopin's actions were misinterpreted by significant figures in the British press. The *vox populi*, however, paints a somewhat different picture; Chopin's music was clearly appreciated, despite revealing certain misconceptions about his life. Such misconceptions were echoed in the various obituaries, which largely referred to Chopin as a pianist, rather than a composer. The various preconceptions, subtexts and misrepresentations established during Chopin's lifetime continue after his death. Clearly, responses to Chopin's music during his lifetime were different to those nowadays; unlike attitudes to performance, distinctive kinds of journalist writing, and, ultimately other kinds of playing, conspire to produce a rich and varied musical context that has since passed. With this in mind, this article showed that it is necessary to consider how background events, framing the ways in which such music was produced and presented, account for the many different factors that informed Chopin's reception during his lifetime in Great Britain.

Much of the material presented in this article is relatively unknown; in presenting press attitudes to Chopin during his lifetime, we can trace how British critics reflect debates going on the Continent. Understanding how the press represented and viewed Chopin during his life time, help to build a picture of various tropes that developed later in the nineteenth-century. For example, after his death the notion of Chopin as a poet of the piano give rise to the

application of various feminine attributes often associated with Chopin later on in the century. The exploration of the game “love me, love me not” between Chopin and British press, brings us the understanding of British socio-cultural world, which influenced Chopin’s life both indirectly and directly, and left the trace followed by reception in the second half of the nineteenth-century. But that is another story.

Bibliography

- Blume, F., *Classic and Romantic Music: A Comprehensive Survey* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1972)
- Cortot, A., *In Search of Chopin* (London: Peter Nevill Limited, 1951)
- Don Vann, J., and Van Arsdel, R. T. (eds.), *Victorian Periodicals: A Guide to Research – Volume 2* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1989)
- Ehrlich, C., *The Piano: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990)
- Eigeldinger, J. J., *Chopin vu par ses élèves* (Neuchâtel: Baconniere, 1970); trans. Naomi Shohet, Kyrisa Osostowicz, and Roy Howat as *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher – As Seen by His Pupils*, 3rd ed., ed. Roy Howat (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986)
- Hallé, C., *Life and Letters of Sir Charles Hallé: Being an Autobiography 1819–1860* (London: Forgotten Books, 2013)
- Hipkins, E. J., *How Chopin Played. From Contemporary Impressions collected from the Diaries and Notebooks of the late A. J. Hipkins* (London: Dent, 1937)
- Ford, B. (ed.), *The Cambridge Cultural History of Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)
- Kallberg, J., “Chopin in the Marketplace: Aspects of the International Music Publishing Industry in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century: Part I: France and England”, in *Notes*, Second Series, Vol. 39, No. 3 (1983)
- Kallberg, J., *Chopin at the Boundaries: Sex, History and Musical Genre* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1998)
- le Huray, P. and Day, J. (eds.), *Music and Aesthetics in the Eighteenth and Early-Nineteenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981)
- Loesser, A., *Men Women and Pianos* (London: Constable and Company, 1954)
- Macfarren, W., *Memories: An Autobiography* (London: The Walter Scott Publishing Co., 1905)
- Matthew, C. (ed.), *The Nineteenth Century, The British Isles: 1815–1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)
- Niecks, F., *Frederick Chopin. As a Man and Musician. 2 Volumes* (London: Novello, 1890)

- Opieński, H. (ed.), *Chopin's Letters*; trans. by E. L. Voynich, (New York: Knopf, 1931)
- Poniatowska, I. (ed.), *Chopin and his Critics: An Anthology (up to World War I)* (Warsaw: The Fryderyk Chopin Institute, 2011)
- Rink, J. (ed.), *Musical Performance: A Guide to Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)
- Samson, J. (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)
- Samson, J. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992)
- Samson, J., *Chopin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996)
- Willis, P., *Chopin in Britain: Chopin's visits to England and Scotland in 1837 and 1848: people, places and activities*. Doctoral thesis (Durham: Durham University, 2009)

Summary

This article considers the reception of Frédéric Chopin, both as a pianist and composer, in Great Britain during his lifetime. Examination of British attitudes to Chopin between 1830 and 1849 reveal an exceptional position in reception history; even though Britain was one of three locations for publication of his first editions, the polarised reactions to Chopin's music greatly influenced the reception and performances of his works after his death, ultimately revealing a different set of attitudes to those exhibited in France and Germany. Much of the material presented in this article is relatively unknown, and in presenting press attitudes to Chopin during his lifetime, we can trace how British critics reflect debates going on the Continent. Understanding how the press represented and viewed Chopin during his life time, help to build a picture of various tropes that developed later in the nineteenth-century.

Keywords

Frédéric Chopin, reception, nineteenth-century Britain

