



Chopin Society of Atlanta

NEWSLETTER

May 2005

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INSIDE

Upcoming Events	1 & 2
Ticket Information	1
Exclusive Interview with Adam Makowicz	1
Chopin's Vacation	2
Thank You to Our Supporters	4
Box Office Upgrade	4

Upcoming Events:

Ticket information and details on page 2.

Chopin's Life & Work
Second Annual Competition
April 23, 2005 10:00 am
Winner to be announced at May 14, 2005 concert.

"Reflections on Chopin"
Adam Makowicz and
Piotr Folkert, piano
John Lemley, host
May 14, 2005 7:30 pm
Chopin's music performed first in its original form, then with jazz interpretation.

Annual Fundraising Event
Chopin Society Member
Exclusive—Evening with
Adam Makowicz
May 15, 2005 5:00 pm
An evening with world-famous Polish pianist, Adam Makowicz.

All Chopin Recital:
Mei-Ting Sun, Winner of the
National Chopin Piano
Competition in Miami
June 5, 2005 4:00 pm
Presentation of this year's winner in concert Atlanta.

To become a member, join online at www.chopinatlanta.org or call 770.663.0620.

Tickets for all events are available by calling CSA Box Office at 678.314.1222. We now accept Discover, Visa, Mastercard and American Express.

Watch for other *Member Only* Events and Ticket Discounts online.

A Chopin Society of Atlanta Exclusive Interview:

Adam Makowicz talks about Chopin, classical music and jazz before his concert with Piotr Folkert in Atlanta

an interview by Bożena Zaremba

BZ: You are a renowned jazz pianist, but at your concerts you often play classical music. Why this liaison?

AM: I was classically trained — I attended musical schools at the end of the '50s and the beginning of the '60s. There were no jazz schools or jazz classes at that time in Poland. Jazz was still considered decadent and unwanted, though no longer forbidden as it had been during the Stalin regime, when you could be jailed for playing jazz. So the only education musicians could get was in classical music. After having played only jazz for so many years, I still love listening to classical music. It is very inspiring and helps me in my improvisations to go beyond typical ways of expression. Gershwin was the first one who managed to combine classical music with jazz when he wrote *Rhapsody in Blue* and *Concerto in F* (which I have in my repertoire). Then Bernstein continued this tradition, as well as Copland and other American composers. Classical music is based in Europe, while jazz came from Africa, Cuba and Brazil, then other parts of the world. Latin music influenced American music as well, to form this unique form of music. But I never liked to limit myself to one convention, and classical music opens great possibilities and gives me incredible tools. Another reason for playing classical music is to have a chance to cooperate with great classical musicians and orchestras.



Adam Makowicz
Photo: Michał Sadowski

How did your classical training influence your jazz career?

It gave me the necessary foundations and the technique. Whether it is classical music or jazz, the bases are the same, the tools are the same.

When did you know jazz was the music you would like to devote your life to?

I discovered jazz when I was about sixteen. I listened to "Music USA-Jazz Hour," a radio program broadcast on the Voice of America every night and produced and hosted by Willis Conover. I gained basic knowledge about jazz from him; later he became my close friend. There were a few jazz pianists like Art Tatum and Erroll Garner who had a tremendous influence on my almost overnight decision to play jazz. I was brought up in a completely different culture, and the rhythm, the swing so inherent in this music was so fascinating that I knew right away this was the direction I was going to take.

In 2000 you released a CD, "Reflections on Chopin," and last year you played Chopin with Leszek Możdżer at Carnegie Hall; here in Atlanta we will have a chance to listen to your improvisations on Chopin. Why such an interest in this composer?

The Carnegie Hall concert was created and organized by the director of the Polish Cultural Institute in New York, Mr. Paweł Potoroczyn. The CD from this concert has already gone double platinum in Poland, which is quite unusual for jazz music. And why Chopin? We are both Polish, I live here in America, Leszek Możdżer in Poland, and Chopin is our national composer. So two Poles playing in New York, at the most prestigious concert hall — we had to play Chopin. Chopin is also one of the best-known composers in the world; there is something in his music that is so appealing to people everywhere. The dialogue with the audience is easier if you play something they already know well.

Continued on page 3

Upcoming Events:

Chopin's Life & Work **April 23, 2005** **Second Annual Competition for Atlanta Youth**

— Please let us know if you would like to be a sponsor or establish a special award in your name. —

Chopin Society of Atlanta, in cooperation with the Polish Saturday School, is organizing the Second Annual Competition for Atlanta Youth, dedicated to Chopin's life and work. The competition will take place on April 23, 2005, at 10:00 am, at Northminster Presbyterian Church in Roswell (2400 Old Alabama Road).

The competition will be held in two age groups, 7-10 and 11-14. For more information, please contact the Chopin Society of Atlanta at 770.663.0620 or chopinsociety@mindspring.com.

The competition will consist of three parts: a written test on Chopin's life and music, a short essay, and audio questions concerning Chopin's work. First Prize \$150 (all groups), Second Prize \$50 (all groups).

"Reflections on Chopin" **May 14, 2005 7:30 pm** **Adam Makowicz and Piotr Folkert, piano; John Lemley, host**

World-famous Polish pianist, Adam Makowicz, will be performing his jazz interpretations of Chopin's music. Piotr Folkert will perform Chopin pieces in their original form.

Jim Fuselli of the *Wall Street Journal* wrote: "Adam Makowicz has been praised by Benny Goodman, compared with Art Tatum, Erroll Garner and Teddy Wilson, honored by jazz publications and toasted all over Europe as a genius. Mr. Makowicz's fiery style, firm chording, and rapid, Tatumesque right hand phrasing make him more than deserving of the accolades he has received."

Ann Ker of the *State Journal*, Springfield, Illinois, wrote: "Piotr Folkert is a stunning virtuoso with a stellar technique. Full of tenderness, passion, joy, sorrow, and singing style that made the music come to life: Folkert showed the stuff the world-class are made of."

The concert will be hosted by John Lemley, radio presenter from public radio station WABE, 90.1 FM.

Location: St. James United Methodist Church, 4400 Peachtree Dunwoody Road, Atlanta, GA 30342. For directions, check their Web site, www.stjamesatlanta.com. Tickets: \$25 Adults, \$15 CSA Members (with paid dues for 2005), \$15 Seniors/Students, FREE Students of teachers that belong to North Fulton Music Teachers Association (excluding adult students). Call CSA Box Office at 678.314.1222.

Annual Fundraising Event **May 15, 2005 5:00 pm** **Chopin Society Member Exclusive**

Come enjoy a special evening with world-famous Polish pianist, Adam Makowicz. A great opportunity to make a personal connection with this outstanding artist and for the Chopin Society members to get together again. If you would like to contribute an appetizer or dessert, it would be greatly appreciated. Location: 540 Morton Mill Court, Alpharetta, GA. RSVP by May 5 at 770.663.0620.

All-Chopin Recital **June 5, 2005 4:00 pm** **Winner of the National Chopin Piano Competition in Miami**

We are proud to present this year's winner, Mei-Ting sun, in concert in Atlanta. Mei-Ting Sun is currently a C.V. Starr doctorate fellow at the Juilliard School, studying with Robert McDonald.

Location: St. James United Methodist Church, 4400 Peachtree Dunwoody Road, Atlanta, GA 30342. For directions, check their Web site, www.stjamesatlanta.com. Tickets: \$20 Adults, \$15 CSA Members (with paid dues for 2005), \$15 Seniors/Students, FREE Students of teachers that belong to North Fulton Music Teachers Association (excluding adult students). Call CSA Box Office at 678.314.1222.

Chopin's Vacation in Szafarnia

In 1924, 14-year-old Chopin spent his summer vacation with his schoolmate from school, in the Szafarnia estate, some 150 miles from Warsaw. The estate belonged to his friend's parents.

Szafarnia, a small village, was not only a pleasant place of rest, offering many attractions to the 14-year-old boy from the capital, but also a place from which he could make excursions and get acquainted with the architecture of neighboring manor houses, old churches, monasteries, mills and castles. The country air helped improve Frederick's health, and the extremely cordial atmosphere in the house of his friend favored games and frolics. Happy Frederick did not neglect his piano playing and compositions, however.

Chopin did have an opportunity to get acquainted with village customs and folklore. Instead of using the traditional form of conventional letters to parents, Chopin sent news from Szafarnia in the form of a newspaper, that he entitled the *Szafarnia Courier*. Among the several hundred letters Chopin wrote to his parents, the *Szafarnia Courier* is of exceptional significance. It tells a lot about the future artist. The descriptions it contains reveal superior literary talent, great imagination and perceptiveness of the young boy.

Chopin used the pseudonym Pichon for himself. Here are only a few examples of the news from the *Szafarnia Courier*:

On August 13, the Hon. Better [a piano teacher in the manor house in the neighborhood] made himself heard on the piano, displaying no common talent [...] and he plays with so much feeling that nearly every note seems to come not from his heart but from his huge belly.

On August 15 important news super-vened: a Turkey-hen hatched by chance in a cubby behind the granary. This important event not only helped to multiply the Turkey family but also increased fiscal revenue and ensured its steady growth. Last night a cat sneaked into the dressing room and broke a bottle of juice: although on the one hand he deserves the gallows, on the other, he is worthy of praise for he chose the smallest one.

continued on page 4

Which elements of Chopin's music appeal to a jazz musician most?

Mainly the melody. Whether it is a ballade, nocturne, etude or prelude, they all have beautiful melodies, and each and every one of Chopin's melodies is great for improvising. It is really incredible that something written so many years ago can fit every genre or style so smoothly. One of the first examples of Chopin's melody used for this purpose (though not a direct quote) was a bossa nova, "How Insensitive," based on *Prelude E minor* and written by the Brazilian composer Antonio Carlos Jobim. It's incredible how this melody fits this genre so well — the melody and the harmony are the same but suddenly we get a beautiful bossa nova.

Let's talk about improvisation. It has been known in music for ages, but it is different in classical music and jazz.

Right. Chopin or Liszt did improvise; there were even improvisation contests at that time. Chopin, for example, would get in touch with his publisher and ask if he could still change something in the manuscript because he liked the way he played the piece the night before better than what he had written in the manuscript. So his music often comprises improvisations that have been simply written down; his preludes or sonatas consist of a few main motifs, and then we hear different variations of the theme. Those variations are very unique: specific for Chopin, for the way he felt the music. When I play his music I only take fragments, the melody (because you cannot improvise on improvisations), which I transform in my own way and add the element of swing. Classical music does not have that swing, which is the most important element of jazz.

Can you describe the creative process of improvisation?

It's a very long and subtle process, which can be compared to the work of a writer working on a novel. You need to learn how to work with the words, then with sentences, and how

to make them comprehensible, how to build tension and make it all interesting for the reader. The same in music — you need to find the way to play a phrase so it will touch the listener's soul, so it will move him/her to a different world of sound, world of beauty. You definitely need musical knowledge to do that, but improvisation is an individual creative process, and every musician plays differently. Every jazz musician searches for his or her unique mode of expression and learns to build musical phrases so that music will reach and influence the audience.

What about spontaneity? Is there a place for that during the concert?

Yes, of course, but the improvisation does not come out of the blue. It does have to have some sense and be consistent. The whole thing is based on contact with the audience. A good improviser can communicate with the listeners. The language he is using has to be concise and has to tell a story that will appeal to people.

What role does intuition play in all of this?

A great deal. Improvisation is after all played on the spot, but you need a blueprint; you need to have plan. The rest depends on a lot of different elements — on the audience and their responsiveness, on the acoustics in the concert hall and on the instrument. These things decide whether the concert will throw the audience on their knees or will be just a good one.

How does a "classical" audience respond to jazz improvisations on Chopin's music?

They find it very interesting, this combination of classical music and jazz. The audience in Atlanta will have a chance to compare the two genres and to experience how Chopin's music can evoke different feelings and emotions.

Is your concert with Piotr Folkert in Atlanta the first time you will play with a classical pianist in such a format?

No, I have played many concerts with classical pianists - here in New

York, for example, with Roman Markowicz, who is also a great music critic, and with Jacek Zganiacz, and also in Poland with Krzysztof Jabłoński. I also played a combined concert—that is, classical and jazz—with the young, talented pianist and composer Stanisław Drzewiecki; we both improvised on his compositions. The response from the audience was always enthusiastic, and they asked for more.



Piotr Folkert
Photo: *Sergiusz Sachno*

Tell us something about the format of the concert in Atlanta.

Piotr Folkert, who is a purely classical pianist, will play the classical version of Chopin's music, and I will improvise on the same piece. We will try to communicate with the audience with the two different genres, and finding this contact with the listeners, both classical lovers and jazz fans, will be fascinating.

What pieces are you planning to play?

Mainly short pieces: preludes, nocturnes, mazurkas and ballads, but we will decide on the details when I come to Atlanta.

Is this your first visit to Atlanta?

Yes, and I am really looking forward to what will surely be a great experience.

Thank you very much for the interview.

Adam Makowicz's CDs and Piotr Folkert's CDs will be available for sale at the concert. See the calendar for the details about the concert and the related events. To learn more about tAdam Makowicz, visit his Web site at www.west.net/~jazz/bio.html

Box Office Upgrade

Our box office has been upgraded to provide more credit card options at a lower cost to the society. We now accept Discover, Visa, MasterCard and American Express for all event ticket purchases, membership fees and donations.

Advertise your business while supporting the Chopin Society of Atlanta

Place an ad in upcoming event programs. Call Mary Montgomery at 770.587.3240 for details.

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Continued from page 2

On August 26 a dog caught a partridge in the cornfield. On seeing this, Miss Cossack took away the poor dead thing from the dog and hung it on the pear tree. The clever dog kept shaking the tree and jumping about until she got the partridge, and having seized it, consumed it with relish.

On August 29 Hon. Pichon was passing through Nieszawa [a small village nearby] when he heard a 'Catalani' [reference to Angelica Cata-

lani, a famous Italian singer who praised Chopin's playing when he was 10 years old] singing at the top of her voice as she sat on the fence. His attention was at once caught, but although he heard both the aria and the voice, this did not satisfy him, for he wanted to hear the words. He walked twice past the fence, but in vain. He could not understand a word. Finally overcome by curiosity, he pulled out three grosches [Polish pennies] and promised them to the singer if she would repeat the song. She kept

fidgiting, pouting and excusing herself for a long time, but encouraged by the three grosches, made up her mind and started to sing a little mazurka, from which the Editor, with the permission of the Authorities and the Censor, will quote only one stanza: "See the wolf dancing behind the mountains for life; He is worried because he has not got a wife."

— Excerpt from Chopin Society of Warsaw materials, by Hanna Wróblewska-Straus

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