



Chopin Society of Atlanta

NEWSLETTER

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Upcoming Events:

Chopin Recital
 Stanislaw Drzewiecki, piano
 March 19, 2006 7:00 pm
 Roswell Cultural Arts Center

Annual Fundraising Event
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Chopin's Life & Work
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“When the Head Leads the Fingers”

Exclusive interview with Stanislaw Drzewiecki and his father, pianist and music teacher, Professor Jaroslaw Drzewiecki, by Bożena U. Zaremba (including translation)

At the age of six you went on your first concert tour to Japan, accompanied by the very prestigious Sinfonia Varsovia Orchestra; at the age of twelve you won Grand Prix at the European Television Festival in Alicante, Spain; and the next year, in 2000, you won the Grand Prix at the 10th Eurovision Contest for Young Musicians in Bergen. Did you ever have a so-called “normal” childhood?

Stanislaw Drzewiecki: Every childhood is different; everyone has different experiences and needs. While studying music you are a loner, but it does not mean you need to avoid social contacts. Maybe I had less time to play with my friends, but I had a chance to meet fantastic musicians, visit wonderful places, and most of all I had great satisfaction sensing how people were moved by my performance. That’s the best prize for grueling and lonely hours of practice.

Jaroslaw Drzewiecki: We never treated our son in an exceptional way. I think he felt that his life was not much different from that of other people, and at some point he probably thought that everyone in the whole world played the piano.



Photo by Lukasz Król

He was not a “child prodigy” for you, then?

JD: I have never liked this phrase, but it’s needed by the media and by the audience; you can’t do much about it. Young people will always succeed if they build their careers on inner harmony. I really admire Stanislaw for being humble in what he feels to be his service towards the composer and the audience.

Your professional career was in a way determined by family tradition. Did you ever ask yourself if this is what you want to do?

SD: This is only partially true. My parents did not actually encourage my music education. It was a teacher friend who wanted to try some fun piano stuff with me. My parents felt like they couldn’t say “no,” and that’s how it all started. And if you do what you really like, it is never hard. Of course, there are moments when I need a break.

What about your formal training?

SD: It started with Professor Ida Leszczyńska, who, after two years, moved to Chicago, where she has achieved great success as a teacher. Then it was Professor Wiera Nosina, and in the last few years I have been studying with my mother, Professor Tatiana Shebanova, a great artist, whose repertoire embraces almost the whole piano literature. This has been a very inspiring phase for me. I have had a chance to study great Romantic composers like Chopin, Liszt, Schubert, Schumann and Rachmaninoff. My discussions with my mom-teacher have often been very heated, but we always reached consensus. At the same time, I had a chance to “practice” the art of diplomacy to carry out my ideas.

Sometimes you perform together—

SD: Oh, yes! We have played family concerts in Canada, Japan, Portugal, Holland, and Russia. In New York we played Rachmaninoff’s *Waltz for Six Hands*. This was fun! This year we are celebrating the 250th anniversary of Mozart’s birth. For this occasion we released a new CD with Sinfonia Varsovia, conducted by Michael Zilm. We are also preparing an unusual project, a tour of 16 concerts around Poland, with Mozart’s concertos for one, two and three

... continued on page 3

Musical Child Prodigies of the Past and Present

by Bożena U. Zaremba based on various Internet sources

A child prodigy is someone who is a master of one or more skills or arts at an early age, ...who, by the age of roughly 11, displays expert proficiency or a profound grasp of fundamentals in a field usually undertaken by adults.

(<http://en.wikipedia.org>)

A five-year-old child playing a musical instrument like a virtuoso excites wonder, admiration, sometimes disbelief and even jealousy. The phenomenon of a child prodigy, though known for ages, is still not fully understood or scientifically explained; the term itself is often misused and can be controversial. But don't we all love the stories about extraordinary talents?

Frederick Chopin (1810-1849), for example, displayed great musical talent at the age of four. He was considered a precocious child, sensitive to and deeply affected by music; he often ended up in tears when he heard his mother sing or play the piano. He began to take piano lessons when he was six, and soon improvised to a great degree. At the age of seven was already the author of two polonaises, in *G minor* and *B flat major* (written down by his father), and other dances, as well as marches and variations, now lost. Warsaw newspapers featured the "little Chopin,"

who immediately became the attraction and ornament of receptions given in the aristocratic salons of the capital.

Chopin's contemporary and close friend, **Franz Liszt** (1811-1886), was recognized as a child prodigy at the age of six. His father, who played the cello in the local orchestra, taught Franz to play the piano. Antonio Salieri heard the young Liszt play at a private house and offered to train the child in composition for free. The audiences were especially impressed by Liszt's uncanny ability to improvise an original composition from a melody suggested by the audience. Playing on par with established professionals at age twelve, Liszt was fast becoming a sensation. He is linked to another child prodigy, Beethoven, whose esteemed student Carl Czerny was Liszt's teacher.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) took an interest in music at an early age, and his father Johann taught him day and night, on returning home from music practice or the tavern. Johann's ambition was to create a new Mozart, a child prodigy, and when, at the age of eight, Ludwig gave his first known public performance, his father announced that he was six years old. Because of this, Beethoven always thought that he was younger than he actually was. He published his first composition at the age of twelve, and when he was only

fourteen he was appointed organist of the court of Maximilian Franz, Elector of Cologne.

It is believed that Beethoven did not surpass Mozart's fame, nor did other child prodigies of the later era – **Nicolò Paganini** (1782-1840), **Franz Schubert** (1797–1828), or **Felix Mendelssohn** (1809–1847). **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** (1756-1791) is still considered the greatest child prodigy in music ever. He was playing both the keyboard and the violin and was composing minuets at the age of five and symphonies at nine! Mozart published his first works, four sonatas for clavier with accompanying violin, when he was eight years old. By the time he turned sixteen, he had written about twenty-five symphonies, and his first quartets. An anecdote has it that a 14-year-old Mozart wrote down, from memory, a celebrated religious work called the *Miserere* by Allegri, while he was listening to its performance. The Pope did not allow it to be performed outside of the Sistine Chapel, and to copy it meant excommunication!

What about the child prodigies of our times? At the age of six, one piano prodigy was asked what he most enjoyed about performing. His reply? "The refreshments."

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Who is your teacher now?

SD: Professor Andrzej Jasiński at the Music Academy in Warsaw. We are currently working on Debussy and Ravel.

Do you, as a music teacher, have a special method that has proven right?

JD: Every teaching process is different, because every student is different, and I always try to create the best scenario for each one. From my experience I know that versatility, curiosity, temperament, and ability to concentrate are very important qualities that help in developing musical skills. I am against the Suzuki method, and I think that working on manual skills needs to go side by side with emotional development and most of all with expanding the student’s imagination. In their work, composers have embraced the whole palette of human feelings, from the most dramatic to the happiest, and the performer does not need to have experienced them all. It is his or her imagination and intuition that come in handy.

When is a student ready to “face the world”?

JD: Performing on stage should start from the earliest possible age, so that the young student can gradually get accustomed to and befriend, not fear the audience. Later on, the responsibility rises and stage fright comes in, but the positive attitude remains. But if we are talking about professional performing, the student is ready when the head starts to lead the fingers; that is, when he or she consciously controls the process of artistic creation.

How do you deal with stage fright?

SD: Stage fright, in the common understanding, is a “unclean consciousness”, which arises from insufficient preparation. Obviously, when you don’t know your notes you fear you may lose control. For me, stage fright is when every single part of me gets mobilized. It’s a force that releases superhuman power so that you can “move mountains.” The mind works better thanks to this force.

What did you have to give up to devote your life to music?

SD: Music is my life, but I still have a lot of “outside” hobbies, which do affect how

I see the world. I believe you need to expand your horizons as much as possible.

Can you tell us something about your hobbies?

SD: I have learned to fly, and I love diving and plane modeling. Recently I designed a virtual town, with all infrastructures, including an airport and public transport. A few years ago I designed a hybrid airplane, which, besides some complex designs, has a... concert hall. I do all of this in my free time, which is more and more scarce.

In recent years you have devoted much time to composing music—

SD: I do not aspire to be a composer, but I feel I have always been creating music, and there are moments when writing music feels like a necessity. These are strange, not fully comprehensible moments. When I was a child, it was my mom who wrote down my “compositions.” Although I knew harmony and rhythm, I could not write down the notation. I wrote my first composition, Waltz in A-minor, when I was seven. The Eurovision Competition called for a contemporary piece, which I did not have in my repertoire, so I wrote my own, Prelude “Insect.” I have also written some pieces for small ensembles, the most notable being music for staging Goethe’s poem, “The Alder King” at the “Lalka” Theater in Warsaw. This show received the Grand Prize at the International Theater Festival in Poznań. Last March my new composition, Double Concerto for violin, piano, and orchestra debuted at the Koszalin Philharmonic. Maestro Peter Dabrowski from Valley Symphony Orchestra in Texas conducted the concert. This piece is based on folk music from all over the world, including the Far East, Gypsy and Polish Tatra Mountains music.

You have won prestigious international competitions, your concert tour takes you to the most prominent concert halls in the U.S. such as Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, and the Walt Disney Concert Hall, and you regularly play in Japan. Which experience do you cherish most?

SD: Definitely the Tenth Eurovision Competition in Bergen, Norway, which was shown live to 24 countries. I represented Polish Television and was honored to receive the Grand Prix from Maestro Esa-Pekka Salonen and Prince Haakon, now King of Norway. Just before the final concert I was told that 10

million people would be watching. This was such an abstract number for me that I was not impressed at all. It was only at the airport that I felt the power of the media, when strangers came up to me to offer congratulations.

What gives you the greatest artistic satisfaction?

SD: When I start to “feel” the composer as if I were composing his music. This was the case with Mozart, Chopin, and Rachmaninoff. Concerts give me an opportunity to pass my fascinations on to the audience.

Which interpretation of Chopin’s music do you prefer, traditional or modern?

SD: Of course, the pianist needs to present his or her own vision, but I definitely prefer interpretation close to Chopin’s vision, based on his notation and his written texts.



Photo by Łukasz Król

One of the last International Chopin Competition jurors said that you “need to play in accordance with Chopin’s personality. To remember what kind of person he was. To read his letters, look at his portraits. Meditate his life and find his voice within yourself.” What do you as a teacher think about it?

JD: Knowledge is always helpful in finding the composer’s intentions. Chopin’s letters to his family and friends are the most interesting resource. They show us his true image, not so idealistic as in formal biographies.

What is your attitude towards the interpretation of Chopin’s music?

SD: Constantly shifting moods, like euphoria changing into nostalgia, and the vast array of human emotions. I try to “tune in,” to understand those emotions, and then pass them on to the audience.

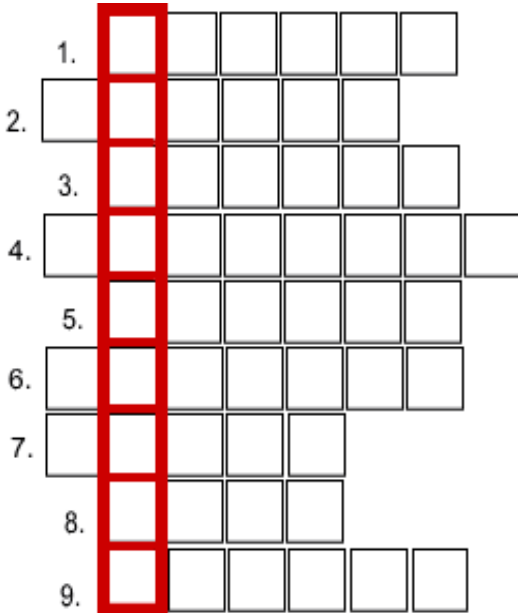
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Crossword Puzzle

by Beata Olszok



Letters in the block will form the name of a type of Chopin composition, which is very similar to the name of Poland.

1. The name of the country where Frederick Chopin was born.
2. The name of the composer with whom Chopin, as a "childhood genius," was compared.
3. The name of the city where Chopin traveled in July 1837 in the company of Camille Pleyel.
4. The type of two compositions, in E-minor and F-minor, which Chopin composed for the orchestra.
5. The name of the city in central France where Chopin spent the happiest and the most productive periods in his life.
6. Polish folk dance in triple time, with a lively tempo, containing a heavy accent on the third or second beat; also Chopin's composition for solo piano.
7. The name of the city in central Europe where Chopin made a short excursion in July 1829 and enjoyed a tremendous success with the public.
8. The name of the famous French novelist and Chopin's great love.
9. The name of Chopin's teacher of music theory and composition at the Warsaw School of Music.

Answers: 1. Poland 2. Mozart 3. London 4. concerto 5. Nohant 6. Mazurka 7. Vienna 8. Sand 9. Eisner
Name of Chopin composition in blocks-Polonaise

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