



Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina [Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin], vol. I: 1816-1831, ed. Zofia Helman, Zbigniew Skowron, Hanna Wróblewska-Straus, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego [University of Warsaw Press], 2009, 790 p.

Monumental editions are tremendous (in an original Latin sense of both: *tremendum* and *fascinans*), where admiration mixes with disbelief that something was made by human hands. This is the case with the publication of Fryderyk Chopin's correspondence. The editors are the best Polish musicologists and experts on Chopin's biography and compositions: Zofia Helman, Zbigniew Skowron and Hanna Wróblewska-Straus. It should be noted that further volumes are also foreseen: Volume 2 letters from 1831-39, Volume 3 1839-49, and a last Volume 4 containing correspondence of family and friends that is connected with and about Chopin. Consequently, not only is this book impressive, but the whole project promises to be a great treat. In the year 2010, pronounced the Year of Chopin because of the 200th anniversary of his birth, this edition contains more than the obvious writing one would expect about the great Polish pianist and composer. The truly European character of this edition arises not only from the geographical and cultural background of Chopin's correspondence, which is more related to the tragic history of the Polish artist during the partitioning of our country in the 19th century and to the turbulent times for the Old Continent, but also from its use of archival sources from museums, archives, libraries and private collections from all over the Europe. Hence, it is - at the present moment - the most complete edition of Chopin's correspondence, taking into consideration all previous publications, translations, and reproductions of his letters in all languages. *Chapeau bas* for the editors!

In spite of the very comprehensive notes, comments, and annexes, the reader is not overwhelmed by the expertise, erudition, and historical knowledge of this volume because it is more than the standard academic study. It is fully interesting and lively, sparkling with all colours and shades, serving as an encyclopaedia, dictionary and history of everyday life. The conscientiousness, precision, and accuracy of the editors are admirable. The readers are introduced into the 19th century artistic and intellectual life not only of Poland, but also other places where Chopin or his correspondents were. In those letters a great composer is not a monument but a "living human being". Some parts show him as a young, gentle and sensitive boy, with a great respect for his parents; another time he is full of a sense of humour; in yet others he is an editor of a hand- and homemade journal "Kurier Szafarski". In all those situations those initial "tremendous" feelings disappear, and the reader stays on with gratitude to the editors for their great job. Bound in cloth hardcover, with excellent design and layout, good quality of reproduction of manuscripts, portraits of family and friends, and illustrations from the epoch, its many features make this book a model edition. This judgment is not altered even by the book's heavy use of graphics especially reasonable if we take into consideration the multitude (almost printed hypertext) of comments and explanations. Therefore the book is recommended both for the expert (as a compendium of Chopin's life and works and the social and cultural context of the epoch, as well as a completion and critical analysis of earlier editions of Chopin's letters), and for a broad audience interested in cultural matters.

It is especially worthwhile to read this book in the year 2010, the Chopin Year, and perhaps it is necessary to provide access to the book for a wider European readership by translating it into English and French. More than that: it is an *obligation*, particularly if we want to make Europeans conscious of the Polish roots of Fryderyk Chopin. This book shows forgotten or relatively unknown sides of his life: youthful, private (not only his relationship with George Sand), Polish. Chopin was born, grew up, and formed his artistic sensitivity and mastery in Poland, and his music absolutely showed this Polish character. This book makes it abundantly clear.

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