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Agnieszka Chabowska

Born in Szczecin (Poland), Agnieszka Chabowska graduated in 1998 with honours from the Academy of Music in Cracow, where she studied in the harpsichord class of Elzbieta Stefanska. She attended numerous harpsichord and fortepiano masterclasses with, amongst others, Jos van Immerseel, Kenneth Gilbert, Jacques Ogg, Mark Krall, Johann Sonnleitner, and Malcolm Bilson. She frequently visited early music festivals and performed with Polish and international ensembles, including such groups as the Polish Baroque Orchestra, Consortium Iagiellonicum, and Studium Musicae Cracoviensea. With Consortium Iagiellonicum, Agnieszka Chabowska was involved in a recording of Bach harpsichord concertos, which was nominated for the Polish Fryderyk Award. She has also completed a recording of the unique music collection from Jasna Gora monastery with Studium Musicae Cracoviensae. Agnieszka Chabowska is currently studying in the fortepiano class of Bart van Oort at the Royal Conservatory, The Hague.

BRILLIANT
CLASSICS

NOCTURNES

(COMPLETE)

Frédéric Chopin / John Field
Bart van Oort - piano



The Art of the Nocturne in the Nineteenth Century

The name Nocturne is usually attached to Romantic character pieces for the pianoforte, written in a somewhat melancholic or languid style, with an expressive melody over broken-chord accompaniment. The nocturne emerged as a distinct genre of piano pieces early in the 19th century, primarily through the poetic creations of Chopin. The pioneer of piano nocturnes was the Irish composer John Field (1782-1837) from whom Chopin adopted the idea and the name. Field applied the term to (at least) 19 piano pieces that he wrote between 1813 and 1835. His writing is clearly idiomatic, exploiting the sounds available on the newer piano of his time. The sustaining pedal in particular enabled him to expand the range of the harmonic accompanying patterns beyond those of the Alberti bass, which necessarily lay under the hand. The melodies of his nocturnes transferred to the keyboard the cantilena (including its coloratura flourishes) of Italian opera (Rossini), with which he became acquainted in Russia in the early 1800s. According to Liszt, Field's Nocturnes "opened the way for all the productions which have since appeared under the various titles of Songs without Words, Impromptus, Ballades etc. and to him (Field) we may trace the origin of pieces designed to portray subjective and profound emotion". Field's influence on Chopin becomes evident when their nocturnes are compared. Chopin did not meet Field until 1833, but there is strong evidence that he played Field's works in Paris and used them in his teaching. He may even have been acquainted with them in his early years in Warsaw, where there were performances of Field's piano pieces in 1818. Chopin brought to his 21 Nocturnes the assuredness of form that Field often lacked. In them he further extended the expressive powers of the piano, he refined the structural contours and enriched the harmonic texture of the genre enormously. Generally more sombre in tone than Field's, they exhibit moods ranging from the melancholy of op. 72 no 1 to the scherzo effect of op. 9 no 3, the simplicity of op. 9 no 2 to the lavish climax of op. 62 no 2. But melancholy pervades the greater part of them. Many melodies have an initial downward sweep, increasing the pensive and introspective atmosphere (e.g. opp. 9 no 1 or 72 no 1). Most of the nocturnes are in basic ABA ternary form. However, the original theme's restatement is often varied through Chopin's unique ornamentation. Some nocturnes have a middle section with dramatic turbulence that not only imposes considerable demands on the pianist, but gives the pieces a more dramatic intensity than their title would suggest. The reprise is sometimes a point of repose after a fiery middle section, sometimes a climactic restatement. Well aware of the audience's expectations, Chopin frequently introduced some element of surprise at this point, and occasionally omitted the reprise altogether (Nocturnes opp. 15 no 3 and 32 no 1). Chopin's Nocturnes are

like musical readings of 19th century French poetry, recalling Alfred de Musset's line: "Les plus désespérés sont les chants les plus beaux", "The saddest songs are the most beautiful ones."

Clemens Romijn

John Field

(Broadwood 1823, collection Edwin Beunk)

While in modern times standardization has, to a great extent, affected the craft of piano building, instruments were still very personal works of art in the eighteenth century. As a result, pianos were different from town to town and from builder to builder, and even within one builder's output. Although craftsmen did influence each other within a certain area, the distance between cities as far apart as London and Vienna resulted in two distinct schools of piano building, so that we have come to recognize two main types of fortepianos: the "English" and the "Viennese."

From about 1770 until 1870, these two schools of piano building competed for the favor of both musicians and the audience. In many sources from the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, explicit differences are noted between them. One of the most important of these descriptions is found in Johann Nepomuk Hummel's *Ausführliche theoretisch-practische Anweisung* of 1828. Hummel (1778-1837) lived in London for a number of years and was therefore well acquainted with English pianos. From his comments, however, he shows himself to be partial to the Viennese instruments:

The Viennese instrument allows itself to be handled with ease by the lightest hands. It [...] does not obstruct velocity through too great an effort. [...] the force of the tone must be generated by the speed and force of the finger only. The English action must be done equal justice because of its durability and fullness of the tone. However, these instruments do not allow for the same level of fluency as the Viennese, since the touch of the keys feels noticeably weightier, while they also fall much deeper [...] The Viennese [fortepiano] allows the performer to play with all possible nuances, speaks clearly and promptly, and has a round, flute-like tone which distinguishes well from the accompanying orchestra, especially in big halls [...] Meanwhile I have noticed, that in spite of the big tone of [the English] instruments in a room, the nature of their tone changes in a large space and does not penetrate as well as ours through a complicated orchestral accompaniment [...].

While the English piano was difficult to become accustomed to for most Viennese and German pianists, it established itself as an alternative to the Viennese piano when London became one of the most important centers for piano building and playing even before 1800. English pianos were different from the Viennese in a number of ways: they had more resonance because the damping was not quite as efficient as in the Viennese pianos, the keys fell deeper and felt heavier than the Viennese, while the tone was both fuller and thicker. Furthermore, English pianos often had a damper pedal from the early 1780's, while Viennese pianos were built with a knee lever until after 1800. These differences, which led to a distinct style of playing on each instrument, were important enough after the middle of the nineteenth century for even the famous piano pedagogue Friedrich Wieck to write about them in his *Clavier und Gesang* (1853).

Frédéric Kalkbrenner (1785-1849), who lived in London from late 1814 to 1824, wrote in his treatise *Méthode pour apprendre le piano-forte à l'aide du guide-mains* of 1831:

The English pianos [...] have caused the professional musicians of that country to adopt a grander style and that beautiful way of singing which distinguishes them [...] Dussek, John Field and J. B. Cramer, the leaders of that school of which Clementi is the founder, make use of the forte pedal as long as the harmony does not change [...]

In his *Theoretical and Practical Piano Forte School*..., op. 500 (1839) Beethoven's pupil Carl Czerny (1791-1857) added:

The [English] pianos of that day possessed for their most distinguished properties, a full Singing quality of tone; [...] this naturally led Dussek and Cramer, and a few others to that soft, quiet and melodious style of execution, [with] beautiful Cantabile...

An important element of this style, which developed as a result of the features of the English piano, was a singing legato for which Johann Ladislaus Dussek (1760-1812) and John Field (1782-1837) were especially known. The legato touch, the thicker and richer tone, longer tone life, and incomplete damping of the English piano enriched the singing powers of the instrument and inspired composers to write long cantabile melodies, found already in sonatas by Dussek and Clementi before 1800: if the English piano could speak less, it could sing more than the Viennese piano. For John Field, both the piano he grew up with as well as these important musical influences presented the ideal background for the development of his Nocturne style.

Of the great English piano school around 1800 ("founded" by Clementi), Dussek, Cramer and Field were the ones who pushed concepts of piano sound in new directions. Field especially became the champion of a veiled, pedalled sound with his dreamy and melancholy Nocturnes. After 1803 when he lived in Russia, Field had ample opportunity to listen to Italian singers and become acquainted with the Italian *bel canto* style through the works of, for instance, Rossini. The articulation in Field's Nocturnes resembles more the breathing of a singer, rather than the rhetorical articulation of the Viennese works of the period.

Nocturnes by John Field became a best-selling item for the publishers. To meet demand, Field rewrote other works to be published as Nocturnes. Nocturne no 8 is an arrangement of the Pastorale from the second *Divertissement* for piano and string quartet, and was published initially as the first of Three Romances in 1814. Nocturne no 6 (1816), transposed from E to F major, originated as the slow movement of the sixth Concerto (published much later in 1823); no 12 was also used as the second movement of his Seventh Piano Concerto. Later in his career, when Field suffered from ill-health and lacked discipline to compose, works were apparently chosen from his output of various other piano pieces and published as 'Nocturnes'. A good example is the late Midi Rondo, or "Notturmo carratteristico" in e minor, a piano solo version of Field's first *Divertissement* for piano and string quartet from 1810; this gay 2/4 allegretto has none of the melancholy and cantilenes of the other Nocturnes and can not be called a Nocturne in any sense. The same applies to 'Nocturnes' no 14 and 15 from his late years 1835-36, both in C major. These are rather shallow, light-hearted compositions, in character closer to the potpourris of the salon than to the Nocturnes that made Field so famous. In spite of their title, they do not belong in this Nocturne CD box.

The Nocturnes betray their improvisatory origins in their freedom of form, which seems the result of an unrestrained flow of free associations, and lack of thematic development. At the same time, there is ample room for the melodic ornamentation and rhythmic freedom that they were so admired for. The art of rubato, almost extinct today, is vital to this freedom. "Tempo rubato" implies that the melody can sing out, not strictly tied to the meter, over a rhythmically strict accompaniment. Nocturne no. 9 in Eb major provides an example of this freedom. Not only may the melody be more free rhythmically in singing the ornamentation, by lingering on a dissonant for example; it may also push on, acquire a sense of urgency, and arrive on a beat ahead of the accompaniment.

Some (parts) of the earlier Nocturnes, with their simple, barely ornamented melodies over a usually full and harmonically rich accompaniment, are no more than a framework of a fully developed Nocturne, as

seen in no. 1 in Eb major and (parts of) no. 6 in F major. While the English pianos with their rich tone and excellent balance between bass and treble would allow for such a treatment of melody, the improvisatory nature of these pieces makes it seem logical that a bare melody with very little harmonic tension should be embellished. As with rhythmic freedom, it is impossible to come up with hard and fast rules for the ornamentation or variation of motives and melodies, but in some of the Nocturnes (especially nos. 8 in A major and 17 in E major) the melodies are heavily ornamented. These served as models for further working out of the less complete Nocturnes. For a stylistic indication I also looked at Chopin's Nocturnes, which are heavily indebted to Field's in more ways than just the general character or style of ornamentation (compare, for instance, Field's no. 9 in Eb major to Chopin's op. 9 no. 2 in Eb major). Furthermore, in some cases the flourishes written out by Field seem to be simplified for the printed version, if compared to those that a brilliant performer as Field himself might have improvised (as in no. 2 in c minor or no. 12 in G major). In other Nocturnes (as with no. 5 in Bb major or no. 8 in A major) the return of motives may be varied; in no. 6 in F major and no. 9 in Eb major I took the liberty of adding brilliance to these otherwise quite finished Nocturnes, as Field himself or any of his contemporaries might have done.

Chopin

(1842 Pleyel and 1837 Érard, collection Edwin Beunk)

Towards the end of his life, Chopin had several instruments at his disposal: "I have three pianos. In addition to my Pleyel I have a Broadwood and an Érard, but I have so far only been able to play on my own." (Letter of May 13, 1848). Several of Chopin's pupils and contemporaries testify to Chopin's preference for the Pleyel piano. The pianist, teacher and writer on music Marmontel (1816-1898), related Chopin's own words:

"If I am not feeling on top form, if my fingers are less than completely supple or agile, if I am not feeling strong enough to mold the keyboard to my will, to control the action of keys and hammers as I wish it, then I prefer an Érard with its limpidly bright, ready-made tone. But if I feel alert, ready to make my fingers work without fatigue, then I prefer a Pleyel. The enunciation of my inmost thought and feeling is more direct, more personal. My fingers feel in more immediate contact with the hammers, which then translate precisely and faithfully the feeling I want to produce, the effect I want to obtain."

The distinctive tone qualities of the two instruments, although both rather remote from what 21st-century listeners are used to in today's pianos, were considered very different in Chopin's time. Montal, a contemporary piano technician, wrote of Pleyel that "...the striking of the hammers has been calculated so as to produce a sound that is pure, clear, even and intense; the carefully made up hammers - very hard in the middle, then covered with a soft and elastic skin - bring out in piano playing a soft and velvety tone, gaining in brightness and volume with stronger pressure on the keyboard ..." Liszt himself wrote that Chopin particularly liked the Pleyel pianos "for their silvery and slightly veiled sonority and their lightness of touch."

Chopin's preference for Pleyel was later acknowledged by his pupil Wilhelm von Lenz (1809-1883), who wrote in 1872: "I had been told that Chopin played on no other instrument. Of the French makes these were the ones with the easiest touch. The instrument responded more easily than my Erard." In addition, Lenz said that pianos by Sebastian Érard were suited best for Liszt, Herz, Bertini, but Pleyel's instruments were the ideal for Chopin, Kalkbrenner and Hiller: "..... a Pleyel is needed to sing a Field Romance, to caress a Chopin Mazurk [...]; for the big concert an Érard is necessary." This division between the style of Liszt and Chopin may also be described as a difference between an introverted and an extroverted style of playing, or between the style of the French salon and the concert hall. Chopin was very outspoken about the Érard: "You can thump it and bash it, it makes no difference: the sound is always beautiful and the ear doesn't ask for anything more since it hears a full, resonant tone."

While working on the beautiful 1837 Érard and the 1842 Pleyel pianos from the collection of Edwin Beunk, I found all this to be very true. To start with, it takes a considerable effort to make the Pleyel sound beautiful - one must be "alert and ready to make ones fingers work without fatigue" (as Chopin himself put it) to make the piano speak and sing. For someone used to playing Viennese instruments from the period 1770-1850, the Pleyel is perhaps easier to understand than an Erard. This surprising feature was commented on by Chopin's student Emilie von Gretschn:

"These nuances - I've experienced them as Chopin's on his beautiful piano, with its touch so close to that of the Viennese instruments. [...] Things that came out perfectly on my solid and robust Érard became abrupt and ugly on Chopin's piano." However, the 'veiled sonority' of Pleyel mentioned by Liszt remains hidden until one adopts a style of playing unusual to the Viennese fortepiano. Along with many other accounts, we have this description by

Chopin's pupil Adolf Gutmann (1819-1882): "Chopin played generally very quietly, and rarely, indeed hardly ever, fortissimo." And indeed, playing loud or "playing to the galleries", as Liszt put it, easily ruins the flexibility of the tone. The Pleyel is therefore particularly suited to the Nocturnes if one allows the instrument to "speak for itself", as it were, rather than to force it into dynamic regions where it will not sing or breathe.

The readily available beauty of the 1837 Érard which I used for the second recording of Chopin Nocturnes and for the CD of Nocturnes by his contemporaries, makes playing Nocturnes very easy at first; with a tone so exquisitely melancholic and so warmly romantic, nothing else seems to be needed to make the Nocturnes sing. Indeed, as Chopin said: "...the sound is always beautiful and the ear doesn't ask for anything more since it hears a full, resonant tone." But bending that beautiful tone is a different matter; in fact, it takes quite an effort to produce the different colors and mood changes that Chopin asks for. For one thing, the touch of the Érard feels heavier and less flexible than the Pleyel, as is testified by several of Chopin's students. Wilhelm von Lenz again (1872): "The [Pleyel] responded more easily than my Érard." But there is one quality to be found in the Érard, a quality which makes it a very popular instrument with modern performers, and which fits our modern music life very well: Érard pianos have a more extroverted character, or in the words of Lenz: "The bright tone of the [Erard] carries no further, but in a clearer, more incisive and distinct fashion than the mellow tone of the Pleyel, which rounds itself and loses a little of its intensity in the corners of a large hall." The Nocturnes op 37 no 2, 48 no 1, and 55 no 1 in particular acquire a certain grandeur on this beautiful 1837 Érard which would be hard to attain on an instrument by Pleyel.

When I recorded the Nocturnes by Field I felt at liberty to ornament some of them and vary repeats, as indeed Chopin himself used to do with the works of Field; we know this from his pupil Karol Mikuli (1821-1897): "Chopin took particular pleasure in playing [...] Field's Nocturnes, to which he would improvise the most beautiful fiorituras." However, since both Lenz and Mikuli stated that Chopin also added ornaments to his own works (and wrote them down in, for instance, the Nocturnes opp. 9 no 1 and 2 or 15 no 2), and sometimes added different fiorituras to the scores of his pupils (two of which I used in the case of Nocturne op. 9 no 2 in Eb), I added small fiorituras of my own in some Nocturnes with returning motives (e.g. op. 9 no 2 in Eb, op. 32 no 2 in Ab, op. posth. in C# minor). The posthumous Nocturne in C# minor has been recorded in the autograph version, which is notated in 2/2 with a polymetrical middle section (3/4 for the right hand against 2/2 in the left hand). This Nocturne also exists

in a version notated in a regular 4/4 meter throughout. I have considered this polymetrical passage as an approximation of the rubato with which Chopin no doubt performed this Nocturne. In this spirit I have applied rubato to other Nocturnes where I felt that the melody needed to sing freely over its rhythmical accompaniment.

Contemporaries of Chopin

(1837 Erard, collection Edwin Beunk)

Field's Nocturnes had such a great influence on many composers in various countries that the Nocturne became a genre piece for generations of composers. After 1812 (the year of publication of Nocturnes nos 1, 2 and 3) his works were widely published. The major part of his output was available in print before 1825, the year in which Chopin's opus 1 was published, and the year in which the oldest Nocturne by another composer (Maria Szymanowska) on this CD was printed. However, it is a striking fact that the art of the Nocturne was practiced mostly in countries where pianists had ready access to English or French instruments. In Vienna and Germany, very few Nocturnes were composed; the Viennese instruments, so classical in nature, were apparently less suited to the cantilenes which made the Nocturne so famous than their English and French (originating from the English) counterparts. There were only few exceptions. For instance, in 1822 Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778-1837) met John Field in Moscow during one of his grand European tours. Inspired by Field, Hummel composed a four hand Nocturne, perhaps even during his stay in Moscow; and chances are that they played the work together.

Poland

Maria Szymanowska (1789-1831) was a celebrated performer all over Europe. She studied with John Field and became First Pianist to the Russian Court in 1822; it was in this capacity that she composed *La Murmure* (published in Paris in 1825). In 1828 she settled in St. Petersburg, where Glinka was one of her frequent visitors.

Ignacy Feliks Dobrzynski (1807-1867) studied in Warschau with Elsner at the same time as Chopin. His Nocturnes op. 21 and op. 24 date from 1833 and 1834, making him one of the early Nocturne composers. While showing a strong influence of Chopin, the quality and originality of his compositions has instigated an increasing interest in the work of this almost forgotten composer. His recently rediscovered Piano Concerto in f minor op. 2 from 1824 is regarded as a work of genius.

The Polish Nocturne tradition was continued by the great pianist-composers Anton Rubinstein (1829-1894) and Ignacy Paderewski (1860-1941).

Russia

During his schooldays, Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka (1804-1857) received three piano lessons from John Field. His Nocturne, doubtlessly inspired by Field and his contacts with Maria Szymanowska, was composed in 1828 just before he left Russia for Italy, and it exemplifies his early style. Glinka became a great influence for generations of Russian composers, most noteworthy Mily Balakirev (1837-1910), Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikowsky (1840-1893), Nikolay Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908), whose childhood Nocturne from 1860 remained unpublished, and Alexander Borodine (1833-1887). Also Anton Arensky (1861-1906), Alexander Glazunov (1865-1936), Vasily Kallinikov (1866-1901), and Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915) wrote one or several Nocturnes.

France

On the 26th of February 1832, Chopin made his debut in Paris. He described his success in a letter: "Finished artists take lessons from me and couple my name with that of Field." During his youth, Chopin may have heard works of Field in Poland, but in 1833, he heard him play in Paris. Field's two visits to Paris were thirty years apart. The first time he appeared on the Paris stages was in 1802, when he was already 20 years old; in 1832-1833 he returned and gave three concerts to a mixed but generally enthusiastic reception. The critic *Fétis* described the audience's response as "a veritable delirium" and added that Field "was not less astonishing in the art of attack as in producing an infinite variety of nuances." Between these two visits, Field's reputation grew rapidly through his published works. As a result, the Nocturne became practiced by many Parisian composers, culminating in the works of Chopin.

Camille Pleyel (1788-1855), son of the composer, music publisher and piano builder Ignace Pleyel, set the tone with his Nocturne à la Field of 1830. At this time Camille Pleyel had already taken over his father's piano business and after Chopin arrived they became close friends. Chopin is reported to have admired his playing of Mozart: "There is only one man left today who knows how to play Mozart; it is Pleyel, and when he is willing to play a four hand sonata with me, I take a lesson." Frédéric Kalkbrenner (1785-1849) was without doubt the most important pianist in Paris until Chopin arrived. For a while Chopin considered taking lessons with him, but when he decided otherwise they remained friends: Chopin even dedicated his first piano concerto to him. Kalkbrenner was very close to Camille Pleyel and his wife Marie, who was his student and became a famous pianist herself. In 1833, she was the dedicatee of both Kalkbrenner's *Fantasie* op. 120 and Chopin's *Nocturnes* op. 9. Clara Schumann's (1819-1896) visit to Paris during a grand tour in 1831-1832 inspired her to compose a number of French genre pieces, published as

Soirées Musicales opus 6 (published in 1836). Charles-Valentin Alkan (1813-1888) was a child prodigy; at age nine Cherubini called his gift "astonishing for his age" and "extraordinary". He was a close friend of Chopin and George Sand, but was also influenced by Kalkbrenner and other Paris virtuosos of the 1820's. Alkan was admired for his melodic and harmonic originality, as exemplified by his Nocturne op. 22 (1844) and the short but intense *Notturmo*, op. 63 no 43 (1861). The organist Louis James Alfred Lefebvre-Wély (1817-1870) was known as a great improviser. He left some 200 character pieces behind for various keyboard instruments. Later nineteenth century French composers who wrote Nocturnes include Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924) and Claude Debussy (1862-1918), besides forgotten composers like Joseph Christoph Kessler (a Nocturne of whom is mentioned by Lenz) and Edmond Weber; first editions of some of their works are preserved in various libraries.

Examples of composers of Nocturnes from other countries include Edward Grieg (1843-1907) who wrote a Nocturne for his *Lyrische Stücke* (op 54 no 4), and a Nocturne as late as 1930 by Gustav Holst (1874-1934). Even in The Netherlands, the nineteenth century saw a prolific output of Nocturnes by composers such as van Bree, Kufferath, de Lange sr, de Lange jr, Verhey, Verhulst, Bertelsmann, Heuckeroth, Hartog, Beltjens, van Tal, Moser, and Cramer.

Bart van Oort

Bart van Oort

After completing his modern piano degree at the Royal Conservatory at The Hague in 1983, Bart van Oort studied fortepiano with Stanley Hoogland at the Royal Conservatory. In 1986 he won the first prize and the special Audience prize at the Mozart Fortepiano Competition in Brugge, Belgium. He subsequently studied with Malcolm Bilson at Cornell University (Ithaca, NY) and received a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Historical Performance Practice in 1993. Bart van Oort has performed in many European countries and appeared at festivals of Utrecht, Florence, Berlin, Antwerp, Brugge, Melbourne, Brisbane, York, Clisson, Montpellier, and Esterhaza. He has performed in the USA and New Zealand and makes yearly concert and lecturing tours through Australia. He was Artist in Residence at the university of Western

