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Chopin's Mazurkas and the Myth of the Folk

BARBARA MILEWSKI

In 1852 there appeared under Franz Liszt's name a seminal monograph, *F. Chopin*, which contained the notion that prototypical Polish mazurkas played a role in Chopin's pieces:

Chopin released the poetic unknown which was only suggested in the original themes of Polish mazurkas. He preserved the rhythm, ennobled the melody, enlarged the proportions, and infused a harmonic chiaroscuro as novel as the subjects it supported—all this in order to paint in these productions (which he loved to hear us call easel pictures) the innumerable

and so widely differing emotions that excite the heart while the dance goes on.¹

The gesture was a common Romantic conceit; by the mid-nineteenth century, the description of art music in terms of national practice was a familiar topos in music criticism. This is why Liszt went to great lengths to paint the character of the Polish people when they danced the mazurka in their native land:

It is essential to have seen the mazurka danced in Poland. . . . There are few more delightful scenes than a ball in that country when, the mazurka once begun, the attention of the entire room, far from obscured by a crowd of persons colliding from oppo-

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¹Franz Liszt, *Frédéric Chopin*, trans. Edward N. Waters (London, 1963), p. 69. Much of the material found in the original French edition of 1852 was rearranged and expanded when Breitkopf and Härtel brought out a new edition in 1879. Waters's translation is that of the original 1852 edition.

site directions, is drawn to a single couple, each of equal beauty, darting forth into empty space. And what varied manifestations there are in the turns around the ballroom! Beginning at first with a kind of shy hesitation, the lady tenses like a bird about to take flight. A long glide on one foot alone and she skims like a skater over the ice-smooth floor; she runs like a child and suddenly bounds in the air. Like a goddess of the hunt, with eyes wide open, head erect, and bosom high, she sails in nimble leaps through the air like a boat riding the waves. . . . Exertion colors her cheeks and brightens her glance, bows her figure and slows her pace until, panting and exhausted, she gently sinks and falls into the arms of her cavalier, who seizes her firmly and raises her for a moment into the air before they finish the intoxicating round.²

But while the exotic description of cavaliers and flushed-cheeked Polish ladies leaping and gliding with abandon was meant to evoke a native source for Chopin's mazurkas, it was never an ethnographic attempt to recover a specific folk practice important to Chopin's music. Rather, positioning Chopin's mazurkas within a Polish dance music tradition was a way to raise the status of these works, to elevate the actual material of the music through the suggestive power of Romantic metaphor. Liszt's image of capering Polish dancers, then, was a transcendental one; it served as a poetic device that helped him to articulate the musical matter of Chopin's pieces.

Interestingly, though, Liszt's original anecdote assumed a power far greater than its metaphorical value would suggest. Firing the imagination of other Chopin critics, it became the origin of one of the longest-standing myths in Chopin criticism—the myth that Chopin's mazurkas are national works rooted in an authentic Polish folk-music tradition.³ In this article, I explore exactly how the idea of an authentic folk source for Chopin's mazurkas took on a life of its own and why it has remained compelling for successive generations of Chopin schol-

²Ibid., pp. 66–68 (trans. slightly modified).

³Appropriately enough, Liszt may not have been responsible for the original anecdote that fed the myth, since Princess Caroline Sayn-Wittgenstein, his Polish-born lover, often served as his ghost writer. This authorial obscurity—authorlessness, even—lends the folk story an even greater mythic quality.

ars to the present day. I then examine the types of music that sounded in the Warsaw of Chopin's youth so as to redirect attention to the urban musical culture that may, in fact, hold some provisional answers to the question that has led so many writers to search among the music of the Polish peasants: how is it that these mazurkas evoke the Polish nation?

I

Twenty years after the appearance of Liszt's publication, critics began to take his Romantic metaphor quite literally. The *national* music Liszt spoke of metamorphosed into *folk* music as writers of music history in Poland sought to legitimize their observations in the more class-conscious, truth-seeking climate of late-nineteenth-century positivism. Marcelli Antoni Szulc, who in 1873 wrote the first Polish monograph on Chopin, turned to a rustic scene of fiddlers playing and robust peasants stomping their feet in the quintessential village setting of the *karczma*, the Polish country tavern, in order to describe the content of Chopin's op. 24, no. 2.

The second [mazurka of the op. 24 set], a lively *obertas* [a fast-tempo variant of the mazurka], is much like a quickly improvised picture of a country tavern scene. Strapping young farm-hands and buxom wenches (*dorodne parobczaki i hoże dziewoje*) slowly gather. The village musicians play with abandon, pairs of dancers briskly form into circles, and the gathered party dances until everyone drops from exhaustion, all the while beating out the meter with loud and lively heel stomping and clicking; finally the jolly sounds quiet, and in the distance only receding footsteps are heard.⁴

Such a metaphor, to be sure, was not unlike that of Liszt's Polish aristocrats dancing in ballrooms.⁵ But the shift from ballroom to *karczma*

⁴Marcelli Antoni Szulc, *Fryderyk Chopin i utwory jego muzyczne* (Fryderyk Chopin and His Musical Works) (1873; rpt. Kraków, 1986), p. 188. All Polish translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

⁵While Liszt never uses the word "aristocrats" in his discussion of the mazurka, his choice of the words "cavalier" and (in this context) "lady," not to mention the gallant behavior he describes, suggests something other than a peasant scene. This is not simply a case of Liszt describing the lower classes from a gentleman's point of view. Even

was significant. By relocating the dance to the countryside, Szulc associated the mazurkas with an image of a pure and simple Polish folk; unadulterated peasants replaced cosmopolitan nobility to illustrate better the authentic national content of Chopin's works. Szulc also found mimetic explanations for the "Polishness" of the music, and in suggesting that certain mazurkas in fact imitated the rasping sounds of village fiddlers, he further blurred the line between the real and the imagined.

Szulc's most dramatic and influential elaboration of Liszt's original trope, however, was in relation to op. 24, no. 2, and op. 68, no. 3, two works that he singled out for their elements "taken directly from folk music." Szulc was reacting to the sharpened fourth scale degree present in the melodic lines of each of these mazurkas; specifically, to the B \sharp s in the F-major section of op. 24, no. 2, and the E \sharp s in the B \flat section of op. 68, no. 3.⁶ He thus became the first writer to apply a general concept of folk borrowing to specific mazurkas.

Four years later, in 1877, the Polish musician and music critic Maurycy Karasowski came out with his own monograph on Chopin in German. In it, he recounted memoirs and letters that described a young Chopin listening intently to peasant music. Even more brazenly than Szulc, Karasowski extrapolated from these fragmentary accounts that the composer had not only listened to folk songs on a regular basis, but had also internalized them in order to incorporate them—or, in Karasowski's words, "to idealize them"—in his art music. Recalling Szulc's discussion of direct folk borrowings in Chopin's op. 24, no. 2, and op. 68, no. 3, Karasowski suggested that Chopin "frequently interwove some especial favourite [folk song]

into his own compositions," a particularly embellished suggestion that would spark the imagination of subsequent biographers.⁷

Szulc's discussion of op. 24, no. 2, eventually found its independent way into two other publications: Ferdynand Hoesick's Chopin monograph of 1910–11, and Hugo Leichtentritt's 1921–22 analysis of Chopin's piano pieces. Both

⁷Moritz Karasowski, *Frédéric Chopin: His Life, Letters, and Works*, trans. Emily Hill, 2 vols. (London, 1879), I, 30–32; emphasis added. Although Karasowski does not often cite his sources, it is clear that most of his knowledge of Chopin's youth derives from not only Chopin's letters but also Kazimierz Władysław Wójcicki's unusual history of Warsaw citizenry, *Cmentarz Powązkowski pod Warszawą* (The Powązkowski Cemetery near Warsaw) (Warsaw, 1855–58; Warsaw, 1974). For an interesting discussion of the numerous liberties Karasowski took in his interpretations of the facts of Chopin's life and in his published transcriptions of Chopin's letters, see Krystyna Kobylańska, *Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina z rodziną* (Chopin's Correspondence with Relatives) (Warsaw, 1972), pp. 9–25. Kobylańska also offers a specific example of a change made by Bronisław Edward Sydow, another editor of Chopin's letters. It concerns one of the few letters in which Chopin discusses listening to folk music. Sydow embellished the now lost letter to read: "wenches sang a familiar song [my emphasis] in shrill, semi-tonal dissonant voices" (*dziewki piskliwym semitonicznie-falszywym głosem znaną piosnkę wyśpiewywały*), whereas Kazimierz Wójcicki, the first author to publish the letter (in 1856), and working with the original in hand, offered this version: "girls sang in shrill, semi-tonal dissonant voices" (*dziewczyny piskliwym semitonicznie-falszywym wyśpiewywały głosem*). Sydow's transcription constitutes yet another attempt to demonstrate Chopin's "familiarity" with the folk.

It should be further noted that the tendency of music historians to emphasize Chopin's unmediated contact with folk music gave rise to another interesting myth: that of Chopin's knowledge of Jewish folk music. In a letter sent to his parents from Szafarnia in 1824, Chopin recounted playing a piece he referred to as "The Little Jew" when a Jewish merchant visited the Dziewanowski manor where the young composer was vacationing. Wójcicki, commenting on Chopin's letter in 1855, correctly interpreted this as a *majufes*, a degrading song and dance that Polish Jews were obliged to perform for gentile Poles on request. In the hands of historians, however, "The Little Jew" was not only misinterpreted as a title Chopin gave to his Mazurka op. 17, no. 4, but, more absurdly still, the offensive prank became evidence of Chopin's firsthand knowledge of Jewish folk music. See, for example, Ferdynand Hoesick, *Chopin: życie i twórczość* (Chopin: Life and Works), 3 vols. (Warsaw, 1910–11); 4 vols. (rev. edn. Kraków, 1962–68), I, 76, 82; Karasowski, *Frédéric Chopin: His Life, Letters, and Works*, I, 25; Mieczysław Tomaszewski, *Fryderyk Chopin: A Diary in Images*, trans. Rosemary Hunt (Kraków, 1990), pp. 22, 30. Chopin's letter appears in Kobylańska, *Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina z rodziną*, pp. 39–40. For an informative and thoughtful study of the *majufes*, see Chone Shmeruk, "Majufes," in *The Jews in Poland*, vol. I, ed. Andrzej K. Paluch (Kraków, 1992), pp. 463–74. I am grateful to Michael Steinlauf for bringing this article to my attention.

in the "subjects and impressions" he draws from Chopin's mazurkas—the "rattling of spurs, the rustling of crepe and gauze beneath the airy lightness of the dance, the murmur of fans and the clinking of gold and diamonds"—his description relies on what could only be the accoutrements of the upper classes. See Liszt, *Frédéric Chopin*, p. 78.

⁶Szulc writes: "We namely call attention to the jarring, but nevertheless extremely characteristic, dissonant B \sharp in the raised seventh harmony of the third part in F major. Compare this to the E \sharp in the B \flat Trio of posthumous op. 68, no. 3. This is taken directly from folk music (*żywceem to wyjęte z muzyki ludowej*)" (Szulc, *Fryderyk Chopin i utwory jego muzyczne*, p. 188).

authors repeated Szulc's bold contention that the sharpened fourths in the F-major section of op. 24, no. 2, were "taken directly from folk music."⁸ For reasons unknown, analytical interest in op. 24, no. 2, dwindled soon afterward, whereas op. 68, no. 3, came under increased scrutiny. In 1939, exercising more restraint than previous writers, Gerald Abraham suggested—rather than asserted—that op. 68, no. 3 (and nos. 1 and 2) "might easily be simple transcriptions of authentic peasant mazurkas."⁹ Abraham offered this supposition in part because he found no element of virtuosity in Chopin's op. 68. But he had other reasons, too:

All three possess the characteristics of the folk mazurka: love of the sharpened fourth (opening of no. 2 and the middle section of no. 3), introduction of triplets in the melody (no. 1), play with tiny motives (all three), drone bass (whether stylized into an unobtrusive pedal as in the opening of no. 2 or emphasized in primitive open fifths as in the middle sections of the same piece and of no. 3), the feminine ending of the piece (even if only suggested by the left hand as in no. 2), and of course the characteristic rhythms and melodic patterns of the folk mazurkas throughout.¹⁰

Abraham thus effectively listed the idiosyncratic elements common to any number of classical renderings of European "folk" music. Ironically, the only characteristic unique to the mazurka that Abraham singled out—the mazurka rhythm—is not at all peculiar to op. 68, but appears pervasively throughout all of Chopin's mazurkas. Abraham was generalizing: in effect he claimed that standard features of the mazurka genre as a whole (indeed, common features of "rustic" music) were both specific to Chopin and the result of direct folk borrowings.¹¹ Delivered by one of the preeminent schol-

⁸Ferdynand Hoesick, *Chopin: życie i twórczość*, IV, 218; Hugo Leichtentritt, *Analyse von Chopins Klavierwerken*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1921–22), I, 223.

⁹Gerald Abraham, *Chopin's Musical Style* (London, 1939), p. 24.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹¹Years after Abraham's study appeared, Carl Dahlhaus, in his essay "Nationalism and Music," claimed that it is aesthetically legitimate for something that is common to all national music to be interpreted as specifically national as long as there is collective agreement that certain characteristics are recognized as such: "Aesthetically it is per-

fectly legitimate to call bagpipe drones and sharpened fourths typically Polish when they occur in Chopin and typically Norwegian when they occur in Grieg, even if some historians are irritated by the paradox of something which is common to national music generally and yet is felt to be specifically national in the consciousness of the individual nations. Firstly the national coloring does not reside in separate, isolated traits, but in the context in which they are found. Secondly the aesthetic element, the validity, has to be distinguished from the history of the origin and growth, the genesis: if there is a class of people among whom the music is transmitted and who recognize a body of characteristics as specifically national, regardless of the provenance of the separate parts, then those people constitute an aesthetic authority." This claim is part of Dahlhaus's overarching argument that nationalism in music is primarily the result of its sociocultural function and only secondarily of its rhythmic and melodic substance. While Dahlhaus's nonessentialist position is welcome, it is not without problems. Who constitutes "the consciousness of individual nations"? Who actually speaks for a "class of people," and are we willing to grant whomever it may be "aesthetic authority"? What do we make of an "aesthetic authority" that resides outside the nation whose music is in question? Carl Dahlhaus, *Between Romanticism and Modernism: Four Studies in the Music of the Later Nineteenth Century*, trans. Mary Whittall (Munich, 1974; Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989), p. 95.

ars of British musicology, this opinion carried significant weight. A case in point is Arthur Hedley's 1947 study, *Chopin*, which again isolated op. 68, no. 3, from the rest of Chopin's mazurkas. Refuting a claim made by Béla Bartók that Chopin probably had no knowledge of authentic Polish folk music, Hedley described Chopin as a national composer who had had actual contact with rural music.¹² He also referred his readers to one of the only three letters in which the composer mentions hearing peasant songs in the countryside. In order to explain the absence of authentic folk themes in the mazurkas, Hedley made three observations: (1) that Chopin was a connoisseur of Polish national music; (2) that Chopin "chose" not to use folk songs in his works; and (3) that the folk mazurkas served only as a point of departure for his imagination. Lest his readers be dissatisfied with this gloss, Hedley offered them a small proof: the middle section of op. 68, no. 3.

Indeed Chopin became a connoisseur of Polish national music and would not tolerate his less sensitive compatriots' tinkering with it. . . . Nor did he

fectly legitimate to call bagpipe drones and sharpened fourths typically Polish when they occur in Chopin and typically Norwegian when they occur in Grieg, even if some historians are irritated by the paradox of something which is common to national music generally and yet is felt to be specifically national in the consciousness of the individual nations. Firstly the national coloring does not reside in separate, isolated traits, but in the context in which they are found. Secondly the aesthetic element, the validity, has to be distinguished from the history of the origin and growth, the genesis: if there is a class of people among whom the music is transmitted and who recognize a body of characteristics as specifically national, regardless of the provenance of the separate parts, then those people constitute an aesthetic authority." This claim is part of Dahlhaus's overarching argument that nationalism in music is primarily the result of its sociocultural function and only secondarily of its rhythmic and melodic substance. While Dahlhaus's nonessentialist position is welcome, it is not without problems. Who constitutes "the consciousness of individual nations"? Who actually speaks for a "class of people," and are we willing to grant whomever it may be "aesthetic authority"? What do we make of an "aesthetic authority" that resides outside the nation whose music is in question? Carl Dahlhaus, *Between Romanticism and Modernism: Four Studies in the Music of the Later Nineteenth Century*, trans. Mary Whittall (Munich, 1974; Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989), p. 95. ¹²Arthur Hedley, *Chopin* (1947; rpt. London, 1953), p. 166. Compare *Béla Bartók Essays*, ed. Benjamin Suchoff (New York, 1976; Lincoln, Neb., 1992), pp. 322–23.

choose to make *direct* use of folk themes in his own works. Among his sixty Mazurkas very few contain an identifiable folk tune (the *poco più vivo* of op. 68, no. 3 [1829], is an exception). The mazurs, obereks, and kujawiaks (the three main forms of the mazurka), which Chopin heard constantly in his early days, were no more than a stimulus to his imagination, a point of departure from which he carried the basic materials to a new level, where they became embodied in a highly civilized art-music without losing anything of their native authenticity.¹³

Two years later, in 1949, the Polish musicologist Zdzisław Jachimecki also identified an "authentic rustic melody" in the middle section of op. 68, no. 3: "In the trio section (*poco più vivo*) of the F-major mazurka written while Chopin was still in Warsaw in 1830 (op. 68, no. 3), Chopin allowed himself to use an authentic rustic melody—with its primitive range and form, and Lydian mode—above a constantly sounding open-fifth, bass accompaniment."¹⁴ But he amplified the claim, stating that it was only one example *among many* in which Chopin used authentic motives in his mazurkas.¹⁵ Like Abraham, he pointed to the "tell-tale" folk elements in op. 68, no. 3—and in Chopin's other mazurkas—as proof of folk borrowing: the use of an open-fifth bass accompaniment; short, repeating motives in a restricted melodic range; and the appearance of sharpened fourths. Jachimecki's unique contribution, however, was to portray Chopin as a composer with very modern sensibilities, an empirical scholar-composer diligently collecting and studying music of the folk—an image more akin to Bartók, Kodály, or Szymanowski than to his Romantic contemporaries Liszt or Schumann. "He knew . . . the most authentic Polish folk music because he drew it straight from its source, without the aid of middlemen. . . . On numerous occasions, in conversations with friends or in his letters, Chopin spoke of his efforts to familiarize himself with folk mu-

sic and to study thoroughly this folk music's intrinsic features."¹⁶

By another route, then, Jachimecki, like Hedley, tried to refute Bartók's claim that Chopin had probably not known authentic Polish folk music. The offending claim had come as early as 1921 in Bartók's essay, "The Relation of Folk Song to the Development of the Art Music of Our Time." Here Bartók spelled out in no uncertain terms his distaste for imperfect (read: inauthentic) popular art music.

The outcome of this mixture of exoticism and banality is something imperfect, inartistic, in marked contrast to the clarity of real peasant music with which it compares most unfavorably. At all events it is a noteworthy fact that artistic perfection can only be achieved by one of the two extremes: on the one hand by peasant folk in the mass, completely devoid of the culture of the town-dweller, on the other by creative power of an individual genius. The creative impulse of anyone who has the misfortune to be born somewhere between these two extremes leads only to barren, pointless and misshapen works.¹⁷

Bartók linked up this negative assessment directly with Chopin, first by suggesting that Chopin "probably had no opportunity of hearing the genuine peasant music at any time," then by stating directly that "Chopin was to a certain extent influenced by the Polish, and Liszt by the Hungarian popular art music. . . . [So] much that was banal was incorporated by them with much that was exotic that the works concerned were not benefited thereby."¹⁸ With the publication of Bartók's article in England, Poland, and later the United States, Chopin's music and his image as a national composer came under siege.

Why did Bartók's views on national music become such an important part of the Chopin

¹³Hedley, *Chopin*, p. 166 (Hedley's emphasis).

¹⁴Zdzisław Jachimecki, *Chopin: rys życia i twórczości* (Chopin: His Life and Works) (Warsaw, 1949), p. 164.

¹⁵For the other instances where Jachimecki mentions Chopin's use of folk material in the mazurkas, see *ibid.*, pp. 164, 165, and 167.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 162.

¹⁷*Béla Bartók Essays*, p. 322. (How sublimely fortunate for Bartók to have had an appreciation for peasant music and the creative power of a genius!)

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 323. Bartók's criticism of Chopin in this essay was not an isolated event. On at least three other occasions Bartók questioned Chopin's knowledge of authentic folk music. It seems that the first criticism appeared in print a year earlier, in 1920, in his essay, "The Influence of Folk Music on the Art Music of Today." But it was the 1921 essay reprinted in the Polish music journal *Muzyka* in 1925 to which Jachimecki was reacting.

folk story? At the time of his death in 1945, Bartók was not only considered a major composer, but also recognized for his achievements as a pianist, pedagogue, and ethnomusicologist. During his lifetime, he often assumed the role of reporter, critic, reviewer, musicologist, and linguist, especially during the earlier part of his career. Most importantly, his writings, published in different languages throughout Europe and in the United States, established him as a prominent expert on folk music and its relationship to national high art music. So influential was he that by the time a collection of his essays appeared in English translation in 1976, its editor, Benjamin Suchoff, characterized Bartók as a “universal man of music of modern times—a twentieth-century Leonardo” and boldly added “champion of the musically oppressed” to the already grand list of Bartók’s accomplishments.¹⁹

What was at stake if the great Hungarian composer’s view of Chopin’s national music went uncontested? Mythology. For nearly a century historians and scholars had tried to demonstrate the Polish content of Chopin’s mazurkas and in so doing had come to depend with ever-increasing persistence on the folk influence argument. By calling into question Chopin’s direct exposure to the music of Polish peasants, and by underscoring the importance of *authentic* folk music in the creation of national music, Bartók threatened to undermine the folk myth that had been offered as historical truth for so many years. In response, writers like Jachimecki and Hedley scrambled to assemble the “proof” that would preserve the myth.

Also at stake was Chopin’s status as a “legitimate” national composer. Behind Bartók’s criticism that Chopin had no contact with genuine peasant music was a more telling preoccupation with the concept of authenticity and the related ideas of originality and genius, all of which betrayed an anxiety of influence divorced from any “genuine” concerns about the role of folk songs in art music. Chopin had been the first composer to export successfully to the West a national music that was linked in the Romantic imagination with an indigenous prac-

¹⁹Ibid., p. v.

tice. It was his music that had set the benchmark for subsequent generations of national composers. Bartók, then, was doing battle with Chopin’s legacy. That Bartók’s own paradigm of national music was itself highly constructed and idiosyncratic seemed to pass unnoticed; authenticity *à la* Bartók had now become the generally acknowledged proving ground.

Thus by the time Maurice Brown set out in 1960 to create a complete index of Chopin’s compositions, he had his work cut out for him. For almost a century the tale of folk-source borrowing had passed from one writer to the next. Along the way, it had become attached first to two mazurkas, op. 24, no. 2, and op. 68, no. 3, then most firmly associated with the latter. Yet unluckily for Brown, none of his predecessors had taken the trouble to produce in print the precise folk melody supposedly borrowed by Chopin for the middle section of op. 68, no. 3. Brown rose to the occasion. In an act of earnest positivism he included a textless Polish folk melody entitled “Oj Magdalino” (ex. 1), a tune that would serve as a floating folk trope in music-historical literature for the next thirty years.²⁰

Unfortunately for us, however, Brown did not cite any source for the tune, and it is not to be found in the likeliest places: Kolberg’s *Pieśni ludu polskiego* (Songs of the Polish Folk), or Wójcicki’s *Pieśni ludu Białochrobatów, Mazurów i Rusi znad Bugu* (Songs of the Białochrobat, Mazur and Ruthenian Folk from the Bug Region).²¹ And while Miketta in his comprehensive study on Chopin’s mazurkas,

²⁰Maurice J. E. Brown, *Chopin: An Index of His Works in Chronological Order* (rev. 2nd edn. London, 1972), p. 38.

²¹Oskar Kolberg, *Pieśni ludu polskiego*, vol. 1 of *Dzieła wszystkie* (The Complete Works) (Kraków, 1961); Kazimierz Władysław Wójcicki, *Pieśni ludu Białochrobatów Mazurów i Rusi znad Bugu*, 2 vols. (Warsaw, 1836; rpt. Wrocław, 1976). Nor does it appear in the obvious twentieth-century sources: Józef Michał Chomiński and Teresa Dalila Turlo, *Katalog dzieł Fryderyka Chopina* (A Catalog of Fryderyk Chopin’s Works) (Kraków, 1990), pp. 116–17; Helena Windakiewiczowa, *Wzory ludowej muzyki polskiej w mazurkach Fryderyka Chopina* (Examples of Polish Folk Music in Fryderyk Chopin’s Mazurkas) Wydział Filologiczny—Rozprawy, vol. 61, no. 7 (Kraków, 1926). I also consulted twentieth-century folk-song collections on the chance that “Oj Magdalino” may have come from a more recent anthology, but was unable to find it in any printed collection of folk songs.



Example 1: Maurice Brown's folk source for Chopin's *Mazurka*, op. 68, no. 3, in *Chopin: An Index of His Works in Chronological Order* (2nd rev. edn. London, 1972), p. 38.

Mazurki Chopina, suggests that the melody of the middle section of op. 68, no. 3, resembles one that would be played on a *fujarka* (a peasant flute), he gives no indication that Chopin's melody is a direct folk borrowing.²² Brown's "Oj Magdalino," as the folk source for Chopin's op. 68, no. 3, thus seems rather mysterious.²³ But even putting aside the question of the tune's origins for a moment, what does it have in common with the *poco più vivo* section of op. 68, no. 3? Everything, and yet nothing. While both melodies circle within a range of a fifth, Chopin's also fills out an octave at its phrase endings. And although both melodies consist of two four-measure phrases, "Oj Magdalino" has two distinct phrases while the *poco più vivo* melody in op. 68, no. 3, has one phrase that is repeated, its last measure slightly modified for harmonic closure during the repeat. In fact, beyond Chopin's replication (twice) of the melodic fragment in m. 6 of Brown's "Oj Magdalino," no direct correlation exists be-

tween the tunes. Indeed, "Oj Magdalino" is so generic that it might bear a resemblance to virtually any simple (rustic) song or songlike melody with repeated motives, a narrow melodic range, and clearly punctuated, four-measure phrases. In the end, Brown's comparison boils down to an isolated measure.

What *does*, however, distinguish "Oj Magdalino" from any other unremarkable tune is the *hołupiec* gesture found at the end of its first and second phrases and at the beginning of the second phrase. In an *oberek* (a quick tempo variant of the folk *mazur*) this *hołupiec* gesture—a measure of three eighth notes sung or played on the same pitch in $\frac{3}{8}$ meter—accompanies the heel stomping of dancers that can mark the beginning or ending of the dance. It is one of the more recognizable features of indigenous Polish music because it is inherently dramatic; its three punctuated, repeated notes at the beginning of a dance signal the listeners and dancers to attention, while at the end of a dance these same repeated notes articulate closure. Such *hołupiec* gestures are not only a characteristic feature of contemporary Polish folk music, but also appear in the nineteenth-century dances collected by Kolberg and Wójcicki.

Ironically, op. 24, no. 2, is the only Chopin mazurka that makes conspicuous use of this gesture. It first appears in the A section at mm. 16 and 20 as a closing figure (ex. 2a), then again in mm. 48 and 52. Immediately thereafter (ex. 2b, mm. 53–56), Chopin uses the *hołupiec* repeatedly—almost parodically—to signal the end of the A section, with the repeating pitch c^1 as a pivot tone between C major and the new key, D^b major, in which Chopin begins the B section, again using a *hołupiec*. In this new section, Chopin plays up the gesture, repeating it three more times (mm. 61, 65, and 69, each

²²Statement C is some sort of folk fife melody. The characteristic Lydian, augmented fourth appears in it. The melody is made up of 5 pitches: $b^2-c^3-d^3-e^3-f^3$ with endings in which Chopin's 'stylization' expands the scale of this 5-pitch peasant flute to 3 lower pitches— a^2, g^2, f^2 —in order to complete an octave scale for this most modest instrument" (Janusz Miketta, *Mazurki Chopina* [Kraków, 1949], p. 409).

²³Of course the fact that the source for "Oj Magdalino" has not yet been located does not prove that Brown's tune is spurious. But also mysterious in terms of the supposed folk source are the tune's Italian-language tempo marking, "Tempo di oberek," and the editorially suggested E^b s in the first four-measure phrase, not to mention the fact that this "folk-tune" appears textless. Noteworthy, too, is the fact that Brown provides a "folk source" for only one other Chopin composition in his index, the popular Polish Christmas carol, *Lulajże Jezuniu*, which has an often noted, but highly questionable, relationship to Chopin's Scherzo No. 1 in B Minor, op. 20.

a. Mm. 16–20.

b. Mm. 51–57.

Example 2: Chopin, *Mazurka*, op. 24, no. 2.

time repeating the four-measure phrase for which the *hołupiec* is a beginning), now with a *forte* marking on the first beat as well as the staccato marking and accent on the second and third beats. No less than fourteen repetitions of this gesture sound by the end of op. 24, no. 2. If “Oj Magdalino” shares an affinity with any of Chopin’s mazurkas, it seems to be with this one and not with op. 68, no. 3.

But not a single scholar disputed the citation of “Oj Magdalino.” Instead, it was integrated into the op. 68, no. 3, folk story, first by Paul Hamburger in 1966. Here the tale with all of its layers intact reached its climax. Hamburger attempted to reconcile Brown’s new finding, the “proof” that could finally lend the story of folk borrowings some serious weight, with Bartók’s pronouncements on national music, authenticity, and folklore. Without a trace of irony, he incorporated two contradictory concepts—one intended to prove the folk authenticity of Chopin’s mazurkas, the other, their artificiality—into a single narrative.

Most of Chopin’s dances, to be sure, cannot be traced to a single, definite folk-model, but arise from a

composite recollection of certain types of melodies and rhythms, which are then given artistically valid expression in one or more works. In this respect Chopin’s Polish-ness is rather like Dvořák’s Czech-ness and Bloch’s Jewish-ness: all three composers distil national flavours from material that is not strictly folkloristic—in contradistinction to Bartók, Vaughan Williams, and the Spanish national school who start off from genuine folklore. But in a few cases a definite model is found to exist, such as the folk-tune “Oj Magdalino” which appears in the *Poco più vivo* of the youthful *Mazurka* in F major, op. 68, no. 3 (op. posth.), of 1829. . . . This example shows why there are so few direct references to folklore in Chopin’s dances: special contexts as the above apart, he felt hemmed in by the primitive rigidity of these melodies *in their entirety*. On the other hand, he readily let himself be inspired by their *elements*: the sharpened fourth, the drone bass, the sudden triplets, the frequent feminine endings, the repetition of one-bar motifs.²⁴

²⁴Paul Hamburger, “Mazurkas, Waltzes, Polonaises,” in *Frédéric Chopin: Profiles of the Man and the Musician*, ed. Alan Walker (London, 1966), pp. 73–74 (Hamburger’s emphasis).

Almost thirty years later, in 1992, op. 68, no. 3, was again invoked as the classic example of folk influence in Chopin's mazurkas, this time by Adrian Thomas: "There can be little doubt whence came the inspiration for the trio of the Mazurka in F major, op. 68, no. 3, from 1830. . . . A fujarka melody over an open fifth drone, it betrays its unadorned oberek origins with an insouciant ease."²⁵ Brown's folk trope did not disappear either, at least not entirely. A reference to "Oj Magdalino," though not the music, makes its way into one of Thomas's footnotes intended to demonstrate the "unadorned oberek origins" of op. 68, no. 3. Only in Jim Samson's most recent publication, his 1996 *Chopin*, did Brown's "Oj Magdalino" finally float off the page. Its only trace is in Samson's mention of Thomas's description of the op. 68, no. 3, trio, which Samson uses to make the case for folk influence in Chopin's music.²⁶

Ultimately, however, op. 68, no. 3, betrays something else: the regular impulse of writers and scholars to seek out a national or indigenous source for Chopin's mazurkas as a means of understanding both these works and their composer. Perhaps more importantly, an examination of the writings on op. 68, no. 3, reveals a change in interpretations over time. While Liszt's metaphor of dancing Polish cavaliers and ladies was the first attempt to describe the musical matter of Chopin's mazurkas, Szulc later replaced Liszt's image with heel-stomping peasants in order to bolster his claim that folk music, not salon music, determined the national character of these works. In doing so, Szulc effectively shifted and redefined the idea of what constituted native Polish music. Subsequent writers and musicologists not only maintained Szulc's argument of folk influence but also came to hear an essential "folkness" in Chopin's mazurkas. As a result, they became increasingly convinced of the possibility of recovering an actual source that the com-

poser presumably had heard in the countryside and had borrowed for his high art creations.

Opus 68, no. 3, became the locus of these evolving interpretations. But the source that scholars searched for was—and remains—inherently irrecoverable because it in fact never existed. The essential folkishness that listeners heard in Chopin's mazurkas was a fictional, mythopoetic folk, animated by stock rustic musical tropes and placed against the backdrop of a national genre as it was reconceived by Chopin. His was a construct that had much in common with the folk image created by his Romantic compatriots, an element I shall consider in the next section of this article.

What began, then, with Liszt as a Romantic conceit was expanded over time into the positivist notion of a specific and identifiable folk source. The longer that Chopin's mazurkas survived the immediate time and place of their creation, the more resonant became the tale of folk borrowing until, frustrated by the search, one scholar eventually came to defend the myth by inventing yet another: an improbable folk source for op. 68, no. 3. Positivism had returned to Romanticism. As if in the spirit of Chopin's own nineteenth-century Romantic project, the interpreters of Chopin's mazurkas in the twentieth century had created an essential construct, at the base of which was something fundamentally imaginary.

II

That critics have never been able to establish direct folk borrowing in Chopin's mazurkas does not mean that the composer was unacquainted with a "pure" indigenous practice. Scant as they may be, Chopin's letters on the subject make it clear that the composer did have access to the music of the folk. Moreover, even had not one of these accounts survived, sociohistorical writings on early-nineteenth-century Polish culture confirm that in all probability Chopin—like any other middle-class Pole of his time—would have had at least a modicum of exposure to peasant traditions. The question that remains, then, is not whether Chopin encountered folk music in its "native habitat," but how such an encounter may have shaped his work. The answer is elusive, not least because critics, as we have seen, have interpreted

²⁵Adrian Thomas, "Beyond the Dance," in *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin*, ed. Jim Samson (1992; rpt. Cambridge, 1994), pp. 154–55.

²⁶"As Adrian Thomas has indicated, a passage such as the trio from op. 68, no. 3 'betrays its unadorned oberek origins with an insouciant ease'" (Jim Samson, *Chopin* [1996; 1st American edn. New York, 1997], p. 65).

the evidence of Chopin's contact with the folk as proof of his intimate familiarity with and appreciation for an "authentic" rural practice, thereby placing undue emphasis on the music of the Polish countryside as the source for his mazurkas and skewing the historical record. Chopin's letters from Szafarnia, on which so many claims have been staked, might more strongly indicate something entirely different: that the folk and its music were a novelty for Chopin, something shocking, altogether *unfamiliar*, and for these reasons noteworthy.²⁷ Thus to arrive at a better sense of the Polish traditions that may have given form to the mazurkas, we need to consider not only the surviving impressions of early-nineteenth-century rural musical practice but also the range of national music that Chopin was hearing in his urban venues. In other words, how did the broader musical landscape of Chopin's Poland relate to his mazurkas?

Among Chopin's biographers, Liszt may have come closest to the principal inspiration for the mazurkas with his ballroom scene of dancing Polish gentry. At the turn of the nineteenth century, the "nation" (*naród*) was a prominent topic not only among diplomats and revolutionary leaders determined to restore Poland's lost independence but also among those members of the middle and upper classes concerned with preserving—or more accurately, *constructing*—a national identity for Poland through its cultural heritage: its language, history, religion,

²⁷The novelty of Chopin's encounters with folk culture is suggested in part by the simple fact that he relates these "colorful" experiences to his parents back in Warsaw, and by the conservatory-style language he uses to describe peasant music-making, which ultimately betrays his point of reference: "We were having dinner, eating our last course, when from afar we could hear choirs of jarring discant, now from old crones gabbling through their noses [crossed-out word], now again from girls unmercifully squeaking a semitone higher at the top of their lungs, to the accompaniment of one fiddle—a three-stringed one at that—which answered every sung strophe in an alto voice from the back. Abandoning our company, Domusz and I got up from the table and ran outside. . . . Fryc's wife brought over a double-bass even worse than the fiddle: it had only one string. Grabbing the dusty bow, I started playing the bass, scraping so forcefully that everyone gathered to see the two Fryces—one sleepily [?] on the fiddle, the other on the single-stringed, monochord-like, dusty [crossed-out word] rasping bass" (*Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina z rodziną*, ed. Krystyna Kobyłańska, p. 42).

and customs. *Warszawskie Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk* (The Warsaw Society for the Friends of Learning) played a leading role in this cultural cause. Founded in 1800, the organization attracted a wide circle of distinguished nobles, intellectuals, revolutionaries, poets, and artists with its engaging programs and its promise of a mixed milieu (an appealing quality in Warsaw's atmosphere of social transformation).²⁸ It held meetings and musical soirées and sponsored lectures on a broad range of subjects—from language, literature, and ethnography to geography and the natural sciences—designed to inform members of intellectual achievements both Polish and European.

Beyond the general promotion of learning, the Society was specifically concerned with the cultivation and enrichment of the Polish language. Most importantly, it financed and published monumental works such as Samuel Bogumił Linde's six-volume dictionary, *Słownik języka polskiego* (1807–14) and Feliks Bentkowski's history of Polish literature, *Historia literatury polskiej* (1814), initiating what would become a comprehensive effort to consolidate and standardize a national language and literary canon. Some members, like Chopin's music teacher Józef Elsner and the influential professor and poet Kazimierz Brodziński, were strongly influenced by Herder's writings and insisted that language was the only true carrier of national identity. In the realm of music they argued that Polish-language vocal composition was the most legitimate form of "national" music and thus best suited to serving the Polish cause. Another member, the composer Karol Kurpiński,

²⁸The Society's formal organization grew out of the informal gatherings held in Stanisław Sołtyk's famous Warsaw salon, where both reform-minded aristocrats and intellectuals from the middle class were welcome. A universalist Enlightenment love of learning and liberty together with the pursuit of romantic (national) identity rooted in a concept of the "folk" shaped the Society's work. For brief but informative discussions of the WSFL, see Jan Prosnak, "Środowisko Warszawskie w życiu i twórczości Fryderyka Chopina" (Warsaw's Role in the Life and Music of Fryderyk Chopin), *Kwartalnik Muzyczny* 28 (October–December, 1949), pp. 25–29; and Igor Belza, *Między Oświeceniem i Romantyzmem: polska kultura muzyczna w początkach XIX wieku* (Between the Enlightenment and Romanticism: Polish Musical Culture at the Beginning of the 19th Century) (Kraków, 1961), pp. 13–15.

who played a prominent role in Warsaw's operatic life,²⁹ offered the same prescription. In *Tygodnik Muzyczny* (Musical Weekly), Poland's first music journal, founded and edited by Kurpiński himself, the composer devoted a sizable number of articles to opera and song, emphasizing their important place in the development of a distinctively Polish music. In at least one article Kurpiński not only asserted that song alone constituted a national music literature, but also underscored the positive influence that performing Polish vocal music had on national morality. He even went so far as to argue that the increasing number of piano students at the Warsaw School of Music and Dramatic Arts (later the Warsaw Conservatory) was an undesirable trend for the country in general and for the nation's morals in particular; the piano, he contended, was only necessary for the study of harmony and as an accompaniment to singing.³⁰

²⁹Kurpiński was the most prolific opera composer in Poland during the first half of the nineteenth century as well as the Warsaw opera's musical director for sixteen years and its conductor for thirty.

³⁰Karol Kurpiński, "Krótka wiadomość o muzyce w polsce" (A Brief Report on Music in Poland), *Tygodnik Muzyczny i Dramatyczny* 1, no. 7 (February 1821), 25–28. The privileging of vocal over instrumental music as inherently more national helps explain why many Polish patriots were conflicted about the merits of Chopin's piano compositions, even as they celebrated him as Poland's most distinguished and most "national" artist. For these Poles—among them the most notorious was the poet Adam Mickiewicz—it was inconceivable that such a nationally minded composer would not recognize his patriotic duty to compose a Polish opera. Indeed, so unsettling was Chopin's textless but otherwise "national" music that one poet, Kornel Ujejski, endeavored to "translate" a selection of Chopin's piano compositions into Polish verse in the late 1850s in his *Tłumaczenia Szopena* (Translations of Chopin). Although admittedly speculative, one possible explanation for Chopin's "avoidance" of operatic writing while he was still in Warsaw could be Kurpiński himself. In temperament the two composers could not have been more different, and Kurpiński's strong opinions and aggressive tactics as the National Theater's director (which ultimately caused his codirector, Elsner, to resign in 1824) may have been a serious deterrent for the more refined Chopin. It is also possible to glean from a number of Chopin's letters that while he was able to appreciate Kurpiński's moral crusade on behalf of national art, he found the approach irritating, philistine, and fundamentally self-serving. Regardless, what truly distinguished Chopin from his musical compatriots was not an ability to follow the aesthetic prescriptions of the day (that is, music plus Polish texts equals Polish music—Chopin made light of this idea of Polishness from the start) but rather his insistence that music could tran-

Kurpiński articulated with respect to music what the Society believed more broadly: that it had a moral obligation—a cultural-national mission—to awaken patriotic feelings among Poles. During Stanisław Staszic's tenure as the Society's president, it formulated the following mission statement: "To rescue and perfect our mother tongue; to preserve and scrupulously document our nation's history; to acquaint ourselves with our native land; . . . to propagate knowledge and art; to collect and save from oblivion anything related to our nation; and especially to awaken, maintain and spread an affection for Poland among our countrymen."³¹ To this end, the Society's members embarked on a "discovery" of popular practice (defined as "folk" practice) and strove to transform it into a national tradition. The inspiration, as elsewhere in Europe, came largely from Herder, but also from Rousseau, whose works were well received among the Polish intelligentsia. Convinced that the Polish peasant (both in his rural and in his transplanted urban form) expressed a distinct national character through song, dress, and custom, and that folk culture could serve as an invaluable source for the creation of national music and literature, the Society championed the first efforts at folk-song collection. It was these early efforts that brought new status and cultural meaning to the folk song precisely (and by no means coincidentally) at a time when the Polish nation as a concrete, political reality had vanished from the map of Europe and patriots felt compelled to affirm and define the substance of their nation. Thus folk songs and the people who created them were the palpable matter of *naród*, the substance around which one could draw an imaginary national line in place of the geographic boundaries that had been erased. For this reason, homegrown genres such as the *mazur*, *oberek*, *kujawiak*, *polonez*, and *krakowiak* became extremely important for

scend the need for texts and still have national-cultural meaning. For a look at the numerous suggestions made to Chopin that he compose a Polish national opera, see Ferdynand Hoesick, *Chopin: życie i twórczość*, II, 106–09. ³¹*Towarzystwo Naukowe Warszawskie* (The Warsaw Educational Society) (Warsaw, 1932), p. 6, as cited in Prosnak, "Środowisko Warszawskie w życiu i twórczości Fryderyka Chopina," p. 26.

Poles, and Poland's cultural elite came to rely on them as durable aesthetic "markers" for national perpetuity.

Early activities in the folk-song enterprise were varied. Hugo Kołłątaj initiated a comprehensive plan to study folk culture, which was announced at the WSFL in 1802 but never realized. In 1813 another member of the Society, Zorian Dołęga-Chodakowski, seriously began collecting Polish, Ukrainian, Russian, and Belorussian folk-song texts, but the Polish folk songs were virtually forgotten after the collector's death and only published in the twentieth century.³² While many members of the Society, like Joachim Lelewel, Tadeusz Czacki, and Karol Kurpiński, collected their own folk material wherever they came upon it (from peasants who worked as servants and laborers in town, from farm hands in the neighboring villages of Warsaw where most of Warsaw's well-to-do summered, and even from friends and acquaintances associated with the WSFL), it was not until 1833 that the first anthology of Polish (and Ukrainian) folk songs with musical accompaniment was actually published. This was *Pieśni polskie i ruskie ludu galicyjskiego* (Polish and Ruthenian Songs of the Galician Folk), whose editor, Waclaw z Oleska (Waclaw Zaleski) invited Karol Lipiński to create keyboard accompaniments to the melodies he had collected so that the collection would have popular appeal and widespread use.³³ No one

seemed to object to Lipiński's artful harmonizations, but what the "purists" of that time did find troubling was Waclaw z Oleska's inclusion of texts written by various minor contemporary Polish poets, including those by the sentimental poet Franciszek Karpiński. Many such poems became popular as songs, particularly among the petty gentry, and in this form were disseminated among the general public.³⁴ Kazimierz Władysław Wójcicki, in the preface to his own collection of folk songs, *Pieśni ludu Białochrobatów Mazurów i Rusi znad Bugu* (Songs of the Białochrobat, Mazur and Ruthenian Folk from the Bug Region), published just three years later in 1836, accused Waclaw z Oleska of trying to enlarge his collection with these "corrupting" urban songs, and of being unacquainted with what Wójcicki believed to be an "authentic" (i.e., rural) folk.³⁵ But while Wójcicki earnestly and energetically set off across the Congress Kingdom of Poland and into Hungarian, Croatian, Moravian, and Czech lands to expand his collection of "true" folk songs, he too did not seem to mind simplifying melodies and adding piano accompaniments to the songs in his collection. Even Oskar Kolberg, who spent a lifetime compiling Poland's first systematic and theoretically based ethnographic study, first published his earliest collected folk songs with keyboard accompaniments, which he himself composed. In all these cases, efforts at folk-song collection were fairly unsystematic and still coupled with the conventions of high art.

By 1842, when Kolberg's first anthology, *Pieśni ludu polskiego* (Songs of the Polish Folk), with piano accompaniment was published, the musical aspect of folk songs had come under closer scrutiny, and critics claimed that the compiler's harmonizations compromised the

³²Dołęga-Chodakowski, whose given name was Adam Czarnocki, was born to Polish parents in Belorussia in 1784 and changed his name sometime around 1813. He first began taking ethnographic notes in the form of a personal journal-diary, which he kept during his exile to Siberia in 1810. He titled his journal *My Reluctant Journey* [Bez chęci podróż moja] and in it recorded features of various ethnic groups such as the customs, language, and song that he observed on his forced travel to Omsk. Russian authorities ordered his exile when it was learned that he planned to steal into what was then called the Congress Kingdom of Poland in order to join the Polish army, something he believed was his patriotic duty to do. He did get to Warsaw and eventually fought alongside Polish troops, but after Napoleon's defeat he returned to folk-song collecting, finding active support for his work in the WSFL. For an informative account of Dołęga-Chodakowski's fascinating life, see Julian Maślanka, the introduction to Zorian Dołęga-Chodakowski, *Spiwy Sławiańskie pod strzechą wiejską zebrane* (Slavic Songs Gathered under the Village Thatched Roof) (Warsaw, 1973), pp. 9–44.

³³Waclaw z Oleska, *Pieśni polskie i ruskie ludu galicyjskiego* (Lwów, 1833).

³⁴Karpiński's poem *Bóg się rodzi* (God Is Born), which became popular as a Christmas carol and quickly lost its association with the author, is but one example. See Czesław Miłosz, *The History of Polish Literature* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1983), pp. 185–86. Richard Taruskin draws attention to a similar phenomenon of urban "literary" songs in late-eighteenth-century Russian musical culture. See Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton, N. J., 1997), pp. 19–20.

³⁵Kazimierz Władysław Wójcicki, *Pieśni ludu Białochrobatów Mazurów i Rusi znad Bugu*, I, 7–12.

authenticity of the folk melodies.³⁶ In a now well-known letter to his family sent in 1847, Chopin judged that “[Kolberg’s] labor only distorts matters and makes work harder for the genius who will one day disentangle the truth. Until then, all these beautiful things remain with their noses straightened, rouged, and their legs chopped off or stuck on stilts, a laughing-stock for those who do not take them seriously.”³⁷ Unlike earlier enthusiasts, collectors, and critics who saw folk-song collections primarily as a way of propagating a patriotic sort of domestic entertainment, Chopin and a handful of other critics had now come to view anthologized folk music as a cultural document, something beautiful in its own right and without need of translation into high art music to be comprehensible and valuable to the upper classes. Chopin’s commentary in particular suggests that he found the arrangement of native melodies with decorative piano accompaniments not only ill conceived but also uninspired. This is a significant point when one considers the claim made by so many later writers that the supposed presence of real folk tunes in Chopin’s mazurkas—not necessarily the height of his style—distinguished his works as more richly conceived and authentically Polish than those of his compatriots.

In response to the criticism of colleagues and peers, Kolberg worked harder to cast his expanding folk-song collection as a scientific record of Poland’s indigenous treasures. In 1857 he published a new collection of folk songs under the same title, *Pieśni ludu polskiego*, but this time without piano accompaniments. For the first time, Polish folk songs were presented in a single-line melodic transcription format in an attempt to reveal their “pure,” unadulterated nature, and this would become Kolberg’s governing principle until the end of his life. Moreover, Kolberg omitted Belorussian and Ukrainian songs (not to mention Jewish songs, which even the earliest collectors did not include)—songs that existed alongside Polish

musical traditions until the first half of the twentieth century—thereby depicting Poland’s musical culture as much more homogeneous than it was in reality.

Yet despite Kolberg’s efforts to market an ideal of Polish folk culture, his new anthology could not help but be a true (if for him an undesirable) record of Polish folk music in a very inclusionary sense: a record of musical practice spontaneously shared by both city and village. Along with the “pure” folk music that Kolberg “discovered” in the countryside, he encountered—and included in his 1857 collection—songs that had been broadly circulated by the earlier, successful anthologies of Waław z Oleska and Wójcicki, not to mention his own original collection of 1842. These were songs whose “essential folkishness” could not, and cannot, be verified because we can never know to what degree the pioneering Polish collectors may have modified—or even created—the tunes for the songs they collected.³⁸

Example 3 offers a glimpse of one such song, *Stała nam się nowina* (Hear Ye! Hear Ye!), an unsettling tale about a woman who murders her husband and buries him beneath a garden of meadow rue. The song was made enormously popular not only by published folk-song collections but also by Adam Mickiewicz’s earlier poetic retelling of the tale.³⁹ Here we can trace the folk song’s journey from Wójcicki’s version, where it is straightforwardly matched up with an accessible tonic-dominant accompaniment, to Kolberg’s slightly more inventive ren-

³⁸This is to say nothing of the musically untrained song collectors who, when they were interested in music at all, relied on the intervention of professional composers to compose folklike melodies and piano accompaniments (in other words, classical renderings of “rustic” music) for the texts they had collected.

³⁹The folk song was reworked into a poem by Mickiewicz in 1820 and published as *Lilije* (The Lilies) in 1822 in his first book of poems, *Ballady i romanse*. While the tale’s action takes place in an unspecified time, Mickiewicz’s poem is set during the period of King Boleslaus the Brave’s successful campaign against Kiev in the early eleventh century, with the effect that the tale seems at least that old. This is no small thing if one considers the new emphasis that Polish nationalists placed not only on the nation’s history, but also on the idea that that history had been unwittingly preserved by the folk through their songs. The poem is reprinted in Adam Mickiewicz, *Wiersze* (Poems), vol. 1 (Warsaw, 1992), pp. 85–97.

³⁶Ludwik Bielawski, “Oskar Kolberg” in *Słownik muzyków polskich* (A Dictionary of Polish Musicians), 2 vols. (Kraków, 1964), I, 285.

³⁷Kobyłańska, *Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina z rodziną*, p. 161.

a. Wójcicki's arrangement of *Stała nam się nowina* (Hear Ye! Hear Ye!) (Wójcicki, *Pieśni ludu Białołchobatów Mazurów i Rusi znad Bugu* [Warsaw, 1836; rpt. Wrocław, 1976], vol. 1, *Ruta*, p.115).

Andantino

Sta - ła nam się no - wi - na, sta - ła nam się no - wi - na,

pa - ni pa - na za - bi - ła pa - ni pa - na za - bi - ta.

f

p

Fine

Example 3

dering (among other things, he opts for supertonic chords in mm. 6 and 7 at the dark textual essence of the song, "a lady killed a man," and uses open fifths as dominant harmonies, making the tune sound at once coloristically "modern" and archaic), only to see it stripped of its harmonic decoration in Kolberg's 1857 anthology in order that the tune appear more authentically folklike. If songs such as *Stała nam się nowina* remind us of the free exchange between artistic and folk practices characteristic of early-nineteenth-century Polish musical life, they also reveal the unfortunate makings of a utopian Polish folk-song "tradition" that decidedly separated urban musical creation from the folk.

What Kolberg also found in the countryside were songs that were urban inventions from the start (ex. 4). Written by professional composers for operas, vaudevilles, and operettas and intended to sound simple and folklike, these songs had migrated to rural settings because of their popularity in Warsaw.⁴⁰ Although a num-

ber of scholars have argued that Polish composers such as Jan Stefani and Józef Elsner assidu-

tions were written by Elsner and Kurpiński during the first half of the nineteenth century. Unlike stage compositions, which were intended for an urban audience and only later migrated to rural localities, folk Masses were written expressly for use in and by village parishes. Composed in a simplified style in order that they be "understood" by peasants, these folk Masses are perhaps some of the finest examples of how Polish art-music composers of this period endeavored to create (and determine) a folk-music style. See Alina Nowak-Romanowicz, "Poglądy estetyczno-muzyczne Józefa Elsnera," in *Poglądy na muzykę kompozytorów polskich doby przedchopinowskiej* ("Józef Elsner's Aesthetic-musical Outlook" in *Viewpoints on the Music of Polish Composers in the Days before Chopin*) (Kraków, 1960), p. 90.

It should also be noted that the creation of folk songs was not limited to composers. Kazimierz Brodziński published a number of "folk songs" in his classic 1818 treatise, *O klasycyzmie i romantyzmie* (On Classicism and Romanticism), while Chopin's close friend Stefan Witwicki wrote over fifty "rustic songs," which appeared in print sometime before 1827 as (straightforwardly enough) *Piosnki sielskie* (Rustic Songs). A handful of these songs were set to music by Chopin and published posthumously as part of the seventeen songs of op. 74. Importantly, unlike Mickiewicz's *Lilies*, these were not poetic reworkings of well-known folk songs but rather poems written in what was thought to be a folk-song style and on folk themes: sophisticated imitations of folk songs akin to Macpherson's *Ossian* but without the misleading pretense of "authenticity."

⁴⁰In this context it is interesting to note the related phenomenon of the folk Mass. A number of such composi-

b. Kolberg's arrangement of *Stała nam się nowina* [Kolberg, *Pieśni i melodie ludowe w opracowaniu fortepianowym*, vol. 67, pt. 1 of *Dzieła wszystkie* [Kraków, 1986] no. 99, pp. 171–72] (first published as *Pieśni ludu polskiego*, 1842).

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Andante quasi Adagio accelerando w całej Posce znana

[1.] Sta - ła nam się no - wi - na, sta - ła nam się no - wi - na,

p *legatissimo* accelerando

pa - ni pa - na za - bi - ła, pa - ni pa - na za - bi - ła.

tempo I accelerando

[2.] Wo - gró - dku go scho - wa - ła, wo - gró - dku go scho - wa - ła,

tempo I

ru - tę na nim po - sia - ła, ru - tę na nim po - sia - ła.

tempo I

c. *Stała nam się nowina* [Kolberg, *Pieśni ludu polskiego*, vol. 1 of *Dzieła wszystkie* [Kraków, 1961] no. 3a, p. 13] (first published in Warsaw, 1857).

Od Warszawy (powszechnie znana).

Sta - ła nam się no - wi - na sta - ła nam się no - wi - na

pa - ni pa - na za - bi - ła pa - ni pa - na za - bi - ła.

Example 3 (continued)

461

Mazurek (Elsnera).

z Warszawy (znany powszechnie).

Dwie Ma-ry - sie, spo-tka-ły się i mó-wi - ły so - bie al - bo ty mi Sta - sia od - stąp al - bo ja go to - bie.
Dwie Ma-ry - sie, spo-tka-ły się i mó-wi - ły o tém jak - to ko - wal so - bą ru - cha kie - dy bi - je mło - tem.

462

Mazuerk dla tancerki Mierzyńskiej (Damsego).

z Warszawy.

1-mo. 2-do 8va 1-mo. 2-do 1-mo. 2-do

463

Mazur (Stefanlego).

z Warszawy.

1-mo. 2-do 1-mo. 2-do

464

z Warszawy.
z Komedio-Opery: Nowy Rok (Damsego).

465

z Warszawy.
z Komedio-Operay: Młynarz i Kominarz (Tarnowskiego).

Example 4: Music composed by professional composers included in Kolberg, *Pieśni ludu polskiego*, vol. 1 of *Dzieła wszystkie* [Kraków, 1961], nos. 461–65, pp. 447–48.

ously collected these and other folk tunes from peasants with an eye (or rather, ear) to authentically reproducing them in their stage works, it is impossible to know how accurate they were, since no transcriptions of the tunes exist for comparison.⁴¹ Moreover, given even the fairly common interaction between Polish gentry and folk in the rural backwater that was Warsaw at the end of the eighteenth century, and the growing interest in peasant culture at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it is unlikely that professional composers would have engaged in the type of "scientific" documentation of folk music that these scholars suggest. As we have already seen, methodical preservation and concerns for authenticity were simply not important until later in the nineteenth century. When these early professionals did borrow tunes from the folk, it was to add local color to their compositions and therefore most likely to be approximate. Indeed, well into the 1840s much of Poland's cultural and artistic elite considered peasants less as the bearers of great artistic truths than as national subjects useful in spreading Polish patriotism.

It is precisely in this fashion that representations of Polish peasants made their way onto the public national stage at the end of the eighteenth century. The composer Jan Stefani together with Wojciech Bogusławski (noted actor, theater director, librettist, and leading advocate for Polish national opera) were the first to present a theatrical portrait of Polish peasant life as the central theme in their renowned 1794 vaudeville, *Cud mniemany, czyli Krakowiacy i Górale* (The Would-Be Miracle, or the Cracovians and Highlanders).⁴² At the

simplest level the work is a love story about the young peasants Stach and Basia, set against the larger backdrop of a longstanding quarrel between villagers from the outskirts of Kraków and the mountain dwellers of the Tatras. Basia's stepmother, who is in love with Stach, conspires to keep him for herself by promising her stepdaughter's hand in marriage to the highlander Bryndas. When Basia rejects Bryndas, however, the dignity of the highlanders is offended and they seek revenge. Differences are eventually settled by Bardos, the enlightened student from Warsaw, who by the "miracle" of an electric machine manages to teach everyone (in between lots of simple songs and dances) the merits of putting old disputes aside and getting along.

When it premiered at the National Theater in 1794 on the eve of the Kościuszko Uprising, Polish audiences were quick to understand the story's thinly veiled allusions to Poland's political situation.⁴³ Bogusławski, himself a conspirator behind the national insurrection, made certain that the spectacle of a large mass of peasants bravely poised to do battle appeared on the stage just as Kościuszko was forming his peasant militia in Kraków. There was little else Poles could do but interpret the many songs with suggestive lyrics such as "We must now

was entirely within the scope of contemporary European stage depictions of the folk. *Agatka* and *Nędza* were "national" only insofar as they localized Enlightenment-era, aristocratic attitudes toward the peasantry in the Polish countryside. Absent from these works is any attempt at a realistic portrayal of peasant life as well as the sociomoral and patriopolitical elements that decided *Krakowiacy i Górale's* key position in the history of Polish national opera. For an incisive analysis of these and other Polish operas of the period, see Alina Nowak-Romanowicz, *Klasycyzm* [Classicism], *Historia Muzyki Polskiej*, vol. 4 (Warsaw, 1995), pp. 123–96.

⁴³After the second partition of Poland in 1793, Polish revolutionaries realized that nothing short of a total national uprising could match Prussian and Russian forces determined to prevent Polish independence. Abandoning hopes for peaceful reform, the revolutionary Tadeusz Kościuszko (whose commitment to the ideal of liberty had earlier led him to fight in the American Revolution) launched a rebellion that united Polish legions with scythe-bearing peasants and led them in a gallant but ultimately unsuccessful uprising that resulted in the third and final partition of Poland in 1795. For an informative study of this turbulent period in Polish history, see Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland*, 2 vols. (New York, 1982), I, 511–46.

⁴¹See Mieczysław Banaszyński, *Śladami polskiej Terpsychory* (In the Footsteps of the Polish Terpsichore) (Kraków, 1962), p. 90; Alina Nowak-Romanowicz, "Poglądy estetyczno-muzyczne Józefa Elsnera," pp. 86–90; Tadeusz Strumiłło, *Szkice z polskiego życia muzycznego XIX wieku* (Sketches of Nineteenth-Century Polish Musical Life) (Kraków, 1954), pp. 81–87, 166–67.

⁴²To be sure, there were Polish rustic operas that predated Bogusławski and Stefani's *Krakowiacy i Górale*, appearing as early as the 1770s. The most notable among them were Maciej Kamieński and Wojciech Bogusławski's *Nędza uszczęśliwiona* (Misery Made Happy) of 1778 and Jan David Holland's 1784 *Agatka czyli Przyjazd pana* (Agatha, or the Master's Arrival). The role of the peasant in these stage works, however, was circumscribed in order to feature the benevolence of the country manor house lord and thus

bravely defend, Whether we win, or we die" not as ruminations on stolen cattle and clan infighting, but rather as a rallying cry for revolution, national unity, and independence.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, Russian authorities in Warsaw were also wise to the work's revolutionary agenda, and after just three performances *Krakowiacy i Górale* was removed from the theater's repertory. The ban hardly mattered; once the uprising broke out, songs from the show quickly spread to the streets, most notably after the battle at Raclawice when Polish peasants captured enemy guns and forced the Russians to retreat. Although the insurrection was eventually suppressed, in the politically charged atmosphere of the capital it seemed as though nothing short of a real miracle had occurred. The vaudeville's scripted socionational fraternity had left the stage to be realized in the Polish cities and provinces where the fighting had broken out.

Beyond playing its propagandist part in the national revolution, *Krakowiacy i Górale* also inadvertently gave birth to a revolution of a cultural-artistic sort. The presentation of a collective folk as stage hero was unprecedented in Poland. By abandoning scenes of the feudal manor and its attendant gentry, and inflecting the libretto with the speech patterns of a peasant dialect (albeit from Mazovia, the region surrounding Warsaw, not from Kraków or the Highlands), Bogusławski made the concept and image that much more striking. Indeed, the only nonpeasant character depicted in *Krakowiacy i Górale* is Bardos, the poor, altruistic urban intellectual who, in a surprising reversal of roles for the late eighteenth century, ends up serving the peasants. Moreover, while Stefani's music owed much to the stock tropes of contemporary European musical representations of rustic characters (for example, simple, repeating, conjunct melodies arranged in four-measure phrases and accompanied by straightforward, tonic and dominant harmonies), in the attempt to reflect more realistically the tradi-

tions of Polish folk music it also introduced the accented rhythms, sharpened fourths, and open-fifth drones, which from that point on became inextricably linked with the idea of Polish folk music. Given the tremendous and lasting success of *Krakowiacy i Górale*, we can only guess that such elements had their desired effect in part because they resonated with the musical experience of the Polish audience.

These accomplishments notwithstanding, with much of its talent either in exile or imprisoned, the national stage remained dormant until the beginning of the next century. Bogusławski and his troupe were compelled to leave Warsaw when the insurrection was suppressed in 1794 and did not return until five years later after a relative calm had settled on the devastated capital. A number of Poland's leading writer-revolutionaries were not as lucky and suffered persecution at the hands of Russian authorities: for example, the poet and playwright Niemcewicz, who had served as aide-de-camp to Kościuszko, was taken prisoner and deported to Russia, where he spent two years in solitary confinement. On his release he left directly for America, returning to Poland only eleven years later, in 1807, after Napoléon formed the Duchy of Warsaw.⁴⁵

Although Warsaw's National Theater eventually did begin to recover from the upheaval, at first by cautiously resigning itself to a repertory of foreign operas and unambitious vaudevilles devoid of political overtones, Poland's nationally minded composers now also shifted their activity to the less conspicuous setting of the salon. It was in this more private yet still public sphere that during the first two decades of the nineteenth century both amateurs and professionals nurtured a national musical style, primarily by composing a seemingly endless number of Polish dances for piano that were more or less based on the folk music then gaining greater attention.⁴⁶ And

⁴⁴Wojciech Bogusławski, *Cud mniemany, czyli Krakowiacy i Górale* (Warsaw, 1952), p. 70. It might be worth noting that the entire libretto is in rhymed couplets, serving, perhaps, to underscore the trivial nature of the narrative and thereby concealing the revolutionary message of the texts.

⁴⁵Miłosz, *The History of Polish Literature*, pp. 172–73.

⁴⁶Tomaszewski lists some 300 composers who published approximately 1,500 mazurs or mazurkas and over 700 polonaises during this period: see Wojciech Tomaszewski, *Bibliografia warszawskich druków muzycznych 1801–1850* (A Bibliography of Warsaw Musical Prints 1801–1850) (Warsaw, 1992).



Example 5: Ogiński, *Mazur*, around 1810, mm. 33–36.

while such adopted (and adapted) dances as the *mazur*, *polonez*, *krakowiak*, *kujawiak*, and *oberek* could be dismissed as merely functional ballroom pieces (they were, after all, scarcely more popular than the waltzes, quadrilles, and contredanses also offered for the amusement of the Polish aristocracy and expanding middle class), during this period of political anxiety and heavy-handed censorship they could not help but also play the critical role of national-cultural memory.

In the Polish parlor—now turned national art-music laboratory—certain features of the piano mazurka rapidly became conventionalized. What we now recognize as the mazurka rhythm (shorter note values on the downbeat followed by longer ones on the second and third beats of a measure in triple meter) became the most distinguishing feature of the dance. Further markers of the mazurka came to include accents placed on any beat of a measure, and cadences stressing the second beat. Occasionally folk-music gestures such as the *hołupiec* (as seen in the middle section of Ogiński's *Mazur*, ca. 1810, ex. 5), however loosely interpreted, were intended to give an even greater rustic cast to these urban art pieces. More rarely (but perhaps most interestingly), motivically repetitive, spun-out melodies above a suggestion of open fifths in the accompaniment were intended to evoke (without too much taint) the “primitive” sounds of peasant fife and bagpipe, thereby transforming the piano mazurka from a stylized dance into a mimetic description of presumptively folklike elements. Yet for all of these novel native characteristics, Warsaw's piano mazurkas were still recognizably of a late-eighteenth-century European Classical dance tradition. They were most often in ternary form

(or a modified version thereof), homophonic in texture, introduced in the major mode, and given a contrasting middle section often either in the dominant or the relative or parallel minor.⁴⁷

Only in 1816 did this rather provisional music-making give way to more daring flourishes of national art. With the Congress of Vienna having established a new and independent Kingdom of Poland a year earlier, a number of public restrictions were lifted, including those imposed on free speech. Emboldened by the political changes and fueled by a renewed optimism, nationalist composers began creating overtly patriotic works for the Warsaw stage. In particular, historical operas about illustrious Polish rulers proliferated. In time, however, the optimism proved unwarranted, since Russian censors, disturbed by the content and sheer number of such works, again introduced bans in the early 1820s on what they deemed politically dangerous material in the National Theater's repertory. What proved to be the more sustaining contribution of the day was Kurpiński's 1816 comic opera, *Zabobon, czyli Krakowiaczy i Górale* (Superstition, or the Cracovians and Highlanders). Instantly dubbed *Nowe Krakowiaki* (The New Cracovians), the opera appeared to be a fairly innocuous reworking of Bogusławski and Stefani's 1794 vaudeville. Kurpiński's librettist Jan Kamiński jettisoned the worrisome subversive couplets that had

⁴⁷For a representative survey of nineteenth-century Polish mazurkas, see *Mazurki kompozytorów polskich na fortepian: Antologia ze zbiorów Biblioteki Narodowej/Piano Mazurkas of Polish Composers: Anthology from the Collection of the National Library*, ed. Elżbieta Wąsowska (Warsaw, 1995).

a. Overture fragments.

Musical score for 'a. Overture fragments.' in 2/4 time, marked *Andante* and *p*. The score shows a piano introduction with a sustained open fifth in the bass and a melodic line in the treble.

b. Overture fragments.

Musical score for 'b. Overture fragments.' in 2/4 time, marked *pp*. The score shows a melodic line in the treble with a sustained open fifth in the bass.

c. Obertas, act I, mm. 1-18.

Musical score for 'c. Obertas, act I, mm. 1-18.' in 3/8 time, marked *Lento* and *ppp (strojenie skrzypiec)*. The score includes vocal lines and piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts with the lyrics: "Da - na, da - na, da - na, da - na, tań - cmy zwa - wo az do ra - na." The piano accompaniment features a sustained open fifth in the bass and a melodic line in the treble. The score is divided into three systems, with the first system ending at measure 6, the second at measure 12, and the third at measure 18. The tempo is marked *L'istesso tempo* and the vocal line is marked *mezzo voce*. The piano accompaniment is marked *pp* and *p*.

Example 6: Kurpiński, *Zabobon, czyli Krakowiacy i Górale*.

given sociopolitical force to the original libretto and instead underscored the satire of the “would-be miracle.” Kurpiński for his part chose to give prominence to the musical “folkishness” that had only been sprinkled throughout Stefani’s score, dramatically opening the very first measures of the overture with a violin melody featuring sharpened fourths above a sustained open fifth in the cellos and basses, and infusing the rest of the opera with simple, re-

peating melodies played over open-fifth drones (ex. 6a, b, and c). Such musical material was meant, at least in part, to evoke the sounds of fife and bagpipe, musical instruments now firmly associated with the Polish folk.

Far from being an innocent paraphrase of Bogusławski and Stefani’s 1794 original, Kurpiński’s *New Cracovians* picked up the national battle almost exactly where the old Cracovians and Highlanders had left off. The

Example 7: Kurpiński and Damse, *Wesele w Ojcowie*, Obertas, finale (without coda).

critical difference was that Kurpiński offered another undermining strategy for expressing patriotic sentiment on the stage, one in which national identity was articulated principally through the music rather than the text. Folk music was thereby converted into a coded language for national continuity that operated much like the Polish parlor dances, but now in the highly public setting of the theater. Thus while Polish historical operas were regularly derailed by the authorities on grounds of their political content, Kurpiński's comic opera successfully advanced a nationalist agenda in plain view of the censors.

Following Kurpiński's example, Polish musical stage works in the 1820s became increasingly saturated with folk music elements. But it was the finale in Kurpiński and Damse's fabulously successful 1823 ballet, *Wesele w Ojcowie* (A Wedding in Ojcow)⁴⁸ (ex. 7) that codified the musical elements of a Polish folk

⁴⁸In the nineteenth century alone, the ballet saw more than one thousand performances on virtually every Polish stage. See Jan Cieplński, *A History of Polish Ballet: 1518–1945*, trans. Anna Ema Lesiecka (London, 1983). Like Kurpiński's *Zabobon, czyli Krakowiacy i Górale*, *Wesele w Ojcowie* also derived from Bogusławski and Stefani's 1794 vaudeville.

mazurka to become the prototype for both contemporary and later Polish composers, including Chopin. Thereafter, what was considered a "real" Polish folk dance for the stage, and referred to as either an *obertas* (a variant name for *oberek*) or a *mazur*, would have all of the following elements: triple meter; mazurka rhythms; sharpened fourths in the melody; open-fifth drones in the bass; accents on any beat of a measure; and repeating motives in a fairly restricted melodic range—in fact all of the very features that critics have argued point to the direct folk influence in Chopin's mazurkas.

III

Numerous scholars during the past one hundred and fifty years have invested heavily in the idea that Chopin's mazurkas were born out of an unmediated understanding of native (i.e., rural) Polish music.⁴⁹ The argument has served

⁴⁹Aside from the already discussed, music-historical accounts that make this claim, a number of ethnomusicological, style-classification studies have used nineteenth-century and twentieth-century ethnographic data on Polish folk music to demonstrate a folk influence on Chopin. See, for example, Windakiewiczowa, *Wzory ludowej muzyki polskiej w mazurkach Fryderyka Chopina*; Wicysław Paschałow, *Chopin a polska muzyka ludowa* (Chopin and Polish Folk Music) (Kraków, 1951); and *Polska muzyka ludowa i jej problemy* (Polish Folk Music and Its Problems), ed. Jadwiga and Marian Sobiescy (Kraków, 1973). An interesting twist in the ethnomusicology/Chopin link-up is Ewa Dahlig's article, "Z badań nad rytmiką polskich tańców ludowych: mazurek, kujawiak, chodzony a 'mazurki' Chopina," (Studies on Polish folk-dance rhythms: mazurek, kujawiak, chodzony and Chopin's "mazurkas") *Muzyka* 3 (1994), 105–30. Here Dahlig argues that her statistical comparison of Polish folk-dance rhythms with rhythms found in Chopin's mazurkas reveals that the *mazur* elements in Chopin's piano pieces are typical of the stylized mazurka dance and *not* rooted in the folk *mazur*. But if Dahlig's findings are unremarkable, her approach to the data is not; by using the same twentieth-century folk sources customarily employed by other scholars to show the connection between Polish folk dances and Chopin's mazurkas, but to opposite ends, Dahlig dramatically calls into question the "scientific" legitimacy that such studies claim. On another level, it is interesting to consider the implications of separating Chopin creation from folk traditions, as Dahlig does, in the context of a post-Communist Poland. In this respect, it appears as though Communism's fall a decade ago has also brought an end to a certain emphasis on *narodowość*, or "nationality," in Polish music scholarship. *Narodowość*, as an element of both cultural identity and socialist realist aesthetics in Communist-ruled Poland, had sent many scholars running to the folk to emphasize Polish national distinctness, to buttress Marxist-style arguments, or both.

as an attempt to explain the unique nature of his mazurkas, the quality that makes them highly original, personal, and, ultimately, Polish. By playing up the role of authentic folk music in these works, however, critics have necessarily downplayed the influence that Warsaw's musical life had on the composer. Yet as I have tried to demonstrate, this too was part of the national musical tradition out of and against which Chopin created his own high art. Like any talented and sensitive young Polish musician of the time, he could not have ignored the provocative visual and aural images of the nation being offered in the city's different musical venues.

By the 1820s of Chopin's youth, experiments in folk evocation and the appropriation of folk imagery—national-style art music for stage and salon—had already been tried with great success by such Polish composers as Stefani, Kurpiński, Damse, and Szymanowska. Polish operas, operettas, ballets, and vaudevilles, often on historical themes and infused with folk dances and songs for national coloring, were performed regularly at the National Theater. An ever-expanding repertory of national dances created for parlor piano was likewise promoted as a patriotic form of entertainment and a sign of national continuity. Thus for Chopin to become intimately acquainted with folk elements such as sharpened fourths, open-fifth bass drones, or cadences stressing the second beat of a measure, he needed to go no further than Warsaw's art-music offerings. Put another way, while direct contact with a rural musical practice doubtlessly made an impression on the young Chopin, it was not singularly defining for his particular evocation of a Polish musical landscape.⁵⁰ To recognize that the composer

⁵⁰Of course, this is not to say that Chopin was naively content to absorb received musical traditions, folk or artistic. Jeffrey Kallberg has persuasively argued that Chopin's persistent struggle with the problem of repetition and return specifically in the mazurkas suggests that the composer regularly sought compositional solutions that would accommodate both the element of repetition essential to the national dance and his own aesthetic concern for formal design and closure. By directing our attention away from the usual discussions of melodic and harmonic substance and toward the issue of form, Kallberg brings us closest to understanding the innovations that actually did separate Chopin's mazurkas from those of other Polish

drew on and synthesized a variety of musical experiences both rural and urban is not, however, to diminish his achievement in this genre.

composers of the day. See Jeffrey Kallberg, "The Problem of Repetition and Return in Chopin's Mazurkas," in *Chopin Studies*, ed. Jim Samson (1988; rpt. Cambridge, 1991), pp. 1–23.

Instead, it gives us a richer context for appreciating the level of inspiration he brought to his sonic account of the nation. In the end, Chopin, like so many of his musical compatriots, was not interested in recovering rural truths, but in bringing Poles of the urban upper classes a little bit closer to a highly constructed and desirable idea of themselves.

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