
FOREWORD

For most of the duration of modern Western European civilisation, the interest in the past which seems natural to us today was inconceivable: people were concerned with contemporary art and learning, and successive epochs intentionally dissociated themselves from what had gone before, regarding it as inferior or insufficient. The first facilities created with antiquarian studies in mind, and the first periodicals presenting historical and aesthetic sources did not appear until the eighteenth century, and actual involvement in gathering sources and making them widely available, and above all a readiness to understand and assimilate the cultural past, arose during the nineteenth century. As the eminent expert on the long nineteenth century Jürgen Osterhammel writes: ‘In Europe this was a time when the state assumed power over memory in every domain’.

In the field of music, the young Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy’s revival of Johann Sebastian Bach’s *St Matthew Passion* at the Berlin Singakademie in 1829 is generally numbered among the symbolic turning points in our contact with the past, although Bach’s music was more widely present in the musical life of the Romantics at that time; in the case of Chopin, familiarity with the legacy of Bach was one of the most important elements in his education as a pianist and a composer.

With the advent of the twentieth century, interest in the music of earlier times grew so much that it essentially began to oust contemporary music from circulation. For many decades, however, works from the past were performed with no consideration for the authenticity or accuracy of their sound. Many outstanding interpretations were created with the use of modern instruments and performance practices, but with no awareness of just how much we can glean from a work restored to its original context.

The great revolution launched several decades ago resulting in the emergence of the current of historically informed performance only recently extended to the music of the Romantic era. In the case of Fryderyk Chopin, the reversion to the original sounds of the epoch brings extraordinary effects, expanding our knowledge of various aspects, including one of the elements that most distinguished the Polish composer, namely, timbre, the originality of which was emphasised unequivocally by witnesses to his playing and is sensed by the greatest Chopin interpreters today. The first step towards recreating Chopin’s tone colour is undoubtedly research into the history of the piano; in that context, we include in this publication the preface to a new edition of Benjamin Vogel’s canonic work

Fortepian polski ('The Polish piano'). An entirely new perspective on colour in Chopin can be found in two studies published here: Jonathan D. Bellman's 'Nineteenth-Century Temperaments and the Music of Chopin' and James Parakilas's 'Chopin's Pedalling on Chopin's Pianos – and Ours'. The starting point for Parakilas is the thesis that Chopin's version of the revolution in the use of the *forte* pedal which occurred during the nineteenth century 'differed from that of any other musician, though it was based on the same developments in piano design. Its originality lay in the way he brought the potential of those technological developments together with his own idiosyncratic performance technique and his creative thinking about musical colour – in particular about the expressive difference between pedalled and unpedalled piano sound. With that difference, finely calculated and meticulously notated in his scores, he revolutionised both the musical representation of experience and the experiencing of musical sound.' Bellman, meanwhile, demonstrating the significance of the use of specific keys in Chopin's works – which he precedes with a synthesis of theories from those times – states clearly: 'There is probably no composer for whom the question of key characteristics and temperament is more pressing than for Chopin, whose music remains ubiquitous in all corners of the pianistic world'. He adds: 'it seems unquestionable that our assumptions about Chopin's aesthetic, and our tacit acceptance that modern equal temperament is good enough to go unquestioned, are based on very little more than habit, convenience and investment. Chopin's music deserves better.' Sharing that conviction, we offer you the third issue of our annual publication, in the year of the 18th Chopin Competition.