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CHOPIN AND GEORGE SAND: VISIONS OF RECONCILIATION AND OTHERNESS

The relationship between Fryderyk Chopin and George Sand has long been a subject of fascination for both sides: that is, for biographers and musicologists of the musician and composer, Chopin, on the one hand, and biographers and literary critics of the novelist, writer and political figure (and more), George Sand, on the other. Their intimate liaison, which lasted some eight years, ended antagonistically, and something of this hostility marks out the two groups of commentators. Their affair caught the gossipy public imagination at the time and can easily be re-awakened, judging by the success of the British-American film *Impromptu*, released in 1991, starring Hugh Grant as Chopin and Judy Davis as George Sand. Mostly unfounded rumours of the good and bad behaviours of the two at the time of their relationship circulated and are played out again in the film, again based on scant evidence. It was generally well reviewed, however, albeit mostly for its burlesque qualities rather than its authenticity.

So what can we actually know of their relationship, particularly in terms of the creative influence of one on the other? How much did their creative and associated quasi-political visions have in common? Very few of their letters survive, and those we have tell us little. We have accounts by contemporaries, but these express views which are so polarised that few of them encourage credibility. The Marquis de Custine, an aristocrat and writer, knew them both. He described Sand as a 'ghoul', intent on killing Chopin.¹ On the other hand, the Polish writer and political activist Adam Mickiewicz, who was also acquainted with them both, reportedly believed that Chopin would finish Sand off, describing him as 'her evil genius, her moral vampire, her cross to bear'.² Fictional accounts are still more suspect.

Chopin and Sand met in Paris in late 1836. Sand was very much caught up in the political and artistic moment. She had already been married and had lovers, in that order. Chopin, six years her junior, had lived a less dramatic life, and he suffered poor health. But his life had not been uneventful in other respects. His French-born father, Nicolas, had emigrated to Poland in his teens to seek his fortune; he had even fought for Polish independence in the campaigns led by Tadeusz Kosciuszko, who had earlier seen action in the American Revolutionary War. Nicolas remained in Poland after its partitioning and became a tutor to wealthy families. He married a well-educated but impoverished relative of the aristocratic Skarbek family in 1810, and in the same year Fryderyk was born. He soon became a prodigious child pianist, celebrated in

1 Anka Muhlstein, *Astolphe de Custine, 1790–1857: Le dernier Marquis* (Paris: Grasset, 1996).

2 Xavier Jon Pulowski, *Franz Liszt, His Circle, and His Elusive Oratorio* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014).

Warsaw early on. By the age of sixteen, when he entered the Warsaw Conservatory, a number of his compositions had already been published. During his three years there he was under the supervision of the school's director, Józef Elsner (1769–1854), a Silesian-born musician who had settled in Warsaw. Elsner was a scholar, composer and conductor, as well as director of the Polish National Opera from 1824. When Chopin graduated, Warsaw was under Russian control, and leaving the country presented problems. Chopin claimed he needed to go on a business trip to Vienna and was granted leave to travel. There, in the summer of 1829, he gave some successful concerts. He returned to Warsaw, and in March 1830 performed his Piano Concerto in F minor to critical acclaim. He left again just weeks before the November Uprising of 1830.

By the time he travelled to Paris and met Sand in 1836, his artistic status was high: he had already composed his *Etudes* (Opp. 10 and 25), for example. The couple spent the winter of 1838–9 on the island of Majorca, in the Carthusian Monastery of Valldemossa, some 20 km north of Palma. The weather was bad, good food was scarce, the islanders were inhospitable and Chopin suffered repeated bouts of ill health. Nevertheless, he worked, notably on his *Preludes*. George Sand wrote an account of their stay on the island, *Un Hiver à Majorque*. And in the years that followed, he and Sand spent their summers at Nohant-Vic, where Sand's manor house was (and is) located, in the Berry in central France (now the Department of the Indre). It was here that Chopin wrote and polished many of his great works. The couple separated in 1847, for complex reasons. Thereafter Chopin composed very little, and his health continued to deteriorate. He played his last concert in Paris on 16 February 1848, as revolution was about to break out, and died in October 1849.

Sand's *Un Hiver à Majorque* has been constantly tapped as a source of information on the relationship between the author and Chopin.³ Yet he barely features in it. This biographical approach has been emphasised further in the case of her novel *Lucrezia Floriani*, which was published in serial form in *Le Courrier français* from 26 June 1846, the year of their separation.⁴ At the time there was outrage. The influential French literary historian and critic Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve was characteristically quick to decry Sand's exposure of her relationship with Chopin. And her acquaintance Heinrich Heine was highly critical of the novel; it was further evidence of Sand's shabby treatment of Chopin. Sand had, however, read the manuscript of the novel aloud to Chopin and he had not, it seems, recognised anything autobiographical in it; Sand certainly denied that the novel's Prince Karol was in any way based on her lover. It is unsurprising, at a time when the *roman à clef* was so much in vogue, that some readers leapt to conclusions as to the inspiration for Karol de Roswald, described early on as 'an angel, with a fine face, like that of a large sad woman, pure and slender like an Olympian god, and to

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Angela Ryan's edition, *George Sand, Œuvres Complètes, 1841–42*, 'Un hiver à Majorque' (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2013), finally lays this approach to rest.

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See Pierre Brunel, 'Lucrezia Floriano, miroir de la liaison Chopin-Sand', *Revue de Musicologie*, 75/2 (1989), 147–158. Brunel provides both the background to biographical readings and a refutation of the approach.

crown all this, an expression at once tender and severe, chaste and passionate. That was the essence of his being.⁵

But there is further compelling evidence that a biographical reading is fallacious. The painter Eugène Delacroix, who spent a good deal of time with Sand and Chopin, and who painted the famous portrait of them (that it was subsequently cut in two is often spuriously cited as symbolic evidence of the drama of their later separation), had been present at the first readings of the novel. His reaction was described in the *Souvenirs* of a common acquaintance:

I was in agony during the reading.... The executioner and victim astonished me in equal measure. Madame Sand seemed wholly at ease and Chopin constantly expressed his admiration for the story. At midnight we all retired. Chopin wanted to accompany me and I seized the opportunity to sound out his impressions. Was he playing a game with me? No, truly, he hadn't understood, and the musician persisted with his enthusiastic eulogy of the novel.⁶

Nor is there any mention in Chopin's correspondence of his displeasure in the novel. Sand's reference to it in her autobiography, *Histoire de ma vie* (1854–55), underlines an important distinction between Chopin and Prince Karol: 'Prince Karol is not an artist. He is a dreamer and nothing more; as he has no genius, he does not have the rights of a genius.'⁷

To read Sand's fiction, or at least what she wrote while living alongside Chopin, for insights into their relationship is fruitless. However, some of her later writing, both fictional and non-fictional, gives us important and fascinating insight into her ideas about music and its place in society, ideas that show close affinity with what we can know or can intuit of Chopin's.

On one of his many long summer visits to Sand's country manor at Nohant-Vic, Chopin and the famous singer Pauline Garcia Viardot set to transcribing local songs and dances. These included *berrichon bourrées* and *briolages*. The latter are recitatives, based on the rhythms of the local patois and chanted by ploughmen to encourage their oxen. Transcribing these was made problematic not least by their existence in numerous versions. Sand describes this in a letter to her associate Champfleury (Jules François Felix Fleury-Husson), an art critic and novelist:

I saw Chopin, one of the greatest musicians of our time, and Madam Pauline Viardot, the greatest female musician that exists, spend hours transcribing a few melodic phrases of our singers and of our bagpipers. [...] [T]he work is practically impossible [...] [particularly] for the very ancient songs, where the versions vary infinitely [...] [and] the tonality of the bagpipes is untranslatable.⁸

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George Sand, *Œuvres Complètes de George Sand*, vi: *Lucrezia Floriani*, 33.

6
Caroline Jaubert, *Souvenirs de Madame C. Jaubert: Lettres et correspondances* (Hetz- el: Paris, 1847), 44. All translations are mine.

7
George Sand, *Histoire de ma vie* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1876), 613.

8
Correspondance de George Sand; textes réunis, classés et annotés par Georges Lubin (Paris: Garnier Bordas, 1964–1995), xii: 264–65.

Fryderyk Chopin. Oil on canvas by Eugène Delacroix.

Photo by Franciszek Myszkowski 1936, Biblioteka Narodowego Instytutu Fryderyka Chopina, F. 1876.



This may be exaggeration, but it underscores Sand's conviction that indigenous musical traditions needed to be taken seriously: 'for the very ancient songs, in which the versions vary infinitely, a man like Meyerbeer or Rossini should have been tasked, or have wanted to task himself, to supplement, using the logic of his genius, [...] lacunae and serious uncertainties'.⁹

Sand's novel *Consuelo; La Comtesse de Rudolstadt* (1842–1844) is, among other things, an exploration of the status of folk music and the complexities of preserving it. The recording of folk traditions emerges as of historical and cultural, as well as personal, significance. But the ephemeral nature of these traditions, their constant re-inventions, makes preservation contrary to its very ontology. What the novel demonstrates is both Sand's sophisticated understanding of what we would call today ethnomusicology and her love of music in terms of aesthetic, emotional, nationalistic and individual identities, however incompatible these may often be. At the same time, the novel also enacts the tensions between forms of nineteenth-century nationalism by bringing 'high' art and 'folk' art into conflict.

As Anne Marcoline succinctly writes:

The novel's eponymous heroine must navigate between the pro-Catholic, pro-Italian rhetoric of her music teacher, Nicola Porpora, who criticizes German compositional practices, and the pro-Protestant, pro-Bohemian rhetoric of her future husband, Albert Rudolstadt, who laments Austrian subjugation of Bohemia and collects ancient hymns that he believes could support a revival of Bohemian national culture. Supporting Consuelo's shift towards folk music, the narrator contends that only traditional music has the ability to arouse 'in as sublime a way human sentiment in the inmost heart of man': 'No other art paints to the eyes of the soul the splendours of nature, the delights of contemplation, the character of nations, the tumult of their passions and the languor of their sufferings [...] [all] without falling into the childish pursuit of mere effects of sound, or into a narrow imitation of real noises'.¹⁰

Initially Consuelo's training is based on sacred and operatic music of 'high' culture. But in Bohemia, Consuelo meets the novel's male protagonist and amateur collector of Bohemian songs, Count Albert Rudolstadt, a self-taught musical genius who, subject to metempsychosis, believes himself the reincarnation of long-dead family members at one point, and Hussite warriors, particularly Jan Žižka, at another. What is at stake is the potential loss of Bohemian culture, including religious tolerance, a language, literature and music. In its Bohemian episodes, and in stark contrast with the Venetian episode, the novel becomes a story about the preservation and recognition of traditional regional culture, principally through music. In the end, both Consuelo and Albert (to a more limited

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Ibid., 265.

¹⁰
Consuelo; La comtesse de Rudolstadt, 348, cited by Anne Marcoline, in 'George Sand and Music Ethnography in Nineteenth-Century France', *Nineteenth-Century Music Review*, 12 /2 (2015), 205–25. This is an excellent introduction to the area.

extent) turn away from hidebound nationalistic agendas and instead develop a more open vision of music and its place in communities and societies. *Consuelo* is the novel Sand wrote in the middle of her relationship with Chopin.

As Sand matured, she became increasingly interested in novels rooted in provincial settings, with their unique and living musical traditions. Official interest in regional cultures came and went in nineteenth-century France. Song collections were proposed and sometimes briefly initiated. This was with a view to producing a distinct, cultural history further to substantiate national identity. For example, the Académie Celtique (1804–1831) was set up with a clear mission:

The dual aim proposed by the Academy is as important and useful as it is well-defined: the search for the Celtic language and antiquities [...]. Thus our aim should be, 1. To rediscover the Celtic language in authors and ancient monuments, in the still extant two dialects of the language, Breton and Gallic, and also in the various popular dialects, the patois and jargon of the French Empire, in addition to the origins of these languages, place names, monuments and uses which derive from them; also to compile dictionaries and grammars of all these dialects which we must hasten to document before their total destruction. 2. To collect, write, compare and explain all the antiquities, monuments, usages and traditions; in a word, to get the full measure of the Gauls, and to explain ancient times by means of modern methods.¹¹

When the Second Empire came into being, a more concerted official programme of regional cultural recuperation was instituted. On 13 September 1852, Hippolyte Fortoul, the French Minister of Public Instruction under Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte (and someone who had great respect for Sand), announced the government-sponsored project in the Ministry's *Bulletin du Comité de la langue, de l'histoire et des arts de la France*. It included lengthy instructions for the collection of the 'Poésies populaires de la France'.¹² The previous year, Sand had anticipated the Napoleonic move, expressing her caveats about such a project in her essay 'Visions de la nuit dans les campagnes', published in the journal *L'Illustration* (December 1851):

In order to complete this research, it would be necessary to send a competent person to each region charged solely with this task. [...] There will be no lack of commentators, but the true discoveries will be extremely rare or incomplete unless they have proceeded carefully, using specialised methods.¹³

The strategy of collecting both material artefacts and ephemera that could provide an 'ancient' bedrock for modern civilisations was first manifest during the rise of nationalism in the eighteenth

11 Eloi Johanneau, 'Discours d'ouverture', *Mémoires de L'Académie celtique*, 1 (Paris: Dentu, 1807), 62–63, cited by Marcoline in 'George Sand and Music Ethnography'.

12 *Bulletin du Comité de la langue, de l'histoire et des arts de la France*, cited by Marcoline in 'George Sand and Music Ethnography'. It is worth pointing out that Sand's essay pre-dates the *Bulletin*. Marcoline may have mistaken this chronology.

13 George Sand, *Les Visions de la nuit dans les campagnes*, in *La dernière Aldini, Myrza, Les Visions de la nuit dans les campagnes*, George de Guérin (Paris: Michèle Lévy Frères, 1869).

century, as in the patriotic writings of Johann Gottfried Herder, a German Enlightenment philosopher, theologian, poet, and literary critic who was a seminal figure in the development of comparative philology. Herder's central thesis was that man's cultural expression is both shaped by – and shapes – his milieu.

In stark contrast to *Consuelo*, in the novels known, not inappropriately, as her 'rustic' or 'pastoral' fiction, music again plays a vital role but a different one. It is explored as a key cultural communicative and semiotic phenomenon with important social, political and psychological corollaries; 'communicative and semiotic' because it is often treated alongside the question of local dialects. The exemplar is *Les Maîtres Sonneurs (The Master Pipers)* of 1853, in which rural customs and dialects are wholly integral to daily life. At the same time local musical traditions and patois define but also separate the communities involved from the culture and language of the capital. There is a wide divide that separates the Parisian musical elite from regional, traditional musicians. The novel is a re-narration of a story allegedly told to Sand by an old man, Étienne Depardieu, in 1853. As in her earlier story, *François le champi* (1848), the language of the text is conceived to be immediately accessible to the French reader while at the same time capturing something of the native *berrichon*, the local language of the Berry region. The tale tells of an introspective musical genius, Joseph. As in the *Bildungsroman*, the story follows Joseph's quest to become a master bagpiper. As a small child, he exhibits a naïve passion for music. He then passes through successive stages of novice, apprentice and journeyman, and then, hopefully and finally, to guild initiate. As David Powell suggests, what 'makes the musical aspect of Sand's description noteworthy is that she accentuates the insistence on music at each turn of the festivities and incorporates it into the narrative rather than leaving it as an accompaniment'.¹⁴

In addition, Sand's presentation of the place of music in a society emphasises its integral nature to that community. Joseph's tragic end is a consequence of his belief in his own musical superiority. This flies in the face of the communal nature of musical expression and communication among his neighbours. What is underlined is the importance of a society of equals, as against solipsistic egotism and rarefied genius. For Sand, these last symbolised the culture of the Second Empire.

It is no exaggeration to say that most aspects of Sand's personality, work and life met with virulent criticism from many quarters at home and abroad. This is as true of her musical interests and convictions as of her relationship with Chopin, one of the greatest musicians of the nineteenth century. But there is no doubt that Sand was highly attuned to *berrichon* musical traditions, and had been since her childhood on what was then her grandmother's estate at Nohant-Vic. Her grandmother was a devotee of Rousseau, and Sand's childhood was informed by her conviction that she

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David Powell, *While the Music Lasts: The Representation of Music in the Works of George Sand* (London: Associated University Presses, 2001), 246.

should be allowed freedom to go barefoot and mix with the farm labourers. Many of her writings testify to this intimate experience. Further, what emerges from them is an astute awareness of the historical, artistic and personal significance of the archiving of folk music, but also of the paradoxes involved in trying to preserve what is a living and constantly changing phenomenon. These subtleties are equally relevant to Chopin's musical vision – and to many of his compositions.

The myth of Chopin, the expatriate composer who had all but forgotten his homeland, has been comprehensively dispelled. There are the mazurkas and polonaises, on one hand, and his close friendship with members of the Polish diaspora in Paris, on the other. He also stayed in close contact with his family by correspondence, and in 1835 holidayed with his parents in Carlsbad (now in the Czech Republic).

Chopin's relationship with Polish musical traditions was nonetheless complex. And other myths were invented and have been challenged over the years. In 1852 his friend Franz Liszt (also a close friend of Sand's) published a seminal monograph on the Polish composer. In it he argued for the influence of Polish mazurkas on Chopin's compositions. Further, Liszt claimed, as Barbara Milewski succinctly summarises, that Chopin's music released the 'poetic unknown' which was only implicit in the original themes of Polish mazurkas. Chopin preserved the rhythms, but 'ennobled the melodies, 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.'¹⁵ This idea of transfiguring indigenous cultural practices was a common Romantic conceit and a familiar topos in music criticism and history.

The claims for Chopin's intimate knowledge – or ignorance – of Polish folk music, arguments for – or against – the mimetic evidence of folk borrowings in his music and claims for Chopin's commitment to grass-roots Polish nationalism (as symbolically represented by folk music) continued on in the twentieth century. Arthur Hedley, in his 1947 study *Chopin*, refutes Béla Bartók's claim that Chopin is unlikely to have had knowledge of authentic Polish folk music and makes three claims: that Chopin was a connoisseur of Polish national music, that his refusal to use folk lyrics in his works was a considered decision, and that the 'folk' mazurkas were no more than a catalyst for his musical imagination. Milewski summarises Liszt's conclusion:

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

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Barbara Milewski, 'Chopin's mazurkas and the myth of the folk', *Nineteenth-century Music*, 23/2 (1999), 113. See this article for an account of the historiography of the debate on Chopin and folk music on which my discussion is in part based. See also Chris Rausedo, 'Tür an Tür: George Sand als Chopin-Interpretin', *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft*, 72/4 (2015), 245–61.

embodied in a highly civilized art-music without losing anything of their native authenticity.¹⁶

It was not until 1960 that Maurice Brown set out to create a complete index of Chopin's works. In it he included a Polish folk melody entitled 'Oj Magdalino', a tune that would serve as a floating folk trope in music-historical literature for the next thirty years. Unfortunately for us, however, Brown did not cite any source for the tune, and it is not to be found. Brown's 'Oj Magdalino' as the folk source for Chopin's Op. 68 No. 3 seems curious. But even if the question of the tune's origins is set aside for a moment, what does it have in common with the *poco più vivo* section of Op. 68 No. 3? Everything, and yet nothing.¹⁷

For nearly a century, scholars have argued about the Polish content of Chopin's mazurkas. Most accepted the importance of the folk influence. Although Chopin's dances cannot be traced to a single folk model, many arise from a composite of certain types of tunes and rhythms, which are then re-articulated. This is hardly surprising given the fluid and unstable nature of folk music. As Milewski summarises:

Chopin's Polish-ness is rather like Dvorak's Czech-ness, and Bloch's Jewish-ness: all three composers distil national flavours from material that is not strictly folkloristic – in contradistinction to Bartok, Vaughan Williams, and the Spanish national school who start off from genuine folklore.

Jim Samson, in his 1996 *Chopin*, finally laid 'Oj Magdalino' to rest.¹⁸ The historiography is nevertheless intriguing. What turns out to be at stake is less the question of folk music and more a question, or questions, of Chopin's relationship with Polish nationalism. What we now know is that Chopin did indeed have access to folk music, both Polish and later French. Chopin's letters make this very clear. In addition, socio-historical writings on early nineteenth-century Polish culture reveal that in all probability Chopin – like any other middle-class Poles of his time – would have had at least some contact with peasant traditions. The question that remains, then, is not whether Chopin encountered folk music directly, but how much it may have shaped his work.

In Poland, as in France and elsewhere, the idea of the 'nation' was much discussed, and not only by activists seeking to reassert and restore Poland's previous independence but also among those members of the middle and upper classes who were committed to the idea of discovering, or even inventing, Polish national identity based on its cultural heritage: its language, history, religion and artistic practices. The Warsaw Society for the Friends of Learning (Warszawskie Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk), founded in 1800, played a leading role in this cultural cause, very much as the

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Ibid.

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Maurice Brown, *Chopin: An Index of His Works in Chronological Order* (London: MacMillan, 1960).

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Jim Samson, *Chopin* (Oxford: OUP, 1996).

Académie Celtique did in Paris, and numerous other like societies throughout Europe.

Chopin's own music teacher Józef Elsner and others were strongly influenced by Herder's writings, as scholars in France had also been, and insisted that language was the only true preserver and container of national identity. In terms of music, they argued that Polish-language vocal composition was the truest form of 'national' music and the key to serving Polish interests. During Stanisław Staszic's time as President, the Society formulated the following aims:

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.¹⁹

The Society's members embarked on a 'discovery' of popular practice (defined as 'folk' practice) and sought to re-create it into the basis of a national tradition. The original inspiration, as elsewhere in Europe, came mostly from Herder, but also from Rousseau, whose works were well received among the Polish intelligentsia. The Society organised the more-or-less systematic collection of folksongs. These initial efforts gave the genre a new musical status at a time when the Polish nation as a political unity no longer existed. Folk songs and the people who created and curated them were the basis on which a nation could be re-imagined despite the non-existence of geo-political borders.

Chopin's attitude to all this bears comparison with Sand's in France. When Oskar Kolberg's seminal anthology of folk music, songs, stories and other materials was published in 1842, Chopin made his views clear in a now well-known letter to his family, sent in 1847. Chopin wrote:

good intentions, but too narrow shoulders (for the job). Often when I see such things, I think it would be better to have nothing; this laborious stuff only distorts things and renders harder the work of the genius who will one day disentangle the truth. Till that time, all these beautiful things remain, rouged, with their noses straightened and their feet cut down, or stuck on stilts; a laughing-stock for those who look upon them without respect.²⁰

At the time, the collecting of folk material was widely regarded as encouraging an important patriotic domestic entertainment. But Chopin was of the view that anthologised folk music was an aesthetic phenomenon in and of itself. He did not value – or see the point of – transforming it into something of more interest to the middle and upper classes.

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Cited by Milewski, 'Chopin's mazurkas', 251.

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https://archive.org/stream/chopinsletters00chop/chopinsletters00chop_djvu.txt, 325.

George Sand, 1838. Postcard after Auguste Charpentier,
Biblioteka Narodowego Instytutu Fryderyka Chopina, MPocz/204.



Both Chopin and Sand had sophisticated views on folk music, its ‘preservation’, its inherent ‘nationalism’ and its aesthetic worth. Nor were their ideas mainstream. Chopin’s reservations about incorporating folk music into his own art find a corollary in Sand’s views about incorporating autobiographical material into her fiction. In the ‘Notice’ to *Consuelo*, she wrote:

There is a mysterious pull, which I wouldn’t myself be arrogant enough to call *inspiration*, but which I experience without wishing to resist when it comes. People who don’t produce imaginative work think that it all comes only from memories and always ask you, ‘Who did you want to depict?’ They are sorely mistaken if they think it’s possible to turn a real person into a character in a novel, even in a novel as un-novelistic as *Lucrezia Floriani*. You always have to *come to the assistance of the reality of that being* [my emphasis] in order to render it consistent and sustained in a fictional construct, if only for twenty pages, because on the twenty-first you will already have left the realm of likeness, and on the thirtieth, the character of whom you claimed to speak will have completely disappeared. What is possible is the analysis of a feeling. In order that it make sense to the intelligence, passing through the imaginative prism, you have to create the characters to fit the feelings you want to describe, not the feelings for the character.²¹

The ‘reality’ of folk music had equally to be ‘assisted’, not simply added in to new compositions.

Unsophisticated ideas about the self, experience and creativity were bandied about in nineteenth-century Europe. Contemporary literary commentators made much of the autobiographical in their readings and assessments of the worth of fiction, for example. Sainte-Beuve insisted on the indissoluble nature of a written piece and its author. The most elegant and vehement refutation of Sainte-Beuve’s approach is Marcel Proust’s in his essay ‘La Méthode de Sainte-Beuve’ (written between 1895 and 1900 and published posthumously in 1954), long after the critic’s death (and Sand’s). Sainte-Beuve’s contention was that literary production is not distinct or separable from the rest of the author’s being and his milieu. This is the mainstay, Proust writes, of Sainte-Beuve’s approach, adding that ‘this method disregards what a brief communion with the self teaches us: a book is the product of *another self* [my emphasis] not the self we show in our habits, in society, in our vices.’

This idea of ‘another self’ – a creative self, distinct from the flesh-and-blood everyday self – was shared by Sand. Early on in her writing career, she described the mysterious origin of her first solo novel, *Indiana*, as emotional rather than in any sense considered or intellectual:

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George Sand, *Consuelo* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1856), ‘Notice’, Nohant, 16 January 1853. It is also the case that Sand used her fiction, consciously or unconsciously, to anticipate life, to try out scenarios in her writing before living them. See Belinda Jack, ‘Epreuve avant la lettre : George Sand et l’autobiographie renversée’, *Littérature*, 134 (2004), 121–30. This idea is also explored in Belinda Jack’s biography, *George Sand: A Woman’s Life Writ Large* (New York: Random House, 2001).

I experienced, when I started to write *Indiana*, a very strong and unusual feeling, which in no way resembled what I'd felt when writing previous works. But this feeling was more painful than pleasurable.²²

And to her great friend Flaubert, she once wrote, encouraging him to be less intellectually rigorous in his creative method:

So let the wind strum your strings a little. You should leave it to *the other* more often.²³

It is telling that her metaphor is a musical one. And it is easy to imagine her giving the highly-strung Chopin the very same advice. As she wrote of Albert in *Consuelo*:

He had so nourished himself on the spirit of these compositions [...] to the point of being able to improvise at length on their themes, to introduce his own ideas, reintroduce and develop the original feeling of the composition and *abandon himself to his personal inspiration*, all without his own ingenious and learned interpretation altering the original, austere and striking character of the ancient hymns.²⁴ (my emphasis)

ABSTRACT

To read Sand's fiction, or at least what she wrote while she and Chopin shared an intimate relationship, for insights into their creative affinities, is unproductive. However, some of her later writing, both fictional and non-fictional, gives us telling and fascinating insight into her ideas about music and its place in society, ideas which show close affinity with what we can know or can intuit of Chopin's. Both were drawn to folk traditions, but how this informed their work is complex.

KEYWORDS

Chopin, Sand, folklore, folk music, stories, novel, autobiography, biography

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22
George Sand, *Œuvres autobiographiques*, i (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 160–61.

23
Gustave Flaubert and George Sand, *Correspondance* (Paris: Flammarion, 1989), 104.

24
George Sand, *Consuelo* (Brussels: Harman et cie, 1842–43), 4, 224.