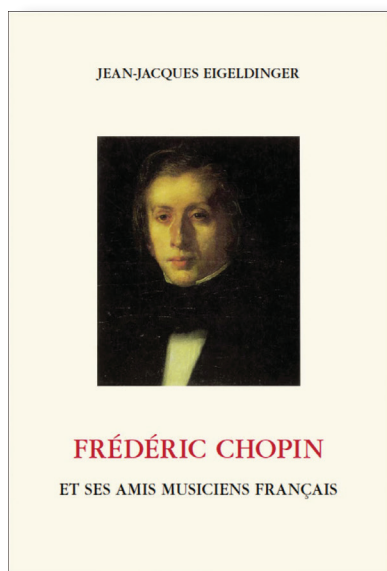


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REVIEWS



DAVID KASUNIC

review

<https://10.56693/cr.150>

Frédéric Chopin et ses amis musiciens français
Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger

Neuchâtel: Ditesheim & Maffei, 2021

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For over 50 years, the work of Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger has been essential reading for anyone with a serious interest in Chopin's music, life and influence. His 1970 book *Chopin vu par ses élèves* (published in an English translation in 1986 as *Chopin: pianist and teacher as seen by his pupils*) remains the principal reference work for those interested in Chopin's piano technique and pedagogy. That book is centred around written testimonials of Chopin's technique, style and interpretation of his works from Chopin, his pupils and those who knew him. Anchoring the testimonials are rigorous and expansive footnotes, all of which in turn is supplemented by

invaluable appendices, including a glossary of short biographies of the Chopin pupils quoted in the book, annotated scores belonging to Chopin's pupils and associates, and descriptions of Chopin's playing by his contemporaries. The rich interconnectedness of this material, often compelling the earnest reader of Eigeldinger's book to use a few fingers to hold pages in place while hopping to and from footnotes and page references, amounts to a thick description of Chopin's musical French milieu. (Conceived before the era of hyperlinks, the novel format of the book recommends an online version.)

Eigeldinger's work since (including revised and expanded versions of *Chopin vu par ses élèves*) has deepened our understanding of Chopin's French milieu. His major books include *Frédéric Chopin: Esquisses pour une méthode de piano* (1993), *Frédéric Chopin* (2003), *Chopin et Pleyel* (2010), *Chopin à l'âme des salons parisiens 1830–1848* (2013), *Chopin et la Baronne Nathaniel de Rothschild* (2016), *Autour des '24 Préludes' de Frédéric Chopin* (2019), and, especially, *L'Univers musical de Chopin* (2000). Chapters in *L'Univers*, such as 'Situation esthétique de Chopin', 'Chopin et l'héritage baroque' and 'Chopin et Berlioz face à face', provide the immediate intellectual frame for Eigeldinger's most recent publication, the book now under review, *Frédéric Chopin et ses amis musiciens français* (2021). For what drew Chopin to 'his French musician friends' was, as Eigeldinger argues, their shared taste for eighteenth-century music and aesthetics.

If the 'amis' of the title registers to the reader of Eigeldinger's earlier writings as a mostly familiar cast of characters – Camille Pleyel, Auguste Franchomme, Adolphe Nourrit, Pauline Viardot-Garcia, Charles-Valentin Alkan, Eugène Delacroix – then this reader will be pleased in being reminded of Eigeldinger's own aesthetic affinity with Chopin, in their shared inventiveness and openness to new ideas. Reading an article or chapter by Eigeldinger is like taking a tour of a special

exhibition at a museum, where Eigeldinger is the trusted scholar-curator. Familiar objects are placed in new settings, new objects are introduced, and the reason these objects are assembled is understood as new. Knowing that every element of the exhibition's curation is intentional and grounded in expertise invites us to discover new ideas.

As Eigeldinger has previously focused on Chopin's relationship with Pleyel, his section on Pleyel is one of the so-called familiar objects being placed in a new setting, here among other devotees of Bach and Mozart. That loving the music of Bach and Mozart amounted to the calling card to Chopin's circle of friends is perhaps the biggest take-away of *Frédéric Chopin et ses amis musiciens français*. While a passion for folk music and an embrace of artistic simplicity as *the* aesthetic tenet were common traits among Chopin's French musician friends, the abiding throughline was a love for eighteenth-century music and musical practice.

New is the author's focus on Fran-chomme, Nourrit, Viardot and Alkan, and each section yields original information and insights. The Fran-chomme section serves as a *précis* for what we have come to expect from Eigeldinger. *The highlighting of a relevant fact*: we learn that Fran-chomme, Chopin's closest non-Polish friend, inherited his love of Bach from his teacher Louis Norblin, the first editor (in 1824) of Bach's cello suites. *Indicating paths for future scholarship*: in a long footnote about Fran-chomme's adaptation of Chopin's music, the author draws our attention to 'two important autograph collections of Fran-chomme sketches, drafts and varia waiting to be identified and studied'. *Correcting a common misunderstanding*: the author stresses that Fran-chomme was never a copyist for Chopin, as has been too often assumed, but only an intermediary with Chopin's publishers. *Being judicious*: Eigeldinger takes the time to say that, while it is uncertain

whether Chopin requested Mozart's Requiem for his funeral mass, we can say with assurance that Chopin did request that Mozart's music be performed for that occasion.

Eigeldinger's section on Adolphe Nourrit culminates in a consideration of the organ music Chopin played for Nourrit's funeral in Marseilles in 1839. Premiering the role of Robert in Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable*, Nourrit was known to Chopin from Chopin's arrival in Paris in the autumn of 1831. What matters to Eigeldinger is the tenor's championing of Schubert songs: it was Nourrit as Schubert interpreter that led Chopin to invite him to dinner in 1837. From here, relying on the letters of George Sand and Chopin's pupil Friederike Müller that mention Chopin's performance at Nourrit's funeral, Eigeldinger weaves a compelling interpretation of the funeral march and finale of Chopin's Op. 35 Sonata, completed later, in 1839, as memorials to Nourrit via Bach and Schubert.

Eigeldinger's section on Viardot, who sang at Chopin's own funeral, makes the case that she was as accomplished a pianist as she was a singer and that, in sharing Chopin's love of Handel, Bach, Mozart, Bellini, eighteenth-century bel canto practice and folk music, she likely had more in common musically with Chopin than any of his other friends. Via Saint-Saëns, Viardot reports that Chopin's piano practice – *spianato* playing, rubato, pedalling and trilling – was anchored in the performance practice of Tosi and Mozart. As Eigeldinger does effectively and succinctly elsewhere in this book, as when detailing Chopin's network of friends in his section on Pleyel or demonstrating the proximity of friends' residential addresses in his section on Alkan, he brings Chopin to life in time and place when limning Viardot and Chopin's visits to Nohant, with the two Bach and folk music enthusiasts delving into the bourrées of the Berry region, a musical investigation whose consequences,

Eigeldinger argues, surface in Chopin's Op. 56 mazurkas.

Chopin also shared a love of folk music with Charles-Valentin Morhange, known as Alkan (*ainé*), but again, it was a shared love of Bach, as Eigeldinger points out, that first brought the two composer-pianists together. Eigeldinger compares and contrasts the attitudes and temperaments of Chopin and Alkan, and of Alkan and Liszt. We come to appreciate why Chopin, approaching death, entrusted Alkan, a professional pianist with a teaching studio, with his sketches for a piano method and with his best piano students, and why Alkan was regarded, by those who knew Chopin, as such a fine interpreter of his friend's works.

While Delacroix, like Pleyel, previously attracted Eigeldinger's sustained attention (especially in 'Situation esthétique de Chopin' and 'Chopin et "la note bleue"'), his inclusion here among the 'musicians' of the title gives him the occasion to highlight how Delacroix's musical training made him a worthy interlocutor for Chopin and a reliable reporter of Chopin's aesthetic positions. It is in this section that Eigeldinger most avails himself of the 2018 publication of Chopin pupil Friederike Muller's correspondence, evidence not available to him previously.

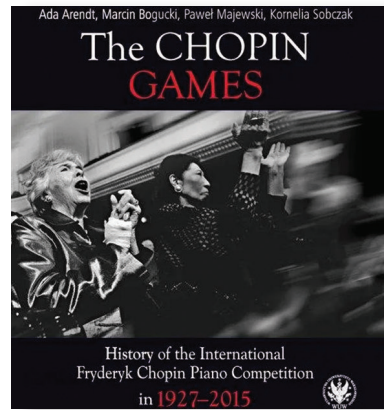
The sections devoted to Chopin's French musician friends (the bulk of this book) are followed by brief sections on topics raised by those biographical sections, such as Chopin's looking to singing technique as a guide for piano playing ('Chanter au piano'). The section 'La voix du violoncelle' happily assembles score excerpts from nine Chopin pieces where the imprint of cello writing is most evident. Eigeldinger notes that Chopin's interest in the cello predated his arrival in Paris, and thus had Polish roots. In 'Prédilections musicales', Eigeldinger likewise notes that Chopin's love of Bach, Mozart and opera was forged in his Polish youth. These predilections are what attracted him to his French musician

friends; Chopin's pre-Paris preference for Viennese pianos is also what predisposed Chopin to the Pleyel piano.

Eigeldinger's focus on Chopin's French friends necessarily places Polish influence and Chopin's Polish friends in the wings. Eigeldinger is, of course, alert to this. As a counterexample to Chopin's French friends' claim that he lacked a visual vocabulary, Eigeldinger cites a letter from Chopin to his family that includes a rich architectural and artistic description (albeit one that does not discuss colour). And as a counterexample to Chopin's French friends' claim that he was not interested in literature, Eigeldinger cites Chopin owning books of Polish poetry and his ties to a Polish intellectual and literary milieu. To a certain extent, then, as Chopin retained strong connections to Polish friends (musicians and otherwise) throughout his Paris years and arguably felt most at home, most himself, with his Polish friends, the ineluctable biases and perceptions of his non-Polish friends, particularly where matters of Chopin reading, writing and speaking French are concerned, will conjure up a Chopin who was not wholly aligned with the one known by his Polish friends and family. Especially welcome, therefore, are those Polish friends who populate Eigeldinger's book, friends who are equally at home in French and Polish circles, like Chopin's pupil Princess Marcelina Czartoryska. As Eigeldinger notes, it was Czartoryska who, in 1854, in keeping with Chopin's dying wish to her that she play Mozart in memory of him, first convened the 'Club des Mozartistes' at her residence, the Hôtel Lambert. Viardot, Delacroix, Chopin pupils Thomas Tellefsen and Camille Dubois-O'Meara, the violinist Alard, the painter Ary Scheffer and the composer Charles Gounod were among the first attendees.

The founding of the Club des Mozartistes speaks to the strong afterlife of Chopin's friendships, the subject of Eigeldinger's

final section, 'Regards amis'. These friends passed along their love and knowledge of Chopin, his music and his pedagogy. In this light, most suggestive is Eigeldinger's addition of a sole appendix section consisting of excerpts from Baudelaire's critical writings on Delacroix. The final excerpt is drawn from the poet's *Œuvre et vie d'Eugène Delacroix* (1863), his tribute to his painter friend, who died that year. This move, at the end of a book on Chopin's friends, hints at, I hope, a next step for Eigeldinger: a book about the quarter-century *after* Chopin's death and the resonance of Chopin in later French music, literature and art.



LISA MCCORMICK

review

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The Chopin Games: History of the International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition in 1927-2015
Edited by Paweł Majewski;
translated by Tomasz Zymer

Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2021.
Hardback, pp. 462.
ISBN 9788323548010.
Price €30.00

When I began researching international competitions in classical music in the early 2000s, the literature available on the topic was sparse. Pianists pointed me towards Joseph Horowitz's journalistic exposé *The Ivory Trade: Music and the Business of Music at the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition* (Summit Books, 1990) and to Wendy Thompson's conversations with Fanny Waterman in *Piano Competition: The Story of the Leeds* (Faber and Faber, 1990). String players sent me to the library archives to unearth influential reports published by string teachers' associations and memorable articles by eminent pedagogues published in music magazines. These publications provided colourful anecdotes, strong opinions and the occasional glimpse behind the scenes,