

## **Origin of early commemoration initiatives at Żelazowa Wola**

Cecilia Jorgensen and Jens A. Jorgensen  
Icons of Europe, Brussels

Proposal for a 60-minute roundtable or panel discussion on congress area 3 for the  
Third International Congress hosted by the Fryderyk Chopin Institute  
Warsaw, 25 February – 1 March 2010

### **Abstract**

Chopin literature provides little information on how Russia, during its century-long and harsh occupation of Poland, could have allowed a monument to be raised for Chopin, a late Polish émigré composer, at his Żelazowa Wola birthplace in October 1894, and on why the Russian nationalist composer Mily Balakirev suddenly showed an interest in Chopin.

The authors visited Żelazowa Wola in 2003 and consulted later the Fryderyk Chopin Institute and the Frederick Chopin Museum, as well as publications on Chopin's birthplace and historical information about Warsaw and St. Petersburg. They met with staff members of Westminster Abbey, and reviewed "a critical study" of Balakirev's life and music and a comprehensive biography of the U.S. landscape architect Charles Eliot. This work was conducted in parallel with the authors' research in 2003-2009 on Chopin's relationship with Swedish soprano and philanthropist Jenny Lind in 1848-1849, and on the inspiration his music and their tragic romance gave to a new artistic movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (ref. separate abstracts proposed by Icons of Europe).

The authors' initial discoveries raise a series of intriguing questions:

- Chopin's birthplace estate was purchased by Adam Towiański in 1859, one year after Jenny Lind-Goldschmidt's Chopin concert tour of Poland. – A coincidence?
- In 1884, why does Charles Eliot – an apprentice of Frederick Law Olmsted, the father of American landscape architecture – travel to St. Petersburg, passing Warsaw on his return? Is there a link to Queen Victoria's groom Colonel Charles Eliot, who "brought the [Jenny Lind memorial] drawings to Westminster Abbey" in 1893?
- In 1891 and to the surprise of the *Warsaw Courier*, why does Mily Balakirev director of the Imperial Chapel and conductor of the Imperial Musical Society visit Żelazowa Wola in "ardent admiration for your Chopin"? Balakirev is not known to have expressed earlier any particular interest in Chopin's music (but in Liszt).
- In 1893, could the Warsaw Musical Society really have persuaded the reactionary Emperor Alexander III to give his "supreme permission" to the creation of the memorial?
- In 1894 at the 14 Oct. inauguration, how could the Society have let Chopin's Polonaise in A major be performed "for chorus and orchestra" (to the dismay of Balakirev) at the very first concert of Chopin's music for as many as "2,000 people ... in the park"?
- How could the elaborate park have been funded originally? The "restored" park contains "16,000 plants ... many unique", although "original drawings" were not found.
- Is it a coincidence, or not, that in 1894 a memorial plaque for Jenny Lind, also with a lyre and laurels, was unveiled at Westminster Abbey with royal patronage?
- In his "authentic" Memoirs of 1933, why does Ignacy Paderewski, patron of the Chopin Monument Committee prior to 1894, not mention the event, nor his role or his 2,000-franc contribution to the monument?

The authors' research on the 19<sup>th</sup> century commemoration history of Żelazowa Wola is not yet complete. They would welcome continued cooperation with institutions in Poland and elsewhere, which might be recommended by the proposed special session at the Congress.