

On the trail of Mazurka in A-flat, opus 24, n° 3

by Jens A. Jorgensen

In 2003, it was discovered that Jenny Lind (1820-1887), the Swedish soprano and philanthropist, sang her own arrangements of four Chopin mazurkas for Queen Victoria in 1855 and 1856. Prof. Irena Poniatowska, President of the Polish Chopin Academy, regarded this discovery as “very important” in the 2003 annual issue of *Chopin in the World*. The discovery prompts a new look at the historical trail of Mazurka in A-flat, op. 24, n° 3. According to sources cited below, it turns out that Chopin’s *original* autograph took an unexpected route over the next 100+ years – which eventually brought it back from Canada to Poland in 1959 aboard the Swedish liner M/S Stockholm.

Autographs in Leipzig

Chopin composed the four Mazurkas opus 24 in 1834-1835. According to the National Library in Warsaw, he dedicated one of two autographs of the third mazurka « à Mme Linde, 22 Sept. Dresden 1835 », the wife of the lexicographer Samuel Bogumił Linde (this autograph disappeared during World War II). Chopin sent Mazurkas op. 24 to Breitkopf & Härtel in Leipzig for publication in 1836. The autographs remained there in the archives, together with other original Chopin manuscripts, till 1936.

Singing for Queen Victoria

Jenny Lind sang her arrangement of Mazurka in A-flat, op. 24, n° 3 for Queen Victoria (1819-1901) at Windsor Castle on 28 December 1855.



Her *Memoir* (1891) states that it was “set to Italian words* for Soprano Voice with Pianoforte obligato”, and that she sang “Chopin’s melody ... as written by the Composer”. – * Translated: “My poor heart, forget the pain / oh divine pleasure of love / In search of love / Oh hope coming from the sky / faithful love will never die / faithful love will never die / no, no, no, no, no, no / Stay faithful to your love / to the sweet faithful love / that will never die!”.

Jenny Lind started with Chopin’s Mazurkas op. 50, n° 2 in A-flat; then op. 30, n° 1 in C-minor and op. 30, n° 2 in B-minor (their text has so far not been found). She concluded with op. 24, n° 3 in A-flat. These four mazurkas formed what was presented as *RECUEIL DE MAZOURKAS de F. Chopin* (“This Recueil has not been published”). According to The Royal Archives, Queen Victoria noted in her Journal that it was the first time she heard Jenny Lind sing for seven years and that “Jenny Lind sang more beautifully than ever, & certainly there is no one at present, at all like her, but she is much altered in appearance”.



Jenny Lind performed again *Recueil de Mazourkas de F. Chopin* for the Queen at Buckingham Palace on 30 May 1856. The original programme shows that she and Pauline Viardot also sang Meyerbeer’s duo *La mère grand*: “Allons, rentrez voici l’orage”.

Emotional attachment

An explanation of Jenny Lind’s emotional attachment to Chopin’s music was uncovered as late as in 2003. British government papers and other new evidence reveal that she travelled incognito to Paris in May 1849 – with the knowledge of Queen Victoria – in an unsuccessful attempt to marry Chopin. While Chopin wrote upbeat letters about their encounters in 1848-1849, Jenny Lind always kept her relationship to Chopin secret. These findings were reviewed with Chopin experts in Warsaw on 1 March 2004.

Liszt, Brahms, Moscheles

Jenny Lind continued in 1856-1858 to sing to opus 24, n° 3 at her European concert tour that included Bohemia, Britain, Germany, Holland and Poland (Wrocław, Gdansk and Poznan). Otto Jahn, the philologist and writer, says in *Die Grenzboten* that Jenny Lind had planned to perform the Mazurka at the Music Festival in

Düsseldorf in 1856, but replaced it with an aria from Bellini’s *Beatrice di Tenda*. Jahn describes Jenny Lind as a “queen” sitting at the top of the table flanked by “knights” including Liszt, Brahms, Jahn and Hanslick. Later, Liszt notes in a long letter of 3 January 1857 to Herr von Turanyi, Musical Conductor of the Town of Aix-la-Chapelle (translated): “Frau Lind-Goldschmidt stands as incomparable in her glittering renown as a singer as Händel in his as a composer”.

Jenny Lind’s *Memoir* observes: “Moscheles, having heard this piece [op. 24, n° 3], in November 1857, at the Gewandhaus at Leipzig, entered in his Diary the strain in bar 10, going up to the high C, differently, He wrote from recollection only; but in this form it has found a place not only in his Biography (Vol. II, London 1873) but also in Grove’s Dictionary of Music Vol. II, page 141, and possibly elsewhere.”

To Canada in 1940

In 1936, Breitkopf & Härtel decided to sell its Chopin collection. The National Library in Warsaw explains it consisted of 49 compositions within 20 opus numbers – including the four Mazurkas op. 24 as well as such key works as Concerto in F-minor, op. 21; Etude N° 1 and Etude N° 8, op. 25; and Fantaisie in F-minor, op. 49. At the initiative of the Fryderyk Chopin Institute, the Government of Poland acquired this collection that, following an exhibition in Paris, was transferred to Warsaw in early 1938. In August 1939, however, when war was seen as imminent, it was decided to evacuate the above Chopin collection as well as precious medieval manuscripts. The initial destination was Romania.

At the same time, in September, another portion of Poland’s national art treasures located at Wawel Royal Castle in Krakow was also



evacuated. An article of 29 August 1999 in *The Ottawa Citizen* by Kelly Egan describes the spectacular and heroic escape that started aboard a 60-meter camouflaged coal barge on the Vistula river, while German tanks rumbled on the west bank. After the perilous journey to Romania and then via Malta to France and England, all the treasures finally arrived at Clyde Port of Greenock in Scotland. They were

loaded in trunks aboard M/S Batory of the Gdynia America Line. The treasures reached Halifax, Canada on 13 July 1940 and were eventually offered safe storage in Ottawa, Ontario and Quebec.



According to *The Ottawa Citizen* (1999), the heavy trunks contained Chopin's works; religious manuscripts from the 13th century; a two-volume Johann Gutenberg Bible; *Szczerbiec*, the bejewelled sword used since 1320 for the crowning of Polish kings; 136 Flemish tapestries (arrases) from the 16th century; hundreds of pieces of gold and silver cups; and many other national treasures. Onboard was also a huge cache of gold bars from the Bank of England.

Issues resolved by 1959-1961

It took 19 to 21 years to return Chopin's manuscripts and most of the other treasures to Poland. In the Cold War climate, the delay was caused by issues on their whereabouts and safety, legal ownership, custody responsibility, release procedures, indemnity protection, and politics. Today, declassified 1952-1957 secret files of the Government of Canada provide an interesting window to these "perplexing" issues (ref. [Table](#)). The issues involved the Government of Canada and provincial authorities, the communist government in Warsaw, the Polish government-in-exile in London, United Nations, UNESCO, national cultural institutions, Polish émigré groups, the Catholic Church, a large bank, the media, and private individuals.

For example, the Acting Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, Canada, observes in a 'secret letter' of 9 December 1953: "There has been a strange silence on their part [the Polish Government] since the campaign over the Chopin manuscripts". Lester B. Pearson, Secretary of State for External Affairs, concludes in a long 'secret memorandum' of 1 August 1956 to Cabinet: "... unless the Canadian Government can give some satisfaction to the Polish Government, we will almost certainly be faced with a dispute in the United Nations or in the International Court of Justice".

Pearson also attaches a draft Agreement to enable the release of "the two trunks [with Chopin's manuscripts, the bible, the sword, and other particularly

important items] held in the vaults of the Bank of Montreal in Ottawa". Given the royal audience in 1855 and 1856, it is no small coincidence that the 1956 Agreement is written "on behalf of Her Majesty the Queen in right of Canada".

Finally, the above two trunks departed in January 1959; a maritime source says via New York aboard the Swedish liner M/S Stockholm. They reached Warsaw by train on 3 February 1959. The risks of transatlantic travel were emphasized by the collision of M/S Stockholm in July 1956 with the Italian TS/S Andrea Doria. The latter sank with its cargo and the loss of 47 lives.



The return of the manuscripts was celebrated with exhibitions at the National Museum and Wawel Royal Castle – in time for the 150th anniversary of Chopin's birthday in 1960. The Castle confirms that the collection of Flemish tapestries that had belonged to King Sigismund II Augustus (1548-1572) came back to Krakow as late as 1961. [Incidentally, when Sigismund II died childless, the son of his sister and the Swedish King Johan III was elected King of Poland as Zygmunt III Waza (1587-1632) and from 1592 to 1599 also King of Sweden (as Sigismund I)].- However, two sources believe that not all the remaining treasures went back home. Eight of 32 trunks appear to be missing.

Epilogue

In 1985, the National Library in Warsaw published *F. Chopin: 4 Mazurki opus 24*, a 500-copy facsimile edition of the original manuscript that Chopin had dedicated to his friend "Monsieur le Comte de Perthuis" (l'officier d'ordonnance de Louis-Philippe, Roi des Français). The edition was issued as a tribute to the XIth Frederick Chopin International Piano Competition. The foreword, written by Mrs Wanda Bogdany-Popielowa, refers to the 1940-1959 sojourn in Canada.



On 6 April 2004, Mazurka in A-flat, op. 24, n° 3 was performed "in the honour of Her Majesty the Queen" at the Embassy of Sweden, Warsaw in the final act of the historically correct musical drama

Chopin and The Nightingale. The objective of this premiere was to celebrate the new Europe with an international audience. It included high-level representatives of Polish cultural institutions, seven ambassadors, and industry VIPs. The day after, the British Ambassador wrote to his government: "The drama ingeniously brought together historical and musical elements from all over Europe ... to bring out the seamlessness of great European culture."

The trail of Chopin's Mazurka will return to Canada in March-April 2005. *Chopin and The Nightingale* will be performed at the Royal Ontario Museum by The Glenn Gould School of the Royal Conservatory of Music. Recognizing that Chopin died of tuberculosis and Jenny Lind raised funds to fight this infectious disease, the TB Program at Toronto Public Health will in the context of World TB Day 2005 be using great culture to emphasize that TB has today, in the 21st century, become a dangerous global epidemic. – In a separate initiative, the Mazurka will take centre stage in a new film project on Chopin and Jenny Lind's relationship.

Jens A. Jorgensen
President, Icons of Europe, Brussels

CANADIAN GOVERNMENT FILES AND OTHER SOURCES

The excerpts of the extensive declassified secret files of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade of the Canadian Government are provided for public non-commercial use under Canada's Copyright Act. Details are available at <http://www.iconsforeurope.com>.

Additional sources: The Royal Archives, Windsor; the National Library in Warsaw; Jenny Lind's *Memoir 1820-1851* by H.S. Holland and W.S. Rockstro (London 1891), dedicated to Queen Victoria; *Allgemeine Musikzeitung* (11 July 1890); *Jenny Linds triumftåg genom nya världen* by Sven Dorph (Uppsala 1918); and Icons of Europe's biography *Chopin and The Swedish Nightingale* (Brussels 2003) and research paper presented at the roundtable of Chopin experts hosted by the Fryderyk Chopin Institute at the Warsaw Philharmonic on 1 March 2004.

Images: painting of Queen Victoria by Thomas Sully; painting of Jenny Lind in 1847 by Alfred Count d'Orsay (National Portrait Gallery, London); *Szczerbiec*, the coronation sword; postcards of M/S Batory and M/S Stockholm; and facsimile of Chopin's Mazurka in A-flat, op. 24, n° 3.