

# Fryderyk Franciszek Chopin

A life-long nostalgia for Poland in compositions of the most outstanding Polish composer



The first piece of music composed by Chopin was a **Polonaise** and the last one a **Mazurka**, both national Polish Dances. The two pieces are indicative of the composer's love for his homeland, that is so often expressed in his music. Fryderyk Chopin was living in exile, and separation from Poland was the essence of his inspiration.



Chopin was born in the village of **Żelazowa Wola**, on 1 March, 1810. His father, **Mikołaj Chopin** was French and came to Poland at the age of sixteen; his mother, **Tekla Justyna Krzyżanowska** was Polish. When Fryderyk was barely 1 year old the family moved to Warsaw.



Chopin was exposed to music since his early childhood. His mother was a singer and played the piano, his father played the flute and violin, and his sister was a pianist. Young Fryderyk grew up with love and care and he had a happy childhood.

At the age of 6, Chopin started regular piano classes. His teacher – **Wojciech Żywny** quickly realized that his student was extremely talented and therefore started grooming him in the skills of piano playing. He was introduced to the music of Johann Sebastian Bach and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

From the beginning Chopin revealed a sense of musical improvisation. His early compositions were mostly polonaises, marches and variations. His father would often help him in notating his musical ideas.

As a young performer and composer, Fryderyk was hosted at the concerts of Warsaw's aristocracy including noble families such as **Czartoryscy** or **Zamoyscy**.

Chopin was making extremely fast progress; in 1822 his piano teacher declared that he was not able to teach him any longer as Chopin's skills overtook his own. Young Fryderyk continued his classes with a famous Polish composer – **Józef Elsner**.

Chopin regularly spent his holidays in the villages in Poland where he familiarized himself with the customs and rituals of the common folk, and absorbed the folklore of the music. His favorite summer holiday place was **Szafarnia**.



This exposure to Polish folk music reflected in most of composer's later works where the characteristic folk harmonies and rhythmical structures can be found.

In the years between 1826 – 1829 Chopin studied at the Main Music School in Warsaw at **Warsaw University**. Compositions from that period are Variations in B flat major Op. 2, Fantasy on Polish Airs Op. 13 and Rondo à la Krakowiak Op. 14 which reflected his individual and distinctive style which would mature in his later pieces.

Example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AnjXebgNGTI>

After graduation Fryderyk travelled to Vienna where he performed his own compositions. The concert in Vienna turned out to be a great success. Inspired, Chopin composed the 2nd Piano Concerto in F minor, with its second movement

Larghetto dedicated to his ‘ideal’ – **Konstancja Gładkowska**. Konstancja was a singer and a former student of the Warsaw Conservatory. This youthful love impacted the Larghetto in its special emotional way. The composition was very well received by the public.



Example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nXoX-HO9U5U>

During his stay in Vienna, Chopin found out about the uprising in Poland of the people of Warsaw, on 29<sup>th</sup> November, 1830. After the tragic news, Fryderyk’s life changed tremendously. His enormous longing for his family and Poland pushed him into expressing his emotions in piano playing. During this period a depressed Chopin was completely unmotivated to compose. Only the drafts of his most dramatic compositions have emerged from this time – Scherzo No.1 in B minor, Op. 20, Etude No. 12 ‘Revolutionary’, Op. 10 and Ballade No. 1 in G minor, Op. 23.

Example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VWHBHeNrg4>

In July 1831 Chopin left for Paris. His productivity was still badly affected by the situation in Poland, which left him uninspired to work. Moreover, he found out that his love Konstancja had married. After half a year of endeavors he managed to organize a concert in Paris, performing together with other famous virtuosos, **Franz Liszt** and **François-Joseph Fétis**. The concert turned out to be a grand success. Chopin became a sought-after pianist in Paris and many

students lined up for piano classes with him. He decided that he would stay in Paris. Fryderyk became very popular among the socialites of the city. He was a part of the artistic elite such as Liszt, Berlioz, Hiller, Heine, Mickiewicz and Prince Adam Czartoryski to name a few. During this time Chopin completed his cycle of **Etudes Op. 10**, which is an important link of his young compositions to his masterpieces such as **Scherzo No.1 in B minor, Op. 20** and **Ballade No. 1 in G minor, Op. 23**.

Example: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fU6B\\_lgUI4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fU6B_lgUI4)

In 1836 Chopin met Amantine Lucile Aurore Dupin, a French writer, best known by her pen name **George Sand**.



Since the first meeting George Sand had expressed a keen interest in Chopin. This relationship gradually became closer, and it influenced Fryderyk's lyrical style of composing. During this time, he was working on the **Nocturnes** and **Mazurkas**. He also finished Scherzo No. 2 in B flat minor, Op.31, considered the most lyrical of his Scherzos.

Example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S94Nh-bSomo>

In the winter of 1838 Chopin and George Sand went for a trip to **Majorca**. During this trip Fryderyk was diagnosed with tuberculosis, most likely due to the humidity on the island. However, the warm atmosphere of his relationship with the writer inspired him to compose pieces that revealed his unique, individual style. In Majorca Fryderyk completed the cycle of Preludes, 2

Polonaises, and he drafted more of his Ballades, Scherzos and Mazurkas. Unfortunately, his work was constantly interrupted because of the disease.

After Majorca, Chopin moved to Nohant in central France, where he stayed at the property of George Sand. Here he completed the Sonata No. 2 in B flat minor, Op. 35.

Example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6GZ6xeGnJQ>

Fryderyk and George Sand spent the hot summers in the village of Nohant, and the rest of the year in Paris, where Chopin's popularity as a teacher, musician and composer was significant.



The time spent in Nohant was very calm and the composer was surrounded with love and care. More masterpieces were composed at that time. He completed the Nocturnes, Ballades, Scherzos, Mazurkas and also bigger forms such as the Barcarole and Polonaise – Fantasy.

Example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UU21X-wmD0Q>

Sadly, Chopin's relationship with George Sand ended. The breakup affected Fryderyk badly and he practically stopped composing.

Although he was not composing he did continue to teach. One of his students, **Jane Stirling**, convinced him to go for a trip around Great Britain but it turned out to be a bad idea. The humid climate of the island intensified the disease and worsened his health.

In 1848 Fryderyk performed for the last time in his life. The concert, a tribute to Polish immigrants, took place at the Guildhall in London.

After returning to Paris, Chopin's health condition worsened. He still tried to teach and compose but lack of strength prevented that. In 1849 Chopin asked his sister Ludwika to come to Paris and take care of him. When she arrived, her younger brother was already dying. He passed away on 17<sup>th</sup> October in 1849.

Fryderyk Chopin will always be cherished as a composer of lyrical and soulful music and remains popular to this day. He remains one of the leading symbols of the Romantic era.



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