in a curling wake. Withal, it is not hard to see that he was his own chief audience. His calm was all but sleepy, and could be neither disturbed nor affected by thoughts of the impression his playing made on his hearers. No haste, no excess, whether in deportment, in phrasing, or in tempo ever broke the melodious reverie that filled the atmosphere with an exquisite aura that seemed to whisper love-drunk melodies, impressions of sweetest bliss, and delightful murmurs, *mezza voce,* all around us.

Art was for him in itself sufficient reward for any sacrifice. Anything over and above that—positions he might be appointed to, the reputation that might surround him, the success and longevity of his composition—all this did not concern him. Field sang for himself alone. To please himself was all he asked of music. But it is directly to this total disregard of anything that aims merely at effect that we owe the first attempts—and what perfect ones!—to infuse the piano with feelings and dreams and to free piano music from the constraints imposed until then by regular and "official" form on compositions of all kinds. Before him they all had of necessity to be cast as sonatas or rondos or some such. Field, contrariwise, introduced a genre that belonged to none of these existing categories, in which feeling and melody reigned supreme, and which moved freely, without the fetters and constraints of any preconceived form. He cleared the path for all those offspring which have since appeared sporting names like "Songs Without Words," "Impromptu," "Ballade," and so on, and one can trace to him the origin of all such pieces, which seek to express intimate, subjective emotions. He was the discoverer of these realms; he opened up a field as new as it was propitious for subtle rather than grandiose imaginings, for delicate rather than lyric inspirations.

The name "Nocturne" suits splendidly the pieces Field was inspired so to christen. For from their very first sounds we are immediately transported to those hours when the soul, released from the day's burdens, retreats into itself and soars aloft to secret regions of star and sky. We see it here all airy and winged, hovering like Philomela of old in the scented air over the flowers, rapturously engulfed by Nature.

L. Ramann (ed.), *Gesammelte Schriften von Franz Liszt,* IV (Leipzig, 1882), 263–68. Trans. R. T.

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Glimpses of Chopin Composing, Playing the Piano

An aura of mystery and of magic surrounded the highly reserved personality of Chopin in his own day, and that aura still surrounds him for us today. By all accounts his music cast a spell on his listeners, and critics spoke of the intensely personal style of Chopin's compositions (see Schumann, p. 305). It is hard to imagine his playing can have been any less so. Yet putting down his inspirations on paper in their final form proved an agonizing process for him according to George Sand, the French novelist and author who shared her life with him for many years:

His creation was spontaneous and miraculous. He found it without seeking it, without foreseeing it. It came on his piano suddenly, complete, sublime, or it sang in his head during a walk, and he was impatient to play it to himself. But then began the most

heart-rending labor I ever saw. It was a series of efforts, of irresolutions, and of frettings to seize again certain details of the theme he had heard; what he had conceived as a whole he analyzed too much when wishing to write it, and his regret at not finding it again, in his opinion, clearly defined, threw him into a kind of despair. He shut himself up for whole days, weeping, walking, breaking his pens, repeating and altering a bar a hundred times, writing and erasing it as many times, and recommencing the next day with a minute and desperate perseverance. He spent six weeks over a single page to write it at last as he had noted it down at the very first.

I had for a long time been able to make him consent to trust to this first inspiration. But when he was no longer disposed to believe me, he reproached me gently with having spoiled him and with not being severe enough for him. I tried to amuse him, to take him out for walks; but it was not always possible to prevail upon him to leave that piano which was much oftener his torment than his joy, and by degrees he showed temper when I disturbed him. I dared not insist. Chopin when angry was alarming; and as, with me, he always restrained himself, he seemed almost to choke and die.

Frederick Niecks, *Frederick Chopin as a Man and Musician* (London: Novello, 1902), II, 132.

Carl Mikuli, who studied with Chopin and in later years became a trustworthy transmitter of his master's legacy, remembered:

Chopin played rarely and always unwillingly in public; "exhibitions" of himself were totally repugnant to his nature. Long years of sickliness and nervous irritability did not always permit him the necessary repose, in the concert hall, for displaying untrammeled the full wealth of his resources. In more familiar circles, too, he seldom played anything but his shorter pieces, or occasional fragments from the larger works. Small wonder, therefore, that Chopin the Pianist should fail of general recognition.

Yet Chopin possessed a highly developed technique, giving him complete mastery over the instrument. In all styles of touch the evenness of his scales and passages was unsurpassed—nay, fabulous; under his hands the pianoforte needed to envy neither the violin for its bow nor wind instruments for the living breath. The tones melted one into the other with the liquid effect of beautiful song.

Carl Mikuli, ed., *Chopin's Complete Works for the Piano* (New York: G. Schirmer, Inc., 1916), Introductory Note.

Towards the end of his life, Chopin accepted an invitation to play in Great Britain. An unusually perceptive review of his second London concert by the Scottish journalist George Hogarth appeared on 10 July 1848 in the *Daily News*. (Although he speaks of a "numerous" audience, there were only about 200 people in attendance, at a nobleman's house.)

Monsieur Chopin performed an *Andante sostenuto* and a Scherzo from his Opus 31, a selection from his celebrated studies, a Nocturne and a *Berceuse* and several of his own Preludes, Mazurkas and Waltzes. In these various pieces he showed very strikingly his original genius as a composer and his transcendental powers as a performer. His music is as strongly marked with individual character as that of any master who has ever lived. It is highly finished, new in its harmonies, full of contrapuntal skill and ingenious con-

trivance; and yet we have never heard music which has so much the air of unpremeditated effusion. The performer seems to abandon himself to the impulses of his fancy and feeling, to indulge in a reverie and to pour out unconsciously, as it were, the thoughts and emotions that pass through his mind.

He accomplishes enormous difficulties, but so quietly, so smoothly and with such constant delicacy and refinement that the listener is not sensible of their real magnitude. It is the exquisite delicacy, with the liquid mellowness of his tone, and the pearly roundness of his passages of rapid articulation which are the peculiar features of his execution, while his music is characterized by freedom of thought, varied expression and a kind of romantic melancholy which seems the natural mood of the artist's mind.

Arthur Hedley, *Chopin* (London: J. M. Dent, 1947), 107.

We will leave the last word to a poet, Heine, who covered the cultural scene in Paris in witty letters to the German press. But when speaking of Chopin, he became serious:

Yes, Chopin must be considered a genius in the full sense of the word; he is not just a virtuoso, he is also a poet, he is able to make evident for us the poetry that lives in his soul, he is a tone-poet, and nothing equals the pleasure he gives us when he sits at the piano and improvises. Then he is neither Polish, nor French, nor German, he reveals then a far higher origin: one realizes then that he comes from the land of Mozart, Raphael, Goethe. His true fatherland is the dream-kingdom of poetry. When he sits at the piano and improvises, I feel as if I were being visited by a man from my beloved country, as if he were telling me the strangest things that have occurred there during my absence …

Heinrich Heine, *Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1980), XII, 289–90. Trans. P. W.

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Mendelssohn and Queen Victoria

Buckingham Palace "cozy"? Mendelssohn was a marvelously acute observer, and while he used that word in fun, there is no mistaking the comfortable German middle-class atmosphere that prevailed at the Palace when the Queen was young and her adored husband, Prince Albert, set the tone. We have come a long way since the days when (as in Molière's *Bourgeois gentilhomme*) the middle class tried to ape the ways of the aristocracy. By the 1840s, bourgeois ideals emanated from the thrones of Europe. Indeed, the Victorian era might well be defined as the era in which middle-class ideals became officially enshrined. Mendelssohn, unlike so many of his fellow artists, did not openly rebel against those ideals; in fact his music accorded remarkably well with the tastes of the educated portion of his public, and this guilt by association no doubt contributed to the decline of his reputation in the years following his death. Bourgeois ideals no longer seem to trouble us today, and we are free to enjoy the