

Chopin Frederic, composer

Period: Romantic

Born: February 22, 1810

Died: October 17, 1849

Nation of Origin: Poland



One of the most original composers in history, Frederic Chopin was not at all a traditional "Romantic" musician; in fact, most of his music is a separate category all its own.

Born in Zelazowa Wola, a small town near Warsaw, Poland, on February 22, 1810, Chopin first studied the piano at the Warsaw School of Music, and was quite proficient on that instrument by his early teens. He played his first public concert at 7, and was a composer at only 15. By the late 1820s, Chopin had won a great reputation as a piano virtuoso and composer of piano pieces. He toured Europe, giving concert performances for ecstatic audiences and critics. In 1831 he arrived in Paris for a concert; so immediate was his love for this city that he promptly decided to make it his new home and he never went back to Warsaw.

In Paris, Chopin was in constant demand as a performer and teacher. He was a favourite at Parisian salons, and he had many friends among the artists of the time, including Hugo, Balzac, Liszt, Berlioz, Schumann, Dumas and Delacroix.

In 1837, Chopin met the novelist Mme. Aurore Dudevant, who used the pseudonym George Sand. The two began a tragic relationship which would prove the most influential and devastating development in Chopin's life. By 1847, they fell apart. Heartbroken over the loss of his beloved, Chopin continued to compose, but was soon stricken by illness. Sapped by tuberculosis, he grew too sick to work, and suddenly died on October 17, 1849, at the age of only 39.

Chopin's music, no matter what the setting, is instantly recognizable. His unique sense of lyricism and unparalleled melodic genius produced some of the most purely beautiful music ever written - music which would influence many composers who followed, from Brahms to Debussy. His works tend to fall into one of three categories - small "technical" pieces (or études) for piano, published between 1833 and 1837; larger, more developed works for the piano (nocturnes, preludes, impromptus, mazurkas, polonaises); and the even larger, freely-conceived works (ballades, fanatasies, scherzos). He also wrote several sonatas, piano concertos, and a smattering of music for other instruments.

In the structure and form of his compositions, he is quite alone; his sense of balance and architecture in music was not particularly related to the Classical or Romantic tradition, but seemed to spring from some unknown source. The overwhelming power and influence of his musical legacy is forever assured.

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