

DR. SŁAWOMIR DOBRZAŃSKI

Maria Szymanowska - Chopin before Chopin. Inspirations and influences.

The music of Chopin – always so mature artistically – appears to us today as a perfect and independent creation of the composer's musical imagination. Indeed, only very few contemporary composers directly influenced Chopin's style. There is, however, no doubt, that Chopin's 21 years older compatriot, Maria Szymanowska, played a major role in shaping his personality both as a pianist and as a composer.

We are not sure if they knew each other personally, but they both lived in the same artistic and intellectual milieu in Warsaw, where Chopin was a student and Szymanowska a celebrity.

All the musical genres composed by Szymanowska were taken over by Chopin (waltzes, mazurkas, etudes, preludes, nocturnes, fantasy, rondos, ballades, songs). Interestingly, Chopin, just like Szymanowska, concentrated almost entirely on composing for the piano.

There are many melodic and technical borrowings from Szymanowska's output found in Chopin's music. These instances are so numerous that a diligent researcher would indeed be able to produce a small catalogue! The similarities in musical and technical ideas are especially striking in Szymanowska's and Chopin's etudes and preludes.

There is no doubt that Szymanowska provided a foundation in Chopin's musical development as a composer.

It is especially interesting that echoes of Szymanowska's music can be heard even in later works by Chopin (for example, the Ballade op. 47), many years after Szymanowska's death.

Finally, it is worth noting that Maria Szymanowska's music played a much more important role in Chopin's musical development than music of many other celebrated composers of the time, such as, for example, Beethoven. In Poland, a country undergoing fast political and cultural changes, symphonic music was barely known. It is exactly in this environment that Szymanowska's fascination with the piano's expressive capabilities was transferred to Chopin for whom the piano became an inexhaustible source of musical imagination.