

# Chopin Notes

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## Upcoming Events:

**3 x Chopin**— three  
different visions of  
Chopin's music

**Ewa Pobłocka, piano**  
**Andrzej Jagodziński Trio**  
**Leszek Możdżer, piano**

**March 21, 2010, 7 pm**  
Roswell Cultural Arts Center.  
See our website for the  
information about the  
After-Concert Essay Contest.

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## Chopin Notes Editorial Staff:

**Dorota Lato**  
President, Chopin Society of  
Atlanta

**Bożena U. Zaremba**  
Editor

**Mim Eisenberg**  
Proofreader

## 3xChopin

Exclusive Interview with artists by Bożena U. Zaremba

*3xChopin* is a stunning and unprecedented project undertaken to celebrate the **Chopin Year** in honor of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the composer's birth. It features three generations of Chopin's music interpreters, three unique personalities, and three diverse visions of the works of this genius. **Ewa Pobłocka** is a distinguished classical pianist. **Andrzej Jagodziński** is a leader of a renowned jazz trio and a precursor of jazz interpretations of Chopin's music. **Leszek Możdżer** represents the youngest generation of jazz pianists. A dazzling entertainer, he is always pushing the boundaries and exploring the possibilities that the instrument offers. They interpret Chopin's music differently; they also talk about it differently from one another.

### About the project and its musicians

Ewa Pobłocka: I have never participated in such a project and was delighted when it was offered to me. It is wonderful that this music stimulates different ideas and different endeavors. We should open ourselves to other possibilities and pursue ways of interpreting Chopin other than just classical.

Andrzej Jagodziński: Możdżer is a thrilling, utterly modern and an avant-garde artist and pianist, not only from the jazz standpoint. In his music, you can hear the influence of various genres of music. I am a more poised and traditional musician; I was raised with different influences, listening to different music, in the same way as my colleagues from the Trio were.

Leszek Możdżer: Am I avant-garde? This can be subject to discussion. In my opinion, I am more of a link between the world of classical music and jazz – I do play improvised music, but the sound that I represent distinctly corresponds to the aesthetics of classical music. Andrzej Jagodziński, on the other hand, is evidently a true jazz musician; he completely transferred Chopin's music into the jazz domain, both in the sound and form.

### About Chopin

AJ: Chopin epitomizes Romanticism, which came about as the reaction to Classicism and its



**Andrzej Jagodziński Trio**

Photo: Arthur Arnesen

stiff structures. I am talking about the liberties Chopin took and his freedom of expression, both in the melody and rhythm. Chopin considered Bach to be the greatest composer of them all, and when he felt lonely or depressed, he would sit at the piano and play Bach's *Preludes and Fugues*, but he was truly a self-taught talent and did not pattern his music after any of his predecessors or contemporaries.

EP: He was foremost a fantastic composer and a fantastic pianist. The musical education of

*Continued on p. 3*

**Chopin Society of Atlanta has grown a cult following among local piano mavens.**

– Pierre Ruhe, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, November 2007

# Mystery in Music

## Essay Contest for Children

What a treat! Christopher O'Riley, a great emissary of classical music, an exceptional educator and a superb pianist, delighted us with a wonderful recital, which proved him to be a versatile, diverse and sensitive artist. Our young audience definitely appreciated his artistry, and we are pleased to present excerpts from prize-winning essays about Christopher O'Riley's concert in October 2009:

"Christopher O'Riley is one of the most expressive and remarkable pianists I have ever heard. Each of the pieces he played was perfectly interpreted, and I could feel the different moods and tones. I could feel the music bounce off my skin and give me goose bumps because of how superior the music sounded. There was a story behind every piece that he played, and the audience could feel it. He played two awesome pieces that weren't even on the program!

Out of every awe-inspiring piece that I heard during the concert, *Kreisleriana Op.16* inspired me the most. It was so beautifully played, I wished it wouldn't stop. I really liked how O'Riley ... took the time to explain what each movement meant and how to play it. I really enjoyed how he used the Tasmanian Devil character from Bugs Bunny as a comparison to the different movements.



Photo: Elzbieta Gürtler-Krawczyńska

Christopher O'Riley with our youngest audience

Over all, O'Riley brought out the melody where needed. I believe the first movement was absolutely extraordinary. The change from one movement to the other was very smooth, but you knew it was there because the mood changed. During some of the movements, you could see his fingers bounce delicately but clearly on the keys. I really liked how he lifted his hand after every loud note of a chord. It created emphasis and suspense to the piece. After every movement, he paused so that the audience could absorb the music. Even though the movements changed from light and fast, to fast and aggressive, O'Riley made every movement noteworthy and made the audience crave for more after this piece was over.

It was a wonderful concert! I loved the choice of music



Photo: Mimi Eisenberg

Christopher O'Riley at the Roswell Cultural Arts Center, October, 2009

and most of all how Christopher O'Riley interpreted them. He played each piece so flawlessly, I wished it had gone on forever. This concert was really poignant, and I can't wait to hear another one of Christopher O'Riley's concerts." (Ingrid Cai)

"The ebb and flow of Claude Debussy's *Images, Book II* can thrill the listener. This piece, written in 1907, still powerfully puts the audience in reverie. Christopher O'Riley's interpretation of this selection of music was breathtaking. I enjoyed this piece for the employment of whole-tone scales. ...The audience really perceives mystery in the second movement of the piece. It begins with the name "Moonlight," which brings to mind mystical, moonlit woods and carries all the way through dark and gloomy passages that remind me of a burglar creeping around in the shadows of an alley. Whole-tone scales give the piece a sense of mystery, but Debussy does not overdose the piece with them. ...Recently, during my personal piano lessons, my teacher spoke about Debussy's use of whole-tone scales in his music. It was really wonderful to be able to attend a concert and actually experience what I have been learning." (Dee Parker)

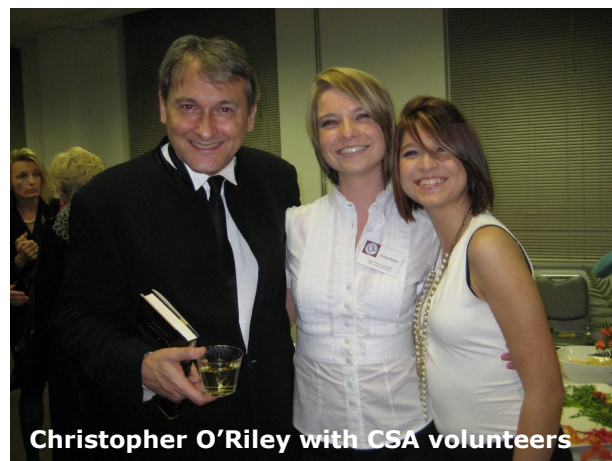


Photo: Elzbieta Gürtler-Krawczyńska

Christopher O'Riley with CSA volunteers

Authors of the best essays have been awarded Barnes & Noble gift certificates. Excerpts have been edited for space and clarity.





Ewa Pobłocka

any pianist should include Chopin, because his music teaches excellent pianism.

LM: Chopin was a brilliant piano composer – he perfectly understood the piano and had a great feel for this instrument, which can be heard in his compositions. Through his music we can appreciate its possibilities more deeply.

#### **Favorite aspects of Chopin's music**

AJ: The most important are his melodies, saturated with Slavonic folk elements. In Polish folk music, singing *ad libitum* or *a capella*, that is, independent of rhythm or harmony, is very common, and this is something that has stayed alive in our tradition of sound.

LM: The melodic quality of Chopin's music and this Slavonic sorrow appeal to me most. Also, I am constantly inspired by his harmony, especially his masterly use of diminished chords and the chromaticism, which electrify every jazzman.

#### **Literary associations**

AJ: His music definitely brings the Polish landscape to mind. In his youth, Chopin often spent his vacation in the country, where he was exposed to original folk music and he transferred this mood into his music. Also, the

news from Poland that reached him during his later visit to Vienna certainly had an impact on his compositions, for example, on *Scherzo in B-minor* (the one with the motifs from the Polish Christmas carol "Sleep Little Jesus"), on which he was working at that time. These inspirations are undeniable, but generally speaking, Chopin's music is purely instrumental, and I would refrain from attaching any programmatic labels to it.

LM: While listening to music, everyone sees something different in his or her own mind, so if you claim that Chopin's music evokes a vision of a landscape or a patriotic statement, it is no more than just your viewpoint. What is more, if Chopin wanted to infuse his music with some sort of proclamation, it was no more than his viewpoint. Music is an abstract form of art. If you wish to reduce it to some tangible vision, this is merely a whim of your mind. Besides, the music itself can create different, sometimes extreme emotions, depending on your particular experience or the time of the day.

EP: It helps understand what the music conveys and communicates. But I do understand and admire those musicians who treat music solely as abstract, and kudos to those who can move the audience with this approach. I personally think that music and art, in general, need to touch the deeper layers of our souls. Hence, a good concert is the one that moves us, no matter if we leave appalled or overjoyed.

#### **Universal traits of Chopin's music**

AJ: It comes from the brilliance of the sound itself in his compositions. The fact that this music conquered Far East audiences proves this with no doubt. They recognize human elements in this music, common to all people.

Another important aspect is the freedom of interpretation that this music allows. Interpretations may differ considerably and still be equally convincing.

LM: Chopin explored music and the piano itself in a profound way. He became a master in his field, which always incites fascination and respect.

EP: This should be examined by musicologists. It is hard for me to tell, because I play so that I don't have to talk about it (*laughs*).

#### **Improvisation**

LM: For me, the most fascinating thing about improvisation is the fact that I don't know what I am going to play in a moment – the unveiling of the future, which becomes the present. Even though jazzmen use certain set elements in their improvisations, improvisation cannot be predictable, because this kills the fascination and the feeling that what we witness on the stage will not happen ever again.

EP: In my youth, I demonstrated extraordinary improvising talent.

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Leszek Możdżer

When I came back from school and my mother asked me how it was, I would tell her, "Mom, sit down and I will play it for you." And then I would sit at the piano to "portray" my day with music, and my mom guessed what had happened at school with absolute accuracy. Later in my life, when I matured and gained more self-awareness and knowledge, I lost this skill to a great extent, though sometimes I dare to insert some ornaments or commit myself to writing a cadenza in Mozart's piano concertos.

**About the difference in improvisation between classical music and jazz. Is it a matter of more freedom in jazz, swing, or syncopated rhythm?**

AJ: All of them, I think. Swing is an inherent part of American music, especially in older styles and in mainstream jazz, where the so-called walking, or swing, is probably among the most important attributes. Besides that, we still have other ways of improvising, mainly in European jazz, where the sound is not so much linked to traditional roots of music as in

America.

EP: It's the liberties that jazz musicians take with regard to timing. They virtually ignore the bar lines, and at the same time they are able to meet at the designated moments. This requires incredible discipline from them.

LM: There is no difference, in my mind. The essence of any improvisation lies in its unpredictability. Swing no longer defines jazz – there are a lot of musicians who play jazz but do not swing, and those who swing but do not play jazz. For me, emotions play the most essential role in improvisation; it's the emotions of revealing the future, which is a mystery.

**The influence of Chopin's music on jazz**

AJ: Some chords that were typical for Chopin appeared 100 years later in jazz. Chopin was notorious for his use of diminished chords. This leads us to chromatic scales, which are widely used in jazz improvisations. Also, some of Chopin's melodic and harmonic associations, which are often based on

dissonance and were not appreciated by his contemporaries, had a huge impact on jazz.

**My Chopin**

AJ: At some point I realized that this is my music; this is my atmosphere; this is the area where I can thrive.

LM: I try to extract and utilize some fragments from Chopin's music, and in this way I can express myself. But most of all, during the concert I want to generate the atmosphere of magic and create the feeling that this moment is one and only.

EP: I try to express both the composer and myself, but the most important thing for me is to "sing" this music as if with a human voice. Also, there have been situations in my life when I was far away from home, whether it was because of martial law or I was on a concert tour, and at moments of incredible longing and sadness, I sat at the piano, where nobody could hear me, and I played Chopin. Then I came to realization that life was not so miserable.♪

**Chopin Society of Atlanta**  
**540 Morton Mill Court**  
**Johns Creek, GA 30022**  
**[www.chopinatlanta.org](http://www.chopinatlanta.org)**

