

## The Many Contrasts of Fryderyk Chopin

Most people accept that Chopin was born on February 22, 1810. In fact, the latest studies indicate that it was most probably March 1, 1810. Then again, there is a memorial plaque to Chopin at 12 Place Vendôme in Paris, where he died; however, the apartment that is shown tourists as having belonged to Chopin, in fact was never his apartment, according to the latest studies. Also, although Chopin was a prolific letter writer, and received many letters from friends, acquaintances, admirers, and others, most have been destroyed due to the ravages of wars and revolutions in Europe. But not only. George Sand herself, who is Chopin's love interest in tonight's movie, burned 200 of her letters to Chopin toward the end of 1851, two years after his death. Thus the mysteriousness of the man continues to grow, and the clarity of his portrait is made possible more and more by his music alone.

Of course, the most important element of all is his music. He composed music for the piano such as no one

had ever composed before. The scope, the beauty, the variety, the power of his music and its great technical difficulty – even for today’s technically-minded pianists – has placed his creations at the very top of music written for the keyboard. One of the greatest attractions of that music is its originality and enduring cutting-edge quality– and that has also been its most controversial element. Most other great piano composers have had their imitators, their schools, so to speak. But Chopin has had none – his music is so original, so perfectly crafted and expressed, that no one has ever been able to successfully develop his style, to continue it. And even though he died over a century and a half ago, during which time many great cultural luminaries have seen their stars fade or die altogether, the fascination with and love for Chopin’s music continues, unabated, to this day.

His melodies are not only beautiful, but often catchy, and have even made their way onto Broadway in some of the most famous musicals.

When we think of Chopin today, he takes on gigantic proportions in our imagination. It is all the more interesting to note that this creator of immortal musical beauty, whose power affects millions around the globe so long after his passing, was in many ways very much a perishable human being. He stood 5 feet 7 inches tall, and at the age of 30 weighed all of 97 pounds. He died of tuberculosis at the age of 39. He was a very cultured man, with exquisite manners, yet had a will all his own, and brooked no compromise when it came to achieving his objectives. He was known to throw volcanic temper tantrums.

Chopin was a man of great feeling, and also of high intellect. His music in its very best moments is a tantalizing balance of the two.

The movie you are about to see tries to show Chopin the man and lover, the person struggling with his problems and his deepest emotions of love, it shows a man who, although the epitome of the Romantic

keyboard poet, knew failure and defeat in his own romantic pursuit of love.

So perhaps it might be of interest to focus in on the relationship of George Sand and Fryderyk Chopin, which is the essence of the movie. Let's hear what the eminent biographers George Marek and Maria Gordon-Smith have to say on this subject in their book titled Chopin.

“Although for the first couple of years of their friendship these two shared the joys of physical love, and even though for a certain time their minds were in harmony with each other, Sand was unable to understand – at any rate to understand on a deeper level – the genius which slowly transformed feeling into musical tones, nor could Chopin feel close to the talent of the novelist, who absorbed life experience and immediately, without retrospection, transposed it into prose. Both these so richly endowed individualities lived in a state of great emotional tension, but of differing character: George Sand's heart, filled with the desire to save the world,

beat, one might say, to the rhythm of democratic slogans, while Chopin, although he was a worldly man, found his true existence in the vast space of the imagination and did not worry about rescuing mankind. With the passage of time these differences of character became ever more apparent, and formed the groundwork for the separation of the lovers. ...

It would be simplistic to say that Sand stopped loving him, even though the sexual aspect of a relationship always played the lead role in her feelings.

...

In 1842, when she was 38 and Chopin was 32, they had been together already for four years, which was a long time for her to be together with a man. Nonetheless, due to the unavoidable run of events, her passion waned, though Chopin's continued. ... Sand, as usual, found a justification for her action, she continued to "love" him, but she no longer desired him. Her passion waned primarily because of her own inconstancy.

The cessation of their physical relationship had its effect on Chopin's nerves. He could not reconcile himself with the thought that her passion had died, he became irritable, would start loud arguments for the most trivial reasons... Outside of those moments they continued to be devoted to each other and full of mutual consideration.

Solange, George Sand's daughter, was fifteen at that time, sexually aware and decidedly not naïve, and called him "Sexless Chopin." He in turn called her a little coquette and remained under the spell of her youthful beauty. Marie D'Agoult wrote to Chopin's friend Franz Liszt: 'I think that soon the Chopin family is going to fall apart. Some of our friends believe that he is morbidly jealous.' And there was a grain of truth in that statement. He was jealous indeed. According to his code of conduct, the woman "belonged" to the man. There were too many unknowns lurking in the life of his beloved. So he made scenes, stalked about with a dark expression on his face. At that time there was no reason for jealousy. Sand did not have an affair with anyone until 1845, when she

became an item with the philosopher Louis Blanc, who was a year younger than Chopin, who had no idea about the liaison.

That handsome blond satisfied Sand's physical needs, but he did not replace and could not replace Chopin for her, to whom she was still deeply attached.

Just like in marriage, which their relationship was for all practical purposes, the noble impulses of their natures remained, as did the habit, the mutual care, and the delight in each other's company."

However, George Sand's children, especially her now fully blossomed daughter Solange, were to become the last straw that broke the relationship between the pianist and the writer. Solange was her own person, headstrong, sure of her own attractiveness, spoiled. Her mother was unable to control her, and therefore, when in early 1845 the sculptor Clésinger asked for eighteen year old Solange's hand in marriage, George Sand assented. As it turned out, the marriage was a disaster, both for

Solange and her mother. In the summer of 1845 the young couple came down from Paris to Nohant, Sand's summer place, and, to make a long story short, a horrible quarrel took place there, during which Solange behaved rudely to her mother, and Clesinger physically attacked his mother in law. Then both Solange and her husband left, without a word. Chopin, as always, sided with Solange, and that did it. Sand and Chopin (who intuitively avoided Nohant that summer and stayed in Paris) exchanged some letters that proved to be their last. Soon after the end of the relationship came the end of Chopin's musical creativity, and the beginning of the end of his life. He died a few years later, wasted by T.B.

George Sand, who had such a profound effect on Chopin's life, found her own fame and influence wane as a novelist. Today, she is interesting only because of her liaison with Chopin. She still lives through him. And Chopin, who died so young, much younger than George Sand, continues to live. He is his music, and his music, so

perfect in its form and expression of the noblest and most  
beautiful feelings, is him.

Albert Juszczak