

The Paris of Frédéric Chopin

A ROMANTIC WALK

On 16 July 1831, Frédéric Chopin wrote to his family, which was still in Poland, "I'm letting you know that I have had my passport stamped for London"... His passport for London nevertheless said "via Paris". Paris! When Chopin arrived in the capital in the autumn, his feelings towards the French were mitigated. He still felt resentful that they had not saved the Poles, who had risen up and now been crushed by the yoke of Russia, but at the same time he was fascinated by the exhilaration of the city. The Revolutionary days of July 1830 marked the start of an era of prosperity and, even more importantly, Paris became the centre of new artistic movements and the heart of Romanticism. "I will undoubtedly remain in Paris longer than I had thought, not because I feel particularly at home here, but because it is possible that I could gradually come to feel that way" (Letter to Kumelski, 18 Nov. 1831). He soon met Rossini, Cherubini, Paër "golden key to Paris", and then Kalkbrenner, who opened the doors to the Pleyel Rooms to him. He joined the world of the musicians of his generation: Mendelssohn, Liszt and Hiller. These decisive meetings placed him at the forefront of the musical and intellectual scenes and also pushed him into society life, into the salons where reputations were made... or undone. Here, the magic did its work and his genius as well as his personality flourished and seduced. He was "launched". Paris would be the city of all his defining moment and all his love affairs. At the home of Liszt he formed one of the most famous liaisons of the century, with George Sand (Aurore Dupin). From now on it would be in Paris that not only Chopin's life, but also his glory, would develop.

1

(4th) 6, Quai d'Orléans

Bibliothèque polonaise (Polish library) – Historical and Literary Society

The **Polish library** is an indisputable "Chopin" location! It is here that are kept not only the souvenirs but also the spirit of Polish immigration, which developed in Paris around General Karol Kniaziewicz, a representative of the insurgent government expatriated after the fall of the Warsaw Uprising of 29 November 1830. Everything the "Polish Colony" (F. Chopin) considered influential left a mark on these locations. Today it is possible to visit the "Chopin room", where the composer's personal souvenirs are kept, as are the collections of Adam Mickiewicz, a Polish writer, emblematic figure of Polish Romanticism and Professor of Slavic History at the Collège de France (higher education and research institute). He was a close friend of Chopin and George Sand even translated some of his poems.

From there we can easily cross the Seine to visit the Lambert Mansion, formerly the residence of Prince Czatoryski. This active patriot, who constantly reactivated the "Polish question", founded the Polish Library, the Historic Society of Poland and several educational institutes for young expatriate Poles. He also held extravagant dances and "charity balls", which were attended by many artists and intellectuals such as George Sand, Delacroix and Chopin.

2

(1st)

The archways of the Royal Palace

Under the archways of the Royal Palace were luxury boutiques frequented by Chopin. Gloves, hats, etc. came from the best tailors, who kept his measurements. He simply had to write to his faithful secretary Julien Fontana and the required articles would be immediately produced and sent to his address!

3

(1st)

Tuileries Garden

The Tuileries Garden was somewhere Chopin went for walks; he also went to the Palace, which burnt down in

1871. The musician performed there for the first time in 1838 at the invitation of Louis-Philippe. As a sign of Royal gratitude, he received a tea service bearing the effigy of the Sovereign and the Queen. He returned a second time, in December 1841, at the invitation of the Duke of Orléans, and on this occasion was paid one hundred gold Francs!

4

(1st)

12, Place Vendôme

This was Chopin's last address. He settled there in the autumn of 1849, in a comfortable apartment overlooking the exposed courtyard to the south. His health declined irremediably. In June, Chopin requested the presence of his sister Ludwika. She arrived from Poland and assisted him until the end of his life. By October he could barely support himself, could no longer play the piano or even compose and tried "to make himself understood with signs" (H. Berlioz). All his friends and admirers rushed to say goodbye to him and surround them with their affection, but so many opportunists and curious onlookers arrived that Guttman, Chopin's student and faithful nurse, was obliged to install some order. On 15 October, the Countess Delphine Potocka, a great friend of Chopin, had the piano pushed next to the dying man's bed so she could sing him some of Marcello's psalms. On 17 October, at two o'clock in the morning, Chopin took his final breath. A few days later, when his papers were being arranged, a letter and a lock of hair from George Sand, his only love, were found sticking out from the 1849 almanac inside his jacket.

5

(8th) 14, Rue de Suresnes

Madeleine Church

Chopin's funeral was held in this church on 30 October 1849. In accordance with the composer's wishes, Mozart's Requiem was sung in his memory. For this occasion and by special derogation, women were allowed to sing in the choir, including the famous opera singer Pauline Viardot (the sister of Maria Malibran), a faithful friend and admirer. The Funeral March was harmonised and Lefébure-Welly played Prelude No 4, which Chopin had composed in Majorca, on the great organ. More than 3,000 people came to pay their last respects to the composer.

A few days later, his sister Ludwika returned to Warsaw, taking with her her brother's heart which was to return to Poland in accordance with his wishes. Since then it has been kept in the cardioph in the Church of the Holy Cross in Warsaw.

6

(9th) 16, Rue Chaptal

Museum of the Vie Romantique

The former home of the painter Ary Scheffer is today dedicated to the memory of Romantic life, which was particularly rich in this New Athens district. This painter, a friend of the 1830 generation of Romantic artists, left behind several beautiful portraits of Chopin.

The residence housed several souvenirs of George Sand, bequeathed by his granddaughter Aurore Lauth-Sand. They illustrate the art of living in the decade 1830 – 1840. The memory of painters such as Géricault and Delacroix, who met Chopin and George Sand, and also Liszt, Rossini and Tougeniev, is still evoked within the luxurious workshop-salon.

The Museum of Romantic Life is one of the fourteen municipal museums of the City of Paris (for further information: www.paris.fr).

7

(9th) Entrance to 80 Rue Taitbout

Square d'Orléans

At the end of July 1842, Chopin and George Sand left Nohant, in the province of Berry, to look for a house in Paris. Charlotte Marliani, the wife of the Spanish Consul, had told them about a new location, Square d'Orléans, built "in the English-style", meaning around a vast courtyard, and therefore far from the noise of the streets, in a district which soon became known as New Athens. They found it charming and signed two leases. George lived on the first floor of number 5 and Frédéric lived at number 9 in a small apartment where he could receive his students and "make music". They returned to settle there at the end of the year. Chopin kept this address until 1849, when he left for Rue de Chaillot and then the Place Vendôme.

A number of their artist friends lived in this location and the surrounding area, such as the pianist Kalkbrenner, the sculptor Dantan, Miss Taglioni, who played "Sylph" in the ballets at the Opera and was the first to dance "en pointe", and of course the Marlianis... they were "amongst themselves", having only to cross a courtyard to get together, meet and dine at each other's houses. Pauline Viardot and her husband moved in as neighbours as soon as they could.

8

(9th) 9, Rue Cadet

The Pleyel Rooms

Paris was not only the capital of music, but also the capital of piano manufacturers. No fewer than 300 factories could be found there. Pape, Erard and Pleyel argued for the favours of the best musicians and rivalled each other in technological innovations. It was through the great pianist and teacher of German origin, Friedrich Kalkbrenner, that Chopin met Camille Pleyel. Then, in the vast "Pleyel Rooms", Chopin was invited to give his first recital on 26 February 1832. The reports of the evening are dazzling: in a few days "Monsieur Chopin from Warsaw" achieved a celebrity which never relented. He also gained the firm friendship of Camille Pleyel. "... if I feel willing, prepared to move my fingers without fatigue, without irritation, I prefer the pianos of Pleyel. The transmission of my thoughts and feelings is more direct, more personal. I feel that my fingers are in more immediate communication with the keys, which exactly and faithfully transmit the sensation I want to produce and the effect I want to obtain." (F. Chopin)

9

(9th) 2 bis, Rue du Conservatoire

Former Conservatory Concert Hall

The Conservatory Concert Hall was one of the major music halls in Romantic Paris. Chopin performed there between 1832 and 1838, despite his aversion to public concerts. But it was mainly there that he went to hear the creations of his contemporaries. Berlioz performed his works there, including the Fantastic Symphony, created in 1830, and then Lelio, Harold in Italy and finally Romeo and Juliet. It was still possible to hear Liszt and Mendelssohn, not forgetting Beethoven's symphonies performed under the direction of François Habeneck. Although it has been considerably restored, the appearance of this hall is still close to that of the original.

10

(20th) 15, Boulevard de Ménilmontant

Père Lachaise Cemetery

On 30 October 1849, the composer's body was placed in a simple vault (11th division) and a bit of earth from his native country, which he had always kept in the urn given to him when he left Poland on 2 November 1830, was scattered on top. A short time later a subscription, presided over by the painter Eugène Delacroix, was launched so that a monument could be created. Pleyel, Franchomme, Albrecht and the painter Kwiatkowski were among those who contributed to it, as did his last student Jane Stirling. The monument was finally inaugurated during a moving ceremony on 17 October 1850; its sculptures were created by Jean-Baptiste Clésinger, the husband of Solange Sand, George Sand's daughter of whom Chopin had always been fond. At the top of the tomb is Euterpe, the Muse of music who is gazing at the profile portrait of Chopin, weeping and

having broken the strings on her lyre. It was also Clésinger who created the mould of Chopin's hand as well as his funeral mask.

Chopin fans should also visit the **Delacroix Museum (6th)**, (6, Rue du Furstenberg) and the **Louvre**, where it is possible to see the portrait of Chopin painted by Delacroix in 1838.

Frédéric Chopin (1810 – 1849)

F. Chopin was born on 1 March 1810 in Żelazowa-Wola, Poland, to Justyna Krzyżanowska and Nicolas Chopin, originally from Lorraine. His first composition was published when he was seven years old and the teachers at the Warsaw School of Music applauded his genius. But Poland was weakened (by political division) and was unable to acknowledge his talent. Chopin therefore tried his luck in the major European capitals: Berlin, then Vienna in 1829, gave him his first accolades. Of frail health – he suffered from tuberculosis or cystic fibrosis – Chopin wanted to participate in the Polish insurrectional movement, but his friends were against it and encouraged him to leave his homeland in November 1830. After a second trip to Vienna, he arrived in Paris in 1831. It was there that his genius was most productive. He met all the figures of the Romantic period and at the home of Liszt he met George Sand. Their liaison lasted nearly ten years. Their separation in 1847 precipitated the decline of Chopin's health. He attempted a trip to England, but returned even weaker, "Buy a bouquet of violets so that I can find at least a touch of poetry when I come home, even if it is just crossing the salon to enter my bedroom, where I will no doubt go to bed for a long time". He died in his apartment on Place Vendôme in the night of 17 October 1849, surrounded by friends and music.

This walk has been created for the bicentenary of the composer's birth.

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