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ON MUSIC AND BIOGRAPHY: MAKING SENSE OF A NEW SOURCE

The relationship between music and biography poses greater difficulties for us *Chopinologues* than it does for many other major composers of the nineteenth century. Our thorough exegeses of Chopin's style demonstrate the astonishing versatility of his art. Our convincing examinations of the events of his life uncover new facts and propose new interpretations of familiar biographical landmarks. We speak volumes about the day-to-day activities of Chopin's life; we analyze in remarkable detail the traits of his compositional style. But we do not often attempt to *integrate* our portraits of the man and the composer. Relatively rare are those studies that make historical sense of Chopin as a composer *and* as a thinker, that imagine his music (to borrow Laurence Dreyfus's memorable words about Bach) as "residue[s] of human thoughts and actions."¹

Why integrated views of the life and works should prove so elusive for us is relatively easy to see. Compared to composers like Beethoven, Schumann, Berlioz, and Wagner (to take examples readily to hand), whose writings and correspondence teem with musical, philosophical, aesthetic, political, and social commentary, Chopin's surviving daily utterances appear to concern primarily the prose of everyday life.

But none of us at this conference needs to be reminded that Chopin regularly consorted with the finest minds of his day: Eugène Delacroix, Honoré de Balzac, Adam Mickiewicz, and George Sand, to mention just a very few from outside music, and Liszt, Berlioz, Schumann, and Mendelssohn among his colleagues from the world of composition. Did Chopin not understand his music to contribute as significantly to human expression as did the creative works of his associates? Can it really be the case that these keenly searching minds all saw (or rather heard) Chopin as merely a purveyor of agreeable or entertaining noise? Is it not instead likely that they perceived in his music, if only metaphorically or indirectly, a sense of shared—or contestable—intellectual, moral, and other values?

These are difficult questions. They certainly would benefit from open discussion of the methods and goals of inquiry. With this in mind, I would like to offer for our discussion a small example where biographical and musical concerns might mutually inform one another. The example involves two recently discovered sources: the newness of these sources, and the absence of a scholarly tradition around them, offer a kind of *tabula rasa* on which we can begin to inscribe our collective ideas on their significance. My own thoughts on these sources are decidedly preliminary; I do not pretend to have exhausted all possibilities for thinking through their importance.

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In April 2006, an antiquarian dealer contacted me with interesting news, and a question. The dealer had the chance to acquire what were purported to be two printed scores that Chopin annotated for a pupil of his. Could I authenticate the annotations?

¹ Laurence Dreyfus, *Bach and the Patterns of Invention* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 10.

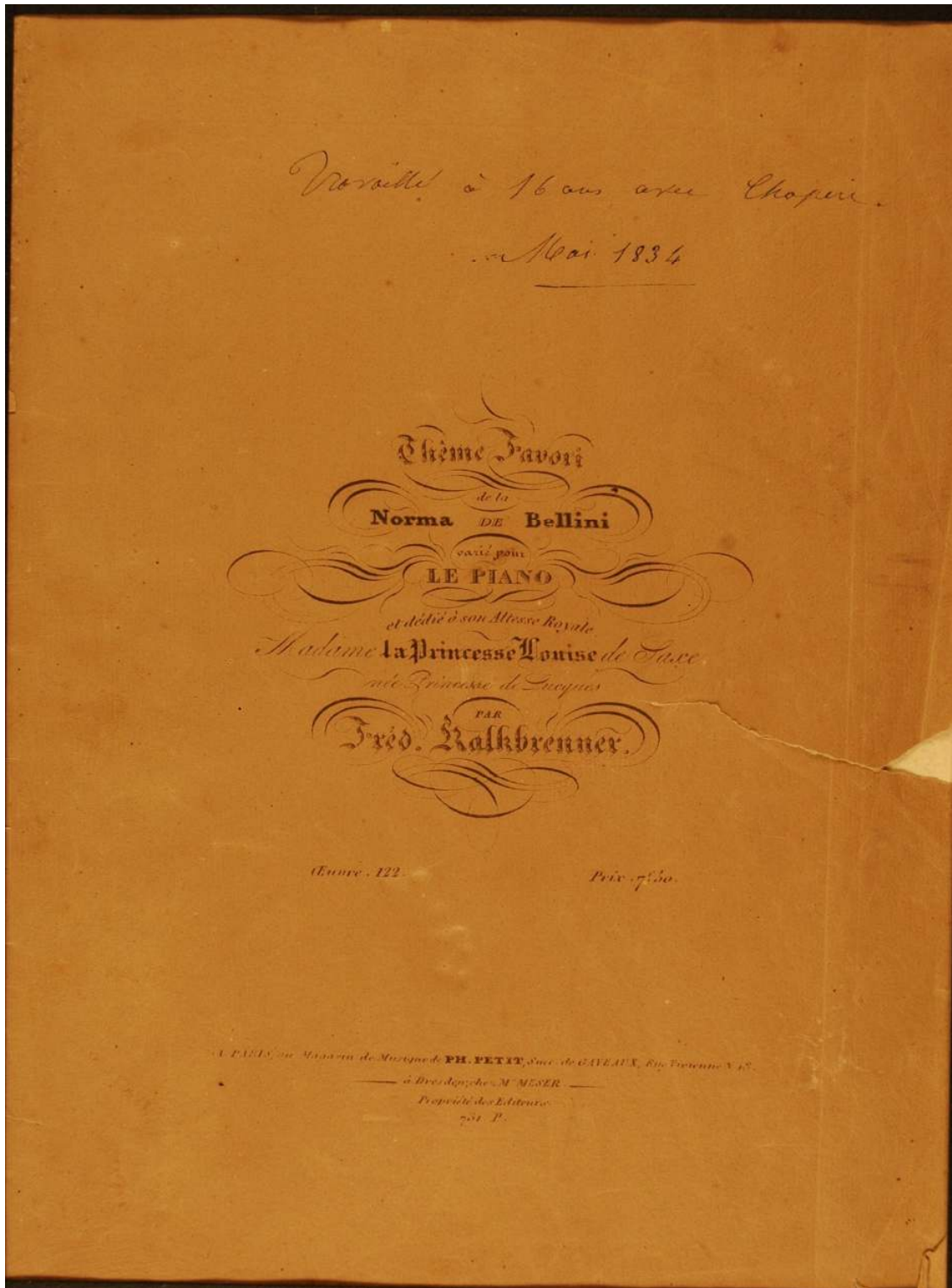
The first score proved to be Kalkbrenner's "Thème Favori de la Norma de Bellini, varié pour le piano," his op. 122, in the edition issued in Paris by Petit (plate number P. 731). Published in early 1834, this piece takes as its theme the tune "Deh! con te, con te li prendi" from the duet between Norma and Adalgisa that opens the second act of *Norma* (unusually for this genre, Kalkbrenner chromatically altered Bellini's accompanimental harmonies already in the initial presentation of the theme). At the top of the wrapper appears an annotation in ink: "Travaillé à 16 ans avec Chopin/Mai 1834". The score itself contains several markings in pencil, many of which appear to be in Chopin's hand: fingerings, legato phrase markings, and, at the end of the second variation (the last variation to show any annotations) the cross-hatch mark that Chopin often used to indicate that he was pleased with the way a student executed a particular piece (or section of a piece). In the concluding measure of the first variation appears a variant cadential figure written in blue ink, not in Chopin's hand, but with the note "indiqué par Chopin" (this hand may be a different one than that on the wrapper).

The second score is the first impression of the French first edition of Chopin's Nocturnes, op. 9. As with the Kalkbrenner, the wrapper to the Chopin edition contains an annotation, but in a different hand than on the Kalkbrenner wrapper (and different, too, from the hand at the end of the first variation): "Nocturne/de/Frédéric Chopin/annoté par lui au crayon/Mai 1834". Of the three works in op. 9, only the E-flat major Nocturne shows annotations. This score contains pencil markings definitely written by Chopin: a correction of a printing error, several fingerings, and—most interestingly—an alternative version of the cadenza at the end of the Nocturne. This alternative cadenza closely resembles (but is not identical to) the versions that Chopin added to the score owned by Zofia Zaleska-Rozengardt in January 1844 and that in 1842 he wrote out on a separate leaf of manuscript paper for Wilhelm von Lenz.²

With the authenticity of the annotations secure, the antiquarian acquired the scores, and subsequently sold them to Hershey Felder (France), in whose collection they now reside. (I am grateful to Mr. Felder for allowing me to reproduce these sources here.)

² See Virginia Fortescue, "The Unknown Chopin: An Alternative to the Cadenza of the Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2," *South African Journal of Musicology* 1 (1981): 45-51. The cadenza appears as item 20 in Fryderyk Chopin, *Nokturny Op. 9-62*, ed. Jan Ekier, Wydanie Narodowe, Seria A, Tom V (Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1995), p. 25. For the Lenz, see plate 19 in Jacques Eigeldinger, *Chopin vu par ses élèves*, 3d ed. (Neuchâtel: la Baconnière, 1988), between pp. 240 and 241. Lenz wrote the date "[18]45" on the manuscript, but Eigeldinger (p. 222) rightly notes that this contradicts Lenz's own reliable testimony elsewhere that Chopin gave him the variants in 1842.

Kalkbrenner score: Title page



Kalkbrenner score: Slur and fingering



Kalkbrenner score: Crosshatch



Kalkbrenner score: Indique

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The image shows a page of handwritten musical notation for the piece 'Indique' by Carl Czerny, often attributed to Kalkbrenner. The page is numbered '5' in the top right corner. The score is written in G major and 3/4 time. It consists of six systems of music, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The notation is dense, featuring many triplets and sixteenth-note patterns. Dynamic markings include *f*, *ff*, and *Cres.*. Performance instructions such as *Ped.* (pedal) are present. The piece concludes with a double bar line and the signature 'Chopin' in the bottom right corner. At the bottom center of the page, the number '751. P.' is printed.

The identity of the student for whom Chopin made these annotations remains unclear. According to the family who wished to sell the scores (and in whose possession they had apparently remained since the time Chopin wrote in them), the student in question was a certain Mme Chertier. About this Mme (or, since she was 16, Mlle?) Chertier I know little, except that she was an acquaintance of Mme Erard (but which Mme Erard?). I have found no reference to any Chertier in the Chopin literature. But as of this writing, aspects of this story (passed down from family member to family member) raise questions about its accuracy. And ignoring the name provided by the sellers does not lead us to any satisfactory possibilities either: none of the birth dates of the relatively few Chopin pupils from this early stage in his teaching career—for example, Caroline Hartmann, Adolf Gutmann, Adèle Forest, or the Baroness d'Est—provide any candidates who would have been 16 years old in May 1834. At present, then, I find myself at an impasse in trying to attach a name to the student.

Are the dates written on the wrappers reliable? We can presume that the hand on the Kalkbrenner is that of the student, the comment being an abbreviated version of something like “[J’ai] travaillé [sur ce morceau] à 16 ans avec Chopin/Mai 1834.” The annotation on the wrapper to the Nocturnes presumably derives from that on the Kalkbrenner, and from the the writer’s knowledge (or assumption) that the person who studied the Kalkbrenner variations with Chopin also studied the Nocturne with him. The formula on the Kalkbrenner variations suggests that the annotation was made some time after the date mentioned there, which raises the possibility of a lapse in memory, or an error in the date. But this possibility seems somewhat unlikely to me, as it would involve a double error, the student needing to misremember the date of the encounter with Chopin, and the student’s own age at that time. When we also note that the dates of the editions themselves (early 1833 for the Chopin; early 1834 for the Kalkbrenner) appear to fit chronologically with the inscriptions on their wrappers, the handwritten dates begin to appear trustworthy. Of course, in the absence of the name of the student, we cannot measure the words “Mai 1834” against this person’s known birth date. But all other things being equal, I think it safe to regard the date as accurate.

(This date might eventually to help identify the student, for in May 1834 Chopin was only available to teach during the first part of the month. Around 13 May, Ferdinand Hiller and he travelled together to Aix-la-Chapelle for a music festival, followed by a trip on the Rhine, and stays in Düsseldorf, Koblenz, and Köln.)

The basic importance of these new sources is clear. First, and doubtless most obvious, the one source presents the earliest known annotated variant to the E-flat major Nocturne. We can now securely assert that Chopin began modifying the ornaments in this work shortly after its publication (the earliest hitherto datable ornament—and of course not all of them can be securely dated—came from the 1840s). Shifting the onset of this ornamental practice back to the first half of the 1830s may require subtle modification of the reasons that Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger adduced for why Chopin felt compelled to add so many variants to precisely this Nocturne. Eigeldinger suggested that Chopin wished both to place his personal stamp on a work that some perceived to be indebted to Field and (because the popularity of the piece came to irritate him) to add virtuosic touches that would elevate the piece beyond the overly sentimentalized performances favored by the ordinary amateur.³ If the personal variants began appearing

³ Eigeldinger, *Chopin vu par ses élèves*, p. 224.

as early as 1834, one wonders if Chopin's irritation had set in quite so soon. More likely, it seems to me, is that the variant in the cadenza shows Chopin trying to inculcate in his students some of the improvisatory sensibility that was understood generally to be part of performing the nocturne.⁴ Moreover, as this particular variant is not particularly demanding from a technical point of view, I doubt Chopin imagined he was making an eventual performance more difficult, and less sentimental, when he pencilled the new ending to the cadenza in the 16-year-old student's score.

Second, the new source for this variant cadenza provides further evidence for Chopin's fluid approach to composition in general, and earlier signs of its application to the genre of the nocturne in particular. In crafting a "special" version of the ending of the E-flat major Nocturne for an individual student, Chopin taught an important lesson about the ongoing nature of composition. This lesson fit well with the tutelage on improvisation, suggesting a kind of continuum between the two domains. In this view, doubtless more implied by Chopin than explicitly stated, the "work" would occupy a realm of subtle and controlled variability, with stylistically appropriate modifications possible from both composer and performer. Hence the sources draw attention to the nuances of a socially-construed model of composition.

Surely other fairly straightforward conclusions can be drawn from these new sources (for example, concerning the evidence that the Kalkbrenner score provides for the kind of phrasing and ornamental variations Chopin the teacher (and presumably performer) was willing to apply to the music of other composers—thus finding himself on the other end of the continuum mentioned in the last paragraph). But I would like to offer for discussion a less obvious way in which these new sources ask us to rethink the relationship between Chopin's biography and his music.

Consider the fascinating accumulation of resonances among the two newly uncovered editions and other known facts from this period in Chopin's life. In the first instance, the two editions annotated in May 1834 effectively create an association between Bellini's *Norma* (admittedly at a step once-removed, through Kalkbrenner's adaptation of it for his variation set) and the "improvisational" alternative to the end of the cadenza that Chopin added to the Nocturne in E-flat major. In the second instance, still in 1834, though probably a bit earlier in the year, we have Hiller's testimony of the congenial evenings Chopin and Bellini spent together at the invitation of Lina Freppa:

I can never forget some evenings that I spent with [Bellini] and Chopin and a few other guests at Madame Freppa's . . . We cordially esteemed her, and sometimes went together to visit her at the extreme end of the Faubourg St. Germain . . . There music was discussed, sung, and played, and then again discussed, played, and sung. Chopin and Madame Freppa seated themselves by turns at the pianoforte; I, too, did my best; Bellini

⁴ For contemporary evidence of the importance of improvising in the genre of the nocturne, see [Pierre] J[oseph Guillaume] Zimmerman, *Encyclopédie du pianiste compositeur*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1840), 2: 70-72. Zimmerman published as an example one of his own Nocturnes, culled from his opus 21. An otherwise unremarkable composition, it is notable for the alternate "*ornemens*" added to a third staff above the treble. These ornaments served as a model for adding "*notes du goût*," as Zimmerman termed improvised decorations. Their presence in a pedagogical treatise suggests the ubiquity of the practice of performers devising their own embellishments in nocturnes. See also Jonathan Bellman, "Improvisation in Chopin's Nocturnes: Some Suggested Parameters" (DMA diss.: Stanford University, 1990).

made remarks, and accompanied himself in one or other of his *cantilene*, rather in illustration of what he had been saying than for the purpose of giving a performance of them.⁵

In the third instance, the one lesson we know that Chopin gave in May 1834 was to the Baroness d'Est (Chopin recorded the Baroness's name in his pocket diary on 8 May 1834, with the number "5" next to it, presumably indicating she had 5 lesson; unfortunately for our purposes, she was then 22 years old, so she cannot be our mystery student), the same Baroness d'Est in whose album the following year would appear side-by-side autograph manuscripts by Bellini (the song "O crudel che il mio pianto") and by Chopin (of course the Impromptu in C-sharp minor, published posthumously as op. 66).⁶

While some element of these correspondences reflects the play of coincidence, viewed in their totality they reinforce for us the importance of the figure of Bellini (both as an acquaintance and as a composer), and especially the power of the Bellinian florid melodic style, to the Chopin of 1834.⁷ Thus the new sources from May 1834 might lead us to attribute some of the impulse to decorate the Nocturne to the intensely vocal milieu within which Chopin was working at the time. If so, in seeking the aesthetic source for Chopin's impulse to offer students special ornaments to the Nocturne in E flat major, we might look as much to the vocal style of Bellini ("Bellini" might stand for the entire Italian operatic school of singing) as to the improvisational tradition of the genre of the nocturne. Recall here the vocally-inflected language of Chopin's teaching of this Nocturne, as reported by Lenz, which features phrases like "invite the first tenor to sing his part in the upper voice", "the theme—like the second variation—should be sung full-voiced, expressive but without being *sentimentalisé* for all that", and "for the style, one should take as a model Pasta, the great Italian school of singing".⁸ The improvisatory quality of the added ornaments should likewise spring from the student having absorbed the essence of this Italian school of singing, even as the ornaments themselves seemed to open the way to a profound, and profoundly transformed, pianistic sensibility. For Chopin, the way to transcendent pianism lay through imagining the voice.⁹ And might we extend this insight to his compositional art in general, and see in these correspondences evidence that points to Bellini as providing a fundamental filter through which Chopin discovered his own mature lyrical voice in his first years in Paris?

From these modest sources, then, we gain insight into pragmatic aspects of his working life: how he worked to bring music alive to a sixteen-year-old pupil, how he cultivated a student's favor by means of a few simple jottings in a score. But I would hope somewhat more than adding a new variant to the list for op. 9 no. 2 or a new student to the roster of Chopin pupils is at stake in thinking about these sources. What they seem

⁵ Ferdinand Hiller, *Künstlerleben* (Köln, 1880), pp. 146-147, as translated in Frederick Niecks, *Frederick Chopin as a Man and Musician*, 2 vols. (New York, 1902; repr. ed. New York, 1973), 1: 287.

⁶ See the important study of this album by Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, "Chopin, Bellini et le Théâtre-Italien: Autour de l'album de Mme d'Est," *L'univers musical de Chopin* (Paris: Fayard, 2000), pp. 99-109.

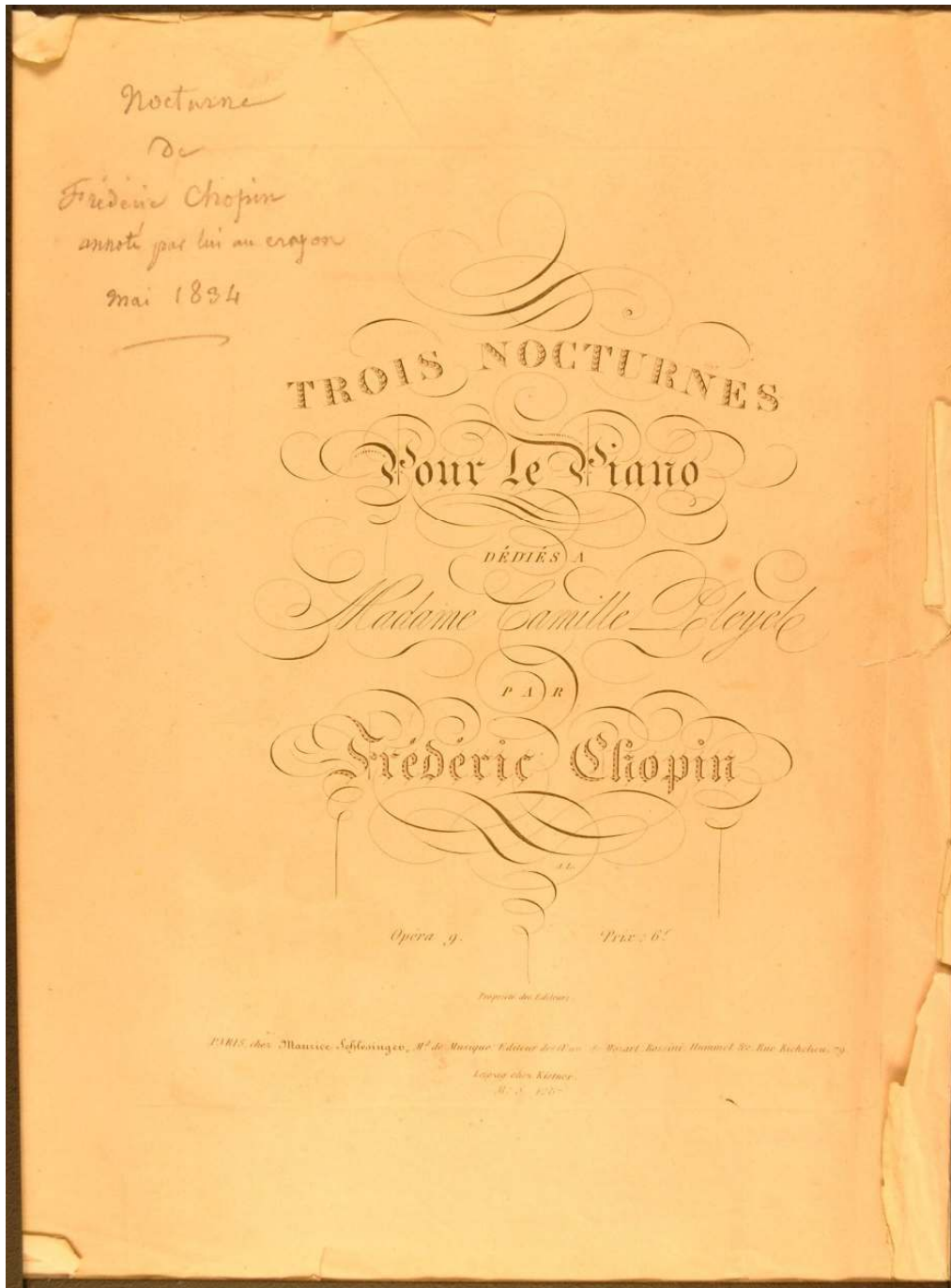
⁷ The degree to which Ferdinand Hiller figures into all parts of this story is also striking. But that is a topic for another paper.

⁸ Eigeldinger, *Chopin vu par ses élèves*, p. 119.

⁹ For an excellent meditation on this topic, see David M. Kasunic, "Chopin the Mimic, or Singing at Night," the first chapter in his "Chopin and the Singing Voice, from the Romantic to the Real" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2004), pp. 18-76.

to invite from us *Chopinolodzy* gathered here in Warsaw is an effort to think through the intellectual meaning of his teaching, to understand it as a sign of a more complex engagement with the societies and cultures that nourished him. This paper takes only very tentative steps toward such an engagement with these new sources. Perhaps our discussion can further illuminate how this profound musical thinker communicated with those around him.

Chopin score: Title page



Chopin score: Cadenza



Chopin score: transcription of the Cadenza

This image displays a printed musical score for Chopin's Cadenza, including a transcription of the original manuscript. The score is organized into several systems. The first system shows the right-hand part (treble clef) with a melodic line and the left-hand part (grand staff) with a complex accompaniment. Performance instructions include 'ff senza tempo' and 'cresc.'. The second system shows the right-hand part with a melodic line and the left-hand part with a complex accompaniment, including a 'dim.' instruction. The third system shows the right-hand part with a melodic line and the left-hand part with a complex accompaniment, including a 'loco' instruction. The fourth system shows the right-hand part with a melodic line and the left-hand part with a complex accompaniment, including a 'tempo' instruction and a '3' marking. The fifth system shows the right-hand part with a melodic line and the left-hand part with a complex accompaniment, including a 'a tempo' instruction and 'pp' and 'ppp' markings. The score is on white paper and includes the number '8' at the beginning of the first system.