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THE PIANO LANDSCAPE OF POLISH LANDS IN CHOPIN’S TIMES

Both the genius of Chopin, as a pianist and a composer, and the ‘musical soil’ on which he was raised were not confined to the couple of decades during which he matured in his homeland. They were the result of many centuries of local musical traditions and, above all, at least several decades of the ‘cultivation’ of piano music, at first mainly in the circles of the aristocracy and rich landed gentry, and then also among the burgher class, relatively new in Poland but growing in strength and affluence. The attendant evolution of musical education and musical life – both concert life and music in salons and private homes – contributed to the emergence of the cult of Chopin and his music. A significant role in all this was also played by imported and domestically produced instruments for the performance of that music, namely, pianos.

It is the latter – the design of pianos and its evolution over time – that forms the principal theme of the author’s considerations. Discussed in this article are the musical and practical attributes of pianos as objects of everyday and occasional – domestic and public – use. These reflections refer to the lifetime of Fryderyk Chopin, with emphasis on his time in Poland and on the lands of central Poland. Also highlighted are the most important elements in the history of the domestic piano industry of those times, including brief profiles of the leading piano makers in Polish lands. The most important among them was the Warsaw piano maker Fryderyk Buchholtz, regarded as the finest in his profession. He was a friend of another Fryderyk – the young Chopin, for whom he built the instrument which the composer used in his Warsaw home c.1827–1830.