

Jan Ekier

AN ATTEMPT TO DISCOVER SIMILARITIES BETWEEN CHOPIN’S WORK KNOWN AS ‘ŻYDEK’ [THE LITTLE JEW] AND HIS MAZURKAS WITH OPUS NUMBER

This article concerns a work written by Fryderyk Chopin as a child, known as ‘Żydek’ [The little Jew], about which the composer wrote twice in 1824 from Szafarnia in letters to his family in the form of the ‘Kurier Szafarski’ [Szafarnia Courier].

According to a tradition popularised by Marcei Antoni Szulc (1873) and perpetuated by many Chopin scholars (Jachimecki, Sydow, Kobylańska, Hoesick, Hedley, Brown, Belotti, Tomaszewski), the name ‘The Little Jew’ is applied to the Mazurka in A minor, Op. 17 No. 4. In the mid twentieth century, some authors (Miketta, Chomiński) undermined the identification of the Mazurka in A minor, Op. 17 No. 4 as ‘The Little Jew’, supposedly characterised by ‘an unquestionable humorous stamp’.

In his article, Jan Ekier contends that an error was made in the work’s identification. In his opinion, ‘The Little Jew’ is not the Mazurka in A minor, Op. 17 No. 4, but the Mazurka in A minor, Op. 7 No. 2. One of his arguments is the character of Op. 17 No. 4, to which pupils gave the nickname – accepted by Chopin – ‘sorrowful face’. Additional evidence is provided by the Breitkopf & Härtel edition of the Mazurka in A minor, Op. 7 No. 2 from 1902, with its contrasting introduction in the key of A major, above which we find the term ‘duda’, denoting a player of the *dudy*, a traditional wind instrument.

This text was presented by Jan Ekier during the conference *Fryderyk Chopin (1810–1849) – dwa wieki fascynacji* [Fryderyk Chopin (1810–1849): two centuries of fascination], held on 22 February 2010 at the Fryderyk Chopin University of Music in Warsaw. It was not published at that time.