

KRZYSZTOF BILICA

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POLAND, WARSAWZWIĄZEK KOMPOZYTORÓW POLSKICH  
SEKCJA MUZYKOLOGÓW**‘CROWING BEFORE DAWN’ *À LA RONDEAU***

It is highly likely that Chopin introduced into the Rondo of his F minor Concerto an attractive horn signal inspired by the first horn player of the National Theatre Orchestra in Warsaw at the time, Karol Goerner. It was Goerner who chose a natural wind instrument and familiarised the composer with its performance capabilities. The *cor de signal* part was based on four harmonic tones produced from that instrument with the use of overblowing. Chopin became aware of the inner composition of the sound, its spectrum. The widely spread broken chords that he would later use so frequently reflect the disposition of the harmonic tones of that sound; they are structures that he was deliberately using a century and a half before those introduced by the twentieth-century spectralists.

It has not been established whether this two-bar horn signal phrase was a quotation of a specific signal or a stylisation of such signals, hunting, military or postal, and we know that Chopin travelled by stage coach, joined in hunting trips and observed military reviews. The signal that the author discovered in a collection of signals for cavalymen published in 1919, identical to the signal from Chopin’s F minor Concerto, appears to be a quotation from that Concerto, a sort of tribute paid to the composer by the military.

The author shows that attributing to Chopin the opinion that this solo horn phrase ‘is wretched’ and was intended to imitate ‘a cock crowing before dawn’ is preposterous and lays bare the apocryphal character of the so-called letters from Chopin to Delfina Potocka, in which that opinion was expressed. Bilica also points out that the composer indicated that this two-bar signal in the F minor Concerto should be performed on a *cor de signal*, a natural horn, and not on a contemporary valve horn. Introducing a natural horn into his composition, Chopin probably wanted to obtain a colouristic effect that can be given by the harmonic tones produced from this instrument.

The essay has been given the form of a rondo (*à la rondeau*), which Chopin employed during his early period (from 1825 to 1833), when the F minor Concerto was composed, with its last movement Rondo in which the horn signal in question appears. The mention of this signal repeated in the text is the equivalent of a refrain (A), while the other textual passages that entwine it equate roughly to episodes: (B) the French horn player Goerner, (C) Chopin in Szembek’s camp, (D) quasi-spectralisms in Chopin and Szymanowski, (E) Chopin in the

phonosphere of hunting and military parades, (F) the newly discovered ‘Officer’s call’ in *Sygnaly dla kawalerji*, (G) Paulina Czernicka’s confabulation about a cock crowing before dawn, and finally (A + coda) a closing mention of the horn signal in the Concerto and a performance suggestion for conductors.