

# In Chopin's footsteps around the University of Warsaw

Bicentenary of Fryderyk Chopin's birth (1810-2010)



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*The University term begins today and I must go and see about Elsner, Bielawski, music-stands and mutes for the violins [...] without them my Adagio would be a failure [...]. The Rondo is effective and the first movement Allegro is impressive...*

These were Chopin's emotional words written on 22 September 1830, just after completing the *Concerto in E minor*, and a few hours before the masterpiece was to be performed by professors of music and his colleagues. Chopin who, at that time lived with his parents in the south annexe of the Kasiński Palace in Krakowskie Przedmieście (now the Academy of Fine Arts), had an intimate relationship with the University that was located on the other side of the street. He was a graduate of the University (having studied there between 1826 and 1829) and was in some sense its "child", having lived there for an entire decade - from 1817 to 1827. Here his musical talent grew and developed. He also witnessed the shaping of the University *campus*, the construction of its successive buildings, the creation of the Museum of Fine Arts, and staging there artistic exhibitions. Chopin recalls many of these events in his letters, naming many professors and students, as well as referring to the University's Botanical Gardens and the lectures he frequented. His first surviving letter written at the age of 13, and addressed to Eustachy Marylski, concerns the University.

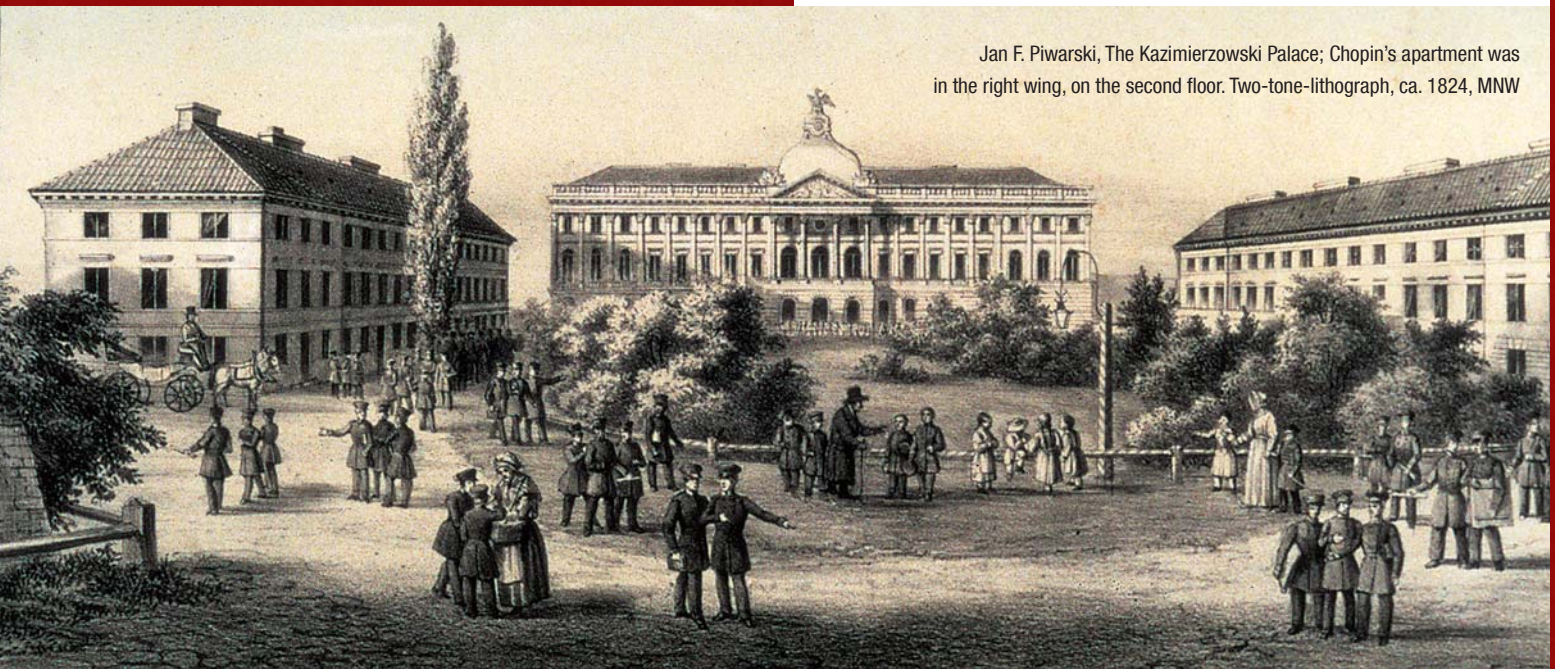
The University of Warsaw, established between 1808 and 1818 (thus contemporaneous with the universities in Berlin, London, and Virginia) and officially founded in 1816, was one of the crowning glories of the Polish Enlightenment. In 1824, over 1,200 students were studying at its five faculties – Law and Administration, Medicine, Philosophy, Theology, and the Fine Arts and Humanities. Almost immediately after its foundation it began collaborating with other European universities, and the University authorities sent silver medals bearing its emblem to 17 of them. It had a rapidly growing Library, a Print Room with over 100,000 engravings and drawings by old masters, and various cabinets containing natural history collections, numismatics, plaster casts and architectural models. As well as the Department of Fine Arts, the University in the early 1820s incorporated the Main School of Music.

When in the autumn of 1826, young Chopin entered the Main School of Music, which had been created by Józef Elsner some five years earlier, its University status was indisputable. Although the School was an integral part of the University, all practical instruction (vocal and instrumental) was provided at the Conservatory, located near the Royal Castle. In the University buildings the young composer was taught figured bass and theory of music, and he also attended lectures on history and literature. *I go* – wrote Chopin in a letter to Jan Białobłocki on 2 November 1826 – *to Elsner six hours a week for strict counterpoint; I listen to Bentkowski [a historian], Brodziński [a historian of literature] and other subjects that are in many way associated with music [Osiński?]*. There are two portraits of Fryderyk by Eliza Radziwiłł, one executed in 1826, the other



Eliza Radziwiłł, A Portrait of Fryderyk Chopin, 1826, MFC





Jan F. Piwarski, The Kazimierzowski Palace; Chopin's apartment was in the right wing, on the second floor. Two-tone-lithograph, ca. 1824, MNW

in 1829. He mentioned them in a letter to his friend Tytus Woyciechowski: *Princess Eliza [...] has drawn me twice in her album and, I am told, has got a good likeness.*

The University of Warsaw was located in the former Royal residence originally known as the Villa Regia, and later the Kazimierzowski Palace, after King Jan Kazimierz who lived there in the mid-seventeenth century. For decades (including in Chopin's time), the name Kazimierzowski Palace referred to the whole historic



Fig. 3 Jan Tafelowski, The Porektorski Building (with Chopin's apartment), ca. 1827, AGAD

complex. It was also known as the "Cadets' Barracks" because between 1765 and 1793 it housed the School of Knights, whose students were known as cadets. A beautiful gate, crowned with a large tin globe, built in 1732 (Fig. 1) led to the courtyard of the palace. The Chopin family had to pass through this gate in March 1817 when they moved to their lodgings in the University grounds, where they lived until August 1827. The old gate was dismantled in 1819, and the present one – eclectic in character – was built in 1910 (Fig. 2; map – 1); it is now one of the most important symbols of the University.

The south annexe of the Kazimierzowski Palace, where the Chopins lived, was built – together with its twin building located on the opposite side of the courtyard – in a pure classical style in 1815-1816 (Fig. 3; map – 2). The Rectors of the Lyceum and the University lived there (hence the name Porektorski), as did Professors Karol Skrodzki, Kazimierz Brodziński, Feliks P. Jarocki, Antoni Blank and Juliusz Kolberg and their families. One of Professor Kolberg's sons, Oskar, wrote in his memoirs:

*When we moved to Warsaw we took up residence in one of the long two-storeyed annexes (in the so-called Cadets' Barracks, next to the Lyceum, the Library and the University). Our apartment – four rooms and a kitchen – was on the ground floor. Our neighbour across the landing was the poet Brodziński, and on the second floor (the same staircase) lived Szopen, Prof. of French, who kept boarders. His son was already then (in 1824) considered to be an exceptionally talented musician.*



Fig. 1 The Gate of the Kazimierzowski Palace, 1732, dismantled in 1819



Fig. 2 The present Gate of the University of Warsaw, 2009



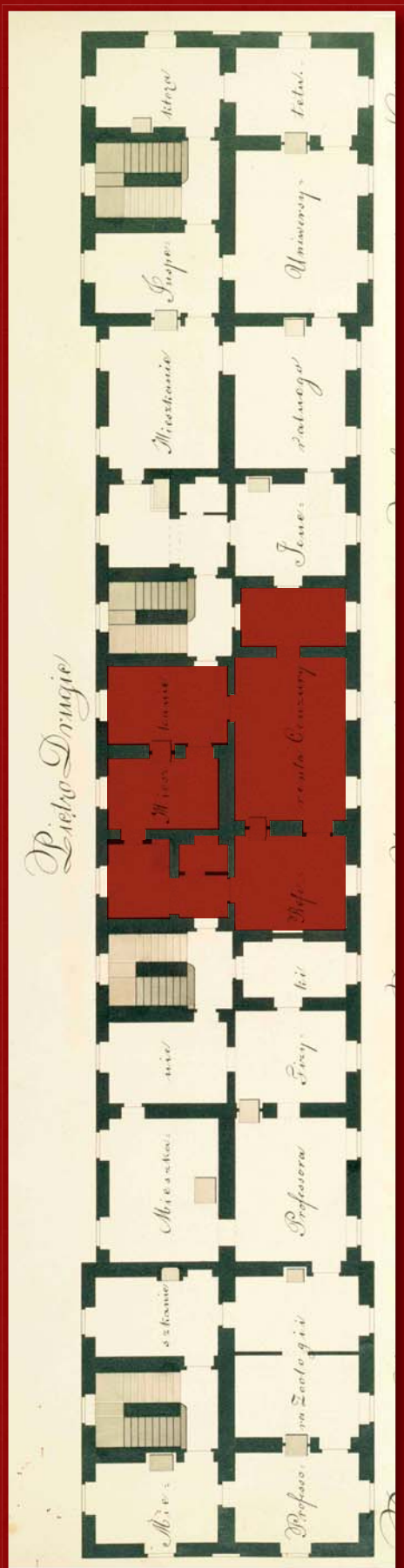


Fig. 4 Jan Tańkowski. The Porektorski Building - plan of the second floor with Chopin's apartment, ca. 1827, AGAD

Wilhelm Kolberg, Oskar's brother, who was in the same class at the Lyceum as Chopin, and later, in 1829, attended private English lessons with him, also left us valuable information.

*I often remember – wrote Wilhelm – as if it were yesterday our learned Cadets' Barracks and this long annexe next to the Lyceum, where I lived, and I remember Fr[ederick] practising on the piano and us practising in the yard, [I remember] the figure of Chopin père and his voice coming from the second-floor window, when at dusk he called back his charges who were playing ball downstairs.*

Thanks to the documentation of Jan Tańkowski's survey of the University buildings conducted in 1827, we are able to ascertain the size of the Chopins' apartment located on the second floor in the Porektorski Building (Fig. 4). The first apartment occupied a zoology professor, Jarocki, with whom Fryderyk went to Berlin in 1828; the second belonged to a professor of physics, Skrodzki, who lived there with his son Eugeniusz; and the third was Chopins' apartment, located in the central part of the floor. It apparently had five rooms and a kitchen, which enabled them to take several boarders. Three of the windows in their apartment faced north, and four faced south. Sadly, little is known about the décor, although we do know that music flourished within it, and that often, after reading Julian U. Niemcewicz's then famous *Historical Songs*, Fryderyk would set them to music.

The Porektorski Building which was home to so many people during Chopin's time there has maintained its original form to this day, although in 1860 it was decorated with pilasters and pediments with reliefs. The second door and stairway to which Fryderyk Chopin and Oskar Kolberg referred still exists, although many of the interiors have been extensively altered. Currently it is home to the University of Warsaw's Institute of Art History. The shorter side of the building, that is the one facing the Kazimierzowski Palace, has a portrait of Fryderyk executed in stucco which bears the following inscription: FRYDERYK CHOPIN LIVED HERE BETWEEN 1817-1827 (Fig. 5; map – 3). On the two-hundredth anniversary of the composer's birth, a new plaque dedicated to Chopin, authored by Professor Antoni Pastwa, was unveiled in the Kazimierzowski Palace bearing an inscription that refers to his University studies in the years 1826-1829 (back cover).



Fig. 5 The Chopin Plaque on the façade of the Porektorski Building

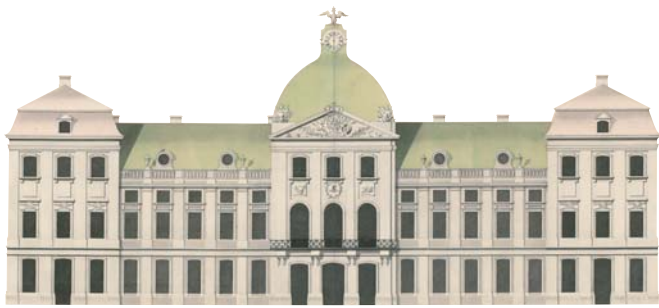


Fig. 6 The Kazimierzowski Palace, façade, 1771, Gab. Ryc., BUW



Fig. 7 Leonard Schmidtner, The Kazimierzowski Palace, ca. 1824, MHW



Fig. 8 The Kazimierzowski Palace, 2009

During Chopin's time the Kazimierzowski Palace (built in the 1630s as a royal residence and rebuilt many times in the eighteenth century) acquired a magnificent neo-classical façade with a four-columned Corinthian portico and pediment with a sculptural relief which has survived to this day (Figs. 6-8; map – 4). The work was carried out between 1815 and 1828 by Hilary Szpilowski and Waclaw Ritschel. Circa 1825 the pediment was decorated with a sculptural relief by Antoni Maliński showing *Apollo among the Muses*. The tympanum on the garden side, with its statues of Hercules and Athena, created in the mid-eighteenth century, has also been preserved. The late Baroque dome that can be seen in engravings and pictures of the period survived until 1844. Its crowning glory was the eagle taking flight – the symbol of the Polish Republic.

The ground floor of the Kazimierzowski Palace was home to the Lyceum and a chapel, while the upper storeys housed the University Library with its splendid and lavishly endowed Print Room. The beauty, spaciousness and resources of the Library are well conveyed by the print reproduced here (Fig. 9). Today, the upper floors of the Palace are home to the University authorities, while the Gold Hall and Senate Hall, reconstructed after the war in the late Baroque style, are the venue for most University ceremonies of any importance.

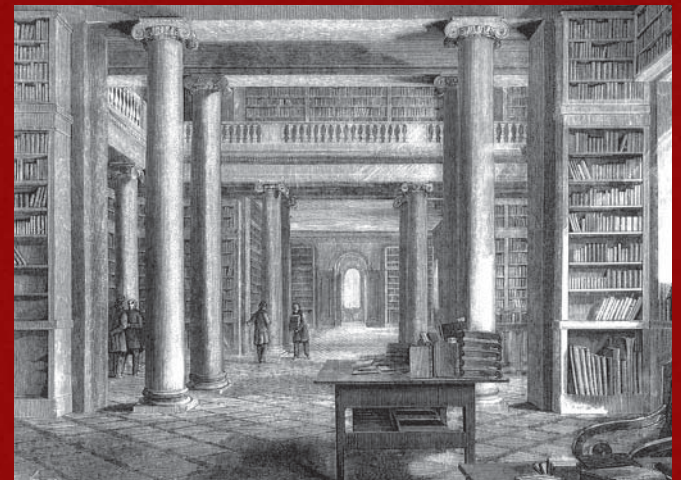


Fig. 9 Franciszek Tegazzo, The Interior of the University Library, 1865



Fig. 10 Jan Tafelowski, The Mineralogical Building, ca. 1827, AGAD

The building on the south side of the Palace, constructed in 1817 (Fig. 10; map – 5) has, since 1821, been known as the Mineralogy Building following the transfer there of the University's collection of minerals (Today it houses the Faculty of Polish Studies).





Fig. 11 Wincenty Kasprzycki, A View of the University Exhibition of Fine Arts in 1828, MNW

It was also home to the University's Cabinet of Numismatics and Professor Zygmunt Vogel conducted his classes in draughtsmanship there for the Lyceum students, which Fryderyk would have attended. The artistic atmosphere of the place is recalled in Wincenty Kasprzycki's beautiful painting dating from the autumn of 1828 (Fig. 11) which shows one of the University's exhibitions of the fine arts. The Mineralogy Building has retained its original appearance to this day thanks to the documentation of Leonard Schmidtnier's survey of 1823-1824, which enabled the building to be reconstructed almost down to the last detail after the Second World War (Fig. 12).



Fig. 12 The Mineralogical Building, currently the Faculty of Polish Studies, 2009

The building to the north of the Kazimierzowski Palace contained the chemistry laboratory and auditorium, as well as the halls for the students of the Lyceum – and so in the years 1824-1826 Fryderyk must have attended classes there regularly (Fig. 13; map – 6). The present building was constructed on the foundations of the original one.

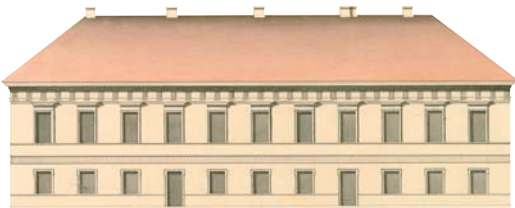


Fig. 13 Jan Tańfilowski, The Chemical Building, ca. 1827, AGAD



Fig. 14 Marcin Zaleski, A View of the Kazimierzowski Palace from Powiśle, 1836, MHW

The University's Botanical Gardens, established in 1811, at the foot of the escarpment behind the Kazimierzowski Palace (Fig. 14; map – 7) held a special place in the affections of Fryderyk and his colleagues. In 1818 a larger garden was created in the Royal Łazienki and, as a result, the garden near the palace was slowly transformed into a park.



Eliza Radziwiłł, A Portrait of Fryderyk Chopin, 1829, MFC

*We who lived with the Chopins – wrote Fryderyk's older colleague, Marylski – often met him [Professor Samuel Linde] in the Botanical Garden which was right behind the Lyceum. We used to go there to learn our lessons or to read the books which were given to us by the public library [i.e. the University Library] on the guarantee of the Professors.*



# In Chopin's footsteps around the University of Warsaw

Bicentenary of Fryderyk Chopin's birth (1810-2010)



Designed by Agnieszka Adamiak ©

## *Campus of the University of Warsaw*

1. The Main Gate of the University
2. The Porektorski Building, the Chopins lived here in the years 1817–1827
3. The Chopin Plaque
4. The Kazimierzowski Palace, the Main University Offices  
(in Chopin's time it housed the Warsaw Lyceum and the University Library)

5. The Mineralogy Building (now the Faculty of Polish Studies)
6. The Chemical Building (now the Offices of the Faculty of Law and Administration)
7. The grounds of the former Botanical Gardens
8. The Auditorium Pavilion; in Chopin's time Professors Brodziński, Bentkowski, Osiński, Skarbek and most probably Elsner lectured here (now the Medical University)
9. The Fine Arts Building (now the Faculty of History)
10. The Tyszkiewicz-Potocki Palace



Fryderyk himself wrote thus in May and June 1826:

*My Botanical Garden, that is the old one behind the palace, has been beautifully done by the Commission. There are no more carrots that used to be so nice to eat beside the spring; nor sandwiches, nor arbours, nor lettuces, nor cabbage, nor bad smells; only flower-beds à la manière anglaise.*

*If you knew what changes there are in our Botanical Garden, you'd hold your head (in astonishment) - They have put such flower-beds, paths, plantations, shrubs and so on, that it's a pleasure to go in, especially as we have a key.*

Fryderyk experienced his first youthful *affaires de coeur* in the University gardens. Eugeniusz Skrodzki (known as Wielisław) wrote:

*I saw Fryderyk walking alone with one young lady. I showed him bizarre worms and bugs, asking anything about them which struck me. To the lady, I offered freshly picked flowers. Fryderyk laughed with kindness and gave me caramels he had removed from his pocket. Up until 1836 verses written in pencil were visible on the bench; whether by Fryderyk's hand I do not know, but I remember that once I came upon him as he was carving two hearts surrounded by thorns with a pocket knife. And perhaps he himself was sometimes that poet of the bench.*



Fig. 16 Marcin Zaleski, A View of the Auditorium Pavilion, MHW

creasing number of students at the University, to the extent that they could not fit into the halls of the first University building, and also because the Acts [Assemblies] of the University used to take place in the Church of the Nuns of the Visitation as a result of the lack of a suitable hall, ordered the small house at the rear of the Tyszkiewicz Palace to be demolished, and on this site in line with the Fine Arts Building had a similarly shaped building erected with a similar metal-covered roof, in which appropriately to the need for seating halls, large halls

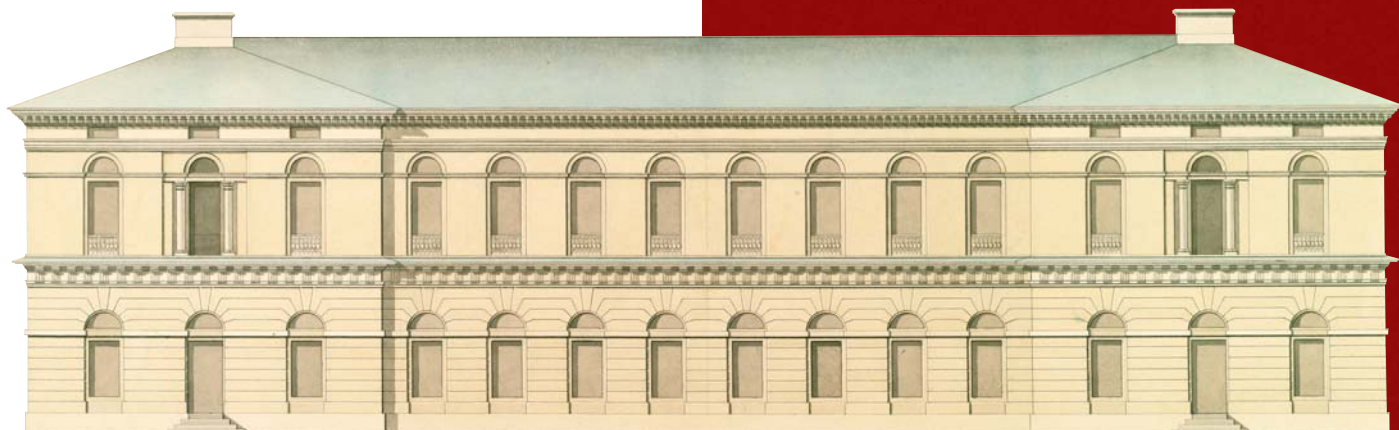


Fig. 15 Jan Tańfilowski, The Auditorium Pavilion, ca. 1827, AGAD

The Auditorium Building, currently occupied by the Medical University of Warsaw, was constructed in 1820-1821 as a twin to the Fine Arts Building situated diametrically opposite to the south (Figs. 15-16; map – 8). In his *Chronicle of the Kaźmierowski Palace*, Feliks P. Jarocki, the Chopins' family friend, who has already been mentioned above, wrote:

*When [in 1820] the walls of the Fine Arts Building were almost completed, the minister [Potocki], in view of the suddenly in-*

*for lectures and a suitable site for the Physics Department, this building was chosen and named the Physics Building.*

Unfortunately, it has not yet been possible to discover in which of the buildings (the Auditorium or the Museum) the Rector of the Music School, Józef Elsner, Chopin's teacher, gave his lectures. It is, however, known that Chopin's godfather – Fryderyk Skarbek, Professor of Economics – lectured in one of the halls in the Auditorium Building. The main auditori-





Fig. 17 Wojciech Gerson, The Interior of the Auditorium, ca. 1867

um on the ground floor mentioned by Jarocki (which Tafiłowski calls the University Ceremonial Hall – Fig. 17) was witness to the then famous Saturday lectures by Ludwik Osiński, which Fryderyk and Marylski, as well as other colleagues, doubtless attended. Aleksander Jełowicki, the author of one of the finest memoirs of Chopin, described it thus:

artist Antoni Blank, who had a keen interest in painting and drawing. Chopin also had daily encounters with those artists who were professors at the University's Department of Fine Arts, founded in 1817, which was the first School of Fine Arts in Poland.

Jarocki writes about the construction of the Department of Fine Arts Building in his *Chronicle of the Kaźmierowski Palace*:

[...] in the autumn of the same year foundations were laid on the west side of the Kazimierzowski Palace's courtyard for the Fine Arts Building. It was to contain a huge hall [Columned Hall] intended for the statues [plaster casts], which [until now] were kept in the [Royal] Castle as mementoes of the famous Painting School of [Marcello] Bacciarelli established by King Stanisław August.

The monumental Columned Hall boasted 700 plaster casts of the most outstanding antique sculptures, which were the University's pride and joy in Chopin's time (Figs. 18-20; map – 9). Next to this was the painting studio, renowned throughout Poland, and one floor above it, the hall, completed in 1819, which held

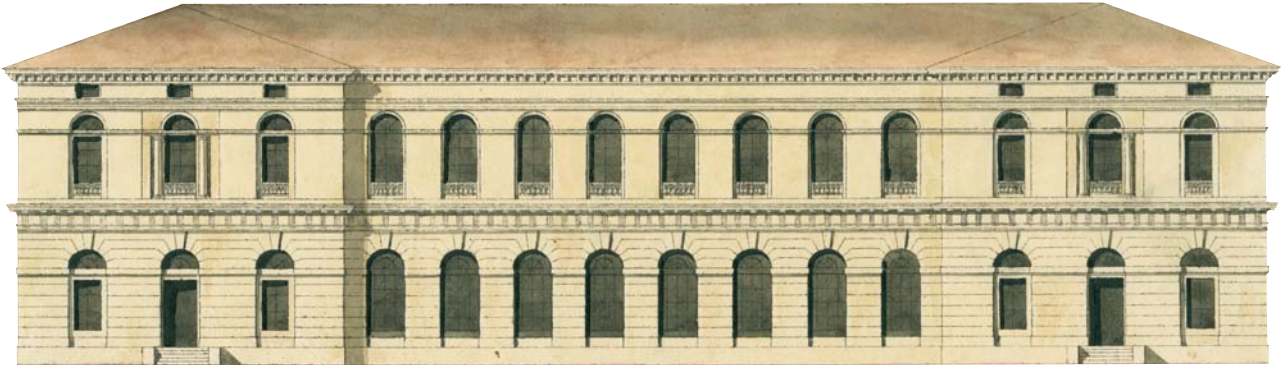


Fig. 18 Leonard Schmidtner, The Fine Arts Building, ca. 1824, MHW



Fig. 19 The Fine Arts Building, ca. 1888

In that era (1824-25), the University of Warsaw had over 1,200 students, a large book collection, rich faculties and many good teachers. Lectures on Polish literature were the most brilliant, and there were two teachers for it: the far-famed Osiński and the warm-hearted Brodziński [...] One went to a Brodziński lecture as if to a familiar friend, and one always left with a heart filled with affection and a tear in the eye.

Among his many talents, Fryderyk was also a gifted artist. A dozen or so of his drawings, caricatures and landscapes have been preserved to this day. This innate talent was further developed thanks to the lessons in draughtsmanship that Professor Vogel gave to the Lyceum students. Also of significance was his friendship with Jan Białobłocki, a law student and a pupil of the



Fig. 20 Franciszek Tegazzo, The University collection of plaster casts, ca. 1866



the zoological cabinet, a kind of natural history museum. It was for this reason that the building was named the Fine Arts Building or the Zoological Building. Today it houses the Faculty of History.

From 1819, the Department of Fine Arts organised artistic exhibitions every two years, which took place immediately beside Chopin's house, and one of the organisers of these exhibitions – Professor Blank – lived in the same staircase as Fryderyk. In a letter to Jan Białobłocki of autumn 1825, Chopin wrote:

*[...] the exhibitions are opening in Warsaw, both in the Town Hall and in the University. I don't tell you what is where, because as yet there's nothing to see and I haven't seen anything; but very soon my goggles will behold jolis tableaux, jolis portraits, jolis machines, bons pianos, bons draps, in short quelque chose d'excellent; my paw shall describe them for you, and the messenger from Dobrzyń shall bring the description.*

This letter helps us to see how, as youth, Chopin's personality and interests were influenced by his time spent among artists. He would have seen the exhibition organised in 1828, which was portrayed by Wincenty Kasprzycki in the above-mentioned painting, now preserved in the National Museum in Warsaw.



Jan F. Piwarski, The Kazimierzowski Palace courtyard with students, detail, ca. 1844, MNW

### Later buildings on the University campus

A number of buildings have survived from the time of Chopin, although several newer ones were to appear later. In the 1820s, the campus took on a neo-classical shape which has remained to this day. The Library, built at the end of the nineteenth century (Fig. 21), which is currently used as an auditorium, also follows this style to some extent. The eclecticism of this building does not affect the overall style of the complex of buildings, although the once magnificent *cour d'honneur*, which Chopin liked so much, pulsing with the dignity of this erstwhile royal location, can only be admired in watercolours, engravings and old photographs. In the mid-1930s, this architectural symphony of harmony and symmetry was further enhanced by the addition of the Auditorium Maximum (extensively redesigned between 1951-1955 after the destruction caused by the Second World War – Fig. 22). As with the Main School building of 1841-1842, its Ionic capitals lend the Auditorium Maximum a particular charm (Fig. 23).



Fig. 21 The Old University of Warsaw Library Building, 2009



Fig. 22 Auditorium Maximum, 2009



Fig. 23 The Main School, 2009





Fig. 24 Krzysztof F. Dietrich, A View of Krakowskie Przedmieście, ca. 1827

### In Krakowskie Przedmieście

Opposite the University gate is the Krasieński Palace and its annexes (Fig. 24). On the second floor of the south annexe is Chopin's Salon (where the Chopins lived between 1827-1830), while above it, on the third floor, the composer had his study. In a letter to Tytus Woyciechowski of 27 December 1828, Chopin wrote:

*Above there is a room which is to serve for my comfort, the stairs lead to it from the cloakroom, and there I will have my old piano, my old desk, it will be a hiding place for me.*

It was here that he wrote his masterpieces – the *F minor* and *E minor* concertos – partially being a reflection of his feelings towards Konstancja Gładkowska, a beautiful singer from the Conservatory, whom Fryderyk fell in love with in mid-April 1829.

A few steps further down the road is the Holy Cross Church, the final resting place of Fryderyk's heart. It was brought from Paris by his sister Ludwika in 1850. After 1857, Chopin's mother, sister Izabela and her husband lived on the second



Fig. 25 The Zamoyski House, ca. 1870

floor of the neighbouring building, Zamoyski House (today at Nowy Świat 69) (Fig. 25); Justyna Chopin died here in 1861. It was from this apartment that the Russian soldiers threw out Chopin's piano after the assassination attempt on Governor Berg in September 1863; many mementoes of the composer, including his priceless letters, were burnt on the pavement in front of this house.



## The Church of the Nuns of the Visitation – Chopin, Lyceum organist

On the northern side of the University gate there are two palaces belonging to the University complex - the Czetwertyński-Uruski Palace of the 1830s, and the particularly notable Tyszkiewicz-Potocki Palace with its characteristic sculptures of powerful Atlases holding up the balcony (Figs. 26-27; map – 10). Dating from the end of the eighteenth century, this fine building houses the University Museum and the Institute of Musicology. The ballroom on the first floor, decorated with beautiful stuccoes, including a representation of the *Judgement of Paris*, is one of the most popular venues for the University's academic conferences and concerts.



Fig. 26 Leonard Schmidtner, The Tyszkiewicz-Potocki Palace, ca. 1824, MHW



Fig. 27 The Tyszkiewicz-Potocki Palace, 2009

The Church of the Nuns of the Visitation, situated immediately beside the Tyszkiewicz Palace, on the cobbled square leading to Królewska Street, was at that time the University church (Fig. 28). The church, which dates back to the Vasa dynasty (seven-teenth century), has not changed since Chopin's time, when he used to go every week in discharge of a highly important duty. In a witty letter to Jan Białobłocki written at the end of November 1825, he noted:

*I am appointed organist to the Lyceum. So you see, my wife and all my children will have double cause to respect me. Aha, Noble Sir, what a head I've got! The most important person in the whole Lyceum, after his reverence the priest! Every Sunday I play the organ for the Wızıtki and the others sing.*



Fig. 28 Jan Seydlitz, Krakowskie Przedmieście with the Church of the Nuns of the Visitation and the Tyszkiewicz-Potocki Palace, mid-nineteenth century, MNP

Fryderyk's contemporary, Józef Sikorski, also wrote of his exceptional organ playing:

*Every Sunday and holy day [...] a morning mass was held for the University's students at the Church of the Nuns of the Visitation. [...] Chopin, [...] in the last year of his residence in Warsaw, was often a guest in the choir, and eagerly played the fugues of a number of masters on the organ, as well as his own improvisations. [...] And once it happened in the break between sections of the mass performed with the orchestra, that Chopin sat at the organ and, following the example of famous organists, took as his theme the motif of the previous section, and a wealth of ideas so great and in such an uninterrupted flow poured forth from his hands that everyone [...], astonished, captivated, forgot their place and the duties they had gathered to perform.*

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Chopin spent what were perhaps the happiest years of his life within the surroundings of the University of Warsaw, soaking up its academic and artistic atmosphere. It was here that he created his youthful compositions, developing a fierce patriotism and thirst for knowledge. In his beautifully written letters he speaks warmly of the professors whose lectures he attended and of his Lyceum and University friends; with some of whom (Julian Fontana and Aleksander Jełowicki) he maintained a friendship to the end of his life. In several of these letters he makes mention of the University's Fine Arts exhibitions, the portrayals of Apollo and the Muses in the pediment of the Kazimierzowski Palace and of the vegetables he used to eat from the gardens behind it. This was the world he took with him to Vienna and Paris, and which he "painted" in his *nocturnes*, *waltzes*, and *polonaises*. As we stroll along Krakowskie Przedmieście, meander through the historical University buildings, traverse the grounds of the old University gardens to the new Library, or enter the Church of the Visitation, let us remember that we are walking in the footsteps of one of the greatest musical geniuses of all time.

Jerzy Miziołek, Hubert Kowalski



# 1810–2010



**Ministerstwo  
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i Dziedzictwa  
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