

THE MYSTERY OF FREDERIC CHOPIN'S *BERCEUSE*

Stacy JARVIS

Université de Birmingham, Grande-Bretagne

ORCID ID : [0000-0002-5113-4792](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5113-4792)

musician@sjarvis-violin.co.uk

Abstract: There is an opinion that lullabies are too simplistic in melody, texture, and harmony to warrant detailed and comprehensive analysis. However, in this study, using the analysis of Frederic Chopin's *Berceuse* (1844), this viewpoint is refuted. The author concludes that this composition goes beyond the commonly accepted characteristics and standards of the lullaby genre. During the analysis, the research author explores ways to penetrate the 'messages' encoded in the pianistic miniature of the composer. Drawing on the philosophy of Theodor Adorno regarding the social aspect of intimacy, it is inferred that despite the traditional inclusion of words in lullabies, Chopin's 'song without words' is unique, lyrical, emotional, melodious, and possesses rich expressive potential for conveying feelings (in emotional nuances) and thoughts (expressed in meaning). The author raises the question of verbalizing musical art as a possibility of elevating music to the realm of language. Chopin's work helps the composer express intimate thoughts about his unsuccessful family and unborn children, nostalgia for a lost family and homeland. The lullaby preserves the son's memory and nostalgia for his Polish family abroad and serves as a means of inculturating the Polish people.

Keywords: Adorno, *Berceuse*, Chopin, lullaby, meaning in music, semantics.

LE MYSTÈRE DE LA *BERCEUSE* DE FREDERIC CHOPIN

Résumé : Certains pensent que les berceuses sont trop simplistes en termes de mélodie, de texture et d'harmonie pour justifier une analyse détaillée et complète. Toutefois, cette étude réfute ce point de vue en s'appuyant sur l'analyse de la *Berceuse* (1844) de Frédéric Chopin. L'auteur conclut que cette composition va au-delà des caractéristiques et des normes communément admises du genre berceuse. Au cours de l'analyse, l'auteur de la recherche explore les moyens de pénétrer les "messages" encodés dans la miniature pianistique du compositeur. S'inspirant de la philosophie de Theodor Adorno concernant l'aspect social de l'intimité, il en déduit que malgré l'inclusion traditionnelle de mots dans les berceuses, la "chanson sans paroles" de Chopin est unique, lyrique, émotionnelle, mélodieuse et possède un riche potentiel expressif pour transmettre des sentiments (dans les nuances émotionnelles) et des pensées (exprimées dans le sens). L'auteur soulève la question de la verbalisation de l'art musical comme une possibilité d'élever la musique au rang de langage. L'œuvre de Chopin permet au compositeur d'exprimer des pensées intimes sur sa famille infructueuse et ses enfants à naître, la nostalgie d'une famille et d'une patrie perdues. La berceuse préserve la mémoire et la nostalgie du fils pour sa famille polonaise à l'étranger et sert de moyen d'inculturation du peuple polonais.

Mots-clés : Adorno, *Berceuse*, Chopin, berceuse, sens de la musique, sémantique.

Introduction

The infancy period is the most crucial stage in human development. Throughout the ages there has been a belief among people that what a child absorbs

with their mother's milk, i.e., what they perceive at the earliest age will stay with them for life, shaping their character and national individuality. The world of childhood is an important component underlying the culture of any nation representing not only invariant stages of human development but primarily a complex cultural-historical phenomenon. Indeed, the world of childhood is an integral part of the way of life and culture of any nation and humanity as a whole. Folk lullabies embody the intonation system of the musical language of each nation, the melodic 'intonational vocabulary' of a certain era. Over time, based on folk lullabies, original lullaby songs emerged, using typical motifs of folk songs of this genre. Robert Schumann, the composer who wrote *Scenes from Childhood* had a significant influence on people's perception of childhood. The improvisational nature of the lullaby genre creating diverse compositions based on traditional lullaby motifs is well known (Sharp 1993: 450).

The role of classical music in this journey into childhood is the premise of this research. Childhood and culture are intricately linked. Surprisingly little has been written about the nature of childhood in relation to music. This may seem strange considering the abundance of music written for children's performance and listening. The main idea of this work is the belief that understanding the role and potential of music is of great importance in any study of childhood. To what extent does the myth of childhood correspond to the realities of life? By turning to Frederic Chopin's *Berceuse*, I will try to prove that it has a profound authorial idea, a cultural program aimed at representing to the child the basic spatial coordinates of the world. The nature of music as a language of intellect and emotions is discussed in the work. Frederic Chopin's *Berceuse* reveals an entire world of childhood - a cultural explosion, a period of rapid growth and acquisition of cultural skills, bringing immediate joy to the little person entering the boundless world of culture. *Berceuse* illustrates the diversity of musical images used in the context of expressing childhood. Chopin's piece vividly demonstrates that the children's musical tradition has long reflected a valuable attitude towards parents, the older generation. It contains a reminder to children of their filial duty. Before the child's eyes unfolds the perspective of their future independent life, the structure of their social space, the system of relationships in the world of people is laid down, and life goals are determined. Moreover, in Chopin's *Berceuse* everything living is constantly in motion, labouring. The child can perceive this world not as something frozen, eternal, but as constantly transforming, and simultaneously affirms an understanding that without effort, without work in this world, one simply cannot survive. Using this piano miniature as an example I will consider the features of the formation of the value-meaning space of the world of childhood. And not only from the position of historically complex integrity but also as a formative generative principle in culture and history. Chopin's masterpiece has become a treasure trove of world piano music. Within the framework of this research, it is important to consider the phenomenon of its cultural identity and value. Despite the fragility of the myth of childhood its musical images continue to evolve. The traditions of authorial music-making are still alive and will remain a guide for empathy and imagination for those adults who look beyond themselves into the world of childhood, which is so real and yet so elusive.

1. The story of the creation of Fryderyk Chopin's *Berceuse* and its addressee

The most renowned example of a lullaby in the form of an elaborate concert piece is Chopin's *Berceuse* (op. 57). The creation of this composition unfolded gradually. The initial sketch of the lullaby, later preserved in Pauline Viardot's family, appears to have originated in Nohant during the summer of 1843. According to Bogdan Zaleski's diary, the composer twice performed this composition on his name day February 2, 1844, for him, Stefan Witwicki and other friends of the poet who had gathered at Chopin's residence (Opienski 1931). The first edition of the *Berceuse* was published in May 1845, and immediately the new work gained worldwide distribution. The immediate inspiration for creating a lullaby-like piece is traditionally attributed to Chopin's fascination with the 'personality' of Pauline's one-and-a-half-year-old daughter, Louisa. According to George Sand, Louisa, with her 'dances, laughter, and babbling, would disarm all the Chopin's in the world' (Tomaszewski 2016: 426). Chopin dedicated the work and its manuscript to one of Eliza Gavard's students. Interestingly, another student, Eliza Perutzi, admitted years later that she was the 'godmother' of the *Berceuse* (Niecks 2004: 339). Only by the end of 1844 was the composer ready to hand over the manuscript to the publishers. It was published in the summer of 1845 under the French title *Berceuse*. The very title may speak to the traditional and inevitable conservatism of the composer's concept: what could be more familiar than the song a mother sings to her sleeping infant? However, Chopin unfolds this genre differently. Before the author officially titled this composition as the Lullaby, he initially referred to it as *Variantes*, merely identifying it by that name (Hordynski 1949, 44). *Souvenir de Paganini* (1829) — a set of variations on a theme from Paganini's *Venetian Carnival* — stands as a notable example of a concise and structurally transparent variation form. Chopin's skill in this composition is unparalleled (Tomaszewski 2016: 657). Frederick Niecks states that Chopin remained a true Pole to the end of his days, and his love of and attachment to everything Polish increased with the time of absence from his native country in regards to the *Lullaby* (Niecks 2004: 63). In the initial segment of Chopin's variations based on the *Song of Laura and Philo*, there is already a foreshadowing of the *Berceuse*.



Example 1: Unknown author, *Song of Laura and Philo*, on lyrics by Franciszek Karpiński, bb. 1-4.



Example 2: Frederic Chopin, *Berceuse* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1882), bb. 3-6.

In the *Berceuse*, there is a noticeable affinity with nocturnes and an affiliation with the genres of 'evening and night music,' as lullabies and nocturnes are close to salon music (Tomaszewski 2016: 405). The 'dreamy character' (Auden 1969: 188), tranquillity, and melodiousness bring them together.¹ The richness and variety of melodic ornaments create a sense of dreams and illusions that arise in a person's imagination on the verge of sleep and wakefulness. When a mother leaning over the cradle lulls her child and sings, her song, accompanied by the gentle and smooth rocking of the cradle, consists of repeating a very short, calm melody.

2. Lullaby as a genre of piano music

Lullabies represent one of the oldest and most unique folkloric genres sitting at the intersection of daily life and art present in the cultures of all nations. This genre plays an exceptionally significant role in human life as the music with which a child becomes acquainted in the earliest period of their existence. Given that the primary cultural function of childhood is seen as maturation, a methodology of enculturation has been developed involving a complex set of means facilitating a child's entry into the cultural world. The world of childhood is an important component underlying the culture of any nation representing not only invariant stages of human development but above all a complex cultural-historical phenomenon (Pumariega and Joshi 2010: 676). Lullabies serve as some of the earliest ethical instructions for a child, reminding them of duties towards family and society, making them carriers of important information. From the earliest months of life every child experience lullabies through which they perceive the surrounding world develop acquire their native language and master the skills of musical intonation. In many lullabies, a perspective unfolds before the child depicting their future independent life the structure of their social space, establishing a system of relationships in the world of people, and defining life goals. The child can perceive this world not as something static and eternal but as constantly transforming. Simultaneously, they affirm an understanding that survival in this world requires effort and self-improvement.

Traditional lullaby poetry provides a child with valuable semantic foundations in various forms systematically and gradually creating a worldview foundation for the forming personality. It serves as a cultural-creative environment in the culture of childhood where values form the basis for understanding and constructing the image of the social world. These songs are characterised by simple and diverse melodies, depth in the poetic texts offering a child initial concept of life and the surrounding world. They feature a smooth melody unhurried musical movement, gentle tone, calm and somewhat monotonous character, moderate timbre, narrow ambitus, rhythmic and intonational repetitiveness and a poetic text that is accessible for comprehension (Sharp 1993: 240) The primary secret of lullabies lies in their effortless rhythm, which can be correlated with the rhythm of breathing or heartbeat. In infancy, a baby is not yet capable of understanding the content and semantic meaning of a lullaby, hence the fundamental importance of rhythm. The rhythm of lullabies is steady, monotonous, enchanting, and beneficial for the child - naturally uniting melody, poetic text, and smooth movement into a single immediate alloy. The rhythmic foundation of a lullaby intertwines auditory, visual, vibrational, and tactile sensations expressed through the

¹ In Zdzislaw Jachimecki (1949) and James Samson's (1985) editions of Chopin's works, the nocturnes are placed in the same section as the *Berceuse* (Tomaszewski 2016: 405).

measured rocking of the cradle, heartfelt singing, poignant words, gentle intonations, tender touches, and indistinct outlines in the semi-darkness of a dear and close person. As a genre in professional music the lullaby emerged in the late 18th century primarily in vocal lyricism. The first examples of such musical compositions are associated with the name of the German composer Johann Friedrich Reichardt, the author of the collection *Lullabies for Kind German Mothers* from 1798. As a distinctive layer of spiritual culture, folk songs are a source of rich information about the history, geography, social life, everyday life, ethical and aesthetic ideals of the society that created them. The connection of folk songs with various aspects of society forms the basis for their genre differentiation, highlighting the lullaby as a variant within the genre. The verbal and non-verbal components of the lullaby, explicating both the worldview of the ethnic group and the individual worldview of the author, characterised by a high degree of such a semiotic law as intertextuality, collectively serve an informative function. From the last third of the 19th century, to convey the character of rocking, soothing, and lulling in music, piano accompaniment with a specific swaying rhythm became widely utilised.

3. Lullabies in classical music

The lullaby is a genre in constant motion, development, and personal transformation, as evidenced by the continual emergence of new works in the lullaby genre including those in the field of piano music. Representatives of many national compositional schools and stylistic directions found creatively engaging with the lullaby genre reinterpreting it, and filling it with their own artistic vision. Over the course of the lullaby's existence as a genre in piano music it has taken on various forms: from small lyrical pieces to compositions with a concert structure featuring free musical expression. Most organically, the lullaby aligns with the genre of piano miniature which has proven to be akin to the lullaby.² Adopting the trends of folk lullabies, original lullabies significantly broaden their thematic scope. In the author's pieces, the lullaby genre is interpreted in an individual manner, as seen by the composer. Consequently, lullabies often transcend the accepted boundaries of the genre and take on a different character. Genre and stylistic features are inseparable from the creative worldview of the authors. As a result, composers create various lullabies - some directly reproducing the genre while others only subtly hinting at it. In connection with this, Juri Lotman remarked: 'The text must be both lawful and unlawful, predictable and unpredictable simultaneously' (Lotman 1973: 29). The most apparent modifications happen in the musical-linguistic direction: alterations in timbral and intonational conditions, adherence not to folk but to established laws in professional music regarding temperament, harmony, and form. Additionally, the influence of a specific era's culture is felt with its artistic representations features of the author's individual style, traces of influences from previous traditions and directions of personal exploration and the characteristics of the specific concept and instrument for which they are written, as a genre of piano music. The lullaby seamlessly entered opera, ballet, and music for dramatic performances; it resonates in performances by symphonic orchestras, chamber ensembles with a solo instrument, as a vocal and piano composition or a piece for instrumental performance. Composers such as Pyotr Tchaikovsky, César Cui, Claude Debussy, Felix Blumenfeld, and Mily Balakirev have written lullabies.

² Miniatures are small musical pieces with titles that define the character of the music and indicate their genre affiliation. In terms of creative parameters, they are concise forms. The flourishing of the miniature is associated with the period of musical romanticism, although it is quite widely represented in contemporary music as well.

Felix Blumenfeld's 'Lullaby' is a piano piece from the *Polish Suite* (op. 23 No. 3) by the composer. This small composition is a poetic embodiment of typical features of a lullaby: it incorporates many musically expressive elements, characteristic of the piano, and the dark, sublime, and majestic D-flat minor in which the piece is written evokes a melancholic, contemplative, and artless atmosphere.

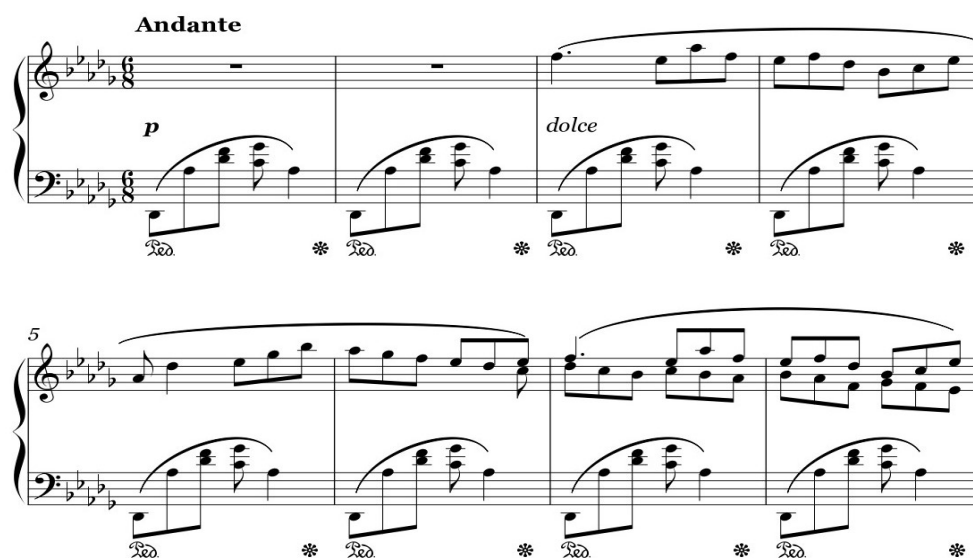
'Jimbo's Lullaby' is the second piece from Claude Debussy's piano cycle *Children's Corner*, composed in 1908 as a dedication to his daughter Emma (who was three years old at the time). The piece, like all the compositions in the cycle, is titled in English as 'Jimbo's Lullaby', referring to the composer's daughter's toy elephant named Jimbo (Sharp 1993: 336). Debussy incorporated the motif of the French folk lullaby *Do, do, l'enfant do* into this piece, notably using its main interval - the major second. The evocative character of the piece is defined by the lower registers of sound corresponding to the depicted animal and subtle melodic modulations in the absence of its development. The concept of isomorphism, denoting a structural or thematic similarity, holds particular significance within the mythological consciousness of Pyotr Tchaikovsky, a facet that finds comprehensive expression in the operatic compositions *Iolanta* and *Mazeppa*. Within the intricate fabric of these operas, Tchaikovsky establishes a profound link between the states of sleep and death, leveraging these phenomena as symbolic vehicles to convey nuanced layers of meaning and existential exploration. In the operatic narrative of *Iolanta*, the protagonist, Iolanta, becomes emblematic of Tchaikovsky's exploration of the transformative power of sleep. Symbolically, Iolanta's descent into slumber is intricately interwoven with the strains of a lullaby, encapsulating a pivotal moment of transition within the character's internal landscape. In this symbolic representation, sleep emerges not merely as a physiological state but as a metaphor for a profound metamorphosis or inner journey that unfolds within the narrative contours of the opera. Conversely, the opera *Mazeppa* introduces the character Andrei, whose narrative trajectory is marked by a tragic denouement—his demise. Tchaikovsky deftly juxtaposes the thematic elements of sleep and death within his mythological framework, suggesting a conceptual resonance between these two ostensibly disparate states. In this context, sleep may be construed as a metaphorical surrogate for death, signifying a poignant and transformative episode in the character's existential trajectory.

In Tchaikovsky's *Lullaby* op. 16 No. 1, based on the verses of Apollon Maykov, the composer captivates with the expressiveness and beauty of the melodic line, along with the purity of the emotions it encapsulates. Tchaikovsky used two keys: A-flat minor as the primary and A major, systematically changing key signatures from seven flats to five sharps and vice versa. The composer applied parallel major and minor, emphasising the sonic contrast of parallel tonalities within the realms of flat and sharp key signatures. The romance, originally in the key of A-flat minor, is transposed for low voices, utilising these two parallel tonalities, always with identical key signatures: F-sharp minor-A major or F minor-A-sharp major. César Cui also wrote several lullabies. In the collection of lyrical and scherzo-like piano miniatures (op. 20), dedicated to his daughter ('ma petit Lydie'), there is a piece titled *Lullaby*. Another piano miniature (op. 39) is named *By the Cradle*. The composer was evidently drawn to the imaginative realm associated with the world of a child, and his creative legacy includes many works specifically composed for young pianists. Furthermore, Mily Balakirev's *Lullaby* written by the composer in 1902 leans more towards concert-style pieces than a lyrical miniature. The composition combines moments of cloudless and tranquil

lyricism in the substantive and bright D-flat major of the outer parts of the piece, as well as the evident dramatism of the tense sounding in its middle fragment.³

4. Polish Folklore Ties and Associations

The musical concept of this composition is unusual: throughout the entire piece, there is a repetition of the same extremely simple harmonies – tonics and dominants (such alternation is typical for Polish folk music). Against this backdrop of unchanging textures, an unruffled and serene melody emerges. By varying it in diverse, vivid figurations, Chopin maintains the tranquil and soothing character of the music. It is more of a tale about a child's magical dreams than a lullaby. In Chopin's composition, elements of folk song are clearly audible, manifested in a series of harmonic and melodic genre-specific features. The manner of presentation and the brevity of the theme itself resemble folk tunes – repeating, varying, transforming multiple times, allowing the piece to preserve, despite its fragmented motifs, the unity of the main image. The melody itself, with its variational type of development, clearly has a folk origin, yet it adheres to the traditions of Western European variation technique. Thus, the domestic genre of Polish folk songs plays a significant role in characterising this calm and tranquil *Berceuse* (Example 3).



Example 3: Frederic Chopin, *Berceuse* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1882), bb. 1-8.

In addition to syncopation, constant changes in rhythms and accents are often observed in Polish folk music. Therefore, it can be argued that Chopin's fervent use of rubato was borrowed from Polish music (Todd 2004: 243). The practice of rubato existed in Polish folk music for several centuries before Chopin's birth, although it was not always applied exactly as Chopin did. Like Chopin's rubato, it is based on the temporal displacement of the melodic part relative to the super-rhythmic pulse of the bass foundation. Chopin's *Berceuse* is difficult to remember and hard to sing in the music, only the character and mood of the lullaby as a genre are sustained. It exudes a lot of languor and tenderness: the composer depicts a mysterious inertial process of drifting into sleep - everything happens beyond one's

³ Some of Mily Balakirev's piano compositions literally reproduce the names of the of Chopin's prototypes along with the tonality. In the *Lullaby Song* in Des-dur one can sense intonation secondary to Chopin's music.

will – pulse, breath, heartbeat. He did not compose a straightforward melody but intruded into the realm of the unconscious and portrayed, through sounds, the portrait of falling asleep, fading away, when the mind is already asleep, but the senses are still awake, and the boundary between dream and reality is almost imperceptible. This poetic picture, bathed in sunlight, seems to be painted by an impressionist, where the original melody, close to a folk tune (it resembles, like a relative, the lullaby melody from *King Roger* by Karol Szymanowski, a well-known Polish song of Ukrainian nannies), as if enveloped in mist penetrated by rainbow rays (Niecks 2004: 254).

Intonationally, Polish folk melodies are very rich; they contain quite complex chromaticism's, and alongside the usual major and minor, ancient modes can be found. Both for improvisations and tunes, the intertwining of vocal and instrumental intonations is typical. Polish national melodies are primarily songs or instrumental tunes performed as accompaniments to folk dances. These melodies stand out for the richness of their rhythms; despite the diversity of meter (usually triple, occasionally duple), they do not give the impression of metric monotony due to highly capricious accentuation (in Polish folk music, the accent can fall on any beat of the measure). All these features of Polish folk music have somehow influenced Chopin's musical language, 'He embodied Poland; he put Poland into music!' (Todd 2004: 253) There is a possibility that the impulse or inspiration for the *Berceuse* was provided by the Polish folk song 'The Moon Has Risen' (see Examples below). The melody is monophonic supported by simple instrumental accompaniment.⁴ In line with the primary strategy of lullabies—rocking, calming, soothing, and putting the child to sleep—there are no sharp sounds in them. The sounds in the refrains, in their acoustic-physical characteristics, are not sharp but melodic and resonant; in terms of phonological characteristics, they are mostly vowels, sonorous, and soft consonants. Gerald Abraham, describing melodic structures of this kind, couldn't resist using a metaphorical description: 'almost epic breadth of conception' (1960: 97). In some turns of the *Berceuse*, one can hear echoes of the intonation of the song 'The Moon Has Risen'. It carries the atmosphere of childhood, youth, the native home, bearing semantic load in the verbal-musical communicative space of the lullaby. The contamination of verbal and non-verbal components, the song and the nocturne, the connection with Polish folklore creates the conglomerate that constitutes the multi-coded text of the lullaby.

The unique form that Chopin gave to the *Berceuse* was undoubtedly determined by its purpose. According to the witty definition by Wystan Hugh Auden, '*The Berceuse* is the strangest example of music with non-musical premises; in the end, it must make the child fall asleep, which means not hearing anything at all' (Auden 1969: 151).

⁴ The Polish language cannot be denied harmoniousness and musicality. The rigidity of the language does not depend constantly and exclusively on the abundance of consonants, but on the way they are combined. In Slavic languages, it is true that many consonants are used, but mostly in euphonious combinations. Phonetically the language is rich, full-sounding, flexible, not confined to a certain middle narrow register, but goes far beyond it, using a variety of intonations, low and high. Unvoiced consonants (clapotantes) are rare in Polish, while assonance is very common.

Example 4: Polish folk song ‘The Moon Has Risen’, bb. 5-9 (melodic line).transcribed to D flat major



Example 5: Frederic Chopin, *Berceuse* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1882), bb. 3-7 (melodic line).



Example 6: Polish folk song ‘The Moon Has Risen’, bb. 3-7 (melodic line).transcribed to D flat major



Example 7: Frederic Chopin, *Berceuse* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1882), bb. 47-51 (melodic line)

Chopin's *Berceuse* is the pinnacle of musical form: 16 variations against an unchanging bass. The particularly sharp and powerful expressive impact in this work is associated with the use of chordal ostinato or double-note ostinato, evoking onomatopoeic associations.⁵ The ostinato bass throughout the piece—a remarkable and poetic invention by the composer—is not without the influence of Polish folklore, the tunes of which are very palpable in the melody of the *Berceuse*. The sonority is perfectly transparent and elegant; dynamics oscillate exclusively between piano and pianissimo, modulated only by crescendo and decrescendo markings. The rocking of the cradle is conveyed by the ostinato movement in the accompaniment, while the variations in the right hand depict bright dreams, as if flickering in a half-sleep. The child has fallen asleep, and the mother over the cradle has immersed herself in the world of dreams. The *Berceuse* in D-flat major is a very concise work,

⁵ Among Chopin's ostinatos, there exist both figured and chordal patterns, implemented strictly or freely, covering either a small or a significant portion of the composition.

consisting of only 70 bars, but it impresses the listener with its poignancy and the richness of compositional technique. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Chopin retained many stylistic features of pre-Classical music. For instance, he employed the archaic chromatic bass in the style of chaconne in the tutti introduction of several of his works and often wrote music in terms of the old-style ritornello. This attests to the fact that the composer remained true to the musical values of the artistic music of his homeland, which existed outside the mainstream of musical activity.

5. Piano Interpretation of *Berceuse* by performers

After listening to and analysing the performances of three great masters of 20th-century piano art: the Polish pianist Josef Hofmann, the German performer Walter Gieseking, and the representative of the Russian school Heinrich Neuhaus, it can be noted that their interpretations of the *Berceuse* are vivid, emotional, and polygenre. Neuhaus's performance is characterised by realistic genre imagery, highlighting the Polish national colour, and maintaining the integrity of the musical form. The pianist emphasises the ostinato bass as the 'iron framework' of the composition and adds expressive melodic variations. The genre of a lullaby, the foundation of the piece, is conveyed by the pianist without unnecessary dynamic contrasts, virtuosic displays, performed seamlessly with skilful use of tempo rubato. The melody, from beginning to end, is played with a deep, velvety sound, defying even the dolce indication in the 3rd bar. Thus, Neuhaus's interpretation of the *Lullaby* lacks sorrow and regret; on the contrary, the music sounds joyful and life-affirming. The variational transformations of the theme in Neuhaus's interpretation have a strongly pronounced narrative character. The pianist, skilfully expanding the boundaries of the main lullaby genre, brings it closer to a fairy-tale lullaby, where each new variation sounds like a new story. In contrast to Neuhaus's narrative interpretation, Gieseking's performance is characterised by an impressionistic manner. Flattening the song-narrative genre of the piece, he applies too much tempo rubato, which is perhaps atypical for a lullaby. Each variation in the interpretation of the German pianist sounds at a new tempo not foreseen by the composer. Such an interpretation, saturated with accelerations and decelerations, often not corresponding to the composer's remarks (bars 19-26), with elements of sound 'play' and in some places, deliberately clear recitatives, transforms the genre character of the measured and soothing lullaby. The structural clarity and classical proportionality, primarily found in the accompaniment, take a back seat for Gieseking, thereby leaving the melody without the necessary support. As a result, the original musical structure of the piece is disrupted, the genre content becomes impoverished, and the song-like Polish colour is lost. Hofmann interprets the *Lullaby* in a deeply individual way. The pianist interprets the song-variation genre of the composition uniquely. However, unlike Neuhaus, he sometimes loses some characteristic genre features of the lullaby: songfulness, unhurriedness, elongation, and inner emotionality – giving the music excessive brilliance, studiousness, and technicality. The serene melody of the outer sections of the piece captivates with genre-like singing quality and unparalleled pianissimo sound. However, starting from the middle section, the performance loses some elements of the lullaby genre, colouring the variations in brilliant etude tones. The variant melody of this section (bars 24-39), played as technical thirds passages by Hofmann, sometimes resembles *Etudes* op. 25 No. 6 and op. 25 No. 2 instead of the more appropriate melodic singing style. And finally, in the coda of the piece, the pianist suddenly deviates from the author's text, replacing the ostinato triplet bass with fifteen strikes of the bass note D, which spoils the impression of a masterfully performed magical pianissimo

of the final section of the piece: the gloomy and intrusive ‘hits’ darken the delicate and soothing image of the Lullaby. Nevertheless, his interpretation should be considered highly professional, romantically inspired, and sublime. However, if Neuhaus, in his performing position, starts from the main genre designation of the piece, then Giesecking and Hofmann negate the main ‘starting’ genre of the composition.

6. The mystery of Chopin’s *Berceuse*

Chopin’s *Berceuse* is a musical fantasy where the composer captures the colourful dreams of a falling-asleep child, the sunny dreams of carefree childhood, and the beautiful state of drowsiness before sinking into deep sleep. The music in this composition seems to live on its own – no one and nothing controls it. The piece is characterised by an atmosphere of elegiac dreaminess, extraordinary subtlety, the refinement of harmonic language, melodic lyricism, and at the same time, the ornamental nature of the melodic line. The ‘lacework’ of ornamentation is presented in the form of colourful, shimmering, and ‘iridescent’ chromatic passages sounding in the upper register of the piano. The composition combines moments of cloudless and calm lyricism in the bright D-flat major of its outer sections with the explicit dramatism of the tense sounding of its middle segment. Extremely laconic, consisting of 70 bars, the *Berceuse* stands out with remarkable compositional technique and poetry. The constructed melody, stirring and swaying in its ebbs and flows between piano and pianissimo like an arabesque hovering above the unchanging bass figure. In this piece the alternation of tonic and dominant occurs a total of 68 times changing minimally. Only right before the end first, the expressively accented c flat appears (bb. 59-60), then the dominant’s place is briefly taken by the subdominant. This piece is built on a figured organ point from start to finish. Already in the first two introductory bars, a harmonised organ point is heard, which only occasionally undergoes significant changes throughout the composition (Example 8). In it, despite the change of harmony within the repeating group of sounds (I – V), the dominant harmony seems to be superimposed on the tonic, so that the second half of the bar continues to be perceived as connected to the tonic organ point.



Example 8: Frederic Chopin, *Berceuse* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1882), bb. 1-4.

The persistent basso ostinato became the starting and supporting point (Tomaszewski 2016: 426). Against the backdrop of the sustained ostinato bass, the organ point, the insistently repeating figures, and sounds, a continuously refreshing and varying beautiful lyrical melody resonates. The inclination towards the use of ostinato, organ point, insistently repeating figures, and sounds - these techniques work wonderfully to integrate the process, but due to the layering of tonal planes, they sometimes introduce ambiguity in harmonic connections, occasionally even causing tension due to the overlapping of tonal planes. Among

Chopin's ostinatos, there are figured and chordal ones, strictly or freely implemented in small or significant spaces within the composition. The composition's structure may be construed as a theme featuring sixteen variations. Yet, as correctly observed by Yuri Holopov in his scholarly contribution presented during the Chopin Works as a Source of Performance Inspiration Conference at the Fryderyk Chopin Academy of Music, the inherent 'theme' itself is characterized by an absence of substantive structural development (Demska-Trębaczowa 1999: 4). The main secret of this form is that the same rhythmic pattern is sustained throughout the entire piece. It may seem like a song form based on a metric eight-bar structure: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8, as it was with classical and romantic composers and in Chopin's sonata forms. However, the puzzle of this piece lies in the fact that the structure is not based on eight, four, or even two bars – 'the whole emerges from one bar' (Demska-Trębaczowa 1999: 6). In bars 3 and onwards, 19–20, typical diatonic and chromatic embellishments are present. From bar 6 onwards, there is developed sub-voice polyphony. Bar 21 features a chromatic sequence of broken major seconds, analogies of which can already be found in Chopin's early compositions. The coloristic chromaticism acts gently, soothingly, in combination with specific articulation (*leggiero*, *delicatissimo*), dynamics (mostly *piano* and *pianissimo*), and the character of movement (uniform, vibrating movement of short durations). In bars 23–24, the thirds' zigzags evoke memories of the *Etude* in g-sharp minor (op. 25). Bars 33–34 and 39–42 are vivid examples of imitative polyphony. The strictly diatonic theme, even approaching pentatonic in the final bars, is enriched with ornaments and figurations of various kinds, oscillating between the light of diatonic and the chromatic half-shadow. The metric-rhythmic aspect and texture, combined with the tonic organ point, help create a measured swaying background, calm and somewhat subdued, setting the mood even before the theme enters with its characteristic imagery. Bars 35–36 exhibit an 'impressionistic' textural quality reminiscent of dripping chords. Subsequently, commencing from bar 47 through the conclusion, an exceptionally expressive attenuation transpires – a sonorous decline suggestive of the music entering a state of repose, facilitated by distinctive embellishments and melodic motifs. The whimsical, intricate images that flickered on the edge of sleep and wakefulness disappear, dissolving into a calm, sweet forgetfulness. As mentioned previously, the entire Chopin's *Lullaby* is built on a tonic organ point (only in the penultimate bar does a full dominant seventh chord appear), which serves as a support for the persistently repeating accompaniment figure. Against this background, a simple, tender melody emerges, lasting only 4 bars but appearing in 16 variations. Initially, one voice 'sings' it. Then, a sub-voice joins, gradually embellishing with shorter durations. The melody then descends to the lower notes of grace notes to the monotonously sounding A-flat in the middle voice, and these grace notes create a sense of gentle, cautious rocking of the cradle. Afterward, ornaments bloom, moving to the upper register, outlining the contours of the same melody. There is something enchanting and fairy-tale-like in these airy figurations. Chopin's *Berceuse* is a genuine marvel not only of poetry but also of variation technique. The musical fabric of the piece seems to 'live', its 'turns' are natural, determined by the process of translating life's emotions into music. The work resembles a lyrical confession. The main emphasis is on the method of variation and variability, which sometimes leads to dramatic tension. However, this is the drama of experience, not action, softened by the overall character of the music. Lyrical expression colours all parts of the work. This phenomenon is, on the one hand, universal, and on the other, unique – influenced by two principles: logically rational and 'psychologically natural'. In the *Lullaby* as in many works from the late period of Chopin's creative output there are elements anticipating Impressionism; richness of

harmonic hues, transparent diatonic passages across the sounds of harmonic figurations, and the tranquil oblivion of the final episode.



Example 9: Frederic Chopin, *Berceuse* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1882), bb. 45-46.

Music can only convey what it itself is, whereas language always points to something, being merely a sign for what is communicated. Sound resonates; it is not a sign of something else but a message in itself. Philosopher Theodor Adorno develops this position, guarding us against the conclusion of the arbitrariness of the ‘composition’ of the musical series, stating that music cannot be called a simple sequence of sounds. Otherwise, it would represent, for our hearing, an acoustic kaleidoscope. However, music does not claim the status of a language of ‘absolute thought’ which, in turn, would transform it into a language according to his definition (Scher 1984: 139).

7. Theodor Adorno on the social aspect of chamberness

Frederic Chopin is often referred to as a composer of a single instrument. Indeed, piano genres dominated the creative legacy of the Polish genius. This is connected to the specificity of his talent and a special relationship with the instrument, which could embody the author's most intimate thoughts, ideas, and emotions. Chopin's new pianism grew, not without considering the achievements of the so-called ‘piano acrobats’ at the turn of the 20-30s of the 19th century. The search for new sounds occurred both in the realm of new piano constructions and possibilities, and in the vast domain of the new orchestra, with virtuosic polytonal and polyrhythmic orchestral sonorities being fruitful. Anton Rubinstein referred to Chopin as the ‘soul of the piano’. This is not an exaggeration but an accurate, albeit succinct characterisation (Slonimsky 2010:14). Chamber music encompasses a vast range of genres and forms of musical performance, featuring various ensembles and solo instrumental music, including piano music, incorporating characteristics of chamber aesthetics as both an aesthetic and ‘technological’ phenomenon. The social aspect of chamber music is explored in the works of Theodor Adorno (1976: 85). The philosopher considers chamber music from the perspective of its sociocultural functions, comparing chamber thinking with symphonic, finding commonalities and differences between them. In the realm of professional music-making, the ‘home’ of chamber music throughout the 19th century becomes salons and later

small halls of philharmonic societies. According to Adorno, chamber music lacks a historically stable 'class' or 'stratum' of consumers. This field of musical creativity is '...structurally something objective. It is in no way limited to the expression of the subjectivity of an alienated individual' (Adorno 1976: 86). The main 'recognisable sign' of chamber music is embedded in the concept of 'closed musical performance', the foundation of which is the desire to 'impact a limited circle of listeners in a small-sized space'. Artistic and technical qualities of chamber music are derived from this premise. Hence its characteristic nature inherent in chamber music, its selection of means of expression, its technique, and in many respects its inclination towards content, especially in the realm of elevated intellectualism, into the sphere of contemplation and reflection, and into the realm of personal psyche. Adorno sees the origins of chamber music in the realm of domestic, amateur music-making. However, when entering the sphere of academic compositional and performance intentions, chamber music gradually moves away from the 'bourgeois home' (Adorno 1976: 86), shifting to professional concert stages while retaining its tendency towards intimate closedness. Theodor Adorno considers the textural-thematic complex as the main indicator, which, in chamber music, acts as the 'fragmentation of thematic material among different parts in the process of development'; 'this type of music, in its internal structure, in its texture, is constituted by the distribution of the performance among several musicians playing together' (Adorno 2000: 79). The socio-communicative aspect of chamber music is revealed in the formula proposed by Adorno: "The impact of music and the character of the consumed diverge, if they do not contradict each other altogether... Therefore, the analysis of the impact of music is unsuitable for comprehending the specific social meaning of music" (Adorno 2000: 58). Thus, the communicative-sociological aspect of chamber music is revealed through its comparison with symphonic music, where the similarities and specifics of these two types of musical thinking are found. Chamber music, nourishing itself, like any music, with life experiences but, being introspective, is less inclined towards representationalism and subjects the 'raw material of external feelings' to a much more refined formal-stylistic treatment than in genre symphony.

Interestingly, Adorno uses Chopin in his book *Quasi Una Fantasia* as an example, noting that in the social sense, "the aristocratic nature of his [Chopin's] music may reside less in the psychological tone than in the gesture of knightly melancholy with which subjectivity renounces the attempt to impose its dynamism and carry it through" (Adorno 1963: 17). Hence stems the subtlety of Chopin's music: "can be understood as a departure from material practice – just as discernment in means, fear of the banal, while traditionalism is nowhere violated by any sensation. In the times of Chopin, the sphere of influence of his music corresponded to salons. As a pianist, he participated not so much in concert activities as performed at soirees" (Adorno 2000: 58–59). Such a 'chamber' and 'socially closed' origin of Chopin's music, however, contradicts its subsequent life: "It so happened that this elitist in its origin and tone music became extremely popular after a hundred years, and after the success of one or two American films, it even became a commodity of wide consumption" (Adorno 2000: 59). The subjective-lyrical mood of Chopin's composition corresponds to the specific intonational sphere of the Romantics - the proximity of melody to the intonations of poetic speech, giving it a unique flexibility and detail.⁶ It is the melody, closest to words, confession, self-portrait, that can shape cohesive expressions. Orientation towards speech

⁶ Such a phenomenon became most typical for late-Romantic melos (Franz Liszt, Johannes Brahms, Richard Wagner, Anton Bruckner, Gustav Mahler, Richard Strauss).

gives rise to rhythmic irregularity, aperiodicity, greater duration of melodic development, and intonational diversity. A special type of expression is formed in the melody - the 'first-person' intonation. Sometimes, there is an oratorical intonation, manifested in a particular emphasis on the statement as a whole or its individual motifs ('musical words'). The culmination of the development of this tendency to bring melody closer to speech (poetic or oratorical) was Richard Wagner's 'endless melody'. Despite not all composers embracing the Wagnerian principle of musical texture structure, the convergence of vocal music with the intonation of poetic speech becomes a characteristic phenomenon of the 19th century, especially in chamber music.

The interpretive capacity of Chopin's music which ventured into the realm of pathos and chamber music did not contradict the possibility of stepping out of this sphere. This was facilitated by the integrity and ambiguity of Chopin's creative legacy, encompassing intonational-genre and stylistic aspects of the broadest impact - from elitist to mass-democratic. To a large extent, at the linguistic and technological levels this was facilitated by the quality of vivid, even decorative concert character, not alien to Chopin but expressed through the prism of lyrical chamberness. Concert character, with its characteristic attributes (virtuosity, antiphony, external brilliance), assimilates, as it were, into the chamber-lyrical structure of his thinking, which corresponds to the inherent connections of the two mentioned principles of musical expression. Indeed, chamber music, in the evolution of musical thought, has constantly interacted with concert-symphonic music. These genres of music share many common points of intersection, including the similarity of architectural schemes.

In the post-classical era, there is, on the one hand, a preservation of differentiation 'by genres' and on the other hand, a return to their original synthesis (syncretism). According to Theodor Adorno, the use of the sonata principle, the sonata form as a general 'matrix' for chamber and symphonic music corresponds more to the portrayal of 'subjectively mediated dynamic integrity' which is more characteristic of chamber music in its various manifestations than for symphonic and concert 'frescoes' with their 'public', 'objective', audience-oriented effects (Adorno 2000: 83). In this context, 'music that aspired to go beyond the intimate world enriched itself with the legacy of public-sounding music, a variety of new technical techniques that could mature only under the protective cover' (Adorno 2000: 89). For Chopin's concert intentions, lyrical chamber music became the 'protective cover' preserving the manner of aristocratic pathos. Chopin's creative method demonstrates the process of ascending from the concert style (early piano-orchestral opuses) to a closed but integral chamber-concert thinking principle. The latter is represented by the solo piano as an instrument capable, due to its polyphonic nature, of combining both elements.

As a composer-pianist, Frederic Chopin cultivates the 'image of the piano' (Gakkel 1990: 4) as a universal model of the world, self-sufficient already in its individual-performing essence, not needing 'impurities' of collective ensemble or orchestration. This explains the socio-aesthetic nature of Chopin's integrated style, where chamber and concert elements are fused within the framework of the instrument most suitable for this purpose, used by Chopin as a pianist. The combination of these two elements, as well as the initial polygenre nature as a leading method of 'clarifying' musical content for the listener, manifested socially and aesthetically, is reflected in Chopin's musical language and the form of the *Berceuse*. It determines the choice of textural means, according to which the leading principle becomes the chamber one, with a characteristic distribution of thematic relief and textural background across all 'layers' of the fabric. Through the lens of genre-textural and stylistic indicators, the principle unveils a simultaneous concert antiphony. However, it does not appear as a

'competition' of voices or layers of exposition but as their 'agreement', coherence, and interchangeability in the process of developing musical thought.

Conclusion

Over half a century ago, Theodor Adorno established a distinctive point of comparison between music and language:

Music resembles a language. Expressions such as musical idiom, musical intonation, are not simply metaphors. But music is not identical with language. The resemblance points to something essential, but vague. Anyone who takes it literally will be seriously misled. Music resembles language in the sense that it is a temporal sequence of articulated sounds which are more than just sounds. They say something, often something human. The better the music, the more forcefully they say it. The succession of sounds is like logic: it can be right or wrong. But what has been said cannot be detached from the music. Music creates no semiotic system.

Adorno (1956:1)

Definitively answering the question of which component in a lullaby is primary, verbal, or non-verbal (musical), is impossible because all signs, only in combination, create a unified complex semiotic system and realise the synsemy of the lullaby. The meaning of the text in the lullaby is conveyed through non-verbal means. All signs, interacting with each other, enrich the meaning conveyed by linguistic signs, complement it, and enhance the emotional markedness of the 'fabric' of the composition. Adorno claimed that music is a language in a metaphorical sense. However, music represents a semiotic system without a semantic level. Therefore, the function of conveying information must be understood metaphorically in relation to the musical language. What can music convey, what can it point to, and what will be in its case the message, the final product of the intention of this kind of metalanguage? (Scher 1984) Music can communicate only what it itself is, whereas words always point to something, being mere signs for what is communicated. Sound resonates; it is not a sign for something else but is a message. Adorno develops this position, safeguarding us from concluding the arbitrariness of the 'composition' of the musical series, stating that music cannot be called a simple sequence of sounds. Otherwise, it would be an acoustic kaleidoscope for our hearing. Yet, music does not claim the status of the language of 'absolute thought' which would, in turn, turn it into a language according to his definition. (Scher 1984: 139). Theodor Adorno adds an aspect of interpretation in this context. According to him, correctly interpreting language means understanding it. In the case of musical art, correctly interpreting music means playing it, reproducing it, so in musical interpretation, it refers only to itself again. In this case, the phenomenon of 'understanding' should be replaced by the phenomenon of non-linguistic understanding. The latter, in turn, is a phenomenon that is incomprehensible in linguistic terms.

In contrast to Bertrand Russell's theory of proper names as hidden descriptions, Saul Kripke, in his work *Naming and Necessity* (Saul Kripke 1972: 122), points out the problem of associating a cluster of descriptions with a name. John Searle raises the question of whether proper names have meaning. He believes that they have reference but not sense, that is, they are denotative but not connotative. According to Searle, names are 'pegs' on which descriptions can be hung assuming that a series of unique descriptions are true relative to it (Searle 1958: 172). In the soft designator - the *Berceuse* - characteristics of the object are not asserted or specified, but it is assumed that a series of unique descriptions are true relative to it. The presence of a specific historical connection between the use of the proper

name to denote a specific musical work and researchers makes this object a referent even for a description that does not describe it correctly. The meaning and content in music are not the same. The object of cognitive understanding is an ideal representation that is elaborated, invented, interpreted, and schematized. Chopin's work helps the composer express his intimate thoughts about his failed family and unborn children, nostalgia for a lost family and homeland. The *Lullaby* preserves the memory and nostalgia for his Polish family in a foreign land and serves as a means of inculturation for the Polish people. The proposed interpretation of Chopin's *Lullaby* integrates three aspects of the work - dedication, thematic content, and musical form - into a coherent whole, providing new knowledge about the studied object and opening new possibilities for both research and performance interpretation of this composition.

Bibliography

- Abraham, Gerald. 1960. *Chopin's Musical Style*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Adorno, Theodor. 1963. *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*. New York: Verso.
- Adorno, Theodor. 2000. *Introduction to Sociology*. Stanford: Stanford California Press.
- Adorno, Theodor. 1976. *Introduction to The Sociology of Music*. New York: Seabury Press.
- Auden, Wystan Hugh. 1969. 'Music in Shakespeare'. *Res Facta* 3.
- Demska-Trębaczowa, Mieczysława. 1999. *Book of the International Scientific Conference: The Work of Chopin as a Source of Performance Inspiration*. Warsaw: Fryderyk Chopin Academy of Music.
- Gakkel, Leonid. 1990. *Piano music of the twentieth century. Essays*. Leningrad: Soviet Composer.
- Hordynki, Vladislav. 1949. 'Unknown letters from Chopin to Adolf Cichowski'. *Kwartalnik Muzyczny* 26/27: 38-48.
- Huneker, James. 2016. *Chopin: The Man and His Music*. California: CreateSpace.
- Kondi, Bledar. 2019. 'Lullabies', *The SAGE International Encyclopedia of Music and Culture* <https://sk.sagepub.com> (accessed 3 January 2024).
- Kripke, Saul. 1972. *Naming and Necessity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Liszt, Franz. 1899. *Life of Chopin*. London: Wendy Reeves.
- Lotman, Juri. 1973. *Semiotics of cinema and problems of film aesthetics*. Tallin: Eesti Raamat.
- McKay, Cory. 1999. 'Chopin and Poland', *Course Paper*. Guelph: University of Guelph.
- Niecks, Frederick. 2004. *Frederic Chopin as a Man And Musician*. Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing Co.
- Opienski, Henryk. 1931. *Chopin's Letters*. Translated by Ethel Voynich. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Pumariega, Andres and Shashank Joshi. 2010. 'Culture and Development in Children and Youth'. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America* 19 (4): 661-680.
- Scher, Steven Paul. 1984. *Literatur und Musik ein Handbuch zur Theorie und Praxis eines komparatistischen Grenzgebietes*. Berlin: Erich Schmidt.
- Searle, John. 1958. 'Proper Names'. *Mind* 67 (266): 166-173.
- Sharp, Andrew Ian. 1993. *Musical Images of Childhood*. PhD dissertation. Liverpool: University of Liverpool.
- Slonimsky, Sergei. 2010. *On Chopin's Innovation*. Saint Petersburg: Composer.
- Todd, Larry. 2004. *Nineteenth-Century Piano Music* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Tomaszewski, Mieczyslaw. 2015. *Chopin. the Man, His Work and its Resonance*. Warsaw: The Fryderyk Chopin Institute.

Wolff, Konrad. 1990. *Masters of the Keyboard*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.