

**TRANSCRIPT OF A PRE-CONCERT TALK
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Today we are appropriately looking at Chopin's visit to Britain in 1848, which lasted from 20th April to 23rd November – seven months in all.

Because Chopin had virtually given up composing by 1848 and therefore wrote no music during his stay – except perhaps a little waltz which is now lost, and a song called 'Spring' – the visit is not regarded as an important time in Chopin's life, unlike the visit to Mallorca 10 years previously which, though it had been something of a disaster, had produced some immortal compositions.

The British visit is seen as a rather depressing mistake at the end of Chopin's life, with the dying man being dragged around an unsympathetic country and forced to play to earn his living.

I hope to show that this was not entirely the case and that rather it represented the swan song of one of the greatest – indeed considered by many contemporary connoisseurs to be – the greatest pianist of the day.

Out of a total of around 30 public or semi-public concerts during the whole of his life, Chopin gave 5 of these in the British Isles in 1848: 2 in London, 1 in Manchester, 1 in Glasgow and 1 in Edinburgh. Amongst these 5 there were 2 personal firsts. Chopin never played to more than 3 or 400 people, except in Manchester where he had an audience of over 1,000 at the Gentlemen's Concert Hall. As was the custom in those days, other artists – particularly singers – would always participate in his concerts. The Edinburgh concert on October 4th was to be the one exception, when Chopin apparently played the entire thing which lasted for 2 hours. This was not only the first time he had done such a concert without supporting artists; it was also an extraordinary achievement for someone in his state of health.

Why did Chopin visit London and the British Isles?

The main reason was the revolution which broke out in France on February 24th 1848. The government of King Louis Philippe was overthrown and the royal family fled to England. Chopin himself had nothing to fear from the revolutionaries, he had friends in the new government. But he earned his living teaching wealthy pupils and most of these fled along with everyone else, so he lost his livelihood overnight. Most of the musicians in Paris decided to leave, seeing that there would be no work for them for quite some time, and because revolutions were breaking out all over Europe, England – which had a comparatively stable government – became the favourite destination.

However there is some evidence that Chopin had been contemplating a visit to London even before it became a matter of financial necessity. The previous year had seen a disastrous change in his life when his 9-year relationship with the writer George Sand, otherwise Aurore Dudevant, came to an end. Apart from the ill-fated visit to Mallorca in the winter of 1838-39, they had led a quiet life between Paris – where Chopin taught – and her country estate of Nohant where they would spend the summer months. It was here that Chopin composed his greatest works.

Sand was knowledgeable about medicine, she nursed him when he was ill, kept him amused, invited his friends to stay, saw that he was well-fed, and generally managed his social life, while an assistant – Sand's friend Marie de Rozières – helped him with his pupils.

Chopin in his turn inspired her with his playing, encouraged her projects and provided a stable home and father-figure for her two children – Sand having separated from her husband Baron Dudevant. Chopin took this role very seriously, even after the break-up with Sand, though he was to say bitterly that she had only taken him on so that she would not lose custody of her children.

The relationship ended abruptly, without rows, and Chopin was left first puzzled then distraught. He had lost not only his companion, whom he loved, but a mother, nurse and manager. His friends were in despair about him.

Chopin had acquired a Scots pupil, Jane Stirling, in 1843, and although there was no intimacy between them, she was utterly devoted, and in many ways took over from Sand, making arrangements for him, and seeing he had everything he wanted. Like Sand she knew something about nursing and homeopathy. She was a decent and keen pianist and, had Chopin lived, they may well have jointly produced an edition of his works. Last but not least, she was wealthy and had a lot of contacts both in London and Paris.

It may well have been she who first put the idea of going to London into Chopin's mind. She did not want Sand coming back into his life and she must also have felt that a change of scenery would do him good. Chopin was apparently in contact with a well-known London magazine '*The Athenaeum*' in 1847 and perhaps this was also Jane's idea. She longed to introduce him to London society.

Periods of inactivity were never good for Chopin, so his friends pushed him into giving a concert at the Salons Pleyel on February 16th 1848. This followed a 6-year absence from the concert platform and the Paris musical world was consequently buzzing with excitement. However there was consternation amongst his friends when they read the announcement of the concert in the press, where it said that Monsieur Chopin would be giving a concert 'before his departure'. Where was he going? and when? his friends and family wanted to know. His sister hoped he was coming to Poland, and was already looking for an apartment. His family must have been very disappointed when instead he set off for London.

Jane Stirling and her sister Mrs. Erskine made all the arrangements, and Chopin duly arrived at the flat they had found for him at 10 Bentinck Street W1 on Maundy Thursday, April 20th, armed with letters of introduction.

Jane was not the only one keen to see Chopin visit London. His favourite pupil, and probably his best, was Princess Marcellina Czartoryska, whose husband Alexander was nephew to Prince Adam Czartoryski, head of the Polish government in exile, based at the Hotel Lambert in Paris. (Poland was at that time under the rule of Russia, Prussia and Austria, and following an uprising in 1831 in the Warsaw area where Chopin came from, and its brutal suppression by the Russians, the Polish elite had fled to Paris and formed an alternative government under Prince Adam).

Throughout the 1830s Britain had sympathised with oppressed Poland and her struggle for freedom. There was an organisation in London founded by Prince Adam called the Literary Association of the Friends of Poland, with Lord Dudley Stuart – the Coutts' heir – as its head. This Association acted as an English branch of the government in exile. The Czartoryskis' agent, Karol Szulczewski, ran it from Duke Street.

However, with the accession of Queen Victoria and her marriage to the very German Prince Albert, attitudes changed becoming more and more hostile to the Polish cause. Poles were seen as wild, uncontrollable people and by 1848, with revolts breaking out in the German controlled area of Poland, and revolutionaries in Europe calling for a liberated Poland, the British government and press were violently anti-Polish. Chopin himself had suffered from this. A well-known London critic who had been a great admirer of his music now described his works as 'a motley surface of ranting hyperbole and excruciating cacophony'. Chopin's last major work for piano, the Polonaise-Fantasy, was described as 'pathological in content'.

In spite of the venom of this particular critic, Chopin was now at the height of his fame and arrived in London as something of a celebrity.

The Czartoryskis undoubtedly must have thought that the gentle suffering, restrained Chopin, with his ravishing music, would be an ideal ambassador for Poland in Britain, and with the combined contacts of the Stirlings, the Coutts family and some of Chopin's old pupils such as the Duchess of Hamilton, Lady Murray and Lady Cadogan, he would soon find himself mixing with the highest society in London, as indeed he did.

It is worth mentioning that Chopin himself and the Polish cause in general received a lot of support from the Scots, who obviously felt a deep sympathy for the country and its music, and there must have been not only a close French-Scottish relationship but also a close Polish-Scottish relationship, because of Bonny Prince Charlie being half-Polish and a descendant of the great King Jan Sobieski. People were steeped in the novels of Sir Walter Scott, the '45 uprising was the subject of romance and had happened only a hundred years before. It is possible that this may have also made the British government and Prince Albert rather uneasy.

What was the actual state of Chopin's health in 1848 when he set out for London?

He had made an earlier visit almost 11 years previously in July 1837 with Camille Pleyel, head of the piano firm who made Chopin's preferred instruments. A Polish friend said "Chopin has been here for two weeks *incognito*. He knows no-one and doesn't want to know anyone but me. He is here with Pleyel, famous for his pianos and for his wife's adventures. They have come to 'do' London. They are staying at one of the best hotels, they have a carriage, and in a word they are simply looking for a chance to spend money". In other words they were there to have a jolly good time, and this they had. However in a letter, Mendelssohn, hearing of the visit wrote "Chopin is said to have turned up here a fortnight ago, but he visited no-one and made no acquaintance I hear he is still suffering very much". Two very contrasting views of Chopin's state at that time.

When the following year Chopin began his relationship with George Sand, they went to stay in Mallorca for the winter. Here again we see two aspects of Chopin: on the one hand entranced by the beauty of the island and inspired to compose like mad, on the other hand being forced to leave the villa they had taken because the locals thought he was dying of TB. Sand actually refers to him as "the dying man" in her book about the interlude '*Winter in Mallorca*'.

The pattern continued throughout their relationship. Sometimes Chopin was in excellent spirits, amusing friends, taking part in theatricals, a wonderful mimic, playing with Sand's children, inspiring everyone with his improvising, and composing great works. Then he would be ill, depressed, remain in bed all day, become seriously nasty and cruel, and Sand would have to nurse him through it. Chopin undoubtedly suffered greatly at these times, with feelings of suffocation, coughing up blood, chest pains and swelling. In the eyes of many people his sufferings became linked to those of Poland.

It has to be said that though Chopin started life with something of a weak constitution, the extreme sensitivity of his nature led him to overreact both physically and mentally to quite trivial things. A ray of sunlight could revive him and a dark sky or mist throw him into deep despair.

George Sand was undoubtedly a brilliant nurse and took infinite pains to restore his strength, also consulting experts as to the nature of his illness. It is to her that we owe the wonderful output of great works produced between 1838 and 1846.

However, around 1844 she began to change her view. She decided that Chopin's ill health was mainly psychosomatic and referred to it sarcastically as "*son maladie*". Becoming more and more worn out with his moods and rages, she began to see him as a sort of leech, and from 1845 was undoubtedly looking for a way of being free of him. Chopin was aware of this, but refused to take the hint. He hung on, but in the summer of 1847 the relationship finally ended.

One can see from this that there were a lot of question marks about Chopin's health. What did he have? TB? Asthma? Heart disease? And to what degree was it psychologically induced?

Berlioz made a famous remark that "Chopin has been dying all his life" and it became something of a joke, particularly as he outlived many of his friends and contemporaries. It must have been surprising to see, as Sir Charles Hallé did, Chopin coming to the piano like an old man, bent double, and then once he started to play straightening up and showing all signs of vigour.

There is no doubt that the break-up with Sand cast Chopin down and the general view of Jane Stirling and friends at the beginning of 1848 was that Chopin needed some concert activity to cheer him up and get him out of himself. It was for this reason that he was encouraged to give the concert at the Salons Pleyel on February 16th. Chopin was to perform a Mozart Trio with two friends, a nocturne and the Barcarolle, etudes and the Berceuse in the first half, and three movements of his new cello sonata with his friend Franchomme, followed by a selection of preludes, mazurkas and valse in the second half.

This was not a heavy programme, but it was not one for an invalid either, and one asks whether Chopin was up to it. The concert was rapturously received by audience and critics alike, the works and performances receiving equal praise. Chopin's playing was described as perfection. Sir Charles Hallé was particularly impressed with the way Chopin dealt with his lack of physical strength. When he came to the *fortissimo* passage towards the end of the Barcarolle, he instead played it *pianissimo*, but with such a variety of nuance that it seemed preferable to the original.

Throughout his visit to Britain he was to adapt his programmes to his strength, for example leaving out the turbulent passages of the second Ballade and refusing to play a concerto for the Philharmonic Society, giving as a reason that they only had one rehearsal. At his private concerts he would have been more daring and undoubtedly played some large pieces, but his programmes for public concerts kept to the 2nd Ballade, 2nd Scherzo, Andante spianato, Berceuse, the Op.36 Impromptu, and a selection of nocturnes, preludes, etudes, valse and mazurkas – in particular the Op.55 Nocturnes dedicated to Jane Stirling, the newly published Op.64 Waltzes and the first two of the Op.25 Etudes.

That the February 16th Paris concert was totally satisfactory is shown by the fact that a second concert was planned for March – but of course this was cancelled because of the revolution.

It is interesting to read a report of Chopin playing incognito at the home of James Broadwood back in 1837. "Was Chopin not the most retiring and unambitious of all living musicians, he would before this time have been celebrated as the inventor of a new style or school of piano composition He is perhaps *par eminence* the most delightful of pianists in the drawing room. The animation of his style is so subdued, his tenderness so refined, its melancholy so gentle, its niceties so studied and systematic, the *toute*

ensemble so perfect and evidently the result of an accurate judgement and most finished taste, that when exhibited in the large concert hall or the thronged saloon it fails to impress itself on the mass”.

This judgement was much the same as was made by critics during his 1848 visit and was also similar to ones made earlier in Chopin’s career. His failure to impress himself on the mass was the reason why he had not adopted the life of a virtuoso pianist. But the extraordinary effect his playing had on smaller gatherings had turned him into an iconic figure and he was regarded as a nineteenth century Orpheus, and an enchanter of the piano.

Although weaker in 1848, connoisseurs considered that his works and indeed playing had grown and deepened in stature. Here is Hipkins, Broadwood’s favourite technician describing hearing Chopin choosing pianos at the Broadwood warehouse in 1848. “It was the first near experience I had of genius. He was ill, but only showed it painfully in his weakened breathing power. Physical weakness was not, however, the cause of his tenderly subdued style of playing. His *fortissimo* was the full pure tone without noise, a harsh inelastic note being to him painful. His nuances were modifications of that tone, decreasing to the faintest yet always distinct *pianissimo*. His singing *leggatissimo* touch was marvellous. The wide extended arpeggios in the bass, were transfused by touch and pedal into their corresponding sustained chords and swelled or diminished like waves in an ocean of sound”.

This then was what the English and Scots were to hear when Chopin gave his last concerts. In spite of his pathetic physical appearance, this was not the pitiful, decrepit last tour of so many great artists, stumbling through their pieces with handfuls of wrong notes and memory lapses. This was a great pianist, still in possession of his musical and mental faculties with his fingers perfectly under control, giving a large number of people the opportunity to hear for the very last time an extraordinary and unique performer.

When Chopin arrived in London he found that the Czartoryskis had put their agent Szulczewski at his disposal, and Chopin lost no time in asking him to find a new flat as he found the one in Bentinck Street too expensive.

Meanwhile he went off, probably to Claremont House in Esher or the vicinity, to spend Easter weekend with members of King Louis Philippe’s entourage. He returned to find that Szulczewski had taken an apartment for him at 48 Dover Street W1. It was not only cheaper than the Bentinck Street one, but had an impressive staircase and large drawing room where he was able to install three pianos: his own Pleyel that he had brought from Paris, an Erard lent by the London branch of the French firm, and a Broadwood.

Henry Fowler Broadwood had taken over from his uncle James as head of the leading English piano firm, under whose auspices Chopin’s musical activity in Britain was to take place. Chopin described him as the English Pleyel, and did not waste a minute in visiting the firm’s warehouse and choosing not only the piano for his flat but also the one

he was to use for three of the semi-public concerts Broadwood was to organise for him in London and Manchester, as well as for the final appearance at Guildhall. Another piano was sent to Scotland for the Glasgow and Edinburgh concerts.

Henry Broadwood and Chopin became friends and Chopin was touched by his kindness in sending over a mattress and pillows to make him more comfortable.

Having got his visit to Louis Philippe's circle over and chosen his pianos, Chopin then spent a fortnight recuperating from the journey before launching into an extraordinary whirl of activity.

Thanks to information in Chopin's letters, the reports of listeners and in particular recent research into the Broadwood ledgers, which indicate the movements of the pianos chosen by Chopin, we now have a much clearer picture of his activities during his stay. Chopin performed at countless private morning concerts, afternoon concerts, and soirées, as well as informally in salons. When not performing he was out dining, going to the opera and visiting friends.

His first concert took place at Lady Blessington's at Gore House Kensington on May 10th. Chopin had a letter of introduction to her lover the Comte d'Orsay and we know that this engagement was unpaid and was meant as an introduction to possible future clients. The Comte and Lady Blessington were broke by this stage and were soon to decamp to Paris. The Comte had been her step-daughter's husband and it had caused a scandal when Lady Blessington pinched him. It is not surprising therefore that her name is one of the few not mentioned in the long letter Chopin wrote to his family in Warsaw describing all the people he met in London. For this particular concert Chopin used the Pleyel from the Dover Street apartment, but was then told that he must stick to Broadwood.

On May 12th Chopin gave a long concert at Lady Antrobus's house at 146 Piccadilly and he may the same day have gone to hear his singer friend Pauline Viardot at Covent Garden where she performed her song transcriptions of some of his mazurkas to great acclaim. On May 15th he played at Stafford – now Lancaster – House, for the Duchess of Sutherland in front of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. This was undoubtedly the occasion which most impressed him during his visit and he wrote a detailed description of it in letters to friends and family. "The Queen talked with me twice. Prince Albert, an enthusiastic amateur musician and composer, came up to the piano. Everyone told me that both these things are rare".

Chopin was therefore disappointed not to be invited to play for the Queen at the Palace, but there may have been several reasons for this. Soon after the Stafford House concert she went into mourning for a relative. However a more likely reason is that on the day that Chopin played for her at the Sutherlands, revolutionaries stormed the Assemblée Nationale in Paris, calling for France to declare war on Russia and Germany to liberate Poland. Prince Albert would not have liked that at all.

Henry Broadwood had set a fee of £20 for the Stafford House concert and all further private concerts, but Chopin mentions in letters that his first paid engagement was for Lady Gainsborough. This took place on May 24th at 9 Cavendish Square W1 and was followed by a second, for the Marquess of Douglas, son of the Duke of Hamilton, on June 9th at 13 Connaught Place W2. There was a third, almost certainly for the famous heiress and friend of Dickens, Miss Burdett-Coutts on June 16th at 1 Stratton Street W1. Chopin may also have played for a Mr. M. Stirling in Albemarle Street on May 17th and for Mrs. Hart-Dyke at 1 Tilney Street on June 29th.

On June 23rd he gave one of the two semi-public concerts arranged by Broadwood in London at the home of Mrs. Adelaide Sartoris, 99 Eaton Place SW1. She was the daughter of Kemble the actor, and sister of Fanny Kemble. She had been a famous singer, and Chopin particularly liked her. Tickets were limited to 150 and cost 1 guinea and Chopin made 150 guineas from it, as he did at a similar concert at Lord Falmouth's house, 2 St. James's Square, on July 7th. Chopin was quite cheeky about Lord Falmouth. He said "You would give him a few pence in the street, and his servants dress better than he does".

Chopin went to hear the Swedish Nightingale, Jenny Lind, sing in *La Sonnambula* at the Queen's Theatre Haymarket, almost as soon as he arrived in London, and was particularly impressed by her voice. He was also struck by the presence of the Queen, the singing of "God Save the Queen" by the audience, and the sight of the Duke of Wellington, seated under the Queen's box "like an old monarchist dog in its kennel".

There was great rivalry between the opera houses. Pauline Viardot was also singing in *La Sonnambula*, but at Covent Garden, and she did not have as much success as Lind, as to her irritation she had Flavio instead of Mario as her partner, while Lind had Lablache. Chopin also heard Lind in *Lucia di Lammermoor* and they became great friends. She went to hear him at Eaton Place, a fact that was noted in a knowing way by the newspapers, and he spent one evening alone with her and her chaperone Mrs. Grote. He says "From nine to one in the morning we did not leave the piano".

Not to be outdone, Viardot assisted Chopin at his St. James's Square concert, singing her transcriptions with Chopin accompanying. Chopin in his turn performed for guests at the Viardots' house in Maida Vale. He also performed for the Duchess of Kent, as well as at Julia Schwabe's house in Clarges Street W1. Julia, married to a Manchester businessman Salis Schwabe, was a friend of Garibaldi and the founder of the Hallé Orchestra. Chopin was to stay with them later in Manchester. He met Dickens, and also visited Carlyle at 24 Cheyne Row SW3, where he played to him and his wife Jane on their piano. As well as all this, Chopin entertained in his own flat and gave numerous lessons. One lady came for a whole week, having a lesson every day except Sunday.

One can see that Chopin was mixing in a very wide circle of London society. On the one hand are all the aristocrats that he lists proudly, but a little mockingly, to his family: "The Duchess of Cambridge, la Marquise de Douglas, Lady Jocelyn, Lady Lincoln – sister of the Marquess of Douglas, Lady Granville, my old pupil Lady Cadogan, Lady Dower, the

Duchess of Argyll etc. etc.,” and on the other, Dickens, Carlyle, radicals such as Mrs. Schwabe and Mrs. Grote, and artistic circles such as the Viardots, Sartoris’s and the Comte d’Orsay.

One wonders how someone in Chopin’s state of health could have stood up to such a social life, but people often remarked on how playing seemed to revive him and judging by the enthusiasm in his letters when describing how he found himself in the best London society, he obviously found this first part of his London visit, from April 20th to August 5th, extremely stimulating and enjoyed being fêted as a celebrity. He was also making money, in spite of endless complaints about the cost of things in London. It is interesting to note that when he returned from the Scottish part of his visit he opened a bank account with Coutts, and was able to deposit £250 – a considerable amount in those days.

Did Chopin think of settling in London? He had made a lot of friends and there were many sympathetic circles who welcomed him. He himself said that “If I had not been spitting blood for several days, if I was younger, if I was not as attached to my friends as I am, I might think of starting a new life”. That he definitely did not decide to stay is shown by the fact that before he left for the Scottish part of the visit, he sold his Pleyel piano to Lady Trotter, wife of Sir Coutts Trotter – yet another of the famous banking family. Lady Antrobus, at whose house he had played on May 12th was her sister.

In mid-July the London season ended and Chopin became anxious. Thankfully he was invited to stay with Jane Stirling’s relatives in Scotland, though it was this part of the visit that was to destroy his health. He left London via Euston on August 5th and travelled up the new West Coast route via Birmingham and Carlisle, arriving the same evening at Edinburgh’s Lothian Road station.

Following a two-day stay in the city at the Douglas Hotel, he travelled on to Calder House, home of Jane’s brother-in-law, Lord Torphichen, where he passed an agreeable time until going to Manchester on August 25th with Jane and Daniel, the new servant Broadwood had found for him. He was to give a concert at the Gentleman’s Concert Hall on August 28th. They stayed with the Schwabes at Crumsall House. When Chopin saw the audience of 1,200 in the concert hall he had a great shock. He said to his friend Osborne who was also taking part “My playing will be lost in such a large room, my compositions ineffective”.

It is perfectly true that the singers were greeted with more enthusiasm, but the critics were surprisingly complimentary, mentioning “a brilliancy of touch and a delicate sensibility of expression which we have never heard excelled ...nocturnes, etudes and Berceuse elicited a rapturous encore”.

Chopin returned to Edinburgh to stay with a Dr. Lyszynski and his wife in 10 Warriston Crescent. He was a Polish homeopathic doctor whom Jane had found to give Chopin treatments during his Scottish visit. Chopin was to return to him at regular intervals.

On September 2nd Chopin went to Johnstone Castle, home of one of Jane's sisters, Anne Houston. The weather was terrible and he became bored and irritable. Every effort was made to amuse him. He was taken to stay at Milliken House and to Strachur, the home of his pupil Lady Murray, which he did enjoy – though her musical taste shocked him, as you will hear later.

One of the main problems was that he could not speak English and in these dark and damp castles he began to feel oppressed and lonely.

Immediately after returning from Strachur he heard that his pupil Marcellina Czartoryska and her husband had arrived in Edinburgh so as to be able to attend his Glasgow concert on September 27th, and Chopin insisted on rushing off to greet them. Meanwhile Broadwood's Scots agent, John Muir Wood, was desperately chasing him around, trying to get a programme out of him. The concert was to take place in the afternoon at the Merchants' Hall, tickets half a guinea each. People came from all Scotland to hear Chopin, amongst them the Murrays, Lord Torphichen, the Duke and Duchess of Hamilton, Lady Belhaven, the Duchess of Argyll, the Czartoryskis and many of the Stirling clan. Chopin had a great success and this time the singer was less popular. A critic said "Madame Adelasio evinced a certain lack of enthusiasm with which we were not at all charmed".

From Johnstone Castle Chopin went to Keir House, home of William Stirling, head of the clan. There was gathered a large party in preparation for the Caledonian Rout, of which Chopin's concert at the Hopetoun Rooms was to form part. In letters written from Keir House one can see Chopin's rapidly changing moods. In one he says "The whole morning until about 2 o'clock I am now completely useless – Later when I've got dressed everything makes me uncomfortable and I sit there panting until dinner time – after which one has to sit for two hours with the men at the table and look at them speaking and listen to them drinking. Bored to tears I then go to the drawing room where I need all my strength of mind to come to life a little".

The next day he writes "If the weather is fine I will stay here for October, for I have more invitations that I can reply to and life in the stately homes here is truly curious ... Everyone is today going to Edinburgh for the Caledonian Rout. All week there will be races, amusements, balls etc. All the nobility will be there. I look forward to some gossip".

Chopin's concert took place at 8.30 at the Hopetoun Rooms on October 4th. Tickets were again half a guinea. *'The Scotsman'* announced the programme, which was much the same as the Glasgow concert – though presumably with many additions because there were no supporting singers. The hall was packed and Chopin was greeted with enormous enthusiasm, particularly by Poles who were in the audience.

However while he was in Edinburgh Chopin had heard some gossip that he did not care for, namely that a rumour was going round Paris that he was going to marry Jane Stirling.

From that moment Chopin's attitude to Jane changed and he makes cruel remarks about her and her sister upon returning to Calder House. "My kind Scottish ladies are boring

me anew. Madame Erskine – a devout Protestant – this good woman without doubt wants to convert me. She’s greatly interested in my salvation”.

Chopin fled to Lady Belhaven’s house at Wishall on October 16th, but he was now so weak that he had always to be carried upstairs. On October 21st he went on to stay with the Duke and Duchess of Hamilton at Hamilton Palace. While there he drew a caricature of the Duke in his diary, writing beside it “This is a Duke in boots, spurs, buckskin breeches with a kind of dressing gown over everything”.

The long, lonely hours and the Scottish mists and general bad weather finally ruined Chopin’s health. He went back to Dr. Lyszynski for further treatments, but they made no difference. He returned to London on October 31st, a broken man. After staying a few days with Broadwood, he moved to 4 St. James’s Place SW1 and from there on November 18th he went to give his last-ever public performance at Guildhall, at what was billed as ‘*The Annual Grand Dress and Fancy Ball and Concert in aid of the funds of the Literary Association of the Friends of Poland*’. He had promised the Czartoryskis that he would be there, and was undoubtedly pleased to be doing his bit for Polish refugees. Apart from the ‘*Illustrated London News*’, the English newspapers barely mentioned him, but the Princess said that he played for one hour like an angel.

Except for this one occasion he did not leave his apartment, but was regularly visited by the Czartoryskis, Broadwood and Jane Stirling and her sister. The two doctors who attended him, including Sir James Clark, the Queen’s doctor, advised him to return to Paris, which he did on November 23rd. He died the following year on October 17th.

We have seen Chopin go through many moods during his visit: elation, despair, amusement, depression and – at the end – complete physical collapse. The one constant was his performance. Everyone commented on the beauty, perfection and originality of both his compositions and his playing. Far from playing to unsympathetic and ignorant audiences, his last concerts took place before the elite and best-educated of London and Scots society. They had the privilege of hearing Chopin’s swansong and they never forgot the experience, passing the memory on to their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

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