

Quotes about Mazurkas

A companion to the *Mazurkas* playlist at:

https://www.mivideo.it.umich.edu/playlist/details/1_6y2ps69u

A Project of the [Piano Literature Corner](#)
at the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre & Dance

Mazurka Dance Cultures and their Evolution:

“The men grasped the long dress of their partner so it would not be trodden upon and lifted it high. Holding them in this cloak which brought both bodies under one cover as closely as possible against them and in this way the whirling continued in the most indecent positions. The supporting hand lay firmly on the breasts, at each movement making lustful pressures. The girls went wild and looked as though they would drop.”

—Ernst Moritz Arndt, *Die Ewigkeit des Volkes* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1934), 32, quoted in Oxford Music Online, “Waltz,” accessed June 3, 2020.

Mazurka Folk Sources:

“Even the oldest sources show us that it was extremely difficult to differentiate between the Mazur and its relatives, the Oberek and Kujawiak. The same melody that is played in 2/4 time in one provide on Poland may be played in 3/4 time in another.”

—Tadeusz Strumiłło, cited in Gorbaty, Jan, [Chopin Journal 1/1](#) (1986), accessed June 30, 2020.

Mazurkas and Polish Nationalism:

“If the mighty autocrat of the north knew what a dangerous enemy threatened him in the simple tunes of Chopin mazurkas, he would forbid this music.”

—Robert Schumann, in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 4 (1836): 137-39, trans. J. Kallberg in Kallberg, Jeffrey, “Hearing Poland: Chopin and Nationalism” in R. Larry Todd, ed., *Nineteenth-Century Piano Music* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

Mazurkas final thoughts: Performing in the Moment

“The mazurka is full of contrasts. It combines the fiery spirit with pride and elegance, vivacity with lyricism, dignity with joy, boldness with gallantry, dialogue between the man and the woman.”

—Ada Dziewanowska, *Polish Folk Dances and Songs: a Step-by-step Guide* (Hippocrene Books, 1997). (517)

Mazurkas: An Introduction in Quotations:

“Ear-splitting dissonances, tortured transitions, piercing modulations, and repugnant distortions of the melodic line and rhythm.”

—Ludwig Rellstab. *Iris im Gebiete der Tonkunst* 4 (1833): 111.

“His character was indeed not easily understood. A thousand subtle shades, mingling, crossing, contradicting and disguising each other, rendered it almost indecipherable at a first view. As is usually the case with Slavs, it was difficult to read the recesses of his mind. With them, loyalty and candor, familiarity, and the most captivating ease of manner by no means imply confidence or impulsive frankness. Like the twisted folds of a serpent rolled upon itself, their feelings are half-hidden, half-revealed. It required a most attentive examination to follow the coiled linking of the glittering rings.”

—Liszt, Franz. *The Life of Chopin*. Luton: Andrews UK Ltd. 2011, 19. Pro Quest Ebook Central, accessed June 3, 2020.

“The Polish word, ‘Żal.’ As if his ear thirsted for the sound of this word, which expresses the whole range of emotions produced by an intense regret, through all the shades of feeling from hatred to repentance, he repeated it again and again. Susceptible of different regimens, it includes all the tenderness, all the humility of a regret borne with resignation and without a murmur, while bowing before the fiat of necessity, the inscrutable decrees of Providence, but, changing its character, and assuming the regimen indirect as soon as it is addressed to man, it signifies excitement, agitation, rancor, revolt full of reproach, premeditated vengeance, menace never ceasing to threaten if retaliation should ever become possible, feeding itself meanwhile with a bitter, if sterile, hatred.”

—Liszt, *The Life of Chopin*, 61-62.

“Instinctively all the women in Poland possess the magic knowledge of this dance. Even the least happily endowed can find their improvised allurements.”

—Liszt, *The Life of Chopin*, 50.

“They are epigrammatic, fluctuating, crazy, and tender, these Mazurkas, and some of them have a soft, melancholy light, as if shining through alabaster – true corpse light, leading to a morass of doubt and terror. But a fantastic, disheveled, debonair spirit is the guide, and to him we abandon ourselves in these precise and vertiginous dances.”

—James Huneker, *Chopin: The Man and His Music*, 210. New York: Dover, 1966.