

Jannick Piskorski, Review of Ada Arendt, Paweł Majewski, Kornelia Sobczak und Marcin Bogucki: *The Chopin Games*, ed. by Paweł Majewski, Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 2021.

Originally published in *Die Tonkunst*, Januar 2023, Jg. 17 (2023), Heidelberg, S. 97-98.

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The multi-authored book *The Chopin Games* provides insights into the history of the International Chopin Competition, one of the most prominent music competitions in the world held every five years in Warsaw. The competition promoted the careers of numerous pianists such as Martha Argerich, Krystian Zimerman and Li Yundi. Ada Arendt, Paweł Majewski, Kornelia Sobczak and Marcin Bogucki examine the debates and controversies that accompanied the competitions. They do not consider their book as a detailed historical account, but as a work oriented towards musicological as well as cultural and social discourse. The authors dedicate one essay to each competition up to the year 2015. These contributions are framed by an introduction, a summary, and an index of persons.

Paweł Majewski reconstructs the atmosphere of the first three Chopin competitions that took place in the Second Polish Republic between 1927 and 1937. In doing so, he draws on previously unpublished sources. Majewski emphasizes the importance of race and nationality in the public reception of the competitions, which found its crystallization point in anti-Semitism. A further point that he makes is the exoticizing, tendentially pejorative portrayal of Soviet citizens in the Polish press, which contrasts the continuous success of Soviet pianists. Furthermore, Majewski interprets the success of the Japanese Chieko Hara in 1937, the audience favourite of the third competition, as the first emancipation of an Asian woman in the sphere of the Chopinists (p. 86f.). Hara's playing, however, was perceived as a contrast to her Asian ethnicity. Thus, she did not appear as a representative of an equal Asian culture, but as a woman who could interpret and feel Chopin *despite* her Asian ethnicity.

Ada Arendt describes the first four competitions in the People's Republic of Poland between 1949 and 1965. While the two winners of 1949 were predetermined politically (p. 131f.), according to Arendt, a noticeable depoliticization of the competition occurred in 1960 (p. 169). Arendt analyses press reports and memoirs as well as posters, cartoons, short films, surveys, and literature (e.g., by Witold Gombrowicz). She also addresses sexist press coverage of women (pp. 182f.). The essay on the competition in 1960 includes, among other things, source excerpts on the perception of Artur Rubinstein, who represented the intellectual Polonia,

Polish Jewry, and as an American citizen the capitalist system. Unfortunately, the article does not include sources on the Iranian Tania Achot-Haroutounian, who won the 3rd Prize in 1960. Reports about Achot-Haroutounian would have been interesting for further research about Orientalism in socialist Poland.

Arendt also reflects on the specific experience from the point of view of the competition-participants, interpreting it in relation to Arnold van Gennep as a ritual: the decision to participate in the competition corresponds to the symbolic death of the participants, because the preparation for the competition and the competition itself require a temporary exclusion from society. Thereby, according to Arendt, the conclusion in the competition is equivalent to the moment of being readmitted to the society after the successful completion of the rite (pp. 184-187).

Kornelia Sobczak focuses on the competitions between 1970 and 1985, with an emphasis on the public's fascination with Ivo Pogorelić in 1980, whose elimination due to his unconventional playing provoked Martha Argerich's withdrawal from the jury. The audience's independently organized protest was trying to overturn the jury's verdict. However, according to the author, this should not be considered in the light of the *Solidarność* strike movement, which was addressed at the state authorities. Rather, Pogorelić dark, pessimistic and tragic interpretation could be seen as representing a romanticism that had always been unpopular in jury verdicts of the Chopin Competition (p. 268). As the participation of Asian competitors increased, so did resentment against them: in 1985 it was clearly articulated in the Polish press against the Japanese team (pp. 290-293). Five years later, the music critic Jan Weber even describes an "Asian invasion" as a danger for the Polish Chopin tradition (p. 315f.). Sobczak, however, does not address the press reports about Mitsuko Uchida from 1970, although Uchida is one of the most famous living Japanese musicians. It could be relevant to inquire into differences regarding racism in People's Republic of Poland between the Party Secretaries Władysław Gomułka and Wojciech Jaruzelski.

Following MacAloon's notion of cultural performance, Sobczak interprets the Chopin Competition as a space where Polishness is negotiated (pp. 218-220). She also includes literature and films in her analyses, such as Krystyna Berwińska's novel *Con amore*, television productions made around 1980 like documentations and previously unpublished archival footage from 1985 from the Polish Television Archive featuring Wojciech Jaruzelski.

The two competitions in the 1990s are understood by Paweł Majewski in terms of the transformation towards globalization in the context of the political system change in East-

Central and Eastern Europe at that time. On both occasions, no 1st prize was awarded. Public interest in the competition declined. The crisis was also reflected in the public debate about the jurors' evaluation system, which was eventually reformed repeatedly. Drawing on a wide range of sources Marcin Bogucki describes in detail the four competitions between 2000 and 2015. He elaborates on the influence of globalization and digitalization: The share of Asian pianists and pianists with Asian immigration backgrounds continued to increase, and social media and YouTube had taken over more and more key functions. Much space is given to the controversy surrounding Yulianna Avdeeva's 2010 victory (pp. 401-408). Bogucki could have focused more on the aspect of gender, since Avdeeva was only the second woman after Martha Argerich to win the competition.

The authors show that the history of the competition is closely connected with the Polish history of the 20th and 21st centuries. They elaborate the influence of political ideologies on Polish musical culture. The Warsaw study has great relevance for future studies on racism towards Asians on Western concert and opera stages: The history of the Chopin Competition also reads as a history of the establishment of Asian pianists. The orientalisation of Chieko Hara in 1937, the openly hostile attitude towards the Japanese team in 1985 in the Polish press, or the spontaneous booing of Yukio Yokoyama after the announcement of his 3rd Prize in 1990 (p. 316) are only a few episodes in this ongoing process. Although the book does not contain a bibliography or a list of sources, it offers an extensive selection of sources on foreign perceptions and images, including those of Soviet citizens, Asians, and women, which provides a counterpoint to the nationalized self-perceptions of Polish pianists in the Polish press (e.g., Janusz Olejniczak 1970 or Rafał Blechacz 2005). *The Chopin Games* is a reference work on music competitions and the musical culture of Poland in the 20th and beginning 21st century.