

PATRYCJA MADEŁA (Poznań)

## *Chopin and jazz. The case of Andrzej Jagodziński's arrangement of the Prelude in E minor*

**ABSTRACT:** The current of jazz interpretations of Chopin's music appeared in Polish jazz in the early 1990s. On the one hand, it is the most original and native stylistic trend of all trends influencing jazz in Poland. On the other, it is an exceptional phenomenon internationally, since no works of classical music have received so many jazz arrangements worldwide. The achievements of Polish jazz pianists in this regard have become most representative, since piano texture and the process of improvisation on a given theme show the most obvious references – not only musically, but also emotionally – to the musical language of Chopin. The recording of the award-winning album *Chopin* by the Andrzej Jagodziński Trio in December 1993 triggered a host of artistic arrangements of Chopin works by Polish jazz pianists, each of which constitutes an individual approach to the Chopin material, reflected in basic factors such as the criteria for the selection of compositions or themes and the process of the original's transformation. Most jazz arrangements of Chopin's music involve the piano miniatures that dominate the composer's oeuvre. This is due to the clarity of the melodic lines, which inspire artists to turn them into themes for jazz standards. The *Prelude in E minor*, Op. 28 No. 4 has become the most frequently arranged piece of Chopin's music in the field of jazz. The numerous arrangements are also stylistically diverse. Jagodziński's arrangement is an example of this pattern being adapted for use in a jazz context. For him, the themes and mood of Chopin's music have become a pretext for the creation of his own jazz compositions largely inspired by Chopin's melodies and harmonies, but also by symmetrical form.

Arrangements of Chopin's music have been continually criticised by purists, who regard such procedures as a sort of profanation (any patriotic content in Chopin's original compositions seems to vanish in the chaos of jazz improvisation, which disturbs the integral form of the originals). The basic problem here seems to be ignorance of the fact that Chopin's music is essentially only a pretext, a kind of external emblem, for the creation of entirely new compositions, carrying different content, characterised by the author's individuality.

**KEYWORDS:** Fryderyk Chopin, jazz, jazz arrangements, Andrzej Jagodziński

In the musical culture of today, more attention is devoted to cross-stylistic barriers, to reaching for a variety of inspirations, referring to the achievements of the past and commenting on them in one's own way. These

artistic activities usually lead to seeking newer means of musical expression, while at the same time pointing to the timeless values rooted in tradition. However, these days an unequivocal assessment of those classical music pieces, which are frequently expressed in a postmodern approach towards the works of past ages, becomes a really difficult task. Representatives of stylistic purism assume that interference with the original material too often becomes an eclectic process, which does not lead to a new aesthetic quality. Also it may be seen as a manifestation of disrespect for the ideals of the author: we deal with fragments of well-known pieces whose original form and content were clearly defined by their composers. Yet, demands for creating completely original music which would meet the idealistic concepts of the uniqueness of each work of art, basically seem to be fruitless. As suggested by Richard Shusterman, an apparently original work of art is always a product of undisclosed borrowings.<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to imagine a work new in all respects, since the legitimate desire for approval and understanding among the public excludes absolute radicalism. Originality must therefore be limited to just a percentage of novelty with a fairly high dose of continuation (borrowings). This rule has been applied in numerous cases of taking up and processing musical material in the musical culture of all historical periods. Interestingly, the artistic value of this type of classical music arrangements, which largely consists in the use of other authors' themes and ideas and integrating them within the framework of the new works, is not questioned. This phenomenon has been so frequent in the creative endeavors of composers in each era of music history that it became the subject of numerous scholarly musicological works.

Jazz interpretations of Chopin's themes, so popular in recent years among Polish jazz pianists, are a continuations of the practice of adapting existing material for new compositions, which began as early as the Renaissance. This phenomenon refers particularly to the parody mass developed in that era, in which the thematic material often accounted for whole compositions (one's own or of other authors), such as motets.

It is worth mentioning that a fifteenth-century melody *L'homme armé*, occurring in more than 30 parody masses and numerous lute and organ compositions, became the most common cantus firmus.<sup>2</sup> In the Baroque era, the fugue was the most ingenious way to develop a theme, mostly improvised on a specified, known, borrowed motif. At that time pieces began to be transcribed on a large scale and their texture was often modified. In later ages the form of variation came to the fore, in which a usually simple theme underwent vari-

---

<sup>1</sup> Richard Shusterman, *Estetyka pragmatyczna. Żywe piękno i refleksja nad sztuką* [Pragmatic aesthetics. Living beauty and reflection on art] (Wrocław, 1998), 267.

<sup>2</sup> 'L' homme armé', in Andrzej Chodkowski (ed.), *Encyklopedia Muzyki* [The Encyclopedia of Music] (Warszawa, 1995), 494.

ous transformations, from ornamentation and figuration of melody to significant transformations of each element of the work. The practice of inclusion of other composer's material or one's own previously composed theme with the framework of a new composition is therefore not unique.

This issue, involving the transmission of certain values, operating so far in one closed circuit, into another closed circuit in which they did not exist previously, is described as follows by Andrzej Chłopecki:

[...] We live in times when books are derived from books, architecture from architecture, and music from music. Almost nothing is created from nature, almost everything from the existing culture. Whether we like it or not, we have been living for some time in the era of postmodernism which is ignored by some people and approved by others. I belong to the latter group, nervously responding to the concept of postmodernism being trivialized to the cross-over as an ideology and sampler technique, as the civilizational, the only choice.<sup>3</sup>

Transcriptions and arrangements are typical phenomena in jazz, since it is in the essence of jazz to use other composers' material and modify it for new compositions. The choice of the theme for improvisation often concerns fragments derived from classical music, from artists such as Bach, Mozart, Schubert and even Strauss and Mahler. Yet compositions by Chopin attract the biggest and still continuing interest among jazz musicians.

The trend associated with jazz interpretations of Chopin's music appeared in the Polish jazz in the early 1990s. On the one hand it is the most original and native stylistic trend of all the trends influencing jazz in Poland. On the other hand, it is an exceptional phenomenon internationally, because none of the works of classical composers have been chosen for so many jazz arrangements worldwide. However, the achievements of Polish jazz pianists in this regard became the most symptomatic, because the piano texture, as well as the process of improvisation on a given theme, show the most obvious reference, not only purely musically, but also emotionally, to the musical language of Chopin. The recording of the album *Chopin* by the Andrzej Jagodziński Trio in December 1993 provide the impetus to start a series of artistic activities in arranging Chopin's works by Polish jazz pianists.<sup>4</sup> This award-winning

---

<sup>3</sup> “[...] Żyjemy w czasach, gdy książki powstają z książek, architektura z architektury, a muzyka z muzyki. Prawie nic nie powstaje z natury, prawie wszystko z istniejącej kultury. Czy się nam to podoba, czy nie, żyjemy od pewnego czasu w epoce postmodernizmu, którą jedni ignorują, inni się pod nią podpisują. Należę do tych ostatnich, nerwicowo reagując na pojęcia postmodernizmu banalizowanie do cross-over jako ideologii i techniki samplerów, jako cywilizacyjnego, jedyne wyboru.” Andrzej Chłopecki, in Tomasz Szachowski, ‘Chopin i jazz’ [Chopin and jazz], *Jazz forum* 12 (1999), 49.

<sup>4</sup> Recorded on the initiative of Polonia Records the album *Chopin* was recognized by the readers of the magazine *Jazz Forum: The record of the year 1994*, received the Polish Mu-

album started a real avalanche of similar projects, each of which constitutes an individual approach to the material of Chopin reflected in the basic assumptions, such as the selection criteria of pieces or themes, and the process of transformation of the original.<sup>5</sup> Jazz arrangements of Chopin's works are generally in its mainstream, including all directions and styles appearing between New Orleans jazz and cool, or sometimes later styles which are not manifestations of avant-garde. Other arrangements which go beyond the mainstream convention mostly refer to the free jazz style. Pianists mostly chose for arrangements Chopin's works in triple metre, although duple metre dominates in jazz music. Triple time, in most cases, was respected by artists, but it also happened that the change of time signature was the basic factor influencing the degree of modification of the original piece. Triple metre itself was not important, because there was a more essential consideration: compositions written in triple metre have characteristic themes or motifs as well as short forms which can easily be adapted to the field of jazz (eg. mazurkas).

Most jazz arrangements of Chopin's music, therefore, concern piano miniatures prevailing in the composer's works. This is due to the clarity of the melodic lines which stimulate artists' creativity to write, on their basis, themes of jazz standards. *Prelude in E minor*, Op. 28 No. 4 has become the piece of Chopin's music most frequently adapted to the field of jazz. Those numerous arrangements are also stylistically diverse. *Prelude in E minor* is characterized by a sophisticated, personalized harmonic, which almost completely eliminates the need for any changes. The harmonic pattern of Chopin's *Prelude* found favourable conditions in Polish jazz. Forming seventh and ninth chords, as well as applying numerous suspensions and progressions, make the majority of musicians who approach the work treat the original with reverence. Chopin's complex harmonic language, combined with a simple and clear theme, constitutes an excellent basis for improvisation. The harmonic analysis of the *Prelude* is as follows:

---

sic Industry Award – *Fryderyk 94*, and has also been given awards by the Third Programme of Polish Radio and the Ontario Association of Jazz Music Lovers.

<sup>5</sup> The Jagodziński Trio's Chopin discography contains the following other albums: *Chopin – Live at the National Philharmonic*, Polonia CD 076, 1995; *Once more Chopin*, ZPR Records, 1999; *Metamorphoses*, Opus 111 OPS 30-285, 1999, and the latest album *Sonata b-moll*, Agora JO404-RPK, 2009. Other pianists applying jazz modifications to Chopin's compositions are: Leszek Możdżer (*Chopin – impresje*, Polonia CD 029, 1994 and *Impressions on Chopin*, Opus 111 OPS 30-263, 1999), Krzysztof Herdzin (*Chopin*, Polonia CD 056, 1996), Włodzimierz Nahorny (*Fantazja Polska: Nahorny – Chopin*, Polskie Radio PRCD 228, 2000), Adam Makowicz (*Reflections on Chopin*, Musician Showcase MS 1027, 2000) and Kuba Stankiewicz – the only one who, together with Inga Lewandowska, recorded an album entirely devoted to jazz arrangements of Chopin's songs (*Chopin Songbook*, Accord ACD 199, 2003). The projects of Leszek Kułakowski, Filip Wojciechowski and Piotr Kałużny were mainly created for concert activities and only few works have been recorded on albums.

## Preludium nr 4

F. Chopin

Chord symbols for Example 1:

Measures 1-3:  ${}^{\circ}T$   ${}^{\circ}S_7$   $D_4^7$   $D_4^{\circ}$   $D_4^7$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$

Measures 4-7:  $D_4^7$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$

Measures 8-11:  $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$

Measures 12-15:  $D_4^7$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$

Measures 16-19:  $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$

Measures 20-23:  $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$

Measure 24:  $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$   $({}^{\circ}S_{II}^7 D_4^{\circ})$

Example 1. Chopin, *Prelude in E minor*, Op. 28 No. 4

In terms of construction, the *Prelude in E minor* is a closed, clear form, consisting of two symmetrical sections AA', which together form a 24-bar (not including upbeat and the final chord). This short and clear structure makes the piece easy to adapt to jazz where it will function as a jazz standard. The logical structure also allows one to include improvised choruses within it.

Andrzej Jagodziński's arrangement is an example of adapting this pattern for use in a jazz context. For him the themes and the mood of Chopin's music have become pretext for the creation of his own, contemporary, jazz compositions largely inspired by the melody and romantic harmony, but also by the symmetrical form. When, in 1993, Polonia Records made Jagodziński an offer to record Chopin's works performed in the classical way, as Keith Jarrett did with the Johann Sebastian Bach's *Das Wohltemperierte Klavier*, the pianist was already preparing his jazz arrangements of Chopin's music<sup>6</sup>. Thus, the idea of releasing the recordings coincided with the long-planned project of the artist. Jagodziński invited the cooperation of experienced jazz musicians: Adam Cegielski (double bass) and Czesław Bartkowski (drums). The following analysis was made on the basis of a studio recording. Therefore, it refers to a single performance with no precise notation. Characteristic examples have been transcribed in order to illustrate the discussed issues more precisely.

## Theme

The whole composition begins with a short 8-bar piano introduction which is derived by Jagodziński from the original accompaniment. While the harmony shows compliance with the original (with the exception of the first chord), the rhythm undergoes a significant modification and thus, the motoric eight note ostinato is converted into syncopated process, which gives the composition bossa nova features. The way of forming the accompaniment part is presented in Example 2.

In the introduction, as well as in the whole theme, the harmony has been taken over from Chopin's original. Only a few suspensions used by Jagodziński are the exceptions from the pattern and they are largely the result of rhythmic shifts. The ostinato chord sequence, serving as an accompaniment, provides a context for the theme of the *Prelude* developing in the double bass part (Example 3).

The original musical material was enriched with acciaccaturas, turns and glissandos, while the rhythm is characterized by a free progress as a result of

---

<sup>6</sup> Marek Romański, 'Andrzej Jagodziński – urok pogranicza' [Andrzej Jagodziński – the charm of the borderland], *Jazz forum* 10/11 (2000), 53.

lengthening and shortening the values. These changes are dictated by Cegielski's individual interpretation and they receive a different form in each performance. The distribution of accents in the bar undergoes a constant transformation, which is directly affected by the specificity of the bossa nova. That is why the original *alla breve* was replaced by common time (therefore the number of bars in the composition increases to 48). The formal structure of the theme is entirely consistent with the original version and, using the whole structure of the pattern, closes within two 24-bar sections AA'.

The musical score for Example 2 is presented in common time (C) and the key of D major (one sharp). It consists of 11 staves of music, divided into two 24-bar sections, AA'. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. The first staff (measures 1-5) shows a melodic line with eighth notes and rests. The second staff (measures 6-10) continues the melodic line with similar rhythmic patterns. The third staff (measures 11-15) introduces a more complex rhythmic pattern with sixteenth notes. The fourth staff (measures 16-20) features a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The fifth staff (measures 21-25) continues the eighth-note accompaniment. The sixth staff (measures 26-30) shows a melodic line with eighth notes and rests. The seventh staff (measures 31-35) features a melodic line with eighth notes and rests. The eighth staff (measures 36-40) continues the melodic line with eighth notes and rests. The ninth staff (measures 41-45) features a melodic line with eighth notes and rests. The tenth staff (measures 46-50) continues the melodic line with eighth notes and rests. The eleventh staff (measures 51-55) concludes the piece with a final melodic line and rests.

Example 2.

Example 3.

## Piano improvisation

The thematic material serves as the base and a source of creativity for the piano improvisation. The melodic structures originate from the harmony which was taken from the first phase of the composition and whose modifications are limited to reordering or adding some extensions to the chord and applying alteration. The harmonic basis appears in the bass line, while the chords derived from the original are performed by the piano, and thus the texture of the composition receives a different shape (it is transformed from a 2- to 3-dimensional composition).

In his improvisation Jagodziński avoids the extreme registers of the instrument, he moves in the middle register (from f sharp to d<sup>3</sup>). The improvisation takes the linear shape, sometimes enriched with double-stops, strongly referring to the primary model by oscillation of the melody around the basic sounds of the theme. Its characteristic feature is a large number of acciaccatu-

ras, and there are also passage-works. Jagodziński uses the following scales: dorian (bar 16), chromatic (bar 55-56), altered (bar 16-17), and pentatonic (bar 25-26).

The image displays a musical score for Example 4, consisting of 14 staves of music. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The music is written in a single melodic line. The score includes various scales and techniques, such as triplets and chromatic runs, as indicated by the text above. The notation is in a standard staff with a treble clef. The music is in G major, and the time signature is 4/4. The score includes various scales and techniques, such as triplets and chromatic runs, as indicated by the text above.

Example 4.

The whole improvisation takes the form of two 48-bar Choruses, and each of them is closed with the final thematic fragment :



Example 5. Chorus I



Example 6. Chorus II

This phase of the composition is followed by two further ones which consist of double bass improvisation (48-bar chorus) and a return to the theme, this time shown in the piano part. Here, as before, the transformations of the main melodic line are just nuances. The *Prelude* finishes with three static chords, identical with the original.

Jagodziński formulates the original thematic material of *Prelude in E minor* in the classical form of a jazz standard, with a skilful balance between the language of jazz and Chopin's musical model. The confrontation of these two such widely different worlds of sounds, in the case of Jagodziński's arrangement, demonstrates the existence of a discourse between romantic music and jazz.

Chopin's compositions were and still are the subject of all sorts of arrangements, including various ways of transforming the pattern, which ranges from transcription, through instrumentations and arrangements, to paraphrases, resulting from the author's inspiration found in a particular piece or just its main theme. The interest in Chopin's music is, to some extent, historically justified. One has to realize the position Chopin holds in the history of music. He was the innovator, being ahead of Wagner's achievements in the field of harmony and heralding the coming of Debussy; Chopin's use of folk scales and modes significantly anticipated Ravel's or even Bartok's achievements. Above all, however, it is Chopin's contribution to the development of piano technique and texture that is most significant. Therefore, the

fact that many musicians, especially pianists, wanted to take up discourse with Chopin's music in their own way, as Liszt did, is not surprising.<sup>7</sup> Chopin himself frequently witnessed the arrangements of his own works, such as *Mazurkas* sung by Paulina Viardot. One thus comes to the conclusion that claiming any interpretations of Chopin's works to be "desecrating what is held sacred" is an a-historical argument. There is a place where one seeks to purify the music of Chopin from individual ideas and where the tendency to modify the notation is opposed: this is The International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition.<sup>8</sup> It is, however, a homage to Chopin that his works also function as material used by the most outstanding musicians, who for years have been arranging them in various styles, trends and conventions. This enables Chopin's music to reach new audiences.

Improvisation, which is an inherent component of jazz arrangements, was a well-known and cultivated practice in Chopin's times. Moreover, it remains in full harmony with the creative process experienced by the composer himself. Chopin was, in fact, one of the greatest improvisers in the history of music, who, from childhood, fascinated his listeners with the gift of improvisation and gained the admiration of the contemporary press, musicians, poets, writers, painters, as well as his family circle and friends.

[...]A concert was announced, which greatly intrigued the public, because the posters added that Chopin would improvise on a given theme. In the Hall of the old theatre in Krasieński Square, crowded with the audience, Elsner, the former director of the Conservatory, having read out the content of the programme, comes out, gives us a scroll of paper and asks us to write a theme to be improvised, and then pass it on to the stage through the orchestra. Fryderyk, on receiving the piece of paper, smiled – then he sits down at the piano and begins to play, i.e. to improvise on the given theme. Amusement and cheer spread throughout the Hall because the theme was the well-known song: *Oj gdybyś ty chmielu na te tyczki nie laź!* [Oh, you hops, if only you did not climb up those poles] [...]. He created a joyful melody out of this theme, with the set note returning every moment; the audience's enthusiasm went beyond all bounds. The theatre shook with thunderous applause and cheering. He improvised on other given themes, and the ovation was endless. We left the theater singing the melodies played by Fryderyk.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Adam Sławiński, in Szachowski, 'Chopin i jazz', 47.

<sup>8</sup> Grzegorz Michalski, *ibid.*, 48.

<sup>9</sup> "[...] Ogłoszono koncert, który ogromnie zaciekał publiczność, gdyż w afiszach dodano, że Chopin na podany temat będzie improwizował. W sali starego teatru na placu Krasieńskich, przepelnionej publicznością, po odczytaniu sztuk objętych programem wychodzi Elsner, ówczesny dyrektor Konserwatorium, wręcza nam zwitek papieru i prosi, abyśmy napisawszy temat do improwizacji, przez orkiestrę podali na scenę. Fryderyk odebrałszy kartkę, uśmiechnął się – siada do fortepianu i zaczyna grać tj. improwizować na zadany

Arrangements of Chopin's music have constantly been criticized by purists who regard such attempts as a kind of profanation (complete works with a degree of patriotic content seem to lose the latter in the sound chaos of jazz improvisations which disturb the integral form of the original compositions). The basic problem here seems to be that this ignores the fact that Chopin's music is essentially only a starting point, a kind of outer emblem for the creation of entirely new compositions, carrying a different content, characterized by the author's individuality. Taking into consideration the constant presence of postmodernism these days, the adding of swing, unknown in Chopin's days, to the qualities of his music, is both an interesting and appropriate practice.

What we do, is perceived with great sympathy and interest by a large group of classical music lovers, especially those open to unconventional things. Hence it is worth the effort. May we just not let ourselves be carried away by the easy enthusiasm, may we not be involved in any kitschy activities. There is such a danger. Any altering of Chopin's original work must be done with an acute sense of responsibility.<sup>10</sup>

*Translated by Marzena Jerczyńska*

---

temat. Radość i wesołość przebiega po całej sali, bo tematem tym była znana piosenka: *Oj gdybyś ty chmielu na te tyczki nie laź!* [...]. Już z tego tematu rozwinął radosną melodię, w której co chwila powracała zadana nuta, zapal publiczności przeszedł wszelkie granice. Teatr trząsł się od oklasków i grzmiących okrzyków. Improwizował jeszcze na inne podane tematy, a oklaskom nie było końca. Wyszliśmy z teatru śpiewając grane przez Fryderyka melodie." Krystyna Kobylańska, 'Improwizacje Fryderyka Chopina' [Fryderyk Chopin's improvisations], *Rocznik Chopinowski* 19 (1990), 69.

<sup>10</sup> "To, co robimy, jest odbierane przez sporą grupę klasycznych melomanów, zwłaszcza tych otwartych na rzeczy niekonwencjonalne, z dużą sympatią i zainteresowaniem. Chyba więc warto się tym zajmować, obyśmy tylko nie dali się porwać łatwemu entuzjazmowi, żebyśmy nie dali się wciągnąć w działania kiczowate. Jest takie niebezpieczeństwo. Jakkolwiek przerabianie oryginału chopinowskiego musi być dokonywane z ogromną odpowiedzialnością." Krzysztof Herdzin, in Szachowski 'Chopin i jazz', 45.