



Fryderyk Chopin: A Life and Times

Alan Walker

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A landmark biography of the Polish composer by a leading authority on Chopin and his time

Based on ten years of research and a vast cache of primary sources located in archives in Warsaw, Paris, London, New York, and Washington, D.C., Alan Walker's monumental *Fryderyk Chopin: A Life and Times* is the most comprehensive biography of the great Polish composer to appear in English. Walker's work is a corrective biography, intended to dispel the many myths and legends that continue to surround Chopin. *Fryderyk Chopin* is an intimate look into a dramatic life; of particular focus are Chopin's childhood and youth in Poland, which are brought into line with the latest scholarly findings, and Chopin's romantic life with George Sand, with whom he lived for nine years.

Comprehensive and engaging, and written in highly readable prose, the biography wears its scholarship lightly: this is a book suited as much for the professional pianist as it is for the casual music lover. Just as he did in his definitive biography of Liszt, Walker illuminates Chopin and his music with unprecedented clarity in this magisterial biography, bringing to life one of the nineteenth century's most confounding, beloved, and legendary artists.

Fryderyk Chopin: A Life and Times Details

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From Reader Review Fryderyk Chopin: A Life and Times for online ebook

Helen says

The definitive biography we Chopin fans have been waiting for! Alan Walker's work is not only magisterial and impeccably documented, but also highly readable. Put this on your holiday gift list for yourself or your favorite 19th century music buff, or hie yourself to your local public library to check it out!

Patrick says

I wrote quite a detailed appreciation of this book on my blog:
<https://musicnarts.blogspot.com/2018/...>

Jack Laschenski says

Over 700 pages with every detail of Chopin's life covered in detail, together with an analysis of some of his music.

Excellent!

Evan Hurley O'Dwyer says

This book was a great biography of the great composer. It does the job so well that there seems to be no need for another biography for the time being. Walker artfully blends the events of Chopin's life with musicological examples and discussions of his music. He brought attention to some references within Chopin's music to some of his other pieces, ones I had never noticed before. Walker is a great scholar and left no stone unturned in his effort to piece together the composer's life.

One can't help but feel sad at the story of Chopin's life. There is rarely any moment post adolescence where the spectre of TB is far away. It is one of the great injustices of music history that he died so young, especially when one considers the majesty of his later compositions, such as the Barcarolle, the Sonata no 3 and the Polonaise-Fantasia. If this were a novel, it would not be a satisfying ending - that the composer die in the middle of such a productive decade. Liszt lived into old age, to a time where he could reflect on his life in its entirety, whereas Chopin left "in the middle of the play."

It was interesting to read about some of the flaws that were apparent from his correspondence with various friends. If there is any flaw that seems most glaring, it is his general disregard for other people who were devoted to him. He was generally had nothing good to say about many of the composers who he was friends with that adored him in turn. The most glaring example is probably of Liszt - Chopin had many disparaging things to say about him, whereas one gets the impression that Liszt held Chopin in the highest regard. It also seemed unfair how much work Chopin expected his friend Fontana to carry out copying manuscripts, etc for

little in return.

The description of his time with George Sand was interesting and the relationship dynamic described is very difficult to define. While George Sand deserves sympathy for the situation she was in, and should be commended for acting as primary caretaker for so long, towards the end one can't help but feel like she went too far in her publication of *Lucrezia Floriani*. Her treatment of her daughter Solange was harsh. Walker quite clearly points out various ways in which Sand was dishonest in some of her writings about her time with Chopin.

Ludwika's husband Kalasanty came out of this biography terribly, and it's difficult to believe how someone could be so petty. This is especially the case when one considers that there is a reasonable chance the composer's belongings, including letters and manuscripts would have survived the centuries if Ludwika had not been forbidden by her husband to create a museum in dedication of her husband.

All in all, this book is an extremely well written and documented account of the life of the composer that is most dear to pianists everywhere.

Patsy says

This is an engaging, thorough biography by the Liszt scholar Walker. It encompasses details of Chopin's life in many aspects, includes musicological notes on his music, and relates how both were affected by historical events and by the people Chopin knew, often with interesting notes on those people's history as well. Extremely well done and a rewarding read.

Philip Koslow says

Alan Walker, author of the monumental biography of Franz Liszt (3 volumes) has struck gold again. Chopin's life, times and music have been previously surveyed by such luminaries as James Huneker, Arthur Hedley, Ferdynand Hoesick (4 volumes) and Sir Charles Halle among others. What could be added to illuminate an extraordinary life of one of the Romantic era's most esteemed composers and piano virtuosi? Details of a life lived is the answer Mr. Walker provides. And they are presented in a fashion that gives the reader the most clear picture of an artist who dwelled in the middle to upper social classes in Poland and France. Preferring to perform in the most intimate of settings rather than before large audiences probably denied him the financial resources that may have made his life more materially comfortable. Not to worry however, his father continued to underwrite much of his daily expenses. That left Chopin teaching and publishing as his main resource for revenue. All this while suffering from tuberculosis that would eventually take his life before the age of forty. Family, friends, the George Sand affair and an early heartbreak are all presented making this tome the ideal "go to" book for trained musicians as well as casual listeners pursuing the "Life and Times" of the piano's most creative imagination in the 19th century. Highly recommended.

Tavner Delcamp says

This is the latest biography of the famous musician, Frederic Chopin, published at the end of 2018. The author is Alan Walker who is a very well-known scholar in the field of musical history. He has written about

several Romantic composers, namely, Robert Schumann, Franz Liszt, and now Chopin. Between 1987 and 1997 he published a magisterial 3-volume biography of Liszt. This biography is an in-depth examination of Chopin's life and also includes incisive analyses of his many piano compositions. Walker builds upon the facts of Chopin's life that have been known for many years, but he not only re-examines the questionable truthfulness of some of these facts, but also gives a very interesting perspective on how Chopin's personality profoundly affected his life as a composer. I have read several previous biographies (Jim Samson, Adam Zamoyski) but I have to say that this biography will certainly become the benchmark study in English. To start, Walker gives an interesting overview of Chopin's family history and explains how his father emigrated from the Alsace region of France to Poland to accept a job as a French teacher. His son was born on March 1, 1810, in the Duchy of Warsaw. He had three sisters, two of whom survived to adulthood. His youngest sister, Emilia, succumbed to tuberculosis as a teenager. This disease was a scourge in 19th century Europe and prematurely took the lives of many prominent composers, authors, and artists. Chopin himself began to exhibit symptoms of TB when he was a teenager. This was to profoundly affect his health over the next 20 years and eventually caused his death at age 39. Walker goes into detail about Chopin's musical education in Warsaw and the many friends he made during this time of his life. Several of them migrated to Paris along with Chopin and helped him in many ways throughout the years in Paris. Chopin never lost his deep love of his home country even after he left permanently in 1830. He never returned because of two reasons: he was able to have a successful career as a teacher and a composer in Paris and because Poland was wiped off the map of Europe due to the invasion of Russia. Walker recounts the relative successes of Chopin in his career while living in Paris. Like most artists Chopin was dependent on the upper classes for much of his income through giving piano lessons. But, additional income came from the sale of Chopin's many marvelous compositions to several prominent publishers. The famous affair with George Sand is given a very detailed description. I knew about the disastrous 4-month trip to Majorca in 1838-39 which Sand initiated in order to help improve Chopin's health. The opposite occurred; he nearly died during this trip. Walker explains why the affair eventually fell apart after 6 years. Also, other individuals who played a prominent part in Chopin's life are described by Walker. I can highly recommend this biography to anyone who has an interest in Chopin's life and wants to better understand why he has had such a prominent position in the history of the piano.

Matthew Somoroff says

This book left me cold, and I love Chopin's music. I listened to the audiobook version, and the upper-crust British elocution of the narrator didn't help. But the author's diction was similarly stuffy and old-fashioned. And after 23 hours of words about Chopin, I had become more informed about the events of Chopin's life but barely more in touch with Chopin as a human being.

Maria says

Best read by a keyboard, unless you're the type who can really read and hear musical notation, as the author includes many excerpts from various pieces and explains them.

HSW says

I couldn't help comparing this book with the previous volumes on Liszt. Liszt was a larger-than-life

personality: generous, enthusiastic, an idealist with the drive to create change. In contrast, Chopin, though innovative, seems surprisingly down-to-earth in his pursuits, caring much more about self-expression.

A sunny, outgoing child, life's cruelties made him withdrawn, granting no one access to the sanctuaries of his heart. Even when George Sand, his 'lover', wrote a thinly disguised novel, portraying him as a neurotic, he did nothing to defend himself against slander. During his final years, his illness progressed to the level of requiring round-the-clock care. It is a heartbreaking story--unless you have a heart of stone, you won't help but feeling sorry for the composer.

With all his sorrows, Chopin naturally sought an emotional outlet in music. There is a chapter devoted to musical analysis of his compositional style and playing. It makes an interesting read for professionals and amateurs alike. Highly recommended.

Marian Hancock says

I enjoyed this book. Chopin is probably my favorite composer and it was illuminating to learn about the times in which he lived in Poland and in France. He composed and performed music in a way that was different from what others had done till then. The beauty of his music continues to capture us today. Such a brilliant and creative person, yet he suffered from tuberculosis throughout his life and died at 39 years of age. What a life!
