

## 200 Years of Chopin

**Frédéric Chopin** was born in Poland in the village of Zelazowa Wola on February 22, 1810 and died of pulmonary tuberculosis before his 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, on October 17, 1849 in Paris.

The son of a French father who worked as a school teacher in Warsaw, and a Polish mother, Chopin was a child prodigy. According to Polish historian and musicologist, Zdzislaw

Jachimecki, at a comparable age, Bach, Mozart and Beethoven were still apprentices, while Chopin was perceived by peers and audiences to be already a master.

Shortly after completing his studies at the Warsaw Conservatory, he left home in 1830 with, among his personal items, a silver cup containing soil from his native land. Jachimecki also noted: "Chopin at every step demonstrated his Polish spirit - in the hundreds of letters that he wrote in Polish, in his attitude to Paris's Polish émigrés, in his negative view of all that bore the official stamp of the powers that occupied Poland."

According to biographer, Arthur Hedly, Chopin "found within himself and in the tragic story of Poland the chief sources of his inspiration. The theme of Poland's glories and sufferings was constantly before

him, and he transmuted the primitive rhythms and melodies of his youth into enduring art forms."



Chopin's compositions were written primarily for the piano as solo instrument. Though they are technically demanding the emphasis in his style is on nuance and expressive depth. Chopin invented musical forms such as the instrumental ballade and was responsible for major innovations in

the piano sonata, mazurka, waltz, nocturne, polonaise, étude, impromptu and prélude. Chopin seldom performed publicly and never actually toured as a concert pianist, partly because he disliked it so, but also due to his poor health.

After his death, his heart was removed and preserved according to his wish. His sister later took it in an urn to Warsaw, where it was sealed within a pillar of the Holy Cross Church on Krakowskie Przedmiescie, beneath an inscription from *Matthew VI:21*: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Chopin's heart has remained there—except for a period during World War II, when it was removed for safekeeping—within the church that was rebuilt after its virtual destruction during the 1944 Warsaw Uprising.