

Chopin with Cherries

Looking for Chopin and the beauty of his music everywhere - in concert halls, poetry, films, and more. In 2010 we celebrated his 200th birthday with an anthology of 123 poems. Here, we'll follow the music's echoes in the hearts and minds of poets and artists, musicians and listeners... Who knows what we'll find?

WEDNESDAY, MAY 21, 2025

"Timeless Dialogues" - American Debut of Paulina Tomczuk with Dominik Yoder (Vol. 16, No. 2)



On 20 May 2025 at the Martin Luther King Auditorium of Santa Monica Public Library, the Helena Modjeska Art and Culture Club presented a wonderful concert of two young musicians, Paulina Tomczuk, violin, and Dominik Yoder, piano. They played a set of pieces for violin and piano, after showing off their talents in solo sections of the well-received concert.



Chopin with Cherries Anthology

Maja Trochimczyk - Editor

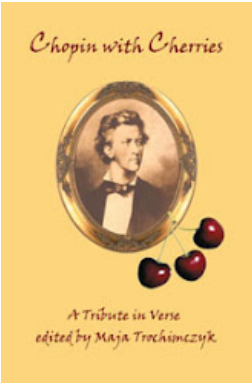
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Review by Alison Ross

Review by Christopher Woods

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CHOPIN WITH CHERRIES



ABOUT ME



Maja Trochimczyk

As an author of seven scholarly books and hundreds of articles and book chapters, I'm well established in the music history world, with two main specializations: Polish music of the 19th and 20th centuries, and 20th-century contemporary music. A former Poet Laureate of Sunland-Tujunga and current member of Village Poets and the Westside Women Writers, I have published over 300 poems in various journals and anthologies. I also wrote five volumes of poems and edited three poetry anthologies. I'm the Acting President of California State Poetry Society, President of Helena Modjeska Art and Culture Club, President of Moonrise Press, and

Born in Zielona Gora, Poland, Paulina Tomczuk is a graduate of Fryderyk Chopin Music University in Warsaw (2024) where she is currently continuing her Masters' studies with Agata Szymczewska. Simultaneously she studies at Hochschule der Künste Bern in Switzerland with Professor Bartłomiej Nizioł. A young soloist's path to fame leads through the thorns of countless competitions, and Ms. Tomczuk has participated in about 70, winning numerous honors. Three recent ones are: the 4th Prize at the 6th Wanda Wiłkomirska International Polish Music Violin Competition in Częstochowa (Poland, 2024), the 1st Prize at the 1st Miniature Competition in Warsaw (Poland, 2022), the 1st Prize at the Kyoto International Music Competition (Japan, 2021), the Grand Prix at the 2nd Wiłkomirski National Chamber Music Competition in Łódź (Poland, 2021), and the 1st Prize at the ISCART International Music Competition (Switzerland, 2021). She has performed as a soloist and in chamber ensembles in Poland, Czech Republic, Switzerland, Germany, France, the Netherlands, and Turkey. This concert was her American debut and it truly revealed her talent.



For the solo violin portion of the concert, she selected three pieces from different time periods - Johann Sebastian Bach's contemplative and polyphonic Andante and Allegro from Sonata for Solo Violin No. 2, BWV 1003, followed by pensive and chromatic first movement, subtitled L'Aurore from Eugène Ysaÿe's Sonata for Solo Violin No. 5, Op. 27 and ending with brilliant and sparkling with vitality Caprice No. 1 by Polish composer Grażyna Bacewicz. I forgot to ask what violin she played, but it sounded exquisite, filling the auditorium with rich, honeyed tones. Being a classical music weirdo, I used to listen to Bach's solo violin sonatas (that I much prefer to those for solo cello) both as "little night music" at home and while driving, to calm myself down amidst the chaos of Los Angeles freeways. Once I got into the mood of the Andante, I found the peace and serenity of pure musical dialogue - a difficult feat to perform on a solo instrument with four strings and one bow. Yet, Tomczuk was able to bring out the inner voices and maintain apparent continuity of intertwining melodies.

Board Secretary and Communications Director of the Polish American Historical Association. I also belong to the American Musicological Society, and the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences. The Moonrise Press published 17 books of poetry and music history. I received fellowships and awards from the Canadian & Polish governments, USC, PAHA, City/County of Los Angeles, and American Council of Learned Societies. In 2016, I received PAHA's Creative Arts Prize for two books of poems inspired by WWII experiences of Polish civilians and children.

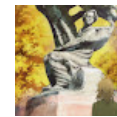
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The Belgian, late Romantic Ysaÿe is violinists' perennial favorite, yet somehow left me lukewarm. We do not have to like all the world's music, even though I'm sure the young violinist performed this dark piece very well. However, Bacewicz's Caprice in stunning interpretation of Paulina Tomczuk aptly made up for this disappointment - it was so vivacious and brilliant that it seemed that sparks were flying from the musician's bow. Bacewicz was a professional, prize-winning violinist and knew the instrument exceptionally well. This is a gem in contemporary repertoire, with its virtuosic staccatos, spizzatos, flying arpeggios and shifts of register and texture. What a fantastic piece and what an extraordinary performance! Looking for words, here, to stop repeating adjectives. Oh, I found it, in the magical vocabulary of Mary Poppins: *Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious!*



Unlike Paulina Tomczuk, whom I have seen and heard for the first time, I've had the pleasure of witnessing the artistic growth of Dominik Yoder over many years. As former Director of USC Polish Music Center I often lent scores from our collection to Roza Kostrzewska Yoder, a Polish music fan who does the most to promote Polish music in California of all musicians and officials that I know. She finds age-appropriate music by Polish composers for all her students, including her three sons, Kacper, Dominik and Lukasz. It must be hard to be the middle child in any family, let alone a family of two pianist parents and three pianist siblings. The good thing, there is excellent music heard and played in that cultural oasis of a home every hour of every day. . . The challenge is to find one's individuality and personal style amidst such competition.



I went to Paris in September, came back changed in October. An astounding city, full of history and charm. My purpose was to talk

about Mari...



Celebrating Van Gogh's Mulberry Tree and Endless Summers (Vol. 9, No. 2)

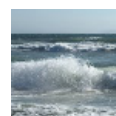
Van Gogh, La

Méridienne où La sieste, d'après Millet Could Chopin ever be friends with Vincent Van Gogh? If thinking of their per...



Finding More Chopin Sites in Warsaw (Vol. 7, No. 8)

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Chopin's Nocturnes in Poetry: Stillness, Nostalgia and Moonlight (Vol. 12, No. 4)

After a day trip to see the ocean, I drove back home in the metallic daze of the full moon. I remembered the Nocturnes, and the many poets ...



Chopin - A Research and Information Guide from Routledge (Vol. 6, No. 4)

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Hardback : \$150.00 ISBN: 978-0-415-99884-0 Publication Date: June 23rd 201...

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Kasper, Dominik, Lukasz Yoder with their parents and the Board of the Modjeska Club at the Wojciech Kocyan Residence in Baldwin Hills, CA, September 2019.

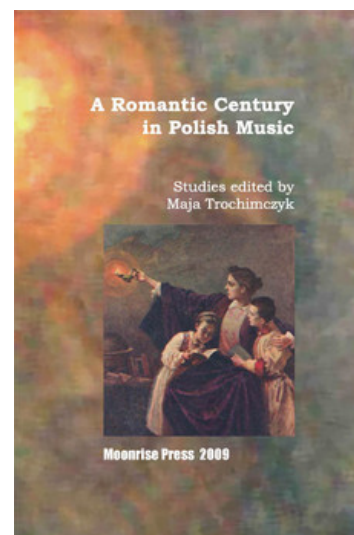
And Dominik Yoder did exactly that. As his official bio notes "he directed unusual passion and determination toward music from a very young age, beginning piano studies at the age of two on his own initiative." If his older brother was playing, Dominik wanted to play as well... When he performed for the Modjeska Club in 2019 along with his two brothers, the audience was impressed with their impeccable technique, virtuosity, and musicality. At that time, Dominik stood out because he was not just a pianist, but also a composer. He played one of his pieces - in a somewhat post-romantic, post-Rachmaninoff style that had little to do with the dissonances and complexities of contemporary modernism, but a lot more in common with the spiritual and emotional world of Romanticism. A beautiful and inspired miniature of dense chords and poignant melodies. Well done! That's what I thought then.



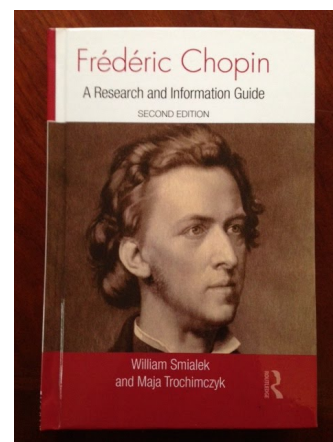
Since that time, Dominik spent hundreds of hours at the keyboard and traveled to numerous competitions, expanding both his impressive technique, the pianistic repertoire, and the expressive range of music he could comfortably interpret and make his own. To return to the list of his achievements he recently won the Beverly Hills International Auditions and the New York Music Guild Competition. Earlier, "he received Second Prize in the 2025 Hartford International Chopin Competition, Fourth Prize in the 2025 Fujairah International Piano Competition, Second Prize in the 2024 Los Angeles International Liszt Competition, the Gold Medal in the 2018 Kosciuszko Foundation Competition for Young Pianists in Washington, D.C., and the Grand Prize in the 2018 Redlands Competition, thanks to which he performed with orchestra. He has been awarded First Prize in more than a dozen local, regional, and state competitions. In 2022, Dominik received the Wybitny Polak ("Outstanding Pole") award from the 'Teraz Polska' Foundation at the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in Los Angeles."

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A ROMANTIC CENTURY IN POLISH MUSIC



FREDERIC CHOPIN - A RESEARCH AND INFORMATION GUIDE



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For the solo piano portion of the concert, Dominik Yoder selected Franz Liszt's most popular Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 in C-sharp minor, followed by Chopin's Nocturne Op. 62 No. 1 in B major, filled with nostalgia and musical filigrees of delicate arpeggios, the dramatic and passionate Étude-Tableau Op. 39 No. 6 in A minor by Sergei Rachmaninoff and concluding with Sergei Prokofiev's virtuosic and boisterous Sonata No. 3 in A Minor. The Hungarian Rhapsody is a very difficult choice - since every classical music listener has heard it countless times, and those into popular music treat it as a soundtrack to a Disney cartoon. Alas, in being ridiculed by cats and mice chasing each other, the timeless music does lose its allure. But, luckily, in Yoder's interpretation it gains back its status of a celebrated masterpiece and more. His pianistic technique is impeccable, with hands flying over the keyboard with astounding velocity and accuracy. The key to technique is to make all keys, all fingers even - so many pianists who do not practice enough after becoming "professional" lose the ability to even-out the dramatic arpeggios and scales, so suddenly there are holes in them when one finger is slightly too weak and "off." Not so, in Dominik Yoder's interpretation! His hands are a joy to behold and the fruit of their work a joy to hear! Virtuosity and brilliance in a Liszt piece is a given. What impressed me the most while listening to Yoder's interpretation of the "timeless chesnut" was how he brought out the inner voices, the sonorous details, the shifts of tempo, mood and touch... These highlights changed and enriched the music, making it sounds fresh and original. So I completely forgot about the cats and mice that stubbornly invaded my mind at the beginning.... Thank you, Dominik, for saving the music from desecration by popular entertainment! Bravo.

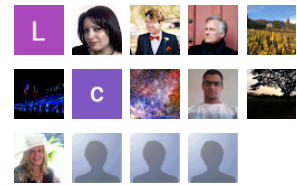


He was no less brave in following the Hungarian Rhapsody by one of Chopin's best known and beloved Nocturnes. At one of his home concert I was not happy because the shift from one, fast and dramatic piece to another, slower one was made too fast. It is one thing to practice, and another to completely enchant and delight the audience. In the Nocturne, Dominik Yoder displayed the "unbearable lightness of being" - the delicate, ephemeral arpeggios, the sweet, slightly sorrowful melodies - the audience was still, almost holding their breaths, so focused on anticipating and hearing the next note, the next climax of a heavenly ascending phrase. . . If I

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continue, I'll end up writing too much purple prose, so let's return to the program. The two Russian works, Rachmaninoff's Etude and Prokofiev's Sonata were written by pianists for pianists, with such overabundance and density of chords, scales, arpeggios, contrasts, forte fortissimo accents, that the audience was completely transfixed by this sonic onslaught. The pianist fully revealed his serious, intense, dramatic side - as a Romantic virtuoso prima facie.

Thus, when I read comments from Ewa Solinska and Prof. Adam Wibrowski claiming that Dominik Yoder is ready to compete in the Chopin International Piano Competition in Warsaw, I was not surprised. He said he does not know enough Chopin by heart yet, so he will wait another five years. Let's wish that in those years, his talent and musicality expand even further, so he reaches the podium of this most important Piano Competition in Poland.



For the "dialogue" portion of the concert, the willowy young violinist changed into a stunning red dress. She brought out some technology on stage - a tablet with the music and a pedal to press on to change the pages. How does the world change! Oh my, oh my... At least she does not have to haul a suitcase of paper around the world when going to concert. On the other hand, who could forget the cosmic vision of harpsichord soloist Elizabeth Chojnacka, with a crown of red curls above a tight silver uniform straight from outer space as she threw to the floor gigantic sheets of music glued to purple cardboard. When the music was over - Xenakis, Boulez et al. - the stage was covered with the music. This was one of my most favorite memories from Warsaw Autumn Festivals...

Our flame-red violinist and somber black-clad pianist first ventured into the classical territory. The Sonata for Violin and Piano in E-flat major, K. 302 by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was composed in 1778 in Mannheim and published as the composer's Opus 1, known as one of his "early" sonatas. The work consists of two movements, Allegro and Andante grazioso. The challenge of Mozart lies in the apparent textural simplicity and transparency of his textures. Here's the melody, here's the accompaniment... But the real challenge is the precision of rhythm, phrasing, the delicacy of touch. And, with two musicians, the challenge is to hear their impeccable coordination. One is the soloist, the other accompanies, then there is a switch and the roles reverse. Paulina and Dominik met this challenge head on and conquered that mountain! Bravo. It was a real delight to follow their musical dialogues and interchanges. When I listen to Mozart, it seems the music always dances a minuet in a crinoline and a wig. But it dances in the center of a vast ballroom, so each stumble, each step is clearly seen. Luckily, this time, there were no stumbles.



I did not remember Claude Debussy's *Beau Soir* for violin and piano from my music history studies and rightly so - it is an arrangement for violin and piano of a song first published in 1891 and setting a lovely verse by Paul Bourget:

, Lorsque au soleil couchant les rivières sont roses
Et qu'un tiède frisson court sur les champs de blé,
Un conseil d'être heureux semble sortir des choses
Et monter vers le cœur troublé.

Un conseil de goûter le charme d'être au monde
Cependant qu'on est jeune et que le soir est beau,
Car nous nous en allons, comme s'en va cette onde :
Elle à la mer, nous au tombeau.

*When at sunset the rivers turn pink / And a warm tremor rustles the
wheat fields, / An advice to be happy seems to arise from the world /
and ascend towards the troubled heart.*

*It is an advice to savor the charm of being in the world / while we are
young and the evening is beautiful / For we are leaving, like this wave
that goes out / to the sea, so we go out to the tomb.*

Debussy was not even 30 years old, and his choice of this melancholy text - "carpe diem" or else - seems indicative of youthful angst. Around that age people suddenly realize that they are not immortal, they will not be forever young, and there is a next generation already chasing after them. The music is appropriately sweetly delightful and somewhat nostalgic, even more in the violin-piano version. When the violin reached the continually ascending while fading notes in pianissimo, the audience was transfixed into silence that was followed with an audible "aaach" afterwards. That's the magic of classical music - to so enchant and entrance the audience, to so take them into cosmic spheres of beauty, that they cannot help but sigh, when the music ends. This was one of my most favorite pieces on the program.



Sergei Rachmaninoff's Vocalise is the last of his Songs op. 14, written in 1915 without words, and sung in that way by many world-famous sopranos. It was also arranged for many instruments that imitate the voice, in the ebb and flow of its flowing melodies. A charming, romantic piece, allowing the violinist to showcase the emotional versatility. I must say, having heard it many times before I was struck by the number of repetition of the same melody in the music. If someone is not romantically inclined, is it still as beautiful? Or just repetitive? The difference between deep romanticism and shallow sentimentality is difficult to maintain. While the musicians gave justice to the music, the piece itself seemed too tedious to me. But what can I say? Could I even sing or play it? It is easy to criticize and complain while sitting on the sidelines...

Luckily the fantastic, perfectly structured and played Scherzo by Johannes Brahms from the F A E Sonata brought the listeners back to the highest level of Romantic artistry. Brahms wrote this movement for a work composed jointly with Robert Schumann and Albert Dietrich in 1853 for the virtuoso violinist Joseph Joachim, with the intention of having him play the sonata, but he never did. Instead he premiered Brahms's Violin Concerto. The work is based on a motive outlining the German phrase that was Schuman's personal motto: "Frei aber einsam" ("free but lonely"). Luckily, the repetitions and recurrences of this phrase in the Scherzo never become as tedious as those of the theme in the Vocalist. Brahms's Scherzo, as interpreted by two astounding virtuosos was truly a perfect ending to this concert. I was grateful to hear classical music so alive and so well under the fingers of these talented young musicians.

The encore was another treat - Henryk Wieniawski's Romance from Violin Concerto No. 2, Op. 22, with the orchestra reduced to the piano. Again, the two musicians displayed their artistry, seamless collaboration, musicality and sensitivity in the most expressive phrases... Overall, the audience greatly appreciated their versatility, musicality, technique, and poise. The applause only ended because the guards were urging everyone to leave, as it was way past the Library's closing time!

It will be great to follow the young virtuosos' careers and see how far they will go. Meanwhile, what the listeners took home was another set of unforgettable memories of high art, high class, high society... The Western civilization has such treasures to share...



Modjeska Club's President Maja Trochimczyk, Treasurer Anna Sadowska, Dominik Yoder, Paulina Tomczuk, and Secretary Beata Czajkowska

Posted by [Maja Trochimczyk](#) at [5:49 PM](#) 

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