



## The Story of the Boy Who Made Beautiful Melodies

**DIRECTIONS:** Read the story. Then circle the best meaning for each underlined word.

Frederic François Chopin was born in a little village in Poland not far from the City of Warsaw, beside which flows the famous river Vistula. Chopin's father, a Frenchman by birth, was a schoolmaster. The boy's mother was a native of Poland. From the time when he was a little boy, the future great composer loved his mother's country and the people just as much as he loved the dear mother herself.

The father knew that his little son was musical, so he took the greatest care to have him taught by the best teachers. Chopin was only nine years old when he first played in public. It is said that he created quite a sensation. But like all those who know that talent is something to be worked for, he did not stop studying just because his playing was pleasing to other people. In fact, it was just on that account that he began to work all the harder.

Then there came a great change. He left his home and went to Paris, where he lived for the rest of his life. Even though he was but a youth of twenty-one, he had already composed two concertos for the piano. These he had played in public to the great delight of all who heard him, but especially of his countrymen.

You see, Chopin's going to Paris was a strange journey. The boy was leaving his mother's country and going to the land of his father. Like Joseph Haydn, who went away at the age of six, Chopin never lived at home again. But he did not reach Paris a stranger. His reputation had preceded him, and some of the great ones in The World of Music welcomed his coming.

During his boyhood Chopin played much in public, journeying to some of the great cities of Europe, among them Vienna, Berlin, and Munich. Therefore, when he played in Paris it was as an artist. Here, as at home, he charmed everyone by the beauty of his music and the loveliness of his touch. He possessed the true piano hand. It was somewhat narrow. The fingers were long and tapering. His hands seemed at once strong and vigorous, yet delicate and sensitive. Indeed, Chopin's music is of just these qualities. It is strong in its nobility, delicate in its sentiment.

One would think that to arrive in Paris and to be welcomed by the great ones would make everything easy. But it was not so for Chopin. Only a few people were present at his first concert and for quite a while he had no pupils. Indeed, it was all so discouraging that he made up his mind to return to his beloved Poland.

His friend and fellow musician, Franz Liszt, begged him not to go. Others, too, urged him to stay in Paris. One friend, who met him in the street as he was about to leave, advised him as did the others to stay in Paris. But no, he was going home.

"But," said this friend, "First come with me to visit a true lover of music."

So Chopin went with him to the house of Baron Rothschild. Here he played, so charming the company with his music that ever so many of them implored him for the privilege of lessons. And so, all in a moment, his troubles blew away, as troubles often do.

Do you wonder what kind of a man the little Polish boy became after he found success in Paris? One person said about him: "Chopin talks little, and rarely about music. But when he does speak of music one must listen to him." Another said: "He is reserved and quiet, especially among strangers, but among his friends he is witty and full of sly humor."

But his thoughts were not for words, they did not weave the pretty phrases of idle talk. They were busy making nocturnes, waltzes, mazurkas, impromptus and many other kinds of music that we shall learn to love as we hear them.

Music was Chopin's true speech. The world soon learned to love what he said in it. And it always will love it. There was neither telephone nor telegraph in those days. Yet it did not take long for another composer, Robert Schumann, who lived far away, in Germany, to learn that a genius by the name of Chopin lived in Paris. The post carried to Schumann a copy of Chopin's first printed music. This was a theme taken from Mozart's Opera *Don Juan*, which Chopin arranged with variations for the piano.

When Schumann played it to his friends everyone exclaimed: "How beautiful it is!"

Then someone said, "Chopin—I never heard the name. Who can he be?"

So we see that his thoughts printed as music flew like winged messengers to carry news of him to others in distant places. And people not merely asked: "Who can he be?" but they found out who he was, and kept passing the news on and on until finally it has reached us!

Chopin was never a robust person, though he was well and busy most of his life. But in the last years he suffered much from illness. This led him to travel to many places from Paris for the good of his health. Chopin was devoted to Poland, the beloved land of his birth. Once he went to England and to Scotland. He played in London and was highly lauded for the beautiful way he performed his own music.

While it is true that Chopin was ill in the last years of his life, we must notice that he kept right on with his work. He played and composed just as he always had done. Chopin died in Paris, October 17, 1849.

Many men, who would have given up everything had they not been brave, have persevered right on through illness. Milton was blind, but he dictated "Paradise Lost" to his daughter. Beethoven was deaf, but he did not give up composing. Robert Louis Stevenson, who wrote the lovely *Child's Garden of Verses*, was ill all his life, but he kept on writing. Norwegian composer and pianist Grieg was probably never well all his life, but he never gave up.

Adapted from *Child's Own Book of Great Musicians: Chopin* by Thomas Tapper

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. **Native** means:      A. born in a specific place      B. young and inexperienced
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. **Sensation** means:      A. widespread excitement      B. a feeling in the body
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. **Preceded** means:      A. went after      B. went before
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. **Possessed** means:      A. had      B. allowed
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. **Tapering** means:      A. getting less thick at one end      B. to gradually slack off
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. **Vigorous** means:      A. active      B. healthy and full of energy
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. **Discouraging** means:      A. causing a loss of confidence      B. doubtful
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. **Implored** means:      A. demanded      B. asked
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. **Reserved** means:      A. slow to reveal opinion      B. to hold for someone
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. **Variations** means:      A. a different version      B. changes
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. **Robust** means:      A. forceful      B. strong and healthy
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. **Lauded** means:      A. praised in public      B. made louder
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. **Persevered** means:      A. imprisoned      B. kept going or working

