

New Work by Frédéric Chopin Recently Discovered in the Collection of the Morgan Library and Museum

The First Significant Discovery of a Chopin work since the 1930s

New York, NY (updated October 30, 2024) – Curator Dr. Robinson McClellan uncovered a previously unknown waltz written in the hand of composer **Frédéric Chopin** in **The Morgan Library & Museum’s** collection. The discovery of an unknown work by Chopin has not happened since the late 1930s. The Morgan’s manuscript consists of twenty-four notated measures that the composer asks the pianist to repeat once in their entirety. Chopin famously wrote in “small forms,” but this work, lasting about one minute, is shorter than any other waltz by him. It is nevertheless a complete piece, showing the kind of “tightness” that we expect from a finished work by the composer. The beginning of the piece is most remarkable: several moody, dissonant measures culminate in a loud outburst, before a melancholy melody begins. None of his known waltzes start this way, making this one even more intriguing. The manuscript is only slightly larger than an index card (102 x 130 mm, about 4 x 5 inches); based on other similarly-sized manuscripts by Chopin, it is assumed that it was meant as a gift for inclusion in someone’s autograph album. Chopin usually signed manuscripts that were gifts, but this one is unsigned, suggesting that he changed his mind and withheld it.

The Morgan’s Associate Curator of Music Manuscripts and Printed Music, Robinson McClellan, first came across the manuscript when he began cataloging the Arthur Satz Collection, which came to the Morgan in 2019. Although the piece was identified as “Chopin” in the Satz collection, he found it peculiar that he could not think of any waltzes by Chopin that matched the measures on the page. McClellan called upon leading Chopin expert Professor Jeffrey Kallberg of the University of Pennsylvania to work with him to verify the manuscript’s authenticity and to understand the role of the work in Chopin’s musical life. Extensive research points to the strong likelihood that the piece is by Chopin. McClellan and Kallberg also enlisted the help of external experts on Chopin as well as the Morgan’s paper conservators, who

confirmed that the paper and ink are consistent with what Chopin customarily used. These investigations all point in one direction: this is a significant discovery in the world of classical piano music.

“This newly discovered waltz expands our understanding of Chopin as a composer and opens new questions for scholars to consider regarding when he wrote it and for whom it was intended,” said Robinson McClellan. “To hear this work for the first time will be an exciting moment for everyone in the world of classical piano.”

“This is an exciting moment for the Morgan to discover another dynamic work by Chopin in our collection of music manuscripts,” said Dr. Colin B. Bailey, Katharine J. Rayner Director. “Our extensive music collection is defined by handwritten examples of the creative process and it is thrilling to have uncovered a new and unknown work by such a renowned composer.”

The Morgan houses one of the world’s finest collections of music manuscripts and rare printed scores. In addition to numerous musicians’ letters and first editions of scores and librettos, the holdings include one of the largest collections of Mahler manuscripts anywhere and substantial holdings of Mozart, Schubert, Chopin, Brahms, Debussy, Richard Strauss, Stravinsky, Ravel, and Schoenberg. Forty thousand collection items span six centuries and many countries. The Morgan’s materials relating to the lives and works of the dramatist William S. Gilbert and the composer Arthur S. Sullivan form the most extensive archive of its kind. Significant music collections at the Morgan include the Mary Flagler Cary Collection, the James Fuld Collection, and the Robert Owen Lehman Collection on deposit.

ABOUT THE MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM

A museum and independent research library located in the heart of New York City, the Morgan Library & Museum began as the personal library of financier, collector, and cultural benefactor J. Pierpont Morgan (1837–1913). The Morgan offers the public close encounters with great works of human accomplishment in a setting treasured for its intimate scale and historic significance. Its collection of manuscripts, rare books, music, drawings, and works of art comprises a unique and dynamic record of civilization, as well as an incomparable repository of ideas and of the creative process from 4000 BC to the present.

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