

## **A short profile of the Chopin-Gesellschaft in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland e.V. in Darmstadt**

In 1970 on the initiative of the Polish pianist Maciej Lukaszczyk (1934 - 2014) the Chopin Society in the Federal Republic of Germany (**Chopin-Gesellschaft in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland e.V.**) was founded in Darmstadt. It is a non-profit organisation run by volunteers. The aims of the society were to spread the knowledge about the life and works of Fryderyk Chopin, to establish cultural ties between West Germany and Poland at a time during the Cold War when there were no political or diplomatic relations between the two countries at all, and to help further the careers of young pianists. Cultural exchanges took place and Polish festivals were organized to introduce Polish culture to Darmstadt. Concerts were organized on a regular basis promoting the music of Chopin and other Polish composers (though not exclusively) and international masterclasses were held starting in 1972 with special emphasis on the interpretation of Chopin's music. Maciej Lukaszczyk conducted a piano class from 1970 to 2014. 1983 saw the first Chopin Competition in Darmstadt. In the meantime:

- 22 international masterclasses have been held, all conducted by internationally renowned pianists/pedagogues, the last one in 2014 being conducted by Prof. Andrzej Jasinski and Prof. Elzbieta Karas-Krasztel.
- 10 Chopin Piano Competition have been held, all devoted entirely to the music of Chopin, the last one in October 2013. Six of the eight finalists from this last competition have qualified for the preliminary round in Warsaw or have been accepted to the main competition, as is the case with Andrzej Wiercinski, who was a finalist in Darmstadt but who as a result of his winning the National Polish Chopin Competition this year automatically qualified for the main competition in Warsaw in October. The average number of contestants over the 30 years of the competition in Darmstadt has been 66 per competition.
- Around 500 concerts taken place - piano recitals, chamber music concerts, concerts with orchestra etc.
- 5 Polish festivals all lasting between 1 and 2 weeks have been held.
- After the death of Maciej Lukaszczyk in 2014, his piano class in Darmstadt has been taken over by Aleksandra Mikuska, his successor as the society's president.

This year the society is celebrating its 45th anniversary. To celebrate this our normal concert series has been supplemented by two special events:

1) A Chopin-Marathon which took place on 21.3.2015 with 23 young pianists from 13 countries performing all of Chopin's works for piano solo non-stop and

in chronological order according to their date of composition. This exciting event lasted almost 16 hours and was highly praised as an outstanding achievement by audience and media alike.

2) A Chopin Festival which will take place from the 11th - 13th September 2015 comprising concerts, lectures and seminars. It will be opened by a gala concert given by Kevin Kenner and the Polish quintet Piazzofort with music by Chopin and Piazzolla. The lecture will be about the person and legacy of Karol Mikuli followed by a concert with works by Mikuli and Chopin. And the seminar will be about the importance of the original texts in interpreting Chopin's works given by Prof. Kaminski followed by a concert of Chopin's chamber works.

### **History and tradition of the Darmstadt Chopin Competition**

The Chopin Competition in Darmstadt has a long and rich tradition not shared by too many other competitions. It is solely devoted to the works of Fryderyk Chopin and has been held regularly every 3 or 4 years in the month of October since 1983, carefully avoiding those years in which the Warsaw Competition takes place.

13 years after founding the society, Maciej Lukaszczyk also initiated the First National Chopin Piano Competition (**I. Bundesdeutscher Chopin-Klavierwettbewerb**) in Darmstadt in 1983 consisting of 2 rounds. The second edition of the competition in 1986 already incorporated 3 rounds and included pianists from Denmark, Austria and Switzerland. The third edition of the competition in 1989 was open to all pianists having lived or studied in Europe for at least one year and was therefore re-named the "**Europäischer Klavierwettbewerb**" (European Piano Competition). It retained this title until 2009, although it was already by then open to pianists worldwide without restriction up to the age of 30 years. To reflect this more clearly, the name was consequently changed to "**Darmstadt International Chopin Piano Competition**" in 2009. The 11th edition of this competition will take place from October 6th - 16th, 2017.

Since 1992 the venue has been the Music Academy in Darmstadt (**Akademie für Tonkunst**), as this offers sufficient practice rooms and a large stage in an attractive hall accommodating 220 visitors. These premises are rented by the Chopin-Gesellschaft for the duration of the competition (see photo on presentation).

The competition is planned, organized and run solely by members of the Chopin-Gesellschaft, who like myself, are idealistic and inspired volunteers. It is carefully planned and organized and as far as is humanly possible, nothing is left to chance. Utmost care is taken to ensure fair conditions for everyone, avoiding

any kind of favouritism, and all attempts are made to provide a friendly and caring atmosphere, in which the participants feel comfortable and enjoy the experience of playing to a knowledgeable and appreciative audience and a carefully selected team of jurors.

The duration of the competition is usually 11 days with an unspecified number of candidates at the outset, but with typically 20 semifinalists and 6 to 8 finalists.

Through the Chopin Competitions in Darmstadt the Chopin-Gesellschaft wishes to honour Chopin and his music, to promote young talent, to inspire young pianists to search for ways leading to the best interpretation of Chopin's music and to help prepare them for the difficult path to Warsaw.

### **Selection and number of candidates**

See graph.

### **Competition repertoire**

This consists of a wide range of works exclusively by Chopin played over three rounds, requiring a total playing time of over 100 minutes, including all the genres that help reveal of good Chopinist: mazurkas, polonaises, études, sonatas, nocturnes, concertos etc. Since 1992 the final round has required the performance of either of Chopin's concertos with a professional orchestra. Some orchestras we have engaged are: The Merck Orchestra from Darmstadt (1992), the orchestra of the Warsaw Music Academy (1999), the Symphony Orchestra from Plock (2002), the Russian Chamber Philharmonic based in Frankfurt (2006 and 2009), the Czech Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra from Pardubice (2013).

In the first round the playing time is around 20 minutes, in the second round about 45 - 50 minutes.

In the next competition in 2017 it is foreseen that the finalists will have to perform not only a concerto with orchestra but also demonstrate their ability to perform a chamber music work by Chopin, namely the piano part of Chopin's sonata for piano and cello op. 65.

It is also foreseen that candidates will be given the opportunity in the first round to improvise for a few minutes on a theme given to them on the day. This will not be a compulsory requirement of the competition, but is intended as an encouragement for young pianists to practise the almost lost art of improvisation, which was so essential in Chopin's day. There will be a prize for the winner, but no-one will be penalized for poor attempts or no attempt.

## **Prize Money**

See graph.

## **Composition of Jury**

The jury typically comprises 7 internationally acclaimed pianists/pedagogues, including over the years a number who have won main prizes in Warsaw, such as:

Halina Czerny-Stefanska  
Edith Picht-Axenfeld  
Julian von Karolyi  
Adam Harasiewicz  
Marta Sosinska  
Eugene Indjic  
Kevin Kenner  
Dang Thai Son

and successful pedagogues such as

Renate Kretschmar-Fischer  
Karl-Heinz Kämmerling  
Dominique Merlet  
Christopher Elton  
Katarzyna Popowa-Zydron

## **Proven Record**

Over the last few years many of the prize winners of Darmstadt have gone on to achieve success in Warsaw:

Hélène Tysmann (winner in Darmstadt in 2006) and  
Pawel Wakarecy (7th Finalist in Darmstadt in 2009)  
were finalists in Warsaw in 2010

Claire Huangci (winner in Darmstadt in 2009) went on to win the Miami Chopin Competition in 2010 and reached the semi-finals in Warsaw 2010. In the meantime she has become a much sought-after pianist on several continents.

In fact no fewer than 16 of the competitors from the Darmstadt competition in 2009 were in the main competition in Warsaw in 2010.

Furthermore, 6 of the 8 finalists from the last competition in Darmstadt in 2013 have been selected for the preliminaries currently taking place here in Warsaw:

Ivett Gyöngyösi  
Kausikan Rajeshkumar  
Marek Kozak  
Miyako Arishima  
Vladimir Matusevich  
and

Andrzej Wiercinski (7th in Darmstadt who as a result of his winning this year's National Chopin Competition in Poland automatically qualifies for the main competition here Warsaw this October).

Other prizewinners from Darmstadt have achieved success at other prestigious competitions:

Da Sol Kim (3rd prizewinner in Darmstadt in 2009) became prize winner at the Queen Elizabeth Competition in Belgium in 2010 and the ARD Competition in Munich.

Hisako Kawamura (winner in Darmstadt in 1999) won the Clara Haskil Competition in Vevey and was a prizewinner at the Queen Elizabeth Competition in Belgium and the ARD Competition in Munich.

## **Problems**

The main problem over the last few years, especially after the financial crisis in 2008, has been funding the competition, i.e. convincing the local authorities and the state of Hessen to provide public money to support the competition. Today politicians want to see tangible results from their investments and be able to measure how much profit is generated or how much status-enhancement is achieved. More and more time and energy is required to persuade the people in office to fund the competition and it is even more difficult in Germany to find private sponsors. (In the USA they have a completely different philosophy regarding donations.)

A measurable increase in status would be achieved if the Darmstadt Competition, with its long, consistent and reliable tradition, were given automatic qualification to the main competition in Warsaw for its first or first two prizewinners.

We ask the Chopin Institute to give this serious consideration in the light of what has been presented above.

Jill Rabenau, Vice President  
Chopin-Gesellschaft in der BRD Deutschland e.V.