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The National quality in Chopin's music of the Paris period

Chopin's sense of nationality grew out of the political situation following the fall and partitioning of the Polish state. The modern concept of the nation as a political, cultural and voluntarist collectivity was shaped between the uprisings of 1830 and 1863, but its formative ideas arose earlier, influencing the intellectual and artistic elites and the mindset of wider social circles. The sense of Poland's enslavement and its disappearance from the map of Europe engendered robust resistance, which the elites were almost obliged to express in literature and in art, showing what was most Polish from the trove of treasures created by the people – the nation. It was an imperative imposed by the time and the situation. But it took the genius of poets (Mickiewicz, Słowacki, Krasiński, Norwid) and in music of Chopin to bear that weight and to raise the topos of nationality to the highest level in European culture.

During his Warsaw years, Chopin turned to folk and national models in the simplest way, arranging well-known melodies, for example in his *Fantasy on Polish Airs*. But the trauma of the failed November Rising, which he experienced in Vienna, strengthened within him the awareness of his national and artistic mission. And although on arriving in Paris he realised that he had already known in Warsaw – as he wrote – 'how much I wanted to feel, and in part succeeded in feeling, our national music', it was only in Paris that he came to forge the elevated national style in which he turned national elements into a universal body of work, to mention but the Scherzo in B minor, the Fantasy in F minor, and the wonderful polonaises and sets of mazurkas. In cosmopolitan Paris, where he came into contact with the most disparate political, social and philosophical theories and ideas, he remained faithful to the ideas that had been instilled in his heart and mind in Poland. He did not assimilate the obtrusive Romantic watchwords as did Schumann, Liszt or Berlioz. He became one of the greatest innovators of romanticism – with the stamp of Polishness.