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Joseph d'Ortigue (1802–1866).

The perspective of a little-known Chopin biographer

The name of Joseph d'Ortigue (1802–1866) does not appear in the literature dedicated to Chopin. To me, this has always seemed puzzling: first of all because of his position in the musical life of the times, as he was considered one of the French most influential music critics; secondly because, being involved in the Paris musical movement and a friend of Berlioz and Liszt, he kept close relations with the Romantic school composers whose views he shared and supported; and finally, since he was a close neighbour of Chopin who lived in Square d'Orléans, he was bound to have met him there. My research let me find two articles by d'Ortigue about Chopin that bring to light their mutual cordial relations: the first one is an obituary published in *L'Opinion publique* [*Public Opinion*] on the 23rd November 1849, the second is an explanatory note addressed to the director of *Ménestrel* dated July 1861, in response to the articles about Chopin by Hippolyte Barbedette. In both texts the author reveals that during their meetings Chopin provided him with a lot of valuable information for the biographical study that d'Ortigue intended to write and that Chopin accepted in its general form. By linking the two articles to the other writings by d'Ortigue, one discovers that his approach to Chopin's genius, in spite of his reservations concerning "the limited sphere of his thought", bears witness to a considerable interest he had for the "wild, somewhat bizarre" originality of his "dialect" pervaded with Polish musical forms. This aspect of Chopin's inspiration did indeed harmonize with his own research of music and traditions of Provence. The relation between the strong ethnic character of Chopin's works and his innovative melodious, concordant syntax let d'Ortigue understand that his music opens future prospects which he sensed, but only vaguely, as he deems Chopin's music "impossible to analyze". It is therefore by the means of a poetic metaphor, more readily accessible than a technical analysis, that the musicologist attempts to pinpoint Chopin's genius, which is based on the solid classical tradition, but at the same time is characterized by a very unique atmosphere and lightness belonging "to a new order of things which has not even been foreshadowed ever before".