

Frederic Chopin

We will start today's lesson with a pop quiz from some of our earlier FAME lessons of the year. Listen to this music (play Schumann's "Happy Farmer"), which you heard earlier in the year and tell me how it makes you feel (*happy*). The first question for today's pop quiz – Could somebody name the piece I just played or tell me who the composer was? The second and final question for the pop quiz – Name the artist for today's FAME lesson (*Duffy*). I asked you these two questions because today's composer wrote several happy musical compositions **and** he was Duffy's favorite composer.

Our composer is Frederic Chopin (have the kids practice his name by holding up a pan and asking them to identify what you are doing – Show Pan), who was the son of a Polish mother and a French father. As you listen to the first piece (play track 9 from the Chopin collection CD; Mazurka in B-Flat) think about how it makes you feel or what kind of music it may be (*lively, dance music*). This is a mazurka, a happy, lively Polish dance piece that Chopin wrote when he was sixteen years old. If you were to associate a color with this piece, what color would it be? (*one of the warm colors – reds or oranges*)

Frederic Chopin was born in Poland in 1810 (use a classroom map to show the kids where Poland is and ask them how many years ago Chopin was born and whether they can think of any other composers from that period – Liszt and Schumann) as the only son in a family with three daughters. All four children were given piano lessons but it soon became apparent that Frederic had the most talent for music. In fact, he was a child prodigy (ask the kids what a prodigy is) and had already composed two Polonaises by the time he was seven. (Play track 6) A Polonaise is a slow dance number that is the first piece at senior proms in Poland. What instrument is playing this music (*piano*). How does this music make you feel? This is a very challenging piece and is played best by piano maestros. This polonaise was probably composed as a dream of a powerful, victorious Poland.

Not only was Chopin a musical prodigy, he was also a caricaturist, who drew cartoons of classmates and teachers and passed them around to his friends during class times. I do not think you should try to do it now because you would probably get your name on the board! He loved comedies and staged several plays with his older sister, Emily, co-directing. All in all, he had a very happy childhood.

Chopin was a dapper dresser, who had his first public recital when he was nine years old. He was dressed to the hilt in a black jacket with a lace collar, short

trousers, and stockings. “Little Chopin” charmed the audience with his superb playing. However, when his mother, who was unable to attend, asked him what the audience liked best, he proudly replied, “The white lace collar that you made, Mama!”

Chopin was a perfectionist who worked and reworked each piece he wrote. As a result, he is one of the few composers to have all his compositions performed even now, almost two centuries later. Most of his pieces were written for the piano earning him the title “The Poet of the Piano”.

He left Poland when he was twenty and was gifted a silver cup filled with Polish soil. It was a gift he would cherish because he never returned to Poland, which was taken over by the Russians in the 1830s. He was so angry at the take-over that he refused to perform in Russia.

Let’s listen to one more piece by Chopin as I finish up the biography. (**Play track 2, Nocturne in E-Flat**). How does this music make you feel? (*sleepy, dreamy, relaxed, comforted*). I will do a little charade as a mnemonic (the “m” is silent so this is pronounced as “nee-mon-ic) for this class of music (**knock on the desk and then turn around**). Can anybody tell me what two actions I performed? (*knock turn*). This piece is called a Nocturne. Would anybody like to tell me what Nocturne or nocturnal means? (*night*) So, this piece is a dreamy melody that makes one think of the stars and moon. What color would you associate with this piece? (*blues, perhaps*).

Although Chopin had a very happy childhood, he was a very frail boy and prone to bouts of sickness. In fact, he was secretly engaged to a young girl when he was sixteen but her parents broke off the engagement since they did not want their daughter to be a young widow! He died when he was only thirty-nine, when his lungs finally gave up to the tuberculosis that had plagued him for a while. His last piece of music was composed when he was too weak to write or play the piece himself and was a mazurka.

After he died, his heart was entombed in his beloved Poland while his body was buried in Paris. He had wanted Mozart’s Requiem to be sung during his funeral. However, the Requiem had parts for female singers, and the church that hosted his funeral did not allow female singers in its choir. As a result, the funeral was delayed by two weeks until the church relented and made an exception for Chopin. This beloved son of Poland had the Warsaw airport and an asteroid named in his honor.