

MUSICAL DESTINATIONS

CHOPIN'S CAPITAL BENEFITS

Warsaw: Poland

Claire Jackson pays a visit to the Polish capital, where the ghost of one composer in particular looms large, whether at relaxed outdoor concerts or in multimedia installations

When a city names its airport after a composer, you know it is serious about promoting musical history. Warsaw's Chopin Airport was officially renamed in 2001 and fans can now take a snap with the airport's namesake via the 'Selfie with Chopin' app. Across the city, key sites activate a virtual incarnation of Frédéric Chopin, who sits in the corner of one's smartphone to enable users to take a portrait with the pianist. It's an innovative way of attracting new audiences to the myriad Chopin-inspired events that Warsaw boasts. Events, that is, like the concerts held at the Chopin Statue at Łazienki Royal Park. For the past 50 years, recitals have taken place at

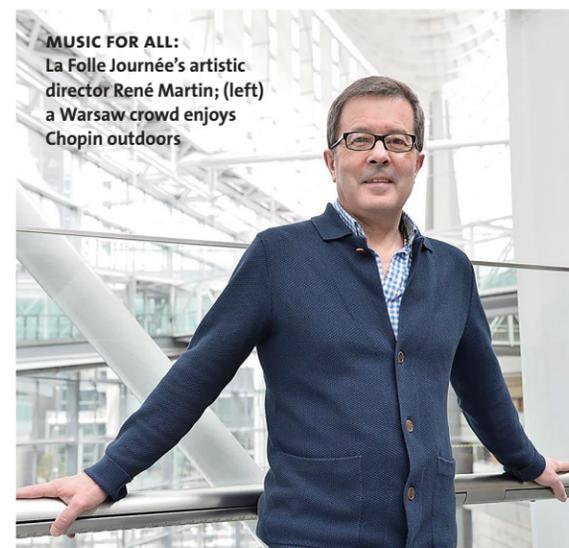
the foot of the stone sculpture every Sunday from May until late September. I arrive in time to catch the last two recitals of the 2016 season. The leaves are turning gold, and the autumnal sun dimples Frédéric's face. A technician fiddles with a handsome Kawai grand piano. I observe children picnicking and adults nursing coffee cups. People arrive throughout the Preludes. There is muted conversation, clapping between movements and people taking photos. Chopin's music was first performed in salons where audiences were

Chopin clearly plays a central role in Warsaw's cultural life

unencumbered by 20th- and 21st-century concert hall etiquette, so the park's audience arguably have a more authentic experience – minus the smartphones, amplification and all. The last recital is given by one of the finalists of the International Chopin Piano Competition, Warsaw's famous musical contest. The event, established in 1927, takes place every five years, culminating in a final with the Warsaw Philharmonic. It has launched the careers of some of the world's most notable artists, such as Martha Argerich, who took first prize in 1965. Seong-Jin Cho won the most recent instalment in 2015. Multimedia Chopin benches, meanwhile, have been installed across Warsaw. I encounter several of these sonorous seats, and each time have to queue for a turn to access



HERO WORSHIP: the Ostrogski Palace, home to the Chopin Museum; (right) taking a composer selfie



MUSIC FOR ALL: La Folle Journée's artistic director René Martin; (left) a Warsaw crowd enjoys Chopin outdoors



MONUMENTAL IMPACT: Łazienki Royal Park's magnificent Chopin statue is a focal point for performance

LOCAL HERO

Frédéric Chopin



Fryderyk Chopin, to give him his original Polish name, was born around 30 miles west of Warsaw in 1810. The family soon moved to the city itself, where Chopin's father held a teaching post at the Lyceum. Learning

the piano from an early age, Chopin was recognised as a child prodigy and began giving concerts in the city from the age of seven. He later studied at the Lyceum himself and composed the first of his Etudes while still based in Warsaw. He left the city in 1830, shortly before the major uprising.

the musical titbits. Visitors are curious to learn more about Warsaw's musical heritage (and children love to push a button). One bench plays Polonaise in A, Op. 40, No 1; another the Waltz in D flat, Op. 64, No 1.

The Ostrogski Palace, meanwhile, is home to the biggest collection of Chopinania in the world. Here you'll find Chopin's pianos: the Pleyel grand is cordoned off, but the coffee-stained upright used during his most prolific years is free to explore. As well as interactive displays of scores, maps and biographical nuggets, there is a 'death room' which features paintings of Chopin before his untimely death aged 39 and a lock of the composer's hair.

Chopin clearly plays a central role in Warsaw's cultural life. It is impossible to avoid his influence – and why would you want to? However, do not fear Chopin burnout; there is plenty to sustain diverse musical tastes. La Folle Journée, for instance, is Warsaw's

annual summer series. The festival, similar in style to the BBC Proms, was founded by René Martin, and is also held in France, Spain, Japan and Brazil – although each series has a local twist. 'The main idea is to de-secularise classical music and take it to the biggest audience possible,' says Martin. 'I named the festival "crazy day", which suggests something revolutionary. Each concert is 45 minutes long and there is something for everyone.'

I attend the Warsaw premiere of Max Richter's *Vivaldi Recomposed*, performed on a Saturday afternoon. The concerts have a family-friendly 'gig' atmosphere: vendors sell T-shirts and there's a graffiti tower for children. 'There are many educational concerts and ones featuring youth orchestras from across Poland,' says Martin. 'We are preparing a public for classical music for tomorrow.' A tomorrow in which, presumably, Chopin will continue to loom large. ■

WARSAW 4 MUSICAL HIGHLIGHTS



Warsaw Philharmonic
Conducted by Jacek Kaspszyk (pictured left), Poland's national orchestra plays its regular season at the National Philharmonic concert hall, a venue that, originally built in 1901, was reconstructed after being destroyed in World War II. The orchestra's season runs from September to June. filharmonia.pl

Grand Theatre
The Grand Theatre/National Opera building is home to its own opera company and the Polish National Ballet. As with the concert hall (above), it was rebuilt after WWII. Details of

both opera and ballet seasons for 2017-18 have yet to be announced. teatr Wielki.pl
La Folle Journée
Held annually since 1995, La Folle Journée festival takes place across several venues in late September, with each year's event centred on a different theme – previous themes have included Russia (2012), America (2014) and Nature (2016). The theme and programme details for 2017 are yet to be announced, but the dates have been confirmed as 29 September to 1 October. follejournee.pl
Tamka 43 restaurant
For a taste of Chopin, head to Tamka 43 which has a menu in his honour. Using the composer's correspondence to determine what Frédéric, George Sand and their friends ate and drank, the Chopin tasting menu features pumpkin soup, red mullet and French-Polish dishes. tamka43.pl