

After composing his seven *Mazurkas* op. 42 (Amadeus BP 1621), it was only natural that Theodor Kirchner occupied himself with the Polonaise, another Polish dance form so influenced by Frédéric Chopin. Kirchner's involvement with Chopin's oeuvre had led to his compiling a *Chopin-Album*, which Rieter-Biedermann released on New Year's Day 1880 and which contained four polonaises among the fifty pieces. The polonaise had become popular: in 1878 David Popper published his *Polonaise de Concert* op. 14 for violoncello and piano, and his second *Polonaise de Concert* op. 28 was released by Hofmeister (Plate No. 7824) only shortly after Kirchner's polonaises; in 1879 Antonín Dvořák composed polonaises for orchestra as well as for violoncello and piano; finally there is the polonaise in Tchaikovsky's opera *Eugene Onegin*, which was premiered in 1879, but its piano score was already available in 1878. Kirchner arranged works by all these three composers.

The 4 *Polonaisen für Clavier* (so the title of the first edition) were published at the end of 1879 by Friedrich Hofmeister in Leipzig (Plate Nos. 7786–7789). Kirchner dedicated the work to “Mr Eph<sup>rm</sup> L. Corning, American consul in Zurich”. The Brooklyn merchant Ephraim Leonard Corning (1836–1924) had been a member of the chamber of commerce before being appointed vice-consul in Zurich in 1874. His long-standing friendship with Kirchner is revealed in various autographs of Kirchner's bearing Corning's name, as well as in letters by Kirchner to Corning from 1888 and 1895. Corning was apparently a patron of music: in 1864 James Ernst Perring had dedicated his cavatina *Beware!* to Corning.

In a letter dated 21 November 1880 the composer Stephen Heller wrote Kirchner about his encounters with Corning: “In the the meantime I have made the acquaintance of Mr. Corning, who is an endearing and interesting person, full of taste, education, with a noble way of thinking and warm sentiments. In him you have a compassionate friend, such as one seldom finds in the course of a life.”

Reviews of Kirchner's *Polonaises* by Arnold Niggli and Hermann Deiters appeared in the *Swiss Musical Times and Singers Revue*, 31 January 1880,

and the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, 18 August 1880. Although Deiters criticised that in the second polonaise the harmonies “in their audacity sometimes transgress permissible borders”, Niggli was full of praise: “Of the 4 polonaises combined in Kirchner's op. 43, it seems to us that the second one in F major earns the first rank, because it unites the chivalrous pomp and splendour of this dance form exquisitely with the expression of subjective feelings. Whereas that trait of the polonaise is beautifully developed in the fiery, spirited main part with its strong accents, the middle section in D flat major deploys a nobly felt, broad and fully flowing song, illuminated effectively thanks to a harmonisation so typical for Kirchner. The polonaise may be recommended particularly for recitals, because it is longer and clearer than customarily the case with our composer. No. 4 (moderato, also in F major) is very graceful, recalling in its cheerful self-indulgence the spirited conversation of a choice salon. The vibrant No. 3 in B flat major, alternating capriciously between 4/4 and 3/4 time, gains our interest especially through an expressive trio that Robert Schumann could have written, while the pompous No. 1 in D major displays more the superficial grandeur and colourful splendour of an aristocratic dance.”

In 1883 Kirchner arranged all the polonaises for piano four hands, and in 1881 he published the second in a single edition for two pianos.\* This second polonaise must have been quite popular, because it also exists in an orchestral version by Heinrich Schulz-Beuthen. Later Kirchner changed two notes in his personal copies of the arrangements (Brahms Institute at the Musikhochschule Lübeck), although he made no entries in the original edition: in No. 1, bar 27, the last quaver was changed from C/c to BB/B. We have kept the original version, which reveals a different situation than in bar 31. In the two piano version of the second polonaise, bar 27, Kirchner altered the expected F/f in the left hand to D flat/d flat, thus anticipating the Neapolitan surprise on the second stroke. We have incorporated this convincing amendment into the original version.

\* Die arrangement for two pianos is available from Amadeus as a supplement to the Waltzes op. 86 (BP 1711).