

Whose Chopin? Politics and Patriotism in *A Song to Remember* (1945)

John C. Tibbetts

Columbia Pictures launched with characteristic puffery its early 1945 release, *A Song to Remember*, a dramatized biography of nineteenth-century composer Frédéric Chopin. “*A Song to Remember* is destined to rank with the greatest attractions since motion pictures began,” boasted a publicity statement, “—seven years of never-ending effort to bring you a glorious new landmark in motion picture achievement.”¹ *Variety* subsequently enthused, “This dramatization of the life and times of Frédéric Chopin, the Polish musician-patriot, is the most exciting presentation of an artist yet achieved on the screen.”²

These accolades proved to be misleading, however. Viewers expecting a “life” of Chopin encountered a very different kind of film. Instead of an historical chronicle of Chopin’s life, times, and music, *A Song to Remember*, to the dismay of several critics, reconstituted the story as a wartime resistance drama targeted more to World War II popular audiences at home and abroad than to enthusiasts of nineteenth-century music history.³ As such, the film belongs to a group of Hollywood wartime propaganda pictures mandated in 1942-1945 by the Office of War Information (OWI) and its Bureau of Motion Pictures (BMP)—and subject, like all films of the time, to the censorial constraints of the Production Code Administration (PCA)—to stress ideology and affirmation in the cause of democracy and to depict the global conflict as a “people’s war.” No longer was it satisfactory for Hollywood to interpret the war on the rudimentary level of a



Figure 1: Merle Oberon’s “George Sand” made love to Cornel Wilde’s “Frederic Chopin” in the 1945 Columbia release, *A Song to Remember* (courtesy Photofest).

counterattack against Axis invasion. These newly mandated resistance—or “conversion” films, as scholars have called them—were to focus the “average” filmgoers’ attention upon the basic choices which they must make regarding the key ideological and political problems of the war.⁴

There was to be no room for neutrality here. Characters like Humphrey Bogart’s Rick in *Casablanca* (1943), Charles Laughton’s Albert Lory in *This Land Is Mine* (1943), and Victor Francen’s Pavel Orvid in *In Our Time* (1944)—and yes, Cornel Wilde’s Chopin in *A Song to Remember*—to name just a few, must renounce their formerly cynical or apolitical attitudes and find spiritual and democratic redemption in their fight against fascism. Thus, as I will argue, *A Song to Remember* represented Chopin as the nineteenth-century European equivalent of the twentieth-century American, Rick. Chopin’s top hat and waistcoat replaced Rick’s trench coat and fedora, his Parisian salon was a hothouse variation on Rick’s *Café Americaine*, his concert grand piano a substitute for Rick’s battered upright, and his great A-flat Polonaise a call to arms like the “Marseillaise” anthem. In regaining his political commitment, Chopin, like Rick, has to abjure the siren call of romance—in Rick’s case, the

alluring Ilsa (Ingrid Bergman) and in Chopin's case, the domineering George Sand (Merle Oberon)—and perhaps sacrifice his own life in the process.

While the parallels drawn by *A Song to Remember* between Chopin's war-ravaged Poland in 1848 and Poland's struggle against invading Nazi and Soviet armies almost a century later were not lost on contemporary viewers and critics in America and overseas—there is, as we shall see, at least some evidence to corroborate that viewers did indeed make the connection—the intervening sixty years since the film's release has blurred that significance and relegated the film to the dubious distinction of just another Hollywood biopic (a category of films that until recently has received little serious critical attention). One looks in vain in extant volumes about wartime Hollywood for even the barest mention of the film.⁵ Perhaps it seems preposterous that a biopic of a classical composer in the exotic milieu of the nineteenth-century salons of Paris could be construed as a piece of World War II populist resistance propaganda. Yet, as OWI administrator Elmer Davis so often remarked, “the easiest way to inject a propaganda idea into most people's minds is to let it go in through the medium of an entertainment picture when they do not realize that they are being propagandized.”⁶ *A Song to Remember* may be a case in point. Thus the purpose of this essay is to restore *A Song to Remember* to its proper consideration, not just as a biopic of Frédéric Chopin but also as an effective wartime resistance, or “conversion” narrative, constituting a nexus of political, historical, and performance constructions supporting Hollywood's wartime patriotic agendas.

Chopin as Man and Myth

In order to transform—I almost said *convert*—Chopin and his music to the stuff of an OWI-mandated resistance story, Hollywood had to exercise considerable ingenuity. At first glance the subject seemed appropriate enough. Chopin came to the movies as a pre-packaged commodity, a well-known and prestigious figure of legendary patriotism, aristocratic polish, and familiar music. The prestige factor was always to be coveted by producers eager to proclaim special distinction for their product. And Chopin's great polonaises would provide the requisite patriotic call to arms for the spirit of Polish resistance in 1944–1945. Chopin's aristocratic mien was problematic, however, in that it threatened to clash with the required “average man” agendas of the OWI. His eight-year affair with the notorious novelist, George Sand (Aurore Dudevant) was quite outside the bounds of the censors of the day. While some of his music was well enough known to have inspired a few “hit” tunes of the day, most of it was nonetheless securely positioned as high brow. Moreover, his alleged patriotism proved to be, on closer inspection, ambivalent to say the least. In other words, there were advantages and disadvantages in exploiting Chopin and his music. Adjustments would have to be made in constructing a “Chopin” congruent with the requisite story formulas, censorship constraints, and propagandistic agendas of wartime Hollywood.

The Research Department at Columbia Pictures quickly discovered that Chopin was an unstable compound of reality and myth. The historical record, as much as it could be divined, was relatively uneventful and apolitical.⁷ Fryderyk Franciszek Chopin was born in Zelazowa Wola, Poland, in 1810 to a French father and a Polish mother. He spent his boyhood in Warsaw and embarked on his musical studies at the age of six. Encouraged by his study with Professor Jozef Elsner at the Warsaw Conservatory, he left Poland in 1830 to pursue a career in Paris, where he remained until his death in 1849. He never married, although there were brief flirtations and failed courtships with a number of women—including Konstancia Gladkowska, Maria Wodzińska, Delfina Potocka—and a prolonged affair with French novelist George Sand. Fastidious and something of a dandy, he curried favor with the French aristocracy and enjoyed celebrity as an accomplished pianist and innovative composer. He abjured concert life in his later years, however, and depended largely on the support of wealthy friends. He died in 1849 of the tuberculosis that had afflicted him for many years.

Even before his death, a plethora of sometimes contradictory myths of an exotic sort surrounded him.⁸ Biographical and character studies by his mistress George Sand, his friend Franz Liszt, and by later commentators such as James Huneker and Alfred Cortot, described him, by turns, as an effeminate, arrogant snob who shamelessly flattered his way through aristocratic circles; as a frail, sickly, vaguely androgynous composer who drooped languidly over his slender little nocturnes and preludes; and as a bold Polish patriot, who composed fiery polonaises and etudes that defiantly proclaimed the pain and glory of his war-racked country. The music itself was adapted and popularized in ballets and, in the next century, twisted out of all recognition in Tin Pan Alley songs.⁹ “It is this legendary Chopin that we must cherish,” wrote pianist and biographer Alfred Cortot. “By disregarding the deprecatory facts of his daily life, but going to the heart of the essential truth, we preserve the image of a Chopin who answers all our aspirations, a Chopin who existed in a world created by his imagination, who had no other existence save that of his dreams. . . .” Cortot concluded, “who by the outpourings of his genius was able to immortalize the dreams and longings of countless human souls.”¹⁰

Hollywood paid more attention to the myths than the record, even if they contradicted the accounts of professional historians. Myth and hearsay claimed their own brand of dramatic legitimacy, borne out of their widespread repetition, variability, and appeal. They reenacted, dramatized, embellished, even rewrote history. Paradoxically, as Peter Kivy suggests in his *The Possessor and the Possessed*, what ultimately mattered was “not what may be true about the nature of Handel’s genius, or Mozart’s or Beethoven’s, but what was taken for truth by those who were in the process of constructing the concept of musical genius.”¹¹ Anecdotal accuracy was irrelevant, declares Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz in *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist*. “The only significant factor is that an anecdote recurs, that it is recounted so frequently as to warrant the conclusion

that it represents a typical image of the artist.”¹² Thus, like their music, these historical figures became polysemic texts, open to ongoing processes of signification and resignification, nexes of cultural processes and interpretations. They were open, as Leo Braudy has noted in *The Frenzy of Renown*, to the constantly renewed interpretations and meanings of successive generations, “even though that meaning might be very different from what they meant a hundred . . . years before.” Braudy concludes, “Such people are vehicles of cultural memory and cohesion. They allow us to identify what’s present with what’s past.”¹³ In other words, public history transcends time and space—even the historical record—to construct its own reality and function as a kind of mythic counterpoint to academic history.

In the process—and this will prove to be crucial in the light of Hollywood’s wartime propaganda agendas—such composers were marketed as individuals who redirected and consolidated their genius into the service of the social welfare and cultural aspirations of the community at large. Beethoven, for example, could no longer be “sold” as a colossal genius whose “sublimity was so overwhelming that it compels one’s awe and reverence as well as one’s admiration” but as a democrat who represented and ennobled the “song of the people.”¹⁴ This process has been dubbed by Joseph Horowitz, in *The Post-Classical Predicament*, as “a new elitism: to participate in the exclusive aura of Great Music became a democratic privilege.”¹⁵ By 1944–1945 Hollywood found Chopin available to be reconfigured as a man of the people.

Chopin and Hollywood

Chopin was merely one among many of the canonic composers Hollywood appropriated at the height of the so-called “classical” studio era, roughly 1930–1960. At this time the film industry was dominated by the vertically integrated “Big Five” studios, MGM, Paramount, Warner Bros., RKO, and Twentieth Century-Fox; the “Little Three” studios, United Artists, Universal, and Columbia; and the smaller, independent studios, such as Republic and Walt Disney. Under the supervision of moguls Louis B. Mayer, Harry Cohn, Darryl F. Zanuck, Jack Warner, Disney, and others, and through their respective distribution networks and theatre chains, they established a “consistent system of production and consumption, a set of formalized creative practices and constraints, and thus a body of work with a uniform style, a standard way of telling stories, from camera work and cutting to plot structure and thematics.”¹⁶

Conditioned by the same pressures and agendas as other genre pictures, Hollywood’s composer biopics, asserts George Custen in his pioneering *Bio/Pics*, “reduced [composers’] lives to a mass-tailored contour for fame in which greatness is generic and difference has controllable boundaries.”¹⁷ The resulting paradigm, in brief, so obviously on display in *A Song to Remember*, rewrote the “life” according to the narrative formulas common to romantic melodramas, musicals, westerns, etc., and, in this particular instance, to the special agendas

of the OWI. It tailored the story to the prevailing screen images of the actors and the commercial agendas of the producers. It exploited the built-in prestige factor of classical music (while reconstituting it for mass audience tastes). And it “normalized” and contained the composer to reflect and confirm the community’s own commonly held experiences. Thus, *A Song to Remember* constructs Chopin as a Polish patriot responsive to and responsible for the welfare of his countrymen. “A man worthy of his gifts should grow closer to those people as he grows more great,” he is admonished in the film by his friend and teacher, Josef Elsner (Paul Muni). These words not only dwell at the heart of the film’s patriotic “message” to wartime audiences, they constitute a guiding motto for the entire corpus of Hollywood composer biopics.

A key part of that message resided in the music. Just as the composers’ lives had been commodified and marketed for popular viewing, so too did the motion picture soundtrack alter and reconfigure the music. Émigré European composers, such as Miklos Rozsa and Dimitri Tiomkin, who were steeped in classical training and traditions, composed pastiches of the music of the masters for their scores, relegating these musics, for the most part, to an extradiegetic role in the narrative discourse.¹⁸ Historian Carol Flinn writes that it is the great irony of the classical composer biopics that the greatest music ever written should merely be used to repeat or reinforce the narrative—“it should not ‘go beyond’ it or draw attention to itself *qua* music. After all, it was only ‘background’ music.” Thus, no matter how distinguished the score, “it is not successful unless it is secondary to the story being told on the screen.”¹⁹ This judgment needs some qualification, however, inasmuch as the *performative* aspects of the music do on occasion become an important part of the biopics, particularly in the instance of *A Song to Remember*.

Quite unique to biopics about artists, particularly composers, was the challenge of visualizing the actual creative process. “Plays about musicians or writers have one insurmountable problem in common,” observes commentator Patrick O’Connor. “It is the least dramatic situation imaginable to show the artist at work, sitting at his desk, or at the keyboard. He must pace the floor, throw tantrums, be tormented by doubts, tear his hair. That is how the creative life seems to audiences, or so [authors and filmmakers] suppose.”²⁰ Actor Simon Callow, who portrayed Mozart in the original stage production of *Amadeus*, agrees. “It’s nonsensical, when you think about it. Maybe you can show something that *stimulates* creativity, but what about the interior process itself?” Callow said in an interview. “Where does *that* come from? Very few filmmakers or playwrights seem to be interested in the actual question of creativity. And maybe that’s true of 80 percent of the people. That sort of thing is probably done best in a novel. Oddly, it might be easier to visualize creative bankruptcy. We all can share in *that* feeling!”²¹

Like the biographical aspects of the subject, the mystery of musical creativity itself has to be contained within the parameters of a mass audience’s experience, understanding, and expectation. Without such containment, declares art historian



Figure 2: One of the first Chopin biopics was a French silent film, Henry Roussell's *Waltz de l'adieu* (1928). It dramatized the romance between the composer (Pierre Blanchar) and Marie Wodzinska (Marie Bell). (Courtesy Kevin Brownlow Collection).

Albert Boime, “We risk the stereotype of the mad artist—creativity as some kind of disease or psychological aberration. This indicates our underlying fear and anxiety about creativity. Hollywood has to use stereotypes as a way of negotiating that fear.”²² For example, as we will see in the discussion of *A Song to Remember* below, composer biopics deployed visual strategies suggesting that musical inspiration derived from nature, the emotions (love, hate, sorrow, frustration, triumph, etc.), and patriotic and folk traditions (the “song of the people”).

Among the earliest films to display Chopin either as a featured player or peripheral presence was a French silent film, Henry Roussell's *Waltz de l'adieu* (1928). Subtitled “A Page in the Life of Chopin,” it dramatized Chopin's (Pierre Blanchar) frustrated love for Marie Wodzinska (Marie Bell). (One wonders what music the film's original cue sheets referenced for the sake of the musicians accompanying the film.²³) American films that appropriated Chopin's music in support of their thematic concerns included *Romance* (1930), a Greta Garbo vehicle, which appropriated the E-flat Nocturne as an elegant accompaniment to its story of a young actress's affairs; the aforementioned *In Our Time* (1944),

which utilized several of his polonaises to underscore the spirit of Polish resistance in the face of the Nazi Blitzkrieg in 1939; and *A Picture of Dorian Gray*, released the same year as *A Song to Remember*, which deployed the Prelude, Opus 28, No. 24 as a sinister, omnipresent melody connoting the moral collapse of the eponymous Gray.²⁴

The stage was set for *A Song to Remember*. Filmed in 1944 and released in January 1945, the Columbia Pictures production was directed by Charles Vidor, written and produced by Sidney Buchman, with music adaptation by Miklos Rozsa and [uncredited] piano performances by Jose Iturbi. Although details of its production history are sketchy, we do know that as early as 1938, according to *The Hollywood Reporter*, plans were afoot for Columbia's leading director, Frank Capra to direct Spencer Tracy and Marlene Dietrich in the leading roles of Chopin and his innamorata, George Sand.²⁵ Eventually, as preliminary titles like *Tonight We Dream*, *The Song that Lived Forever*, and *The Love of Madame Sand* were discarded, the project went to a Hungarian-born emigre, Charles Vidor, who had just directed Columbia's stylish Rita Hayworth musical, *Cover Girl*, and the roles to Cornel Wilde and Merle Oberon. Claims circulated that the Oscar-nominated screenplay had its origins either in a 1928 French silent film, *Valse de l'adieu*, a novel, *Polonaise*, by Doris Leslie; or in an original story by Ernst Marischka.²⁶

The casting of robust, athletic Wilde was intended to allay fears any viewers might have had concerning any of the prevailing effeminate stereotypes of Chopin. Wilde was a relative unknown at the time—he had appeared in several B pictures in light romantic roles, like the Sonja Henie vehicle, *Wintertime* (1943)—but was just now coming into his own as a macho leading man. Taking advantage of his background as a champion-class fencer, *A Song to Remember's* publicity releases characterized him as an actor who yearns for sword and doublet and who spends his off-screen time engaging in fencing exercises with fellow cast members. “Although Cornel never touches hand to sword hilt in the movie,” proclaimed one press release, “there are sundry nobles and others who do carry swords . . . It is that kind of picture.”

At the same time, the studio promised anyone wary of elitist “classical music” that Chopin's melodies were “all-time hits,” none of which were “highbrow.” While their original titles might be unfamiliar, viewers were assured they are better known “under the titles of popular tin pan alley song hits of today and yesterday.” They positioned Chopin as a proto-pop songwriter, “who has furnished the basic melodies for more modern and popular song writers than any music-maker in history.”²⁷ Morris Stoloff, the studio's chief music producer, emphasized the populist nature of Chopin's music—“though played for the aristocrats of his time—the early nineteenth century—[it] was drawn from the peasant music of Poland, Chopin's birthplace, and is felt and understood by anyone with a heart” (pressbook).

A Song to Remember begins with the 11-year old Chopin studying music in his native Warsaw. From the outset he is represented as a hot-headed Polish



Figure 3: In *A Song to Remember* the celebrated Franz Liszt (Alfred Bekassy) (seen at the far right) introduced Chopin to the patronage of Parisian aristocratic circles (courtesy Photofest).

patriot, banging angrily on the piano after witnessing Russian troops hauling Polish prisoners away to Siberia. “My dear boy,” counsels his music teacher, Jozef Elsner (Paul Muni), “music and freedom are like one. They both belong to the world. A real artist wants freedom in every country.” The boy promptly enlists Elsner’s complicity in the meetings of a secret band of revolutionaries. “Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is every man’s birthright,” declares the revolutionary leader. Fifteen years pass. Chopin, now a handsome young man, is invited to perform at the salon of Count Wodzińska. But when the new Russian Governor-General of Poland arrives, Frédéric starts up from the piano and vehemently declares, “I do not play before tsarist butchers!” He abruptly storms out of the room.

Fleeing the tsarist authorities, Chopin, accompanied by the loyal Elsner, flees to Paris, carrying with him a pouch of Polish soil given him by a lady friend and fellow revolutionary named Kostancia. Elsner had already suggested that a series of Parisian recitals might raise money to aid the Polish cause; and now Chopin determines to carry out the plan. But his recital debut is ruined when he learns of the incarceration, torture, and death back home of his revolutionary friends, Titus and Jan. Overcome with sorrow, he breaks off his performance and quits the room. The concert is a disaster and the reviews are scathing. But he receives an invitation to visit the home of the Duchess of Orleans,

George Sand (Merle Oberon), the notorious young female novelist who smokes cigars and dresses in the masculine attire of trousers, vest, and top hat. She is so impressed that she promptly takes over his career management and, with the aid of Franz Liszt, arranges for his next concert at her salon. In a clever ruse, she contrives with Liszt to begin the recital; but under cover of the dim light of the room, Chopin takes his place at the keyboard. When the lights go back up, Chopin is at the keyboard to receive the acclaim of the crowd.

Sand's first advice to her new protégé is to suppress his patriotic impulses because they will impede the true calling of his art and his career. "Shut the world out," she urges, "[find with me] a place apart, away from the petty struggles of men." Elsner intervenes. "I see trousers on a woman," he warns Chopin; "I know that woman has a will of her own. I have ears. I know about her reputation—books that shock the world and laws of conduct designed for herself." Chopin ignores his old friend and follows Sand to the island of Majorca, where he composes removed from the "causes" and struggles of petty worldly affairs. "Your genius is for creating music for smaller men to play," says Sand. "Follow that genius, Frédéric, or you are lost, and everything with it. Be selfish with that genius. Stay here, write music . . ." But Chopin cannot entirely get away from haunting reminders of his countrymen's struggles back home. He sits at the piano, huddled against the chill, a shawl about his shoulders, and toys idly at the keys with the unfinished Polonaise that has been preoccupying him of late. "I'm not in the mood for waltzes and graceful studies," he declares. Sand, alarmed at the possibility of losing him, once again angrily denounces the music.

Meanwhile, back in Paris, the forgotten and impoverished Elsner frets at Chopin's indifference to the plight of his countrymen. He is still waiting for that patriotic polonaise Chopin promised him years before. Upon Sand's return, Elsner seizes an opportunity to visit her and inquires how his absent friend has been doing. He reminds her that Chopin has a duty to raise money to support the cause of Polish freedom. "Concerts are out of the question," she retorts. "He's too ill for that. He couldn't stand the strain of concerts now or at any time in the future. His purpose is to serve his own work." Elsner is aghast. "You're a lady of very strong will, used to having her way in all things," he responds sharply. "But I shall see that you will not have this way with Frédéric."

Later, after learning from the visiting Konstancia of tsarist atrocities back in Poland, Elsner confronts Chopin and flings another pouch of Polish earth on the table. "Your genius is a rare gift," he declaims. "So many ordinary people seem to be robbed to make one such man. A man worthy of his gifts should grow closer to those people as he grows more great. Fight harder for them with that same genius. But you are a waste of that gift, a man who has lost all sense of decency and honor."

But Sand isn't through yet. She denounces political causes and describes the sacrifices she has had to make, as an artist and a woman, to serve the purest aims of her art: "To have some talent and ambition and to be a woman . . . Maybe you think it didn't cost the woman something to do it, year after year in

the face of contempt and slander . . . But I ruled my own life.” But her words are drowned out as Chopin goes to the keyboard and plays the opening measures of his polonaise. His mind is made up. He will go on a concert tour to raise money for the release of his imprisoned countrymen.

In the film’s penultimate montage sequence Chopin travels from concert hall to concert hall across Europe growing steadily weaker from his exhausting labors. Ravaged by tuberculosis and weakened by the stresses of the tour, he thunders out his Polish defiance of tsarist oppression in his fiery etudes and polonaises. At length, during his last performance, he spits blood onto the keyboard, staggers offstage, and collapses. Later, on his deathbed, his face now peaceful and composed, he breathes his last: “It’s like coming home,” he whispers, as the music from one of his nocturnes embraces the scene like a benediction.

Containment and Censorship

The story formulas of “classical” Hollywood, the censors of the PCA, and the policies of the OWI all laid claim to Chopin, and all played their parts in reconstituting him for wartime audiences. In the first place, prevalent story formulas demanded that his masculine and patriotic agencies be affirmed. The aforementioned public image of his effeminate, perhaps androgynous nature, his chronic bad health, and his diminutive stature—his passport declares he was a shade under five feet tall and weighed less than a hundred pounds—demanded redress. Although there are no studio records available to prove the point, other composer biopics of the day, notably Fox’s *Swanee River* (1939) and *Stars and Stripes Forever*, two 20th Century-Fox biopics about, respectively, Stephen Foster and John Philip Sousa, have left paper trails demonstrating that the studios typically took great care to lend—or outright invent—masculine characteristics to “normalize” their artist protagonists.²⁸ Moreover, in the case of *A Song to Remember*, Chopin’s sturdy patriotism must be signified at the outset. His trip to Paris must be seen as initially part of a plan to raise money for the Polish cause. His lapse into selfish indulgence under the malevolent influence of Sand must be no more than a temporary aberration. And the recovery of his masculine agency must be confirmed by his decision to embark on the (ultimately fatal) concert tour.

Ironically, Sand, not Chopin, was the aggressive political activist.²⁹ But here, in conformity with prevailing Hollywood melodramatic formulas, she acquires the stereotype of what has been dubbed the “Fatal Woman,” the chilly, possessive, ultimately self-destructive female typical of other contemporary melodramas, notably Jean Negulesco’s *Humoresque* and John Stahl’s *Leave Her to Heaven* (both 1946).³⁰ It is up to Chopin’s fussy, bumbling, comic sidekick, Josef Elsner, to divine and expose the danger Sand poses to Chopin. “I see trousers on a woman,” he warns the composer (eloquent of the masculine anxiety of the 1940s as much as in the 1840s concerning assertive women). “I know that

woman has a will of her own.” It is up to Elsner, not Chopin, to rebuke her: “You’re a lady of very strong will,” he declares sternly, “used to having your way in all things. I shall have *my* way here, Madame!” Indeed, his blandishments, combined with a visit by Chopin’s former Polish revolutionary colleague, the beautiful Konstancia (in her own importunings she is the distaff side of Sand³¹), and the sight of that pouch of Polish earth, are enough to bring Chopin to his senses. He rejects Sand, finishes his polonaise, and takes to the road on his last-gasp concert tour. All the while, despite the best efforts of the Hollywood makeup artists to transform the robust Cornel Wilde into a sick and gaunt victim of an unspecified disease, audiences were not fooled. Even at his sickest and most henpecked, Wilde’s nascent virility seemed to reassure viewers that at any moment he might burst out of his flowered waistcoat and storm the tsarist barricades.

This representation of Chopin’s patriotism was just as spurious as that of George Sand’s apolitical aesthetics. Although, according to historian Jolanta T. Pekacz’ study of the subject, many Polish chauvinist commentators had insisted that Chopin was “a truly patriotic composer who never renounced his Polishness,” in reality patriotism played little if any role in Chopin’s personal life after he left Poland in 1830.³² He came to Paris not as a political refugee but as an ambitious concert pianist and composer, whereupon he gallicized his name, Fryderyk, to Frédéric. There was no Jozef Elsner by his side to prod his conscience (he never saw Elsner again after leaving Poland); and, as was noted at the outset of this essay, except for a single benefit performance in London the last year of his life, he never embarked on a concert tour to assist the Polish cause. If anything, the contemporary Polish poet and patriot, Adam Mickiewicz criticized the his patriotic fervor, and accused Chopin of wasting his talent on the aristocracy instead of using it to speak out against tyranny. And although Chopin dutifully contributed money on occasion to Polish causes, he continued giving lessons to Russian aristocrats passing through Paris.³³ It was only after his death that he returned to Poland (at his instructions, his heart was removed and sent back to Warsaw).

If Chopin were temporarily reduced to a relatively passive role in the clutches of the predatory Sand, at least his patriotic polonaises and stormy etudes are heard periodically to remind and reassure us of his inherent masculinity and patriotic commitment. By contrast to the “feminine” nocturnes, the stormy C-minor Etude (“Revolutionary”) earned its sobriquet when Chopin composed it after hearing of Warsaw’s conquest by the tsarist armies. According to biographer Tad Szulc, “he did react [to the news] with a paroxysm of fury and despair that he recorded in his diary.”³⁴ And the polonaises, particularly the great A-flat, Opus 53, always connoted Polish national pride.³⁵ Accordingly, the film’s music director, Miklos Rozsa, strategically deploys their melodies as a series of *leitmotifs* functioning both diegetically and extra-diegetically, in performance scenes and on the soundtrack.³⁶ For example, the aforementioned Etude in C

minor functions as a cry of pain for the Polish victims of Czarist repression. We first hear it in orchestral guise as Chopin bolts from the presence of the Governor-General at the Wodzinska salon. It reappears in variously instrumented versions every time there is a reference to Polish sufferings. By contrast, the plaintive melody from the so-called "Raindrop" Prelude (Opus 25, No. 15) is associated with the pouch of Polish earth that Chopin carries away with him. The lovely theme from the third Etude in E major (also from Opus 10) is first heard when Chopin meets George Sand, and is heard thereafter as a symbol of their love. And, from the outset, the melody of the heroically declamatory A-flat Polonaise is attached to the theme of patriotic duty.

Rozsa's deployment of the A-flat Polonaise theme ingeniously reinforces each stage of Chopin's developing patriotic commitment. After its introduction in an arrangement for piano and orchestra under the Columbia logo, it reappears periodically in fragments and variants in major and minor modes, in an ingenious array of instrumentations—at times cleverly counterpointed by a few measures of the tumultuous eleventh Etude in A minor, Opus 25, and at other times by themes from the First Piano Concerto. In a beautifully staged scene in Pleyel's salon, Chopin performs it as a duet with Franz Liszt. "A Polonaise!" exclaims Liszt. "The spirit of Poland! Magnificent! And you play it with the spirit of a patriot!" Later, at his first Paris concert, upon hearing of the deaths of his Polish friends, Chopin interrupts his playing of Beethoven's "Moonlight" sonata with a few brusque measures of the Polonaise. Aware of its significance to Chopin, Sand never fails, as has already been demonstrated, to dismiss it. But fleeting references to the Polonaise persist on the soundtrack (serving as Chopin's internal diegesis), always nagging at him, even while he's comfortably ensconced with Sand at Nohant and Majorca. Meanwhile, Elsner frets all the while, wondering when Chopin will stop composing trivial waltzes and nocturnes and finish the damned thing. At last, as Sand rants against Chopin's decision to return to the concert stage, Chopin picks out the Polonaise theme again, his playing growing louder and louder as his determination is fixed, until it fairly drowns out her discouraging words.

Finally, the A-flat Polonaise also plays a crucial role in the most elaborate of the performance sequences. The climactic montage depicting Chopin's desperate recital tour to raise funds for the release of Polish prisoners is a masterpiece of the seamless blending of diegetic and extradiegetic music. The montage begins with a breath-taking straight cut from Chopin's playing of the introductory measures of the A-flat Polonaise in Sand's room to a public performance in the concert hall of the opening measures of the eleventh Etude, Opus 25 (a clever and dramatically effective juxtaposition of the two pieces). The ensuing interplay of sights (a variety of playbills from Paris, Amsterdam, London); close shots of hands on the keyboard; shots of Chopin's perspiring brow) and sounds (a seamless medley of orchestrated snatches from the A-flat Polonaise, a "Waltz-Brilliant," the second Scherzo, another polonaise (the



Figure 4: In *A Song to Remember* Paul Muni portrayed “Jozef Elsner,” Chopin’s music teacher, who functioned as Chopin’s patriotic Polish conscience (courtesy Photofest).

“Military,” Opus 40, No. 1), the C-minor Etude, and a culminating reprise of the A-flat Polonaise (whose completed version is heard at last), reveals a steadily weakening Chopin, blanched and strained, his colorful waistcoat replaced by a severe black coat, the ebony cravat tightly knotted at his neck, the collar pulled tightly up his neck. And yes, there is the notorious moment when Chopin coughs Technicolor blood onto the piano keys.

Containing and “normalizing” Chopin’s private life, while constructing his masculine and patriotic identity, required judicious overview from the PCA censors. Composer biopics like this, perhaps because of their less privileged status among critics and historians, have been conspicuously ignored in histories of the PCA. Recent scholarship, sifting through the PCA files and other censorial agencies, like the Catholic Legion of Decency, have focused on other patterns of censorial practices—particularly regarding the social problem films of the 1930s like the gangster and “fallen women” cycles, the wartime propaganda films of the 1940s, and the proliferation of politically-themed films of the post-war period.³⁷ Yet, it is evident that the unconventional behavior and the sexually open attitudes of composers such as Liszt, Paganini, Strauss, Jr., and Chopin must have presented peculiarly difficult challenges to the Code.

Drafted in 1930 and administered rigorously after 1934 under the leadership of Joseph Breen, the PCA held as its basic premise, as Gregory D. Black has noted in *Hollywood Censored*, that “movies did not enjoy the same freedom of expression as the printed word or theatrical performances. This most democratic of art forms had to be regulated. . . because movies cut across all social, economic, political, and educational boundaries . . .”³⁸ As historian Richard Maltby demonstrates in his witty dissection of Code strategies, the Code was implemented to render narratives “chameleon-like, adaptable, resilient, and accommodating” to differing components of the viewing audience. “A movie’s inclusion of contradictions, gaps, and blanks” Maltby writes, “allowed it to be consumed as at least two discrete, even opposing stories going on in the same text.” Putting it another way, it could render the “objectionable” to some viewers “unobjectionable” to others. “Having chosen not to divide its audience,” Maltby continues, “Hollywood was obliged to devise a system that would allow ‘sophisticated’ viewers to read whatever they liked into a formally ‘innocent’ movie, so long as the producers could use the mechanics of the Production Code to deny that the sophisticated interpretation had been put there in the first place.”³⁹ Thus, Hollywood filmmakers were forced to devise strategies to suggest more “adult” themes while, at the same time, retain the endorsement of the Code and the mass public.

Particularly problematic in Chopin’s case was his open affair with George Sand. The exact nature of the nine-year relationship, spanning roughly 1838-1847, has long bedeviled biographers and commentators. Chopin’s contemporaries were in general agreement about Sand’s overtly “masculine” role in the relationship. According to many reports, she treated Chopin as her “little one”; she “devoured” him. Indeed, as Sand’s novelist and friend, Balzac, once pronounced, “All in all, she is a man, so much the more so because she wants to be one; because she has given up the role of a woman and is no longer one.”⁴⁰ But there is considerable dispute as to what degree Chopin and Sand found in each other mutual sexual fulfillment and creative support (as popular myth alleges), and to what extent the relationship proved to be dysfunctional, even mutually destructive (as some historians claim). Sand biographer Curtis Cates, speculates that a sexual component to the relationship was probably limited to just one or two years. “We can only surmise—for the documentary evidence is lacking—that [Sand] had found the physical act of lovemaking with Chopin considerably less exalting than his music” (486).⁴¹ Moreover, as Chopin biographer Benita Eisler contends, their breakup in 1848 had nothing to do with squabbles over patriotic duty, as *A Song to Remember* alleges (indeed, patriotic issues seem never to have been a subject of discussion between them) but with a variety of petty and extremely nasty disputes, involving, among other things, turmoil in the private lives of Sand’s children, Maurice and Solange. By this time, Eisler continues, Sand had taken on another lover and was beginning to treat Chopin “like one of the aged domestics, recently dismissed after years of service.”⁴² William G. Atwood, in his study of the relationship, *The Lioness and*

the Little One, takes rather a different view, placing much of the blame for the failed relationship on Chopin's hyper-critical temperament and meddlings in Sand's family affairs.⁴³

Of course, Hollywood would have none of this. An examination of PCA files reveals that Breen closely monitored over several years the progress of the script's depiction of the Chopin-Sand affair. To begin with, any suggestion of the other romantic liaisons in Chopin's life, notably with Maria Wodzinska and Delfina Potocka, should be deleted. Similarly, there should be no backstory about Sand's other affairs, notably with the young poet, Alfred de Musset (although he has a cameo appearance early in the film), or the affair that immediately preceded her relationship with Chopin, a liaison with Felicien Mallefille, a former inamorata of Sand's so jealous of Chopin that he stalked the two lovers and threatened them with violence. As for Sand and Chopin, aside from the suggestion that they were living together, and apart from a chaste kiss and a touch of the hand, there were to be no suggestions of an actual sexual union.

"From the standpoint of the Production Code," Breen wrote to Columbia producer Harry Cohn in a memo dated 19 July 1943, "what is needed is a definite and affirmative voice for morality in connection with the illicit relationship between Chopin and Sand. There should be a definite and specific condemnation of this relationship," Breen went on, "in order thus to show that the relationship is wrong; that it is not condoned, nor justified, nor made to appear right and acceptable." Accordingly, Breen recommended deletion of lines like Sand's declaration, "We make our own laws—and break them if we like"; and the alteration of Elsner's line, "To be a great artist one must first be a great man" to a substitute line: "One must first be a great man and a *decent* [italics mine] man." However, subsequent drafts of the script failed to convince Breen that his admonitions were heeded. "We continue to be of the opinion that this story is entirely unacceptable under the provisions of the Production Code," he scolded in a memo dated 13 January 1944, "because it is a story of illicit sex without sufficient compensating moral values . . . We must insist that such an element be injected into the story if the finished picture is to be approved. This condemnation of the sinful relationship between these two characters should come from Elsner in one or two of the scenes between himself and Sand." (And we recall instances already cited in the dialogues between Elsner and Sand.) Moreover, Breen was anxious to delete a scene suggesting that the dying Chopin invite Sand to see him. That would suggest "a complete lack of regeneration on his part." Rather, "It would be very helpful from our standpoint if the action were to be reversed; if Sand were to apply for admission to the death chamber only to be turned away."⁴⁴

Chopin Goes to War

At the time of *A Song to Remember*'s release in January 1945, several critics noted its wartime relevance. *Variety*, for example, called attention to the story's emphasis on "the Polish revolutionary situation" and *Film Daily* noted its "potent appeal to the present-day conscience of the underlying theme of Poland's fight for freedom."⁴⁵ Alone among commentators writing from the hindsight of a half century, George Custen confirms that "Frédéric Chopin's artistic and social conscience and his presence allows the Polish liberation theme to be showcased at a time when Poland was under Nazi oppression, and contemporary classical musicians from war-torn countries (like Italy's Arturo Toscanini and Poland's Artur Rubinstein) were mixing music and Allied propaganda in their public performances."⁴⁶

After Pearl Harbor, Hollywood had been quickly shifting away from its formerly non-interventionist stance. As a result of the newly-formed Office of War Information and its Bureau of Motion Pictures (BMP), a forty-two page document entitled "Manual for the Motion Picture Industry" codified and mandated a new attitude toward the war. In his study of the subject, Clayton R. Koppes notes, "The enemy was not the German, Italian, or Japanese people but the ruling elites and their ideologies."⁴⁷ Thus, imbued with the left-leaning aims of Vice President Henry Wallace's *Century of the Common Man* (1943), Hollywood was advised to depict the global conflict as a "people's war" between freedom and fascism.⁴⁸ Despite some contentiousness among the studio moguls at the addition of OWI constraints to the already burdensome PCA, within the next year an estimated one-third of the features in production dealt directly with the war. A much higher proportion treated the war more indirectly as a given set of social, political, and economic circumstances.

Among them were the so-called "conversion" films, particularly, the subset of peoples' resistance dramas. They were designed, assert Koppes and Black, "to focus attention upon key problems which the people must decide, the basic choices which the people must make."⁴⁹ This constituted a "conversion" in another sense in that standard narrative paradigms were undergoing transformations. Genre formulas of crime pictures, women's melodramas, and backstage musicals were retooled into espionage thrillers and resistance dramas. Hollywood turned to retooling the traditional narrative from one that had emphasized individual protagonists working toward the goals of a successful career and a romantic "coupling," or sexual attachment into a new paradigm, where, according to historian Thomas Schatz, "the individual had to yield to the will and activity of the collective (the combat unit, the community, the nation, the family)." [At the same time,] "coupling was suspended 'for the duration,' subordinated to gender-specific war efforts that involved very different spheres of activity . . ." In other words, concludes Schatz, "the war effort created radically different requirements, indefinitely postponing the climactic coupling while

celebrating the lovers' dutiful separation and commitment to a larger cause . . ."⁵⁰

Thus, *A Song to Remember* joins other resistance films such as the celebrated *Casablanca* (1943) and the less well-known but important *This Land Is Mine* (1943) in its heroic confirmation of the self-sacrifice of the individual to the larger cause of democracy.⁵¹ Like Rick, caught in the crossfire of debate between the cynical Renault and the idealistic Czech patriot, Victor Laszlo, Chopin must choose between the aesthetic self-indulgence of Sand and the nationalist conscience of Elsner. Echoing the declamation of the formerly politically neutral Rick to his beloved Ilsa at the conclusion of *Casablanca*, for example—"I've got a job to do, too . . . It doesn't take much to see that the problems of three little people don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world"—are the words of Elsner to Chopin: "A man worthy of his gifts should grow closer to those people as he grows more great. Fight harder for them with that same genius." Rick leaves Ilsa behind, the words "We'll always have Paris" echoing in her ears. Chopin turns away from George Sand, the measures of his A-flat Polonaise ringing in her ears.⁵²

In order to track further *A Song to Remember's* relevance to wartime audiences, it is necessary to compare events in Poland in Chopin's lifetime with the fate that befell Poland at the time of the film's production and release. During Chopin's boyhood, Poland had been fragmented by a series of partitions mandated by the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Under the benevolent despotism of Tsar Alexander I, Poland had no sovereignty but enjoyed a relatively favorable position as compared to the iron rule Russia imposed elsewhere. However, with Alexander's death in 1825 and the accession a few years later of the autocratic Nicholas I, all this changed. Poland soon became an authoritarian society. Censorship reigned, universities were closed, and the tsar's secret police spied on radical student activities. Russian troops brutally suppressed the disastrous "November Uprising" in 1831. A counter revolution occurred in 1848, as it did in other countries, notably France, Austria, Italy, and Germany, but it was brutally crushed.

Flash forward to the twentieth century. As a result of the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy in 1918, Poland had proclaimed its independence. Moreover, with the outbreak of hostilities in the late 1930s, Poland found itself once again torn apart. Hitler attacked Poland in September 1939, precipitating Britain and France's entry into the expanding war. After the Nazi-Soviet Pact, Soviet forces moved in from the east and partitioned off the nation. The Polish government went into exile for the duration of the war, while Russia recognized a puppet government, the Polish Committee of National Liberation. The country was now effectively under the domination of Hitler and Stalin, the two most ruthless tyrants of the century. Later, when the Poles rose against the Nazis in Warsaw in June 1944, the Russians stood by in their position across the Vistula River, while the Nazis crushed the resistance, killing an estimated 20,000

Liberation members and more than 150,000 Polish civilians. Soviet domination in January 1945 ended prospects of an independent Polish regime.⁵³

This was the historical context of events during the making and release of *A Song to Remember*. Indeed, production was not yet completed when the Soviets crushed the Warsaw Uprising and were preparing to assume total dominance. Thus, it is not difficult to trace parallels between the subjection of Poland by Soviet forces in 1944-45 with the film's depiction of encroaching tsarist tyranny in Chopin's time. Audiences would also have understood the distinction the film makes between the Soviet regime's totalitarian leadership and the Russian *people*—a subtlety likewise explored in other Hollywood Russian-related films of the period, notably, *Song of Russia* and *The North Star* (both 1943), where American audiences could sympathize with the heroic struggles of the peasants of the Motherland against fascism, while, at the same time, distrust the Communist leaders' iron rule over Poland.⁵⁴ Thus, it is particularly significant that in *A Song to Remember* a Polish patriot tells Chopin that the real enemy of Poland is *tsarist repression*—read that, Stalinist tyranny—not the Russian people themselves. “They tell us that the Polish people and the Russian people are enemies,” he declares. “Except for those leeches under the tsar, they aren't enemies at all. In fact, they get along quite well together. Strange, isn't it?—tyrants must have something in common, to teach our peoples to hate each other.”

At first glance it seems strange that Columbia Pictures' mogul Harry Cohn, a former song plugger on Tin Pan Alley, who, according to historian Edward Buscombe, had “no interest in politics at all” (generally preferring action and comedy pictures), would have countenanced such an overt blend of classical music and political ideology. On the one hand, it should be remembered that Cohn had already demonstrated his faith in the boxoffice potential of classical music with a number of vehicles for opera star Grace Moore, beginning in 1934 with the hugely successful *One Night of Love*, which blended well-known arias with popular ballads. The results, as described by studio historian Rochelle Larkin, “mixed lumps of Puccini and the like into a pancake batter of plot thickeners such as the nice American girl, European settings, playboys, yachts, and glamour.”⁵⁵ Moreover, Cohn assigned Sidney Buchman, a left-leaning liberal sympathetic to the OWI's policies, as writer-producer of *A Song to Remember*. For years Buchman had held a privileged position as Cohn's favorite writer at Columbia, and he had already established his “social message” credentials with the satiric but inherently patriotic *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) for Frank Capra. Indeed, HUAC would later investigate Buchman.⁵⁶ Thus, it is not such a stretch to discern Buchman's—and, by inference, the OWI's—fingerprints all over the political activism of *A Song to Remember*.

Whose Chopin?

A Song to Remember's canny blend of biography, politics, and music, regulated and configured by the agendas of the PCA, OWI, and classical



Figure 5: Among the recent screen biographies of Chopin is James Lapine's *Impromptu* (1992), which cast Hugh Grant as the composer and Judy Davis as George Sand (courtesy Hemdale).

Hollywood story formulas, was a popular success that garnered six Oscar nominations, including Best Actor (Cornel Wilde), Music Score (Miklos Rozsa), and Cinematography (Tony Gaudio). It continues to this day to earn substantial rental receipts.⁵⁷ As a Hollywood prestige picture, "It achieves," opined critic Sherwin Kane in *Motion Picture Daily*, "the praiseworthy aim of bringing the concert hall to the film theatre. . . where it is certain to be welcomed by the patrons of both."⁵⁸ Indeed, the strains of the A-flat Polonaise were transformed into a wartime anthem. One year after the release of *A Song to Remember* the tune was "inducted" into American patriotic service when songwriters Buddy Kay and Ted Mossman added lyrics and entitled it "Till the End of Time." Heard on juke boxes across the country, it became something of an anthem for returning servicemen and was heard over the credits of Edward Dmytryk's drama of post-war service life, *Till the End of Time* (1946). Similarly, *The Hollywood Reporter* applauded it as a welcome addition to the recently imported European screen biographies of composers: "It is the first venture in this field by American filmmakers and is a magnificent success . . . It is one of the finest and most beautiful screen productions yet given to the world, and in the field of music films of its kind it stands alone."⁵⁹

As a politically oriented representation of Chopin, *A Song to Remember* was but one more in the long line of cinematic texts that have appropriated, exploited, and interpreted the life and music of the composer for their own

ends. For example, Chopin was a self-indulgent, social-climbing snob targeted for satire in James Lapine's *Impromptu* (1991)—“Without the noble patronage of the aristocracy, we are orphans indeed; they understand and nurture us; they are our model and inspiration.” In Tony Palmer's *The Strange Case of Delfina Potocka* (1999), he was a sexy, bigoted hedonist—“The identical energies that are used to fertilize a woman, to create a man, are the identical energies used to create a work of art”—whose posthumous reputation was appropriated by Cold War Polish Communists for their own ideological purposes. And in Roman Polanski's *The Pianist* (2003), he was the musical exemplar (if only on the soundtrack music) of Polish resistance.⁶⁰ Biopics produced in Poland have, in turn, constructed their own interpretations: Either he was the proto-socialist sympathetic to the lower classes in Aleksander Ford's *Młodosz Chopina* (*Young Chopin*, 1952) or the selfish opportunist in the revisionist *Pragnienie miłości* (*Chopin: Desire of Love*, 2004).⁶¹

Whose Chopin, indeed. The varied plethora of cinematic representations notwithstanding, the celebrated Polish genius remains now, as always, a *moving target*, ever elusive, just out of reach, the depiction of his life and music never an end but always an ongoing *process*.

Notes

1. Unless otherwise noted, all studio publicity citations are taken from the pressbook of *A Song to Remember* folder, USC Cinema-Television Library/ Doheny Library, Los Angeles, CA.

2. “A Song to Remember,” *Variety*, 18 January 1945.

3. For example, Otis L. Guernsey, Jr. in the *New York Herald Tribune*, in a review dated 26 January 1945, objected that “‘A Song to Remember’ is not a motion picture to remember. It’s two-hour Technicolor contemplation of Frédéric Chopin’s life is a gilded screen biography whose hero conforms to all the Hollywood conventions governing historical celebrities.” And the critic known simply as “T.M.P. in *The New York Times*, 26 January 1945, condemned the script as “a dramatic hodge-podge, which provides absolutely no conception of the true character of the composer.”

4. Gregory D. Black and Clayton R. Koppes, “What to Show the World: The Office of War Information and Hollywood, 1942-1945,” *The Journal of American History*, 64 (June 1977), 91.

5. Until recently, the subject of composer biopics has been entirely ignored by film historians. At this writing, however, two book-length studies have appeared—Charles P. Mitchell's *The Great Composers Portrayed on Film, 1913 through 2002* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2004) is basically a reference work; and John C. Tibbetts' *Composers in the Movies: Studies in Musical Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005) is more a historical and social contextualization. Otherwise, the following standard examinations of history and biographical films neglect to consider composer biographies as a distinctive subset of biopics: Mark C. Carnes, *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies* (New York: Henry Holt, 1995); George MacDonald Fraser, *The Hollywood History of the World: From One Million Years B.C. to Apocalypse Now* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1988); Leger Grindon, *Shadows on the Past*; Marcia Landy, ed., *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001); John E. O'Connor and Martin A. Jackson, *American History/American Film: Interpreting the Hollywood Image* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1979); Joseph Roquemore, *History Goes to the Movies* (New York: Doubleday, 1999); Peter C. Rollins, *Hollywood as Historian: American Film in Cultural Context* (Lexington: Kentucky University Press, 1983); Robert A. Rosenstone, *Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Pierre Sorlin, *The Film in History: Restaging the Past* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980); Robert Brent Toplin, *History by Hollywood* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996).

6. Quoted in Koppes and Black, “Blacks, Loyalty, and Motion-Picture Propaganda in World War II,” *The Journal of American History*, 73 (September 1986), 391. Similar pronouncements had already been made by such master propagandists as Lenin and Josef Goebbels, and Pope Pius XI.

7. Biographies and commentaries of Chopin consulted for this paper include Alfred Cortot, *In Search of Chopin* (New York: Abelard Press, 1952); Herbert Weinstock, *Chopin: The Man and His Music* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949); Arthur Hedley, "Chopin the Man," in Alan Walker, ed., *Frédéric Chopin: Profiles of the Man and the Musician* (New York: Taplinger, 1967); William G. Atwood, *The Lioness and the Little One: The Liaison of George Sand and Frédéric Chopin* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); Jeffrey Kallberg, *Chopin at the Boundaries* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); Tad Szulc, *Chopin in Paris* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998); and Benita Eisler, *Chopin's Funeral* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003).

8. At the very moment of Chopin's death, on 17 October 1849, two photographers burst into his rooms and set up photographic equipment. When they attempted to move Chopin's bed nearer the window to catch the dawn light, they were escorted to the door. According to biographer Benita Eisler, in *Chopin's Funeral*, "these larval paparazzi announced the end of Chopin's world of aristocratic privacy and discreet patronage." (200) The first "biography" of Chopin was published by Franz Liszt in 1852, three years after the composer's death. For the most part, it was actually written by Liszt's mistress, Princess Carolyn Sayn-Wittgenstein. "The process of viewing him and his art through a kind of distorting lens," wrote the dean of Chopin specialists, the late Arthur Hedley, "went on at ever-quicken pace during the second half of the nineteenth century." See Hedley, "Chopin the Man," 2.

9. See note 27.

10. Cortot, *In Search of Chopin*, 216-217.

11. Peter Kivy, *The Possessor and the Possessed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 38.

12. Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 11.

13. Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 15.

14. Joseph Horowitz, *The Post-Classical Predicament: Essays on Music and Society* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1995), 145. Horowitz quotes a textbook by an unidentified author. For a recent examination of the appropriation of Beethoven's music, particularly the "Ode to Joy" from the Ninth Symphony, by German nationalists, French republicans, Communists and Catholics, see Esteban Buch's *Beethoven's Ninth: A Political History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

15. Joseph Horowitz, *The Post-Classical Predicament*, 147. Horowitz compares Damrosch's work in popularizing the classics with that of Leopold Stokowski and Leonard Bernstein. By contrast to Damrosch, Stokowski and Bernstein advocated exposing children to more "modernistic" music. For his part, Damrosch deplored such an agenda, declaring, "Children should not be confused by experiments" (147).

16. Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), 8-9. For useful examinations of the Hollywood studio system, see also David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristen Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); and Janet Staiger, ed., *The Studio System* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

17. George Custen, *The Bio/Pic: How Hollywood Constructed Public History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 26. Custen notes that from 1930-1960 Hollywood led the way in sheer numbers of biopics with an estimated three hundred features, 227 of which came from the eight major film studios and fourteen from independent production entities, like Republic and Monogram. One-quarter of these pictures focused on artists and entertainers. 20th Century-Fox produced the most with fourteen, followed by MGM, with thirteen.

18. Deploying these practices in composer biopics and other film projects were a number of European and Eastern European-trained composers, who emigrated to Hollywood and brought with them what historian Tony Thomas has dubbed the traditions of the "Mittel-Europa Strain" of late nineteenth century classical music. For example, Dimitri Tiomkin, famous for his western scores (*High Noon*, 1951 and *Red River*, 1948, studied at the St. Petersburg Conservatory of Music under Alexander Glazunov and Felix Blumenthal; Miklos Rozsa, noted for his many Korda and MGM historical films (*The Jungle Book*, 1938 and *Ben Hur*, 1959) studied at the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest and under Hermann Grabner at the Leipzig Conservatory of Music; Erich Wolfgang Korngold, a Viennese *wunderkind* who made his Hollywood reputation scoring Errol Flynn vehicles (*Robin Hood*, 1939 and *The Sea Hawk* 1940), was encouraged in his studies by no less than Richard Strauss, Gustav Mahler, and Giacomo Puccini; Constantin Bakaleinikoff studied at the Moscow Conservatory before coming to America to work as a music director for MGM, RKO, and Paramount; and Max Steiner, another Viennese prodigy who grew up under the influence of his famous grandfather, Maximilian Steiner (the impresario of the Theatre an der Wien), and who studied with Gustav Mahler, became the most prolific composer in Hollywood, creating for RKO, Selznick, and Warner Bros. the scores for such classics as *King Kong* (1933), *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1942), and *Gone with the Wind* (1939). Less well known, but deserving attention, is Heinz Roemheld, head of Universal studio's music department, who had studied music in Berlin.

For an overview of the subject, see Tony Thomas, *Music for the Movies* (South Brunswick, N.J.: A.S. Barnes, 1973), 64-106. See also Kathryn Kalinak, *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 66-110; and Alfred W. Cochran, "Cinema Music of Distinction," in Michael Saffle, ed., *Perspectives on American Music, 1900-1950* (New York: Garland, 2000), 323-348.

19. Carol Flinn, "The Most Romantic Art of All: Music in the Classical Hollywood Cinema," *Cinema Journal*, 29 (Summer 1990), 38.

20. Patrick O'Connor, "Call of the child," *Times Literary Supplement*, 12 October 2001, 19.

21. Interview with the author, 14 July 2003, London.

22. Interview with the author, 3 June 1989, Los Angeles, CA.

23. I wish to thank film historian Kevin Brownlow who screened for me his own print of the film.

24. Chopin's prelude, as arranged by studio composer Herbert Stothart, was erroneously billed as "Les Preludes" in the closing credits.

25. The film's production records are unavailable. In a letter to the author, dated 27 February 2004, Karl Thiede of Columbia Pictures acknowledges that the *A Song to Remember* is one of many Columbia Pictures productions whose production records have disappeared. This was confirmed by my visits and inquiries to the USC Cinema-Television Library and the Margaret Herrick Library at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in Los Angeles in the summer of 2002.

26. Joseph McBride, *Frank Capra: The Catastrophe of Success* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 379. McBride claims that Capra himself worked on the screenplay. Moreover, an entry in the *American Film Institute Catalogue of Feature Films, 1941-1950* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999) quotes a letter from the Screen Writers Guild that "the story was derived from a French picture about Frédéric Chopin that was screened years earlier in Europe but never released in the United States" (2274). It is not certain if that film, erroneously cited as *La Valse* [*Valse de l'adieu*], is indeed that source. It is doubtful, however, because a viewing of the picture confirms that the story is more concerned with Chopin's ill-fated romance with Maria Wodzinska than with Sand, who remains a peripheral character.

27. Already in Chopin's lifetime, over his objections, his piano pieces were published and popularized with what he called "stupid titles," such as "The Zephyrs," "The Infernal Banquet," "Minute Waltz," "Raindrop Prelude," and "Butterfly" and "Winter Wind" Etude. Michael Fokine's 1908 ballet, *Chopiniana* (later retitled *Les Sylphides*), adapted and orchestrated many of the piano pieces to tableaux drawn from his life, establishing it as one of the most enduringly popular of all ballets. Tin Pan Alley songwriters hit pay dirt with pop songs based on his melodies. For example, the second theme from the *Fantasia Impromptu* for piano was recast by songwriters Harry Carroll and Joseph McCarthy as "I'm Always Chasing Rainbows" for the 1918 Broadway show, *Oh, Look!* Buddy Kaye and Ted Mossman appropriated the theme from the great A-flat Polonaise, Opus 53, for the World War II hit song, "Till the End of Time." And cartoon character Andy Panda performed his own version of the celebrated A-flat Polonaise in Walter Lantz's "Woody Pecker" cartoon, "Musical Moments from Chopin" (1945). Out of the endless list of such "borrowings" from other composers besides Chopin, a few notable examples from the '30s and '40s include Ray Austin's "Tonight We Love," a pop arrangement for bandleader Freddie Martin of the opening theme from Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto, Sigmund Romberg's "Song of Love," a transformation of the first theme from Schubert's Eighth Symphony, and Peter DeRose's "The Lamp Is Low," an adaptation of Ravel's *Pavane pour une Infante Defunte*. See Julius Mattfeld, *Variety Music Cavalcade: Musical-Historical Review, 1620-1961* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962).

28. A perusal of the production records of *Swanee River*, dating from 31 May to 11 August 1939, reveals the lengths studio chief Darryl F. Zanuck went to transform Stephen Foster's rather colorless personality and uneventful life into a more masculine, activist figure. "He comes through as a dull person," Zanuck wrote in a memo on 11 July 1939, "and he becomes very weak and spineless. . . . We will make a radical change in Foster's characterization. . . . We must bend over backwards to lighten Foster—give him a sense of humor" (*Swanee River* file, Twentieth Century-Fox Archives, Doheny Library, USC, Los Angeles, California). Regarding John Philip Sousa, Zanuck's story editor, Julian Johnson, notes in a memo dated 2 November 1942: "I knew Sousa fairly well and the old boy was really pretty dull, uninteresting and certainly profoundly lacking in personality. . . ." Another memo added, "But—the idea of making a patriotic picture under this title, and with Sousa's best music, is still a good one. If someone can create a story" (*Stars and Stripes Forever* file, Twentieth Century-Fox Archives, Doheny Library, USC, Los Angeles, California).

29. For an overview of the historiography concerning George Sand, see David Coward, "Liberated Women," *The New York Review of Books*, 26 April 2001, 28-31.

30. Feminist critic Marjorie Rosen writes, "It may be no coincidence that the plethora of these films coincided with female acquisition of economic and social power in life. . . . Avarice

and controlled loathing more often than passion dictated the carnage wrought by Fatal Women.” See Marjorie Rosen, *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies & the American Dream* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghan, 1973), 224-225. Furthermore, notes Mary Ann Doane “She is the hyperbolized figure of an excessive female sexuality, which must ultimately be eliminated. Her presence makes manifest the male’s impotence. . . . The very notion of a patroness of the arts indicates a perversion of the traditional male-female power relation. . . .” (98-99) See Doane, *The Desire to Desire: the Woman’s Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 4. *Humoresque* and *Leave Her to Heaven* both depict these “Fatal Women.” In the first, Joan Crawford is a wealthy patroness of the arts who supports a young musician (John Garfield). In *Leave Her to Heaven*, Cornel Wilde reappears, this time under the thrall of Gene Tierney, a woman so possessive of him that she commits murder and suicide to block his love for another woman.

31. Konstancia Gladkowska was not a firebrand Polish patriot, as alleged in the film, but a talented singer whom Chopin met in Warsaw in 1829. There is no evidence that they ever enjoyed a romantic relationship.

32. Jolanta T. Pekacz, “Deconstructing a ‘National Composer’: Chopin and Polish Exiles in Paris, 1831-49,” *19th-Century Music*, XXIV (Fall 2000), 161-162. Chopin’s Polish nationalism was, according to Pekacz, “one of the central features of our perception of Chopin. . . . It was simply a matter of course to assume that a composer so obviously ‘Polish’ in his music had to be also a staunch Polish patriot according to nineteenth-century standards.” Not only did Chopin take no part in the political life in Warsaw in the 1820s, but “Chopin did not seem to be interested in joining the more radical circles of the Polish emigrants in Paris.” Indeed, Pekacz concludes, “Chopin seemed indifferent not only to political disputes and rallies but also to any form of political activity” (168-169).

33. Eisler in *Chopin’s Funeral* claims that Chopin never really wanted to return to Poland, even after amnesty was granted in 1833 to Polish exiles; that he did not support his family financially during his peak earning years; and that “he was indifferent to politics.” Eisler continues: “The conservative loyalties of his family, pious Catholics and servants of the ruling class, and his own rejection of any forms of adolescent rebellion suggest that his apolitical stance was a way of remaining loyal to radical friends while accepting authority whatever its source—his parents, St. Petersburg, Rome, or the local Russian garrison” (31).

34. Szulc, *Chopin in Paris*, 21. The so-called “Revolutionary” Etude, the twelfth etude from his Opus 10, was actually completed in Paris late in 1821 or 1832 and published in 1833.

35. Was Chopin’s music gender-coded? The issue is musicologically complicated and technically beyond the scope of this article. In brief, the nocturnes, polonaises, and mazurkas have elicited many speculations regarding their affective properties. In his study of the subject, Jeffrey Kallberg claims that the nocturnes, in Chopin’s lifetime and beyond, possessed a filigree detail and sentimental association that found favor at the hands of female pianists: “The nocturne was routinely characterized as usually given to a gentle and quite rapture,” explains Kallberg. “Indeed, given the prevailing attitude of the time in which affiliation with women and with effeminacy usually led to a lesser ranking in the aesthetic hierarchy, it would have been odd if the nocturne had escaped unscathed” (41-42). On the other hand, claims Chopin specialist Garrick Ohlsson, the large-scale, declamatory polonaises connoted a “masculine” aggressiveness that “began providing the framework to express depths of personal feeling deeply rooted in his distant, unhappy homeland.” See John C. Tibbetts, “Ohlsson Takes on Chopin,” *The World and I*, 7 (December 1992), 162-168. Pianist Alfred Cortot in his 1952 biography designated the A-flat Polonaise as “a veritable apotheosis of patriotic sentiment, in which Poland is viewed as liberated.” As for Chopin’s mazurkas, they are also presumed to reflect Polish pride in their direct references to Polish folklore and folkloric musical elements—the sharpened fourth interval, the drone bass, the repetition of one-bar motifs, syncopated accents on the second or third beats of the bar. See the discussion by Paul Hamburger in Alan Walker, ed., *Frédéric Chopin: Profiles of the Man and the Musician*, 95-113.

36. Rozsa and director Vidor also lavished considerable ingenuity in other performance sequences, foregrounding the musical selections in their original piano versions, albeit truncating their length. Chopin’s first performance of the *Fantasia Impromptu* at the Wodzinska palace transpires during an elaborately staged dining scene, where the shimmering music is overwhelmed with the sounds and sights of a parade of waiters and the arriving guests. A later scene, wherein Chopin first meets Franz Liszt, stages the encounter as a delightful two-piano duet as each man plays the A-flat Polonaise with one hand while shaking hands with the other.

37. In particular, see two books by Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Censored* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994s) and *The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies, 1940-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

38. Black, *Hollywood Censored*, 1.

39. Richard Maltby, “‘A Brief Romantic Interlude’: Dick and Jane Go to 3 ½ Seconds of the Classical Cinema,” in David Bordwell and Noel Carroll, eds., *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 438-446.

40. Quoted in Atwood, *The Lioness and the Little One*, 46.

41. Curtis Cates, *George Sand: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975). Cates speculates that a sexual union between Chopin and Sand was probably limited to just one or two years' duration early in the relationship. "We can only surmise—for the documentary evidence is lacking—that [Sand] had found the physical act of lovemaking with Chopin considerably less exalting than his music" (486).

42. George Sand comes off as something of a monster in Benita Eisler's *Chopin's Funeral*. Near the end of their relationship Sand was purportedly behaving very badly toward Chopin. Not only did she write a book, *Lucrezia Floriana*, which contained a thinly disguised dissection of her affair with him, but she took on another lover, the sculptor Clesinger, who soon seduced and married her daughter, Solange. When that misbegotten union went awry, Chopin refused Sand's orders to break off communications with Solange, with whom he had enjoyed a close and sympathetic relationship. Sand countered viciously and implied Chopin was in love with her daughter. Eisler contends that Chopin had proved to be a better parent to Sand's children than she had been: "He had exposed Sand's image of herself as the perfect mother for a delusion. . . . This was Chopin's unforgivable sin: his knowledge that she had failed her child, a failure from which all of her own miseries flowed" (166-170). In later years, Sand described Chopin as a hopeless neurotic with whom she had had only a chaste relationship. Yet, concludes commentator Angeline Goreau, it was Sand who enabled Chopin to write music for as long as he did. "The attraction that held them together may be explained by the voracious appetite for work they shared. Chopin never wrote so well as when he lived with Sand at Nohant, he worrying the piano all day while she scribbled at night. And in the end, we have the extraordinary body of music, and the novels that tell us what it was like to be a woman in Sand's time. So who is to say it was all a terrible mistake?" See Angelina Goreau, "Whatever George Sand Wants. . ." *The New York Times Book Review*, 20 April 2003, 29.

43. For a generally more favorable interpretation of Sand's role in the affair with Chopin, see Atwood, *The Lioness and the Little One*.

44. Curiously, this advice from Breen was not followed. The film's penultimate scene has Sand rejecting Elsner's offer to come to the dying composer.

45. "A Song to Remember," *Variety*, 18 January 1945; "A Song to Remember," *Film Daily*, 18 January 1945.

46. Custen, *The BioPic*, 69

47. Clayton R. Koppes, "Regulating the Screen: The Office of War Information and the Production Code Administration," in Thomas Schatz, *Boom and Bust: Hollywood in the 1940s* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1997), 270.

48. For a discussion of the "Manual for the Motion Picture Industry," see Koppes and Gregory D. Black, "What to Show the World: the Office of War Information and Hollywood, 1942-1945," 91.

49. Gregory D. Black and Clayton R. Koppes, "OWI Goes to the Movies: The Bureau of Intelligence's Criticism of Hollywood, 1942-43," *Prologue*, 6 (Spring 1974), 44-59.

50. Thomas Schatz, *Boom and Bust: Hollywood in the 1940s*, 204.

51. *This Land Is Mine* was directed by Jean Renoir from a script by Dudley Nichols. Charles Laughton portrayed Albert Lory, a meek school teacher who, in the crucible of the French Resistance, summons up the courage to denounce the Nazi invaders, even as the soldiers come to arrest him. Renoir biographer Raymond Durnat notes that the film "was not to be a suspenseful melodrama" but should "portray Resistance matters with an authenticity which would satisfy the French, or the ideal, spectator. It had to explain 'neutralist' hesitations at a period of peak war effort. It had to explain them to [American] spectators who had hardly known war, let alone Occupation." See Durnat, *Jean Renoir* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), 234-241. A sampling of other wartime "resistance" films include the following: Polish resistance: Warner Bros.' *In Our Time* (1944), Columbia's *A Song to Remember* (1945); Czech resistance: United Artists' *Hangmen Also Die* (1943), MGM's *Hitler's Madman* (1943); Norwegian resistance: Warner Bros.' *Edge of Darkness* (1943), Columbia's *First Comes Courage* (1943), Columbia's *Commandos Strike at Dawn* (1943), Twentieth Century-Fox's *The Moon Is Down* (1943); and German resistance: Warner Bros.' *Watch on the Rhine* (1943), RKO's *Hitler's Children* (1943).

52. Ironically, reports Koppes and Black, the OWI was not wholly satisfied with the characterization of Rick in *Casablanca*. "He was too cynical for too long, according to one OWI evaluation," and his climactic speech was insufficiently detailed and specific regarding OWI agendas. See Koppes and Black, *Hollywood Goes to War* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 290. For useful accounts of the making and reception of *Casablanca* are Howard Koch, *Casablanca: Script and Legend* (Woodstock, N.Y.: The Overlook Press, 1992); and Rudy Behlmer, *Behind the Scenes* (New York: Samuel French, 1990), 154-176.

53. For a useful overview of the Warsaw Uprising and its immediate aftermath, see Simon Sebag Montefiore, "A Great Betrayal," *The New York Review of Books*, 15 July 2004, 14-18.

54. For an overview of World War II Hollywood films that sympathetically depicted the Soviet struggle, see Robert Fyne, *The Hollywood Propaganda of World War II* (Lanham, Md.: Garland, 1997), 102-113.

55. Rochelle Larkin, *Hail Columbia* (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1975), 182.

56. Edward Buscombe, "Notes on Columbia Pictures Corporation 1926-41," in Janet Staiger, ed., *The Studio System*, 30. As an admitted member of the Communist Party from 1938-1945, Buchman refused to name names before HUAC and was subsequently fined and blacklisted. Buscombe points out that half of the Hollywood Ten were employed at Columbia during the 1930s.

57. Data cited by Joseph McBride demonstrate that the film's rentals through 1985 were \$7,430,468 against the original negative cost of \$1,607,953. See McBride, *Frank Capra: The Catastrophe of Success*, 379.

58. Sherwin Kane, "A Song to Remember," *Motion Picture Daily*, 18 January 1945. Confirming Kane's prophecy, Chopin biographer Herbert Weinstock, writing in 1949, attributed directly to the film the "suddenly increased popularity" of Chopin's great A-flat Major Polonaise, Opus 53, fragments of which are heard throughout the picture: "Jose Iturbi's brash, insensitive performance of this flashy and vital piece," Weinstock wrote, "was at once taken to the hearts of thousands of people who had otherwise only a remote—and either awed or disdainful—interest in serious music." See Weinstock, 266. Regarding such popularizations in general, composer Sigmund Romberg declared, that moviegoers "have learned to like the better class of music. . . . [I]t is to the movies that we owe this sense of appreciation" (quoted in Gerald Bordman, *American Operetta* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 117).

59. "A Song to Remember," *The Hollywood Reporter*, 18 January 1945. The writer was probably referring to the following foreign imports—Abel Gance's *Un grand amour de Beethoven*, which had reached American screens in 1939; a British import about Franz Schubert, *Blossom Time* (1936), starring Richard Tauber; and another British import, *The Great Mr. Handel* (1942), starring Wilfrid Lawson. The critic is incorrect, however, in referring to *A Song to Remember* as "the first venture in this field by American film makers." MGM's big-budget *The Great Waltz*, starring Fernand Gravet as Johann Strauss, Jr., was released in 1938; and several Stephen Foster films had appeared in the 1930s, including *Harmony Lane* (1934) and *Swanee River* (1939), with Douglass Montgomery and Don Ameche, respectively, as Foster.

60. For more details about these films, see my *Composers in the Movies*.

61. For detailed examinations of both Polish films, see Ewa Mazierska, "Multifunctional Chopin: The Representation of Fryderyk Chopin in Polish Films," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* (Vol. 24, No. 2 (June 2004), 253-268.