



**MOTION THROUGH TIME: KUJAWY VILLAGE MAZURKAS AS A KEY TO  
UNDERSTANDING *RUBATO* WITHIN THE TIME FRAME OF A BAR  
IN CHOPIN'S MAZURKAS**

**Catherine Joy Steer**

Thesis submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
at  
The University of Adelaide  
Elder School of Music  
June 2004

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## ABSTRACT

*Rubato* within the time frame of a bar in Chopin's mazurkas is a phenomenon which has long mystified musicians. When Chopin himself applied it to his mazurkas, the tempo subtly slowed down and, within the same bar, accelerated to make up for lost time, the first beat of the bar thus constantly arriving on time. In spite of extensive research into this type of *rubato*, there is still little known about it. This thesis therefore investigates the phenomenon.

During a conversation with the German-born pianist Hallé, Chopin attributed *rubato* within the time frame of a bar in his mazurkas to the Polish mazurka itself. Significantly, of the various kinds of Polish mazurkas which Chopin encountered during his lifetime, only those from villages in the region of Kujawy, where he spent holidays as a youth, featured this type of *rubato*. When it was applied to them, the tempo subtly slowed down and, within the same bar, accelerated to make up for lost time, just as in Chopin's mazurkas. This was achieved, in the case of Kujawy village mazurkas, by close interaction between text, melody and dance movements as they moved through time together. Hence, this thesis argues that Kujawy village mazurkas, particularly the interaction there between text, melody and dance movements, provides a key to understanding *rubato* within the time frame of a bar in Chopin's mazurkas.

This thesis is presented in two parts. The first part studies motion through time in Kujawy village mazurkas. It determines how text, melody and dance movements interacted whilst moving through time together. In particular, it focuses on how they interacted during the application of *rubato* within the time frame of a bar, in preparation for applying knowledge of this interaction to Chopin's mazurkas. With this preparation complete, the second part studies motion through time in Chopin's mazurkas. It determines how the motion might have been influenced by the interaction in Kujawy village mazurkas between text, melody and dance movements. It then

considers how knowledge of this interaction might be used to interpret *rubato* within the time frame of a bar in Chopin's mazurkas, thereby providing new insights into a phenomenon which in the past has proven to be so elusive.