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Frédéric Chopin and George Sand
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Le lien entre deux génies

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Abstract:

This article highlights the fascinating interconnectedness of different art forms-music, painting, and literature-through the lens of Frédéric Chopin and George Sand's relationship during their stay in Majorca. The focus is on how these great artists' experiences influenced and enriched each other's creative expressions. Overall, the article reveals the intricate tapestry of culture, where music, painting, and literature converge, enhancing and enlivening each other. The interconnectedness of these art forms underscores the universality of artistic expression and serves as a testament to the enduring impact of creative collaborations in the realm of culture.

Keywords:

Frédéric Chopin, George Sand, Majorka, music, literature.

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Résumé :

Cet article met en lumière l'interconnexion fascinante des différentes formes d'art - la musique, la peinture et la littérature - à travers la relation de Frédéric Chopin et George Sand lors de leur séjour à Majorque. L'accent est mis sur la manière dont les expériences de ces grands artistes ont influencé et enrichi les expressions créatives de l'autre. Dans l'ensemble, l'article révèle l'entrelacement complexe de la culture, où la musique, la peinture et la littérature convergent pour se renforcer mutuellement. L'interconnexion de ces formes d'art souligne l'universalité de l'expression artistique et témoigne de l'impact durable des collaborations créatives dans le domaine de la culture.

Mots-clés :

Frédéric Chopin, George Sand, Majorka, musique, littérature.

The painting by Eugène Delacroix, "Portrait of Frédéric Chopin and George Sand", was started in 1838 and remained

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unfinished. The couple is depicted at the very beginning of their relationship. The ethereal and fully immersed in music Chopin plays the piano. Sitting nearby is Sand, attentively listening to her beloved. The depiction of the piano on which the composer played did not survive, but it is known that Delacroix had it specially commissioned for his studio to work on the painting.

Unlike a typical paired portrait, there is no static quality in its protagonists. Sand is likely looking at the hands of her lover, and her entire countenance is a reaction to his playing. In the painting, she played the role of a counterpoint to Chopin's figure: the image of the composer was more important to Delacroix. An interesting fact: George Sand is so strongly associated in the public consciousness with an emancipated woman smoking in a male suit that many researchers, without hesitation, claim that Delacroix depicted her with a cigarette in her hand. However, and it is hard to believe, her true favourite pastime was embroidery, which she is engaged in on the canvas.

Chopin highly valued George Sand's musical taste and, when performing his new compositions before her, attentively listened to her remarks. In turn, he also helped George with advice. When she was working on the novel "Consuelo", whose main heroine was a singer, it was Frédéric who acted as a musical consultant.

For unknown reasons, Delacroix never completed this paired portrait, which lay in his studio until the artist's death in 1863. Then the painting ended up with another artist, Constant Dutilleux. After his death, his heirs cut out two separate portraits from the painting: Frédéric Chopin and George Sand, deciding that two paintings could fetch much more money. Unfortunately, the part of the painting not occupied by the characters was irretrievably lost[(1)].

From a purely economic point of view, they may have been right. The portrait of Frédéric Chopin now adorns the walls of the Louvre, while the portrait of George Sand is preserved in the Ordrupgaard Museum in Copenhagen. One would hope that at

some exhibition dedicated to the great French artist, the lovers would finally be reunited.

Yaroslav Ivashkevich noticed that when looking at "elegant portraits of Chopin by Ary Scheffer or, for instance, Franz Winterhalter, one can imagine how Chopin looked, but when gazing at Delacroix's masterpiece, one truly understands what Chopin was like"[(2)].

Much brought Delacroix and Chopin together. In 1830, a year that brought so many trials to the Polish people, the great artist responded to the July Revolution in France with his painting "Liberty Leading the People". Delacroix's revolutionary Romanticism resonated with Chopin and the Polish poets, just as the Dante-inspired ideas of patriotism developed by masters of Polish culture. And even until the end of the composer's days, Delacroix captured his noble features, bringing his likeness closer to that of the "supreme poet", grasping the truly Dantean power of Chopin's creativity more deeply than anyone else[(3)].

One of George Sand's works, "Winter in Majorca", was written after her trip with her children and Frédéric Chopin to the island, where they spent the winter of 1838-1839[(4)]. This composition reflects the events of the initial stage of the relationship between the two outstanding personalities. Chopin met Baroness Aurore Dudevant (1804-1876), formerly known as Aurore Dupin, who published her literary works under the pseudonym George Sand, in late 1836[(5)]. The years of their life together coincided with the most remarkable period in Chopin's creativity, characterized by productivity, maturity, and artistic perfection. All the composer’s "peak" works in various genres were created between 1837 and 1848, encompassing the time of proximity between Chopin and George Sand[(6)].

The writer depicts her stay in Majorca, coloured with romantic expectations, admiration for its nature, the inspired creativity of the composer, on the one hand, and the lack of mutual understanding, dislike in relations with the locals,

Chopin's illness, and the difficulties of everyday life on the other. George Sand's narrative is filled with bitterness and sarcasm towards the native population of Majorca, mocking them for laziness, greed, backwardness, and roughness, but at the same time, she highly appreciated the primal beauty of the region, dedicating many pages of her work to its description(7).

George Sand liked to express freedom and progress, values that she represented to her fans and supporters. In this work, she stands against the Majorcans, based on her mood, but also the hostile attitude of the natives towards a foreign and liberated woman, which contradicts their religious beliefs about the subordinate position of women in society(8).

Thus, the writer testifies to the poor humanity and weak inclination to accept a foreigner, while emphasising how the Majorcans of that time denied any woman the right to live according to her own will and convictions. "Winter in Majorca" is an example of the intolerance that the writer was capable of(9).

"Winter in Majorca" emerges during the triumph of French Romanticism, and artists consider it a genre of its own. Following Jean-Jacques Rousseau, it is based on personal emotions, convictions, and can take the form of a personal diary(10). However, in the context of travel notes, the description also serves as a guidepost for other researchers, adding authoritative references from other travellers.

Many have considered and still consider this trip to be unsuccessful, exhausting for Chopin's health. In the Valldemossa monastery, the travellers from Paris were able to find a romantic corner, promising an atmosphere of seclusion and creativity(11). Today, many well-known actors, philosophers, and artists have their homes and studios here. The historical spirit of these places has a positive influence on the professional sphere of these individuals. Therefore, in the city of Valldemossa, surrounded by mountains, a spirit of creativity prevails.

The creation of Chopin's "Preludes" and the associated

journey to Majorca are shrouded in legends and traditions, endlessly repeated in various versions for over 170 years by several generations of biographers and musicologists. The initial source of these legends seems to be the letters of Chopin himself and the memoirs of George Sand (the so-called Story of My Life).

The appearance of George Sand - in men's clothing, smoking a pipe, the untraditional relationship - repelled the locals, who simply shunned her. Neighbours didn't like this French family because they didn't attend church(12). The mayor and the priest called them pagans, Mohammedans, Jewish. The peasants conspired to sell them fish, eggs, and vegetables at insanely high prices. They had to go to the city for all their supplies. She often went with the children so that they wouldn't bother Chopin, whom they disliked and often plotted against. His illness was exacerbated by the internal family relationships. Even rare outings on the streets ended with stones being thrown at him(13). And she carried bags of groceries through the slippery mud uphill, cooked, took care of the children, managed their entire household, protecting him around the clock, turning into a nurse.

According to George Sand, once Chopin was playing music alone while she and the children went shopping. Chopin fell asleep, and he dreamed that he saw himself drowning in the lake. When George Sand returned from shopping in town with the children, she found Chopin unconscious at the piano. When he came woke up, Chopin uttered strange words that all biographers love to repeat: "I knew well you were dead"(14).

"Prelude N°15 in D♭ Major" that Chopin composed that night is often called the "Raindrop Prelude" because of the repetition of A♭, which appears throughout the entire piece and sounds like raindrops to many listeners(15). Regardless of the external descriptive (real or imaginary) elements in this prelude, its beginning immerses the listener into a lyrical atmosphere of "nocturnal contemplation".

If in the outer sections of the "D ♭ major Prelude", the defining aspect is considered to be psychological in nature, then its middle section is characterised by vivid pictorial imagery, which has given rise to various programmatic interpretations. One cannot overlook the chorale-like quality emerging in the low register melody, which is twice concluded with fierce and resonant forte full-voiced chords.

The slow, ominous, inexorably approaching, and receding procession of these scary monks is embodied in the development of his "Prelude". Other parts of the piece are permeated with gentle and tender intonations of rain, as if filtered through Chopin's lyrical perception. At the end of the prelude, one can clearly feel the falling of the last, shimmering raindrops in the sun, and the refreshed earth sighs after the storm...

The inseparability of poetic landscapes and lyrical sentiment is reinforced by the melismatic passages interwoven into the musical texture, showcasing their delicate nuances. They flutter lightly and gracefully or tenderly embrace the supporting tones of the melody.

Following the minor subdominant, the major tonic of the recapitulation resonates with a particularly luminous quality. The recapitulation, faithfully mirroring the first section, restores the airy transparency of its colour, bestowing upon the nocturne's form symmetry and equilibrium among all its parts.

Chopin couldn't bear the local cuisine, and Sand had to cook his lunch herself. Only she, being naturally strong, could endure this lifestyle: taking care of the sick, cooking, going to the shops in Palma, wandering in the rain with the children, crossing turbulent streams in shabby carriages, and at the same time revising "Lelia", writing "Spiridion", as money was needed, and François Buloz, who had provided her with financial assistance, demanded a manuscript for printing. Eagles often flew over their beds. The mountain was frequently shrouded in mist, and the

small lamp by the light of which they moved around the deserted monastery seemed like a wandering spark[16].

Interestingly, one of Sand's friends who recommended her to rest in Majorca was Juan Álvarez Mendizábal, who, just over two years before that, as the Prime Minister of the liberal government of Spain, implemented a reform that led to the closure of all monasteries in the country. The ancient Cartesian monastery in Valldemossa was abandoned by the monks, and for a while, the family of the opposition politician settled in several cells, later replaced in December 1838 by the unusual lodgings of Sand with her companion and children. Being "among palms, cedars, cacti, olives, oranges, lemons, aloes", Chopin wrote to his friend Julian Fontana: "The sky is like turquoise, the sea is like azure, the mountains are like emerald, the air is like in heaven... I will probably live in a wonderful monastery, the most beautiful place in the world: sea, mountains, palm trees, a cemetery, a crusaders' temple, ruins of mosques, ancient thousand-year-old olive trees"[17].

It was a closed sacred space where temporal landmarks differed from secular life, and the beginning of the night and the stroke of midnight could determine the established laws of the church.

George Sand was in no less joyful excitement and hurried to solve two problems that arose due to the move. First: how to transport Chopin's piano to the remote village high on the mountain slope? And second: how to furnish the three empty rooms where they were to live? Both were filled with romanticism. However, their dreams were shattered by practicality in the shortest time. Once, returning from Palma with her son on the slippery mountain road softened by rain, George Sand cursed the heavy bags of provisions and was filled with anxiety for Chopin.

The rains and winds continued without respite. The howling of the wind in the corridors of the monastery, as George Sand

described it, resembled "desperate cries and moans" that brought her to tears. Fog seeped into the corridors and rooms, so thick that they couldn't see each other while inside their own room.

During the period of 1837-1838, the composer's attention was predominantly captivated by miniatures. Mazurkas, polonaises, waltzes, and nocturnes reached a state of perfection. Among them, the Preludes (1836-1839) stand out as one of Chopin's deepest, most original, and truly classical creations[18] They seem to form the culmination of Chopin's artistry in the realm of intimate chamber pianism. The concept of lyrical miniatures is expressed through a remarkably concise, concentrated, and aphoristic form.

Here, Chopin wrote the "Prelude in B ♭ minor", skilfully intertwining bell-like sounds with funeral march chords. However, no one had actually passed away. Rather, the winter weather on Majorca set a melancholic tone, and their love proved too peculiar to find true happiness. The evocation of bell chimes in the late evening, symbolizing the departure from daily affairs and worldly distractions, is palpable in Chopin's "A ♭ major Prelude". It concludes with eleven sustained bass notes, signifying a metaphorical zero point - the passing of one day and the dawn of the next. The music of the Prelude imparts a sense of the day's culmination and the embrace of the night, yet with only eleven "clock strikes".

The defining characteristics of the outer sections of this "Prelude" (accentuated by a more agitated development) indicate a special, serene atmosphere of departing from the hustle and bustle of the day. Depending on the performer's interpretation, one may perceive an excessive regularity and squareness in the phrasing, a uniformity in the rhythmic structure akin to the psychological practice of subduing individual pretensions with a wilful self-composure. The bass "bell tolling" seemingly confirms the conventionality of the temporal boundary that is subject to

one's state of being, mood, and perception.

Chopin, often referred to as the "Polish Mozart", revolutionised the genre of instrumental preludes like no one before him[19]. Essentially, he recreated this genre, imbuing each prelude with a complete artistic image. Comparing all the preludes and their inexhaustibly rich imagery leads to the conviction that in each of them, the composer sought to create an exceptionally concise musical image-a concentrated emotional essence, evoking the compactness and plasticity of Dante's creations. These images are juxtaposed based on a rigorously maintained principle of classification, forming the foundation of Chopin's prelude cycle.

In the turbulent year of 1838, Frédéric Chopin composed his "Walz in F Major" (N° 3 op. 34). Like the first and second waltzes, it bears the subtitle "brilliante", however, these brilliant pieces are remarkably distinct. The fourth waltz is notably concise, and its structural scheme is exceedingly simple:

Introduction	First movement	Development	Repeat	Coda
-	AB	C	A	-

The music of this waltz, like the first one, captures the atmosphere of a social gathering: casual merriment, light conversation, swirling couples, and joyful liveliness. However, unlike the first waltz, this one sounds more refined, portraying the elegant Parisian society. Particularly graceful and "lace-like" is the first theme of the waltz (theme "A"), where a triple-meter accompaniment blends with duple-meter melody.

Both the first theme and the dance theme of the development with vibrant accents and graceful grace notes (theme "c"), as well as the coda built on the middle section theme, depict the external atmosphere.

Once again, just as in the first waltz, there is a lyrical theme here - theme "B" from the first part of the waltz. Its melody is melodic, beautiful, and tender, displaying a noble

character in its design. Its harmonic support is also of interest. The intonations of this theme combine features that are characteristic of some lyrical themes from Chopin's previous waltzes. In its initial bars, there is a resemblance to the "personal" theme found in the tenth, fourteenth, and first waltzes. It contains a descending, plaintive intonation at the end of the phrase, preceded by an intonation lamenting a stable pitch level (bars 1-3). Similarities can also be found with the first theme of the tenth waltz. In the key of B♭ major, this theme starts on the high note "F" (dominant) - the fifth degree of the scale. The melody begins on a weak beat, holds over, and concludes in the next bar with a descending progression. Additionally, there are similarities with the main theme of the third waltz, where phrases commence after a pause on a strong beat.

In this waltz, just like in the first one, the lyrical theme appears almost "extraneous", as it is only presented once within the waltz. There is no direct recapitulation of this theme, but before the coda, at the end of the recapitulation section, a melodious phrase that shares some similarities with theme "B" is repeated three times. Each repetition descends in register, gradually fading and diminishing until only its faint echo remains. After a pause - in the coda - the melody from the middle section resounds loudly, reaffirming the waltz's fundamental, dance-like character.

Chopin revisits a theme he first introduced in "Waltz N° 1", which contrasts the artist's inner world and profound emotions with the external surroundings. The lyrical theme adds a new dimension to the waltz's soundscape, revealing genuine human feelings amidst the hustle of the ballroom: pride, pain, and regret. Yet, true emotions are not of interest to the indifferent society revelling in the midst of another's grief. People are compelled to conceal and hide their true feelings. They will

never again reveal their emotions to others, instead, they will join in the merriment like everyone else around them, and no one will ever suspect their inner struggles.

Chopin's waltzes mark a higher stage in the development of this dance genre during the Romantic era compared to the waltzes of Schubert and Weber. Schubert's waltz hardly broke away from domestic traditions and did not claim to have a sophisticated form or significant scope. Weber, in his "Invitation to the Dance", outlined the type of programmatic suite, relying not only on the waltz of urban democratic festivities but also on salon atmosphere. In "Berlioz's Fantastic Symphony", written in 1830, the waltz occupies an entire section of the symphony.

Chopin's waltzes transcend domesticity, salons, and specific programmatic elements. Harmonically, they are somewhat simpler than most of the composer's other works, and they are more modest in scope. Chopin's waltzes belong to the category of contemporary romantic miniatures, but they are not so much of a chamber nature as they are of a concert style.

The stay in the cold monastery walls of Majorca during the winter rains negatively impacted Chopin's health. Nevertheless, he continued to overcome illness and persisted in his creative pursuits[(20)]. George Sand endeavoured to organise treatment for the ailing composer, and she put significant effort into arranging their domestic affairs. Despite the challenges, she did not deny herself the pleasure of taking long walks with her children in the picturesque surroundings of Valldemossa, gathering impressions of the island, which remained exotic to the French reader. It was here that Chopin first felt the proximity of death. It seemed that the path back was forever cut off, and he would never see the sun again - the Carthusian monastery appeared as if destined to become his tomb. Despite the dangers and fears, even during the dreadful nights when blood choked his throat, that entire period remained in his memory as a time of great, genuine beauty.

On Majorca, Chopin fully realised his concept of a cycle

of 24 preludes in all key signatures. Similar to Bach's works, these preludes are unified by the principle of contrast and encompass all 24 tonalities. However, the tonalities are arranged not chromatically but according to the circle of fifths, and the minor preludes are in parallel keys rather than the same-named keys[21]. In Chopin's composition, the prelude ceases to be merely an introductory piece and transforms into an independent, artistically complete miniature. Each piece unfolds only one image, one emotional state, with only two exceptions – the preludes in C♯ minor and D♭ major, which are constructed on contrasting images. The idea of a lyrical miniature is expressed in the preludes with utmost conciseness – most of them are characterised by brevity, occasionally to the maximum extent (e.g., N° 7 and N° 20).

Like Bach's preludes, Chopin's music in these preludes exhibits genre-specificity: N° 2 as a declamation, N° 6 as a cello elegy, N° 7 as a mazurka, N° 9 and N° 20 as marches, and the main theme of Prelude N° 15 as a nocturne. Many of these preludes can be considered "songs without words", and some have an etude-like character, such as E♭ minor, which anticipates the "strange" finale of the "Second Sonata".

Certain preludes can be described as little tragedies. Chopin managed to infuse the period form with highly poignant content. For instance, "Preludes N° 2 in A minor and N° 20 in C minor" are associated with thoughts of the defeat of the Polish uprising and contain elements of a mourning march. In "Prelude in A minor", there is a restrained, mournful, and austere melody, emphasizing the rhythmic figure of a mourning march with bell-like sonorities in the bass. "C minor Prelude" exhibits a richly textured chordal structure, resembling a march-chorale. Its development descends gradually from the tense sonorities of the first phrase to the remote, mournful sonorities of the final phrase. As if unbearable tragic emotions and suffering recede deep into the soul,

transforming into hidden pain.

Chopin's deliberate choice to conclude the prelude cycle with tragically compelling images was not accidental. In this conclusion lies the key to understanding his intention, which encompasses a wide range of emotional expressions, yet notably excludes any "scherzo-like" moods. Throughout the cycle, one can find preludes that approach the genres of etudes, nocturnes, mazurkas, funeral marches, and elegies, but there is not a single "prelude-scherzo".

This cycle became a true "encyclopaedia of Romanticism", encompassing all typical images, genres, intonations, and principles of form found within this artistic movement.

After the couple's move to Nohant, Chopin composed "Nocturnes in G major and G minor, the Impromptu in F ♯ minor", and the "Mazurkas" (op. 41). Among the works created in "Nohant", the "Sonata in B ♭ minor" stands out. This composition is of considerable scale in its form. The extreme emotional intensity inherent in its main themes contrasts with its extended lyrical expressions. The third movement of the sonata, a funeral march written by Chopin in 1837, became its tragic centre. In the overall sound of the sonata, it acquires characteristics not of personal but of societal mourning. This music resonates with the strikingly impactful mournful and tragic passages of the "Polonaise in C minor" (op. 40, N° 2), composed during his time in Majorca.

Despite the apparent simplicity of its movements, no court dance carried such profound meaning or required such refinement of manners and strict posture from the cavaliers and ladies as the Polonaise. In the 19th century, during the Polonaise, the first couple set the figures that the others were to repeat. This would go on for several rounds (the dance could last for over 20 minutes), after which a change of partners would occur. The right to choose the partner was given to the lady (white

dance). The change of dancers in the first couple led to constant variations in dance figures. In the creative work of Frédéric Chopin, the music of the dance played an enormous, if not central role. He created polonaises first and mazurkas last. Interestingly, in the Russian Empire of the 19th century, balls were opened with polonaises and concluded with mazurkas.

The origins of Chopin's polonaises can be traced back to a dance that has long been prevalent in the urban circles of Poland. However, the seriousness of their content and the power of their imaginative expression give this genre a significance far beyond its immediate purpose. The dance evolves into a distinctive symbol of Poland, its history, and its people(22).

Chopin endured severe life trials, and his compositional talent acquired new qualities - depth in understanding the world and expansiveness in expressing emotions. Indeed, Chopin breathed new life into the conventional and archaic genre of the polonaise, transforming it into a carrier of progressive artistic ideas of his time.

During his stay in Majorca, Chopin composed a series of significant works, showcasing his creative output during this period. Among them are the remarkable set of "Twenty-four Preludes, the Ballade in F major, Polonaises op. 40, Scherzo in C♯ minor and Sonata in B ♭ minor"(23).

In Chopin's compositions, one can discern a poetic and intellectual power, surpassing that of his contemporaries and rivals. His works emanate a mysterious beauty, refined pathos, whimsical imagination, flowing melodies, and rich harmonic diversity that reflect his own distinct characteristics. However, these works are not without their challenges, as they often present a formidable difficulty for ordinary performers.

Eight years after their parting, shortly before bidding farewell to Chopin, George Sand wrote a work that likely served as a summation of the history of their love and friendship. In her

novel "Lucrezia Floriani", Sand denied that she portrayed Lucrezia as herself, but rather, she depicted her beloved character, the egotistical Caroly, who became the cause of her premature death, as Chopin[24]. The novel's core theme revolves around the essence of these two diverse personalities - George Sand and Chopin. The selfless, kind, and empathetic Chopin is portrayed as the malevolent egotist Caroly, while the authoritative, strong-willed George Sand is transformed into the suffering and perishing Lucrezia[25].

The theme and problem of love were central to the writer's creativity, and her interpretation of it is connected with the enigmatic long-lasting success among readers of different levels, types, eras, and countries. George Sand's merit lies in being one of the creators of a new romantic myth about love, possessing not only concrete-historical but also universal aesthetic-philosophical foundations. Love (in a broad sense) is the attribute of boundless spiritual generosity, which defines the uniqueness and appeal of George Sand's works: she crafted not only aesthetics but also ethics and even metaphysics of such "abundance", drawing the reader into a powerful and spiritually charged stream of creativity. For George Sand, the capacity or incapacity to love becomes a sign of completeness or incompleteness of human existence.

The characters from Sand's novels had an immense influence not only on literary works from the 1840s and later but also served as models for emulation, "life-creating" and like all mythologems, acted in two ways. On one hand, people saw in Sand's heroes and their behaviour a key to understanding and interpreting their own life situations, and on the other hand, they sought to align their lives (consciously or semi-consciously) with the plot twists of her novels.

It is true that some friends of George Sand assisted her in fabricating a fictionalized biography of Chopin. They wrote about musical evenings in Nohant, where she allegedly arranged

meetings between Chopin, Liszt, and Pauline Viardot. These invented stories eventually found their way into books about Chopin, including Charles Rollin's "Recollections", the brother of François Rollin, one of Sand's lovers[26]. However, it is a well-established fact that Ferenc Liszt never visited Nohant after 1837 and did not meet Chopin or Pauline Viardot there. The "Recollections" were filled with imaginative tales and were published with George Sand's knowledge, who, when asked how such a collection of nonsense could be published, remarked, "He needed the money so badly"[27].

Today, the monastery where the great artists resided houses a museum, its keepers showcasing a time-worn bench on which the geniuses pondered over their works. This is indeed the case, with a caveat: Sand and Chopin, seeking happiness on Majorca, experienced a challenging winter of love.

To this day, the museum in the monastery allows visitors to immerse themselves in the lives and creations of the composer and writer. Visitors can behold the cell where they lived, the bench on which they shared their thoughts, some of Sand's manuscripts, Chopin's musical notations, a plaster cast of his face and hand, and even a Pleyel piano, on which the composer fashioned his masterpieces. The experience can be further enriched in the monastery's annex, where a small piano concert is held every hour, traditionally culminating with "Prelude N° 15 in D ♭ major", Chopin's most famous work created on Majorca.

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