

## ***Kobiece kroki (Feminine Steps): Expressions of Gender and Voice in Chopin's Mazurkas***

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SMT-AMS Joint Annual Meeting

Minneapolis, MN

6 – 8 November 2025

### Abstract

In his book *Chopin at the Boundaries: Sex, History, and Musical Genre*, Jeffrey Kallberg examines Chopin's nocturnes within the context of their gendered generic origins. Building on the work presented in Kallberg's book, this paper explores the role of gender in Chopin's mazurkas. While the gendered associations of nocturnes are well established, mazurkas—grounded in a dance tradition with distinct gender roles—also present an opportunity for examining musical portrayals of masculinity and femininity. By analyzing several mazurkas, I demonstrate the ways in which both intra-opus musical elements—such as phrasing, ornamentation, and cadences—and inter-opus relationships between mazurkas often emphasize choreographic elements associated with the woman's role. In this way, Chopin's mazurkas shift the focus away from the masculinity often associated with the original dance genre.

My analyses draw both on personal experiences learning Polish folk-dance choreography, as well as discussions by Tomasz Nowak and Aleksandra Kleinrok on 19<sup>th</sup>-century dance textbooks, and Ada Dziewanowska's *Polish Folk Dances & Songs*. I then apply the feminist literary theory of Elizabeth Harvey's *Ventriloquized Voices* to argue that the prioritization of feminine elements in Chopin's mazurkas represents a musical transvestism of voice—where a male composer “speaks” with a female voice. However, by situating my analyses within the context of Warsaw's salons, Chopin's letters, and other biographical sources, I propose that, unlike Harvey's literary examples, Chopin's mazurkas do not ventriloquize an external feminine voice but rather express an internal one.