

Experts: Chopin's heart shows signs of TB

September 17 2014, by Monika Scislowska



In this July 28, 2008 file photo a woman sits in front of the shrine where the heart of Polish-born composer Frederic Chopin rests in the Church of the Holy Cross, in Warsaw, Poland. Polish medical experts say Wednesday, Sept. 17, 2014, that the preserved heart of 19th century composer shows signs of tuberculosis and possibly some other lung disease. The findings seem to corroborate Chopin's 1849 death certificate which said that the Polish-born musician died at the age of 39 in Paris from TB. (AP Photo/Alik Keplicz, File)

The preserved heart of composer Frederic Chopin contains signs of

tuberculosis and possibly some other lung disease, medical experts said Wednesday.

The findings seem to corroborate Chopin's 1849 death certificate, which said the Polish-born musician died at the age of 39 in Paris from TB.

He rests in Paris, but in keeping with a Romanticism-era practice his heart was brought to Warsaw, where he grew up, and is kept as a national relic inside a pillar at The Holy Cross Church. Held in two cases and a sealed crystal glass jar, it was inspected in April by forensic and genetic experts to check the state of the preservation.

One of them, geneticist Michal Witt, said the heart is "much enlarged, suggesting respiratory problems linked to a lung disease, and bears TB nodules."

He would not, however, speculate on what other disease the frail and frequently ailing Chopin could have suffered from. When Witt was seeking permission in 2008 to see the heart, he suggested that Chopin could have had cystic fibrosis, an incurable genetic disease.

Backing earlier speculation, forensic expert Tadeusz Dobosz, said the "color of the preserving liquid suggests it can be cognac, the strongest alcohol known at the time," and also used for such purposes.

The experts said heart is "very well preserved," but they did not open the jar. They further sealed it with natural wax and suggested another inspection no sooner than in 2065.

Chopin is considered Poland's greatest composer, famous around the world for his piano concertos and other works for the piano.

He was born in 1810 in Zelazowa Wola, near Warsaw, to a Polish

mother and a French father. At the age of 20 he left for Vienna and Paris, where he died on Oct. 17, 1849.

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