

FIGURE 4–1



MARCHE FUNÈBRE.

Fr. Chopin.

PIANO.

Opening measures of Chopin's Marche funèbre.

reviewer in 1807 wrote, “The funeral march is new and bears the character of noble melancholy. As long as it is, even in relation to the other movements, we are still glad to linger in the emotion it arouses.”¹²⁰

Of all the “concert” funeral marches that have been introduced, none is more famous than the



Photography was still quite new in 1846 when Chopin's image was recorded.

“Chopin Funeral March”—an 1837 *Marche funèbre* for solo piano that Fryderyk Chopin (1810–1849) quickly retooled as the third movement of his [Piano Sonata in B-flat minor](#) that same year. (American schoolchildren in the twentieth century co-opted it as the playground chant: “Pray for the dead and the dead will pray for you.”¹²¹) As seen in FIGURE 4–1, the march has an oscillating ostinato bassline that is a bit reminiscent of the “tolling bell” ground bass in “O Death, Rock Me Asleepe” (LISTENING EXAMPLE 2). The right hand plays a solemn melody with march-like dotted rhythms. It was widely assumed that Chopin meant the piece to symbolize his grief for his homeland, Poland, which had lost its independence and was under Russian control.¹²²

Curiously, many of these theatrical or concert versions have subsequently been repurposed for “real” funerals over the course of the following centuries, sometimes far from the nation where the original setting had been written. For instance, after its premiere in a London theater, *Saul's* “Dead March” quickly became a standard feature in England’s “great occasions of national mourning; . . . not only was it used at the actual funerals, it was also specifically added to concerts ‘as a token of respect.’”¹²³ Its use in Winston Churchill’s 1965 funeral service came more than 225 years after it had been written.¹²⁴ Across the Atlantic, the “Dead March” was also heard in the United States, at the funerals of both George Washington (1799) and Abraham Lincoln (1865).¹²⁵ Similarly, Beethoven’s