

Paderewski Festival
Paso Robles
Saturday Paderewski
Gala Concert

Paso Robles Inn Ballroom
November 5th, 2022
7:30 p.m.

Jakub Kuszlik

piano recital



Program:

Grażyna Bacewicz – Piano Sonata No. 2

Maestoso. Agitato

Largo

Vivo

Ignacy Jan Paderewski – Polonaise in B major, Op. 9 No. 6

Ignacy Jan Paderewski – *Légende*, Op. 16 No. 1

Ignacy Jan Paderewski – *Cracovienne fantastique* in B major, Op. 14 No. 6

Fryderyk Chopin – Scherzo in E major, Op. 54 No. 4

Fryderyk Chopin – Sonata in B minor, Op. 58

Allegro maestoso

Scherzo: Molto vivace

Largo

Finale: Presto non tanto; Agitato

Program Notes

Grażyna Bacewicz, one of the most distinguished women composers of the twentieth century, left behind a rich output of compositions that are not only important in the context of Polish music but also on a wider European and worldwide scale. Bacewicz did not live long. She was born and raised in the city of Łódź, and died just twenty days shy of her sixtieth birthday, on 17 January 1969 in Warsaw. In her memoirs titled *Znak szczególny* (“a characteristic trait”), she was bold enough to describe very aptly a characteristic trait of her temperament, “Nature – having graciously endowed me with compositional talents – also equipped me with something that makes it possible to nurture those talents. As it happens, I possess a tiny, invisible engine which lets me finish things in ten minutes rather than an hour, and hence I run rather than walk, I can write fifteen letters in half an hour, and even my pulse rate is faster than normal [...]” Grażyna Bacewicz possessed an uncanny facility to compose, which must not be confused, however, with agreeing to artistic compromises or taking ‘shortcuts’ with regard to creative choices. Her output is ambitious and, from the technical point of view, splendidly advanced. There is abundant evidence for that, of which her most iconic work – the famed *Concerto for string orchestra* – is the most prominent example. The *Piano Sonata No. 2* of 1953 is another perfect work she wrote. Małgorzata Gąsiorowska, the author of a monograph on Bacewicz’s compositions, considers it to be “...one of the most excellent works of this kind in all of twentieth-century music,” and compares it to the last Sonatas by Sergei Prokofiev. The *Sonata No. 2* comprises three contrasting movements. This tripartite aspect is, by the way, a very characteristic feature of Grażyna Bacewicz’s oeuvre. The first movement *Maestoso-Agitato* is virtuosic, tempestuous, rhythmically emphatic, harmonically dense but also severe – and these features are evocatively followed up on in the work’s subsequent movements. Its peaceful and gentle episodes are further developed in the soulful *Largo*. Initially subtle and reflective, it later builds up to an incredible, consistently constructed climax followed by a period of calmness. However, a truly decisive change in the work’s atmosphere is only witnessed in its third movement *Toccata. Vivo*. This fast and energetic finale offers a tastefully stylised folk dance, an oberek, showing yet another crucial and characteristic trait of the composer’s writing. Grażyna Bacewicz was an accomplished violinist but also a seasoned pianist. Otherwise, she would not have performed this immensely challenging Sonata so successfully. The premiere performance took place during one of the concerts organised by the Polish Composers’ Union in Warsaw in 1953. Małgorzata Gąsiorowska asserts that it had “won sincere admiration.”

Ignacy Jan Paderewski is a symbol and a legend. This eminent artist is remembered today not only as a pianist and composer, and not only as a megastar and celebrity, a status he enjoyed at the turn of the twentieth century, with all the requisite trappings such as glitter and wealth. After all, Paderewski was also a public figure and a politician whose contribution to winning back Polish independence after 123 years of being under a foreign rule cannot be overestimated. This chapter of Ignacy Jan Paderewski’s life was crowned when he became the Prime Minister of the newly re-established country in 1918. All these activities were intertwined and interrelated – after all, Paderewski’s spectacular career of a concert pianist led to his involvement in politics, which in turn promoted the popularity of his pianism. Paderewski mainly composed in his youth, when he was harbouring high hopes of becoming a successful composer. Over time, those hopes had to be abandoned amidst his spectacular career of a performing pianist. He returned to composition following many years of hiatus in this domain, to round it off – quite symbolically perhaps – with his *Symphony in B minor ‘Polonia’* (1909). He had been composing works for piano almost three decades earlier; they were dominated by comparatively small pieces for solo piano. This is a characteristic feature of the nineteenth-century musical output as such. The piano virtuosos who ventured into composition were mostly interested in enriching their own concert programmes. Paderewski was thus following in the footsteps of such eminent pianists as Ferenc Liszt or even Fryderyk Chopin, who – contrary to the trend, however – abandoned his concert engagements in favour of focusing on composition. Paderewski’s *Polonaise in B major* appeared in a collection of *Polish Dances* Op. 9 (which originally bore the French title of *Danses polonaises* rather than Polish *Tańce polskie*). The six-movement suite, dedicated to Henryk Toeplitz, was published by Bote und Bock from Berlin in 1884. Whereas its outer movements, a Krakowiak and the Polonaise featured in this concert programme, were written in the same year, the four remaining miniatures had been composed two years previously. Apparently, the composer performed them quite often, and certainly when he appeared in Berlin at the time of the publication. As the Warsaw press noted with satisfaction, the works were praised by the reviewers who emphasised their typical Polish elements. The *Polonaise in B major* begins with a fanfare motif reminiscent of a trumpet. The characteristic, stately rhythms of the *chodzony* (the traditional Polish name for this ‘walking’ dance) and similarly treated cadences proceed alongside virtuosic episodes, at times dreamlike and even sentimental. The result makes for an interesting contrast and adds much-desired colours to the overall sound. Two further collections appeared a few years afterwards: *Humoresques de concert* Op. 14 in 1886-1887, and *Miscellanea. Série de morceaux* Op. 16, created over a period of a decade between 1886 and 1896. The *Fantastic Krakowiak* (bearing the French title of *Cracovienne fantastique* in its original publication) in B major was most likely written on an impulse and penned before 7 November 1886. The work seems demanding in its pianistic layer and is very impressive sound-wise. To be chivalrous and majestic in England, “... the national dances of Poland seem by Mr. Paderewski may be juxtaposed with idealised *Mazurkas* by Chopin.” On the other hand, the *Légende* in A flat major, Op. 16 No. 1, initially seems to be the quintessence of peacefulness and salon-like carefreeness, but later on it reveals some gloomier episodes that have an intriguing air of mystery. One might find references to Chopin’s music here, specifically his Ballades. If this were the case, they are merely distant echoes; Paderewski’s melancholy glance at the times gone by, so to speak. When the young composer performed his *Légende* in 1889 at a soiree in the apartments of the Zeleński family in Kraków, it resonated “... with such poetry that his luxuriant and unruly mop of hair looked like a golden halo.”

Fryderyk Chopin’s works published during his lifetime are an extraordinary, breath-taking accomplishment. The sixty-five opuses, featuring concertos and other works for piano and orchestra, chamber pieces and most of all his solo piano music, are a collection of the highest quality, an offering of quintessential art of the European Romanticism. Amongst them, the *Ballades* and *Scherzos* stand out as the most original and ambitious works of Chopin’s imagination. Each of these genres is represented by four compositions. The idea behind the Scherzo in E major, Op. 54, was conceived in 1842 (somewhat close to the conception of his last *Ballade*), and the entire work was completed in the summer of the subsequent year. If the previous three Scherzos by Fryderyk Chopin are stormy, dark or even demonic, the E major one sounds slightly different. Lighter and gentler, it writes a symptomatic next chapter in the history of the Romantic genre that had been started by Felix Mendelssohn. This is a world of fairy-tale music, not exactly carefree as it is occasionally rather mysterious, but definitely cheerful and even if these aspects are conventionally rather autumnal, rather than summerly, sunrises. Chopin opted for airy textures in the outer sections combined with reflective wisdom in the inner episode. It is hard to find the words that would not sound banal. For this reason, perhaps, in his attempt at underlining the uncanny atmosphere of the E major *Scherzo*, Mieczysław Tomaszewski quoted a phrase from Henryk Hejne’s letters. The poet enquires rhetorically, “What is this – music?” And he supplies his own reply, “It is a wonder. It stands between the thoughts and the phenomenon, as a poetic intermediary between soul and matter.” Such associations are frequently evoked in Chopin’s music in general, not only in his wonderful, mature, wise and distanced Scherzo Op. 54.

The greatest masterpieces written by Fryderyk Chopin would have never been created had it not been for the secluded retreat of Nohant, where the composer spent the summer months of his relationship with George Sand. In his essay *Dziedzictwo Chopina* [The Chopin legacy], Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz clearly emphasised that that idyllic place, “... Most importantly [...] witnessed the creation of the two great piano Sonatas, the apex of Chopin’s oeuvre, [it heard] the Sonata in B flat minor [...] and the even more beautiful and Apollonian *Sonata in B minor* with its thunderous and sensual finale.” It was all happening in 1844, when Chopin stayed in the village for an unusually long period of time, namely from late May to 28 November. The fruit of those days and months was a composition that the commentators and monographers alike have been rather enthusiastic about. “The four movements of the Sonata contain some of the finest music ever written for the piano” – ascertained British musicologist Arthur Hedley. Whereas the *Scherzo* Op. 54 emanated peacefulness and distance, these features were only amplified in the *Piano Sonata in B minor*, Op. 58, most notably in its third movement, the extended and poetic *Largo*, which seems to be the key section, the nub of the *Sonata*, as it encapsulates the message of the whole composition. It begins, however, with an excellent *Allegro maestoso* – highly dramatic and laden with murky and turbulent episodes. The Scherzo is concise, airy and symmetrical – the brisk whirl of the outer sections is contrasted with the static, introverted Trio section. This inner segment of the short second movement heralds the above-mentioned powerful *Largo*. To say that the *Largo* is a kind of nocturne would be a misunderstanding. It is poetic through and through, a fact that does not, however, undermine its philosophical depth, wisdom, that cannot truly be conveyed by words. The music itself is convincing enough and, fortunately, it is also ambiguous. The reflective *Largo* is violently interrupted by the forceful chords of the finale (*Presto, non tanto. Agitato*). Chopin interrupted it with a flourish, not sparing grand culminations. The fourth movement thus became the antithesis of the first, lending the whole sonata an almost monumental character. There are not many Romantic piano sonatas that could compete with Fryderyk Chopin’s Op. 58 Sonata, an ultimate masterpiece.

Karol Marcin Majchrowski
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