

Reviews

Renata Suchowiejko: *Musical Paris à la polonaise in the interwar period: Artists — Events — Contexts* [Muzyczny Paryż à la polonaise w okresie międzywojennym. Artyści — Wydarzenia — Konteksty]
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Polish-French Musical Bonds

Polish-French bonds and relations: whether political, cultural or musical have had a long-standing tradition. Leaving aside former dynastic liaisons of the Polish and French royal families, it was Paris where the Great Emigration community of political refugees from Poland flocked and developed, and it was there that the great works of Polish Romanticism were created by Chopin and Mickiewicz. Also, it was in Paris that Henryk Wieniawski, studied and mastered his skills as a great Polish violin virtuoso portrayed in another excellent study by Renata Suchowiejko: *Henryk Wieniawski, as composer in the light of the 19th century virtuoso tradition* (Poznań, 2005). The panorama of social, aesthetic and artistic contexts presented in the study on Wieniawski is broad, but it remains centred on the hero who is the one and only: Wieniawski. In the present work, *Musical Paris à la polonaise in the interwar period: Artists — Events — Contexts*, Renata Suchowiejko focuses on the interwar period when Poles, having regained independence, could travel abroad at last, proudly bearing Polish passports, but this

time there is not only one hero, but many. Amongst them is Karol Szymanowski, who particularly cherished his Polish passport.

According to Renata Suchowiejko (*Preludium*, p. 10), the main problem that she faced as a researcher was the inconveniently immense volume of source material, which is a rare occurrence for researchers who usually have to contend with a shortage of historic sources. Therefore the book, rather than having a continuous, uniform narration is an extremely rich anthology of sources discussed as a whole without separating one theme from another. Separate chapters are dedicated to the various famous musical personages who also occasionally appear in other parts of the book. Maria Modrakowska, who is so fascinatingly portrayed in *Polish Mélisande* (p. 61 ff.) was also hosted in Wanda Landowska's "Shrine to Old Music" (*Enchantress of Saint-Leu*, p. 81 ff.) and re-appears in the description of the magical classes of Nadia Boulanger as she was a favourite singer of the great Nadia (chapter 14, p. 275 ff.). Many other personages are also highlighted throughout the book including quoted archive documents, paragraphs dedicated to an individual person and a delightful 80 page section devoted to concert posters (pp. 393–471). All of these figures eventually unite in a beautiful vision from the past.

In order to keep the promise made in the second part of the title: *Artists — Events — Contexts*, Renata Suchowiejko researched little known, even rarely used or unused sources. First of all she delved into the French press, thoroughly researching four professional periodicals: *Le Courrier musical*, *Le Ménestrel*, *La Revue musicale* and *Le Monde musical*. She also carried out selective research of several other journals and dailies, including also Polish ones (*Kurier Wileński* and *Śląskie Wiadomości Muzyczne*).

The impressive 15-page *Bibliography* (pp. 473–488) with its detailed list of papers, reports, reviews and other press materials demonstrates the breadth of research carried out by Renata Suchowiejko. Another archival source she tapped into was a collection of concert programmes used to determine precise places, dates and times (also important!), organisers of concerts, and compositions that actually had been or were intended to be played and eventually replaced by other musical works as well as the names of artists appearing on the stage.

Two huge archive materials examined by Renata Suchowiejko consist of two collections. The first one contains documents illustrating the activities of a French organisation of international scope: Association of French Expansion and Artistic Exchange (L'Association française d'expansion et d'échanges artistiques — AFEEA). The other is the archive of a Polish organisation: Association of Young Polish Musicians in Paris (L'Association des jeunes musiciens polonais à Paris — AYPMP). The latter collection has been kept in the archives of the Library of Warsaw University since 1967 when Mr Szymon Laks, a composer and a former member of AYPMP delivered the archive to the Embassy of Poland and then the archive was forwarded to Poland. A private letter of Mr Laks in which he refers to the transfer of the archive is kept in the collection of Lak's archives in the Polish Library in Paris and Renata Suchowiejko has published a copy of the letter in her book (p. 196–197). A number of papers were published

in Poland on the AYPMP and its history, especially on the occasion of the 50th anniversary (e.g. a special issue of *Ruch Muzyczny*, 1977 vol. 5). The description of the AYPMP has been expanded by Renata Suchowiejko who — in as many as 3 chapters — presents the Parisian perspective and context of the activities of the AYPMP under the leadership of Piotr Perkowski and Zygmunt Mycielski, i.e. the supposedly most successful period of the AYPMP. The author shows both — the spectacular successes as well as the dissensions. For instance, the author considers that out of 23 chamber concerts listed in the first five years of AYPMP activity only a few of them could be considered to be first class events as they took place in renowned concert halls or artistic salons and were announced by posters with tickets available in public sales. The list of AYPMP activities also covers 47 concerts in the format of “auditions musicales” and they are considered by the author to be simply social events that had very limited or simply no press coverage at all.

Renata Suchowiejko presents certain privileges and benefits that AYPMP members enjoyed, such as buying tickets for important musical events in Paris at preferential prices. The statute of the Association also provided for assistance for the membership in various ways, including financial assistance which was an important factor particularly at the time of the Great Depression of the 1930s. The *Memoirs* of Maria Modrakowska, Sylwester Czosnowski and Stefan Kisielewski paint a vivid picture of the life of young artists in lodgings at 15 rue Lamandé and the typically student and truly artistic atmosphere in which the Polish community enjoyed life at that time. The official reports of the life in the AYPMP present documents such as the Statute of the Association, reports and minutes from official meetings, financial statements, activity reports which reveal long-lasting disputes such as whether, or not, AYPMP members should be required to report their public appearances to the Management of the Association, a procedure intended to ensure a high professional standard of performance and repertoire to be presented by Polish artists appearing under the AYPMP logo. The book presents an impressive list of thirty *membres fondateurs et protecteurs* who supported AYPMP (p. 206), including famous artists (Pola Negri, Ada Sari) and influential figures from the high society of the period. There is also a list of 141 AYPMP ordinary members (p. 211-213) which is as interesting as the list of founders and patrons because we find there the names of many figures who have fallen into oblivion. Footnote No. 38 is unclear because it reports that the list was compiled in December 1935 and covers persons who were members of the Association any time from 1927 until 1939. Was the list intended to be prophetic? The members were so determined to keep AYPMP that the last meeting of the Management Board was held only after the World War II in January 1946.

The book presents a collection of concert programmes and reports on premieres. What is particularly noteworthy about them is that several musical works were created for chamber ensembles of rather unusual composition, for instance Feliks Roderyk Łabuński's *Aria for voice, flute, clarinet, bassoon and harp*; Antoni Szałowski's *Sonnet for voice, violin, viola, flute, clarinet*

and celesta and Kazimierz Sikorski's *Violin sextet* and many more works by such composers as Roman Statkowski, Henryk Jarecki, Michał Kondracki, Alfred Gradstein, Jerzy Fitelberg, Bolesław Woytowicz, Piotr Perkowski, to mention, but a few artists that are absent from today's musical life. Perhaps some of their works might be returned to musical life in a format of the former AYPMP concerts? The idea seems still more plausible because the AYPMP idea has survived and in 1995 the Association of Polish Musicians in Paris was established. Its name is slightly different than that of the former AYPMP, but the organisation is active in Paris and continues to organise concerts and social events in the Polish Library. They are not mentioned by Renata Suchowiejko in *Musical Paris à la polonaise* for obvious reasons: the author is dealing with an earlier time frame in the book.

In the interwar period Polish music promoted by AYPMP was strongly supported by the French. The activity of the French Association for Artistic Expansion and Exchange is a convincing example of such support. AFEEA was established and managed from 1922 until 1938 by Robert Brussel, a prominent critic and manager. Renata Suchowiejko claims that her book may help to "discover new figures" and she is certainly right with regard to Brussel. The idea that AFEEA should be established was born before World War I and its founder was Alfred Cortot, pianist. The idea was further developed on a large scale by Brussel. He focused on action-oriented projects and an information system. AFEEA operated in 170 towns in 52 countries through the network of local correspondents, French residents abroad and a powerful central office in Paris staffed by a large number of personnel, including many interpreters and translators. In this way, he managed to have extremely good insight into the global artistic market. Theatre, orchestral and solo performances and shows as well as exchange of exhibitions arranged by him could be counted in the dozens. The documents and files of AFEEA (called *Fonds Montpensier*), may be found in the resources of the Bibliothèque nationale de France where they are stored in 960 boxes of which 14 are marked "Pologne" (Poland). Brussel always kept in touch with prominent Polish musicians. He visited Warsaw during the great celebrations that were perfectly organised and managed on the occasion of the unveiling of a monument to Chopin in the Łazienki Park (12–14 November 1926). Brussel's article on Polish music appeared in *Le Figaro* in 1932 and has been published *in extenso* in the book in a Polish translation (pp. 312–314). It proves that Brussel's insight into the core of Polish culture was truly wise. His actions and activities inspired Polish animators of artistic projects. In 1926 the Polish Association for Polish Art Promotion among Foreigners (Towarzystwo Szerzenia Sztuki Polskiej wśród Obcych — TOSSPO) was established under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Education.

Another "new face" unveiled by Renata Suchowiejko in her book is Édouard Ganche, a writer and medical doctor who established Société Frédéric Chopin in 1911. He decided that his mission would be the protection of Chopin's legacy. With this idea in mind he endeavoured to ensure Chopin's proper recognition in French culture. Ganche published a number of papers

about Chopin and collected Chopin mementoes and keepsakes (that eventually were transferred to Cracow). He effectively ensured that places where Chopin had lived in Paris were properly marked and also managed to get the Oxford University Press publish the *Complete Works of Chopin* in 1932. Ganche perceived Chopin and his works as a great driving force to promote the Polish cultural identity which is why concerts organised by his Société Frédéric Chopin presented not only Chopin's music, but also selected folk songs. These melodies were transposed for the piano by Henryk Opieński while their lyrics were translated into French and published in a bilingual edition in Geneva. Ganche, in co-operation with Polish editors, opened "A store of Polish music scores" where one could borrow or buy scores of works by Karłowicz, Wertheim, Różycki, Lipski, Szymanowski and many more. (p. 130, footnote 25). Concerts organised by the Société Frédéric Chopin had various forms and significance. In 1918 Polish and French artists performed at a charity concert for Polish soldiers who were wounded while serving in the French Army during World War I. In 1931 on the occasion of the first centenary of Chopin's arrival in France and continuing through 1932, a number of impressive and dignified concerts were organised on Ganche's initiative. Ganche also championed the idea that Chopin's ashes should rest in the Royal Cathedral on the Wawel Hill and his idea was just about to have been carried out...

Ganche worked with L'Association France-Pologne and with the association of Les Amis de la Pologne (Friends of Poland) which had branch offices in French towns. The associations supported by the Polish Embassy organised several events for local communities of French people of Polish origin, as well as a lot of concerts and celebrations organised on various occasions such as the 10th anniversary of Poland's regaining independence, the Day of the Seas, Marshall Piłsudski's name day. (The name day is celebrated in Poland in the same way as the birthday is celebrated in many countries of the world — translator's remark.) Without these initiatives and involvements it would not have been possible to organise these most significant events in Paris: The Festival of Polish Music in 1925, and the premiere of Szymanowski's ballet *Harnasie* in the Opéra National de Paris in 1936 and — in 1937 — the appearance of the Polish Ballet Company, or, to be more precise, the Polish Representative Ballet Company established in Poland. Renata Suchowiejko reports these events in separate chapters and presents in detail a lot of unknown facts along with extensive background information.

It was Wanda Landowska who played an important role in the aforementioned Polish-French movement and who is featured in a chapter devoted to her. She was a harpsichordist, writer and lecturer on old Polish music of which French audiences had no knowledge whatsoever. Landowska would take part in many of the previously mentioned musical events and her outstanding artistic personality attracted much public interest. She became famous for musical summer festivals that she had organised since 1927 in her residence in Saint-Leu-la-Forêt near Paris. A concert hall was a part of her residence where she also displayed a collection of instruments and musical scores. The concerts were expertly organised and managed so that

the prospective audience was informed of the concert programme, prices of tickets and how to get there most conveniently by coach or by train. The programmes featured mostly classic and baroque music (Bach and Mozart). Most concerts consisted of a solo harpsichord recital by Landowska and her introductory remarks. The harpsichordist also carried out courses for teachers and held classes — both public and private, that attracted young musicians from all corners of the world.

There was also another magical personality of that time: Nadia Boulanger. Her classes were happily attended by Polish students. Renata Suchowiejko presents a very interesting description of Nadia's legendary photographs portraying her lectures, analyses and joint music making and practice as well as concert rehearsals at private homes. The events took place at Nadia Boulanger's apartment at rue Ballu. When the result of music making and practice eventually satisfied the performers, the programme was then repeated at a private concert directed by Nadia. Her legacy consist of thousands of letters, a large collection of photographs from public sources and her private archives, surveys conducted among her students and manuscripts of works composed by various artists, including Polish ones such as Bacewicz, Maciejewski, Szełigowski and Woytowicz.

The two aforementioned "home schools" of Wanda Landowska and Nadia Boulanger are just two elements in the broad spectrum of artistic schools presented in a fascinating manner by the author in *Paris — world musical university* (pp. 255– 275). The author has briefly described two private conservatoires: one for women from a working class and the other one for women from aristocratic families. She also mentions schools for choral or vocal art as well as Delcroze's methods. The three largest schools have been described in detail showing their organisational structure, rules of operation, recruitment procedures, tuition fees and education levels. These schools offered the services of excellent teachers. Le Conservatoire de Paris, a public school offering free tuition, was established at the end of the 18th century (!) and there was a time when the school provided tuition to musicians, stage actors and dancers. There were three tuition levels: elementary (available to children 9 years of age or older) advanced and higher. There were two categories of tuition recipients: regular students and unenrolled students. Auditions held in the format of annual examination sessions, school graduation recitals and on other occasions were open to the public. The Conservatoire was awarded the status of a university-level institution only in 1936. The private Schola Cantorum was established at the end of the 19th century by a composer, Vincent d'Indy. In spite of its name and initial concept, the school combined the mission of a school for future musicians and teachers. The school offered its original and exclusive tuition programme, administered in two streams, i.e. the stream for performers at the master level and the stream for skilled performers (*métier*).

Two more private schools were opened after World War I: Le Conservatoire américain de Fontainebleau, open only to Americans (and therefore omitted in the book), and L'École normale de musique. The latter school admitted students of various ages, predominantly from

abroad, without entry examinations, to courses administered at three levels: elementary, intermediate and advanced. In 1928 the students of the school represented 36 nations. What is particularly interesting is that the students of courses in the art of composition were required to compose works in their respective national styles. The graduates received either a certificate of skills or a teaching certificate, depending on the number of courses completed by the student. The main focus was given to educating prospective teachers. Renata Suchowiejko searched for and found students who were citizens of Poland and had studied at these schools. The list of such students is quite impressive and printed in tables on pages 261–262 (students of the Conservatoire) and pages 270–271 (students of L'École normale de musique).

The gallery of artists in the book begins with a chapter in which Ignacy Jan Paderewski is portrayed (p. 21 ff). The chapter contains a selection of long excerpts from reviews and press reports of concerts Paderewski gave in Paris in 1923, 1928, 1929, 1931, 1932 and 1933. These texts give an excellent insight into the perception of Paderewski (i.e. by the Paris communities) at a time when Europe healed its war wounds and Paderewski enjoyed greater admiration and fame for signing the Treaty of Versailles than for his artistic skills. The reporters and authors who made in-depth analysis of Paderewski's interpretation of music also showed their admiration for him both as a man and as the politician who brought freedom to his homeland. Charity concerts given by Paderewski at that time are hardly remembered today and their list is to be found in the book. A detailed *dossier de presse* presented Paderewski's tour across France in 1929 and his appearances in Marseille, Bordeaux, Nantes, Strasbourg, Lyon, Toulouse and Nice. Renata Suchowiejko gives the reader interesting general remarks on the repertoire of Paderewski and his approach to musical text and the recording of musical sounds. Phonographic technology was created and developed during the lifetime of Paderewski who recorded his performances from 1911 until 1937 (p. 35).

The chapter devoted to Karol Szymanowski (p. 41 ff) gives us a description of a musical season in Paris with its six orchestras of which four were established as early as in the 19th century and two were new private orchestras. The picture Renata Suchowiejko paints of the season also covers chamber music concerts whose style and ambience was shaped by the musical societies and by the journal: *La Revue musicale*. These concerts were designed to showcase modern music of that time. And it was the world in which Szymanowski had appeared before his great compositions such as the *1st Violin Concerto* or the *3rd Symphony* were performed at the *grands concerts*.

In the course of her search through the press archives, the indefatigable author found a number of figures who had been hardly recognized in Polish literature (Chapter: *From concert halls — press review*, p. 101 ff). It is probably true that Maria Modrakowska may have not been portrayed so beautifully as appears in the book if her youngest son had not opened his family archive to Renata Suchowiejko, but the Parisian press was kind not only to Modrakowska, but to other artists as well, such as Maria Freund, an excellent

singer who was considered a master of German lyric vocal music and musical avant-garde pieces (Schönberg) and who also included Polish songs by Karłowicz and Paderewski into her repertoire. Also we discover two “extravagant” and “flamboyant” artists: one is Ganna Walska, a collector of rich husbands and the owner of Le Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, who occasionally performed as a singer. How well or badly she sang is hard to tell because the press reports were simply publicity notices (most likely ordered and paid for by her millionaire husband) rather than objective critiques. The other artist of the two is Tonia Pavel-Kleczkowska who developed the art of her original music-and-dance performances incorporating elements that she generally borrowed from various cultures most often from Spanish, Italian or Polish ones (pp. 116–117). She was also quite a competent columnist.

A number of pianists who might be considered more “modest” as very little data on them is available, flashed through the pages of the book, namely Ryszard Byk, Erwin Brynicki and Stanisław Niedzielski. The author, however, omitted the fact that Niedzielski has a solid bibliographical entry in the *Dictionary of Polish Pianists* ed. by Stanisław Dybowski (Warszawa, 2003, pp. 472–475). The biographical entry shows that Niedzielski was a pianist engaged by the Gaveau piano company and performed in La Salle Gaveau using only Gaveau’s instruments. These facts are proven by a poster and press cuttings reproduced in the book.

For obvious reasons, the author recalls Polish “stars” of the time, who visited and stayed in Paris, namely Ewa Bandrowska-Turska, Artur Rubinstein, Bronisław Huberman and also Feliks Roderyk Łabuński. Traces of his personality appear in several chapters of the book. He was elected President of the Association of Young Polish Musicians in Paris four times and worked his way up to prominent positions in French associations and societies and in the musical life of Paris. His compositions were performed at that time but now we may ask “Is it fair that Fate has veiled his music in the mists of time so tightly that we know nothing of it at all?”

That distant time of the interwar period is brought to life dramatically in this delightful edition by Renata Suchowiejko. The hard cover in faded colour features a drawing by Zofia Stryjeńska. The front and back inner covers feature collages composed of old posters and concert programmes. Several photocopies of such programmes and posters have been carefully developed and printed on art paper. Slightly gray and white stylishly blurred photographs of articles and individuals portrayed in old newspapers and journals add variety to the text of the book. The stylization in the mood of the *Roaring Twenties* really brings out the spirit of the epoch. I do wonder, however, why the author does not provide internet addresses to sources used in the book. Of course, the *Roaring Twenties* were not a part of the digital era, but does the stylization of the book go so far as to suggest that the author could really do such a gigantic work and create her extraordinary book without the use of digitized sources? Another question: is it worth restoring the abandoned practice of explaining so called “foreign words” and, is it proper to do so in an inconsistent manner? In the text about Paderewski he is compared to Amphion and his creative potential is compared to *Theban legends*. Both “foreign words” are

explained in the book (p. 26, footnotes 8 and 9). However, Huberman as Poseidon (p. 109) and Szymanowski as Zoroaster (p. 167) are missing explanations, while, again, in the passages devoted to Paderewski in the *Annex* (pp. 323–329) we find many explanatory notes.

Every page of her book proves that the author's research skills are excellent, and that she is curious, discerning and effective in finding sources and using them wisely. The edition is not free from minor editorial errors, e.g. the numbering of chapters as shown in the *Contents* should be also provided in the body of the book. And in the sea of names, people, locations, titles, dates, lists and quotations some trivial errors may be found. These may be successfully rectified when *Musical Paris à la polonaise* goes into a broader circulation. In my opinion, the historians of the Second Republic of Poland will not agree with the conclusion of the author "*after Poland regained independence, musical culture was supported by the state and this brought about conditions for its development*" (*Postludium*, p. 315). Well, contrary to the developments in France, musical institutions in Poland were managed by municipal authorities, trade unions, associations or private persons. None of the musical institutions was nationalised at that time and the threat of bankruptcy haunted their cultural life constantly. They revived or collapsed. Musical bonds with France, presented in this book in great detail, appear as a shining beam of light among the problems that, now and then, troubled the young state.

Małgorzata Komorowska

