

LIFE AND MUSIC

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From the correspondence I received from the Secretariat of The Inamori Foundation I understand that the wish of the Organizers of this meeting is that I speak about my life from childhood up to now. I don't mind, although I am not sure, whether such a topic of my lecture would be interesting enough to engage your attention for three quarters of an hour. So I will try to add to it here and there some thoughts that, as I hope are not quite common place.

I was born on 25 January 1913 in a family of landowners, whose estate was about 150 km. north from Warsaw. The place was beautiful, with a splendid view from the garden on the valley of the river Narew. It was not without influence on my character that I spent my early years in contact with the nature. Beautiful forests, fields, rivers, meadows, gardens are still in my memory, although the estate does not belong to my family since long ago.

One year after my birth the first world war began. Poland was then in a big part under the domination of the Russian empire. The German offensive against Russia began in 1915 and it was on the territory of Poland. So masses of Poles looked for shelter in Russia. My family joined them and that is why I spent 3 years in Moscow. This stay had a tragic end. My father was involved in some underground activity among emigrants, organizing Polish military troops to be used in a suitable moment to free Poland. After 1917 revolution in Russia the Bolsheviks arrested my father and in September 1918 executed him. Soon after Poland became free and we could return to our country. Our estate was ruined by the war and came never to its former well-being. I stayed there until I had to go to school in 1924 in Warsaw. A few years earlier I began to learn the piano playing. In fact I don't remember being indifferent to music. It has always fascinated me and I couldn't imagine myself having other profession than that of a musician and even a composer at that. Already at the age of six I improvised on the piano and the first "Preludes" for piano I wrote down correctly at the age of nine. At that time I frequently attended the concerts of the Warsaw Philharmonic. That was the most important source of musical experience. I owe the development of my musical

taste and knowledge to that institution. Of course, what I was then listening to was mainly the standard repertoire of the concerts for the audiences of subscribers: Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Grieg and the like.

The true revelation came a little later, when I was 11 years old. At a concert at the Warsaw Philharmonic I heard for the first time the 3rd Symphony “The Song of the Night” of Karol Szymanowski, certainly a great composer of his time. This music is fascinating by its harmony, sound-colors and emotional force of great originality. At that moment to hear the 3rd Symphony of Szymanowski was as if the door of a miraculous garden opened in front of me. I was in a state of excitement for weeks. I tried to recreate Szymanowski's harmonies on the keyboard. At that occasion I discovered the whole-notes scale, up to then unknown to me. The whole experience was a true initiation into the music of 20th century. Strangely enough however the music of Szymanowski had practically no influence on what I composed later. Then, being still a teenager I deciphered Ravel's and Debussy's music and whatever of 20th century music was available in our country. At twelve I interrupted the piano lessons and began to study violin, that I abandoned after 6 years to come back to piano, that I studied and graduated at the Warsaw Conservatory. But earlier, at the age of 14 I began studying privately composition with Professor Witold Maliszewski, composer, pupil of Rimsky-Korsakoff and Glasunoff. Later I entered his class of composition at the Warsaw conservatory. I graduated in 1936 piano and 1937 composition. My last year of composition studies was somewhat peculiar. My professor was very conservative in his musical opinions and tastes. I thought, that the piece for orchestra which I began to compose then would probably be unacceptable for him. So, being afraid of a discouragement from his side, I stopped to attend his class and planned to come only after the end of the work on my “Symphonic Variations.” But in the middle of it the professor called me and demanded to come to the class. I brought the half of the score. But his decision was a model of the honesty of a teacher. He said that if I follow writing such music he couldn't teach me any more, as he doesn't understand it. But to finish my studies I must write something that he could approve. I did it and received my diploma. The Symphonic Variations had to wait for its completion until I ended in 1938 my one-year military service.

During the years of my studies (2 years of mathematics, 5 years of composition and 4 years of piano, all of it between 1931 to 1937) I had the opportunity

to attend concerts of some of the greatest musicians of our century. The pianists: Jozef Hofmann, Robert Casadesus, Walter Gieseking, Alfred Cortot, Wilhelm Backhaus, the violinists: Jozeph Szigeti, Georg Kulenkampf, Bronislaw Huberman, Pawel Kochanski, Jacques Thibaud, cellist Emanuel Feuerman, conductors: Bruno Walter, Ernest Ansermet, Georg Georgescu, Klemens Kraus. I heard great composers playing their works: Hindemith playing viola, Prokofieff playing his piano concertos I, II, III and V, and also a solo recital. I heard Ravel conducting his concerto with Marguerite Long as soloist, Szymanowski playing his Sinfonia concert. It is a list of historical names now. They enriched my whole life. Certain performances remain still in my memory as e.g. the last sonatas of Beethoven by Jozepf Hofmann, Symphonic Variations of Franck by Casadesus. They were all the inspiration for my conducting of my works now. It was a great lesson to understand what the art of performances of music is.

In the autumn of 1939 I planned to go to Paris to go on studying composition. But the Second World War broke out on 1st. September and instead of going to Paris I went to Krakow as commander of a military radio station by the Headquarter of the first Army. The war in Poland without help of any other country, when our country was attacked from both west by Germany and east by Soviet Union lasted no more than 6 weeks. After 8 days of being prisoner of war I escaped from the moving camp and went to Warsaw on foot (about 400 km.).

The period of German occupation of Poland from 1939 to 1945 was very peculiar in our country. Besides the more or less known atrocities like concentration camps, executions on the streets, arrests etc. There was also a situation that affected especially the culture of Poland. The Germans treated the Polish nation as one destined to be annihilated entirely in the future. That is why any cultural activity was forbidden. There was no universities, libraries, theaters, concerts etc. The whole musical life as modest as it was concentrated in cafés, where even the most important Polish musicians performed sometime quite serious music. With my fellow composer and colleague Andrzej Panufnik we formed a two pianos duet and played every day in cafés. We made over 200 transcriptions for 2 pianos of quite serious repertoire: from organ Toccatas of Bach to Bolero of Ravel. We made also some free paraphrases like Waltzes of Strauss harmonized à la Ravel and the like. One of them, made by myself was so to say a “private” version of the 24th Capriccio of Pagnini. It was the only piece from among our transcriptions that remained, as the rest (over 200 pieces) were burnt down during

the uprising of the Polish underground army in Warsaw in 1944. The piece won after the war some popularity, as the number of the gramophone recordings by still new duets is over 20. During the period of the German occupation I tried to keep composing. I managed to complete the first movement of my first Symphony, some sketches of the other movements, 2 piano Studies, a Trio and quite a number of small pieces.

It was by chance that I didn't remain in Warsaw during the uprising. If I did, I couldn't probably speak to you now.

In January 1945 came so called "liberation." In fact it was a great disappointment. It was not a true liberation, but rather a taking over. Although the state of Poland was formally recreated, but it was not a free country as it is now, but almost a Russian colony. Nevertheless everybody in Poland felt the strong will to reconstruct the ruined country with the totally destroyed capital-Warsaw. My modest contribution to this work was connected with my profession. There was strong need of so called "functional" music: the repertoire for music schools, for small ensembles, for children (songs and easy pieces), etc. I have composed quite a number of these, using very often folk tunes as the raw material.

But at the same time I was working on my more important compositional work. I completed my 1st. Symphony whose first performance took place in 1948 in Katowice (Warsaw was then still in ruins, having no concert hall and a rather modest orchestra). The performers of my 1st. Symphony were the Radio Orchestra, conducted by Grzegorz Fitelberg. He was a very important conductor in Poland, a friend a promoter of the new music and particularly of the music of the young Polish composers.

In 1949 began the so called "Stalinism" in Poland, the terribly gloomy period, during which the cultural policy-makers wanted to follow the Soviets and tried to impose upon the artists the principles of the so called "socialist realism" and eradicate what they called the "formalism." Nobody knows up to now what the word "formalism" could mean and how the "realism" can be realized in music. The congress of composers and musicologists in a provincial castle "Lagow" was organized by the authorities to inaugurate a new period of music according to the lines mentioned above. The result was the state of depression that shared many of us. I thought then that only my so called "functional" music would be publicly performed, but the more important music of mine would remain in a drawer up to the end of my life. I tried to understand what was the purpose of this kind of policy, why should artists be deprived of their own style, their

aesthetics, their artistic personality. The answer to these questions came later, when we began to understand the principles of a totalitarian regime. The authorities had to dominate absolutely the whole nation. Nobody beyond the leading group could have any kind of influence on the society. That is why the great artistic personalities as in music Shostakovich and Prokofieff were in the Soviet Union criticized most severely, even persecuted. The situation in this respect in Poland was not so serious as in the Soviet Union. I was one of the first victims. My 1st. Symphony performed at the inaugural concert of the Chopin competition in 1949 produced a true scandal and was declared “formalist.” For 10 years it was not performed. Up to now I don't understand what it could mean. After the concert—as I was told—the vice-minister of culture, the man who realized the cultural policy in communist Poland declared that a composer like Lutoslawski should be thrown under a street-car. Of course, I was very proud of it. Later the same man tried to convince me to compose something like the “Song of the Forests” of Shostakovich, a terrible kitsch, which this great composer was probably compelled to write. I simply refused, saying, that that didn't interested me. There was no results. That proves, that the authorities didn't really persecute the composers in Poland as seriously as in the Soviet Union. That period lasted much shorter in Poland than in the Soviet Union and in the other countries of the middle-eastern Europe. Already in 1955 the authorities ended being interested in what the composers did and what kind of music was performed. I guess that they got to understand, that music was not efficient enough for the purposes of the political propaganda and that they resigned from any influence on the composers.

In 1956 the international festival of contemporary music “Warsaw Autumn” was inaugurated. In the program beside the works of the classics of the 20th century and those of the living composers were also the most experimental works. The authorities interfered very little into the program made up by the composers and musicologists. The authorities assured a considerable budget for the festival in which besides the leading Polish orchestras and soloists some foreign ensembles performed: Orchestra National de la Radio-diffusion et Télévision of Paris, Wiener Symphoniker, State Orchestra of the USSR from Moscow, State Philharmonic from Bucharest, State Philharmonic from Brno, Tatrai Quartet from Budapest, Quartet Parrenin from Paris. The festival was a true sensation not only for Polish but also for East-European audiences. The music of our century had never been performed in these countries for nearly 30 years. Some

important classic 20th century works were performed in Poland for the first time. They were received with enthusiasm by the audiences. Five pieces op.10 of Webern for example had to be encored in entirety. The festival had an enormous influence on the young generation of Polish composers. It was a true break through for the young Polish music. For my generation “Warsaw Autumn” had no such a great importance, as we could hear before losing contact with the rest of the world much of what was played at the festival.

For many years after the end of the war I earned my livings composing “functional” music: incidental music for theaters and radio-plays, children songs for the radio broadcasts etc. Our State Music Publications couldn't do anything for our music to be performed in other countries, especially in the West. So until the age of over 50 I remained almost entirely unknown a composer outside Poland. To publish in a western country was strictly forbidden for years. My contract with my present publisher in England (Chester Music, London) was concluded in 1966 when I was 53. Since only then my music has been available for performances wherever wished. The copyright (royalties) enabled me to stop composing “functional” music, as my works began “to work” for me.

In 1962 I went for the first time to the United States. For 8 weeks in summer I was teaching composition in Tanglewood, Massachusetts. In that period I had the opportunity to attend regularly the concerts of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and some great conductors: Charles Munch, Pierre Monteux, William Steinburg, Erich Leinsdorf. After the stay in Tanglewood a one month trip across the country was offered to us by the International Institute of Education. During a short stay in New York I have had the opportunity to pay visit to Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Varése.

In 1963 for the first time I publicly conducted my music. It was at the occasion of the first performance of my Three Poems of Henri Michaux at the Musical Biennale in Zagreb. The work is written for 20 parts chorus and an instrumental ensemble. 2 conductors are necessary. I was asked to conduct the instruments. As conductor I was not quit a beginner, as since my study years I have always conducted my “functional” music, i.e. incidental music for theaters. And radioplays, children's music for radio-broadcasts etc. The reason of my decision to begin conducting my concert-music were above all some entirely new problems connected with the introduction of the element of chance into my music. The so-called controlled

aleatorism, about which I shall be talking another time, requires an entirely new kind of conducting. At the occasion of the first performance of my 2nd Symphony, that I conducted, I wanted to test myself: is this kind of music at all possible to play, is the result obtained precisely such as foreseen? etc. The result of this experiment turned out quite positive and since then I have been using this kind of technique of composition very often. It offers quite new, earlier unknown possibilities particularly in the domain of rhythm. Some conductors of the older generation treat rather mistrustfully such music, which is without meter and without bar-lines. On the other hand for the younger ones the technique of “controlled aleatorism” is something quite obvious.

Since the first performance of my 2nd Symphony which I conducted in Poland I began being engaged to conduct concerts of my music in other countries of Europe. Lately also in the United States and Australia did. I have chance to conduct concerts of my music with the best orchestras of the world as e.g. Berliner Philharmoniker, Wiener Symphoniker, Orchestre de Paris, Orchestre Philharmonique de Paris de la Radio France, BBC Symphony, The Philharmonia Orchestra of London, Hallé Orchestra, Scottish National Orchestra (at present the Royal Scottish Orchestra) as well as the leading American orchestras, those of New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Cleveland, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Pittsburgh, Houston, Saint Louis, Louisville and some others. The contract with such elite-orchestras has been a priceless experience for me not only as conductor, but also as composer. To form the sound as one wants to hear, to discover all possible secrets of one's own works, to get in direct contact with various kinds of audience, all this is of supreme importance for a composer. Nowadays I give about 15 concerts of my music a year. I prefer to give concerts exclusively of my music, than to share a concert with someone else conducting a traditional program. I know then, that a big part of the audience came to hear their beloved symphony of Schubert and only wait for it during my part of the program. On the other hand, when the program is exclusively made up of my works, I can be sure, that those who came, did it to hear my music. The atmosphere in the fall is then particularly favorable for a better performance. I have been very lucky having the opportunity of collaborating with some of the best soloists of our time. The pianist Krystian Zimerman, the violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter, the cellist Mstislav Rostropovich, the singers Peter Pears, Dietrich Fisher-Dieskau, Solveig Kringelborn, the oboist Heinz Holliger and his wife, the harpist Ursula Holliger and many others. I owe to them all the moments of true inspiration in my compositional

work. My programs contain sometimes some old pieces of mine as e.g. Symphonic Variations (1938). Reporters and listeners ask me pretty often what I feel when conducting my old music, which after all is so different from what I compose now. My answer is this: I try not to think of myself being a composer presenting his works to the audience, but rather a conductor, an interpreter performing works of his younger colleague, about whom he knows more than any other conductor. Of course, I have to accept the works I decide to perform myself. There are some, that I never conduct. It is not that I discard them entirely. I just don't like performing them. Some require too much time to prepare them, they are time consuming, even if quite performable. I think the orchestra music must be playable. It is very easy to compose music difficult to play. The true art is to be able to compose not very difficult music without artistic compromises.

Another question I am rather often asked concerns teaching. I am not a teacher and there are some young composers who would like to study composition with me and probably reproach me for my refusal. But to tell the truth, there are several reasons of such attitude of mine. Firstly I don't believe that teaching composition is really advisable to an active composer. The best one can do is to analyze as many kinds of music as possible. To do so the teacher himself must study a lot of works, which for an active composer might be damaging his own creative work. So I think I would be a rather bad teacher.

Still another question I am asked is why I have not composed an opera. It is true that I had been looking for a subject for an opera, that would be acceptable for me. It was rather difficult, bearing in mind, that I am pretty bad opera viewer. Some fragments of even the greatest master works, when seen in the theater make me laugh. An embracing couple singing instead of whispering, looking at the conductor instead of into the eyes of each other etc.etc. Of course, this kind of things concerns purely realistic theater. That is why a subject I was looking for would have to be non-realistic, e.g. fairy tale, dream, surrealistic or fantastic play etc. In such a play singing instead of speaking would be a small detail of an accepted convention. One of model solutions could be "L'enfant et les sortilèges (the Child and the miracles)" of Ravel. A singing armchair is not more strange than a speaking one.

The big part of my work is composed for symphony orchestra, which is rather traditional means of expression. The instruments of it are constructed on the harmonic

scale as the base. The majority of them are above all diatonic instruments and they were not meant to serve the sound ideas of the composers of our century. But we have up to now nothing to replace them. No instrument could compete with violin, oboe, horn and all others. The electronic and electro-acoustic music is a different kind of art and it is an error to see in them the successors of traditional instruments. Although I am not an enthusiastic listener of electronic music, I must admit, that there is some reason in considering it more in spirit of our time than the traditional instrumentation. However it is significant, that in spite of quite fantastic possibilities offered by some studios as e.g. Ircam in Paris or Stanford in the U.S.A., there is still no one true master-piece produced in them. It may be due to the fact, that the main preoccupations of a great number of composers are the means of expression rather, than the expression itself; the technique of composing rather, than the purpose it is meant to serve. Music is after all not only a composition of sounds, but also, or may be above all the composition of human reactions to it. The perception of the arts occurs in our psyche, the senses are but an intermediary factor.

Now I come to a question (also often asked) which belongs to fundamental ones: for whom I compose music? My answer is apparently a highly controversial one and may even provoke indignation. But I will try to explain, that this attitude is the only one, that can be considered honest from the part of a creative artist. This answer in: I compose music for myself. I shouldn't be astonished, if the first reaction to such a statement were: what a disgusting egoism. I can understand such a reaction, but it is a terribly superficial one and I can easily retort it: Yes, I compose for myself, but I am sure there is a number of people to whom I am resembling; with whom I have similar taste and even possibly similar wishes, so they can find in my music something for themselves. As I said before, it is the only honest attitude of a creative artist. Why I say so? Suppose I should like to satisfy the taste and wishes of other people, to please them, to be appreciated. First of all I don't believe one can really know what the musical wishes of another man are like. Everybody hears music in a different way, so it is beyond my imagination to know how other people really hear my music. But there is a more important justification of my apparent egoism: If I composed music to satisfy someone else, I should have to deceive myself, to resign from following my own taste and wishes, my esthetics, to resign from saying what I believe in, in other words—to resign from saying the truth. It would be as if I offered others false money.

Some artists, writers, philosophers maintain, that the duty of a creative artist is to express the world in which we live. The great writer Joseph Conrad says even, that the duty of the artist is to do justice to the visible world. I am definitely against such a view. I think the visible world, the world in which we live has no difficulty in expressing itself without our help. We are not predestined to express the real world in the art. The ideal world, the world of our dreams, of our wishes, of our vision of perfection is the domain of the arts. The access to this ideal world is given the creative artists. Their duty is to enable the access to this world through their works to other people. This is one of the most important tasks of the artists. They must not forget about another very important fact: the talents are not the exclusive property of the artist. They are entrusted to him. He must not use them freely e.g. to get money or fame. The talents are not to be used, they are to be served. They require a lot of work, of thought, of consideration. In other words the talents are not just a gift, they lay a heavy responsibility on the artist. Perhaps all this makes his life difficult, requires patience, persistence, endurance, but on the other hand life offers the artist experiences and satisfactions, that can not be compared with anything else.

Music fills in almost my whole day, but not entirely. I find time to read literature, although less and less fiction; to visit collections of painting, to go to theaters etc. For several years I have been sailing on the lakes and rivers in Poland.

As I said at the beginning of this lecture the topic of it, according to the wishes of its organizers, is the history of my life. From time to time I had to make reference to the political events, which inevitably interfered in my life and work. Major changes in my country began in 1980 at the moment when "Solidarity," a workers national movement came into being. The possibility of a little more freedom had already an enormous influence on my state of mind. The first free congress of culture, organized exclusively by scientists and artists took place in December 1981. In my speech I denounced the purposes of the cultural policy of the authorities. The allusion to what happened in this respect in the Soviet Union had as a result, that for 7 years my music was forbidden to be publicly played, there my name couldn't appear in their press.

The martial law weakened for some years the activity of the opposition circles, but soon a Citizen Committee was brought to being at the initiative of Lech Walesa. I had the privilege to join it. To demonstrate the protest against the martial law, the

internment of the activists of the opposition and other annoyances many of us artists boycotted the media. We refused to appear in TV, to give interviews to the press etc. I refused to be decorated by the minister of culture and resigned from appearing publicly as conductor, didn't appear in TV etc. The situation was gradually changing in the favorable direction, the Soviet Union gradually withdrew its domination, the freedom of Poland was becoming a fact. This fundamental change has a tremendous significance for me, as it does for every honest Pole. There are certainly many problems, which make the situation of our country difficult and disquieting, but there is no price, that the majority of us wouldn't pay for one only fact: the resumption after several decades of the independence of our country.