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## Cultural Importance of the 4<sup>th</sup> International Chopin Piano Competition in the Light of Polish Music Life Reviving after the WW II

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### Abstract

The article aims at summarizing different activities undertaken to organize and run the first post-war Chopin piano competition. It is an attempt to collect facts, accounts and memories concerning actions initiated by Polish music culture environment after the Second World War. The author focuses on a detailed description of the organization and proceedings of the 4<sup>th</sup> International Piano Competition, making use of information that has existed in independent sources so far. The article uses diaries, biographies, autobiographies, private notes, interviews with representatives of Polish culture, archive films and documentaries belonging to the Polish Film Chronicle. Press excerpts were not used on purpose, as most press information was included in the aforesaid bibliography entries. The analyzed sources let us conclude that the organization of the first post-war Chopin piano competition in Warsaw was an event requiring both the engagement of all state institutions and personal contribution of musicians and music teachers. The author considers such a detailed historical-cultural account justified and necessary, especially in 2020, the 210<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Frederic Chopin, the year in which the 18<sup>th</sup> Frederic Chopin International Piano Competition was supposed to take place.

**Keywords:** Chopin Piano Competition, WW II, Jan Ekier, Halina Czerny Stefańska, Zbigniew Drzewiecki.

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## 1. Attempts to revive Polish music cultural life after the war

The attack of the Nazi Germany on Poland in 1939, a nearly six-year occupation of our country filled with mass murdering of civilians, resulting in the destruction of Polish cultural heritage and achievements, led to a total collapse of Poland. In 1945, the Polish faced the challenge of rebuilding the state capital, completely ruined after the Warsaw Uprising – the challenge that seemed impossible from the point of view of the country's development. The devastation executed by the Nazi army in 1944 made it impossible to properly realise any basic elements of social life. The number of civilians was diminished and the inhabitants of Warsaw coming back from nearby transition camps, including Pruszków, looked for their pre-war housing in vain. The tenement houses on the left bank of the Vistula river were almost completely destroyed so many people headed towards flats located on the other side of the river, in the district of Praga. Among them, there was Jan Ekier who, coming back from Durschgangslager 121 (Pruszków), was trying to find his flat at Washington Street. Having found a half-ruined tenement house, straight after the war, Ekier moved into his ancient flat with his family. In his journal, the pianist writes about two concert grand pianos untouched by the war and a library.<sup>1</sup> The pianist also writes how the Warsaw community cherished Frederic Chopin's music throughout the whole war due to underground shows given by Polish pianists in private flats. Jan Ekier recalls how he used to write down places for those secret concerts. On small pieces of paper, in careless handwriting, one could write dates only as in case of arrests by the German authorities, lack of knowledge concerning names and places protected the organizers. Crowds of Poles used to arrive at such underground concerts while getting to the venue often put their lives at risk.<sup>2</sup>

Another Pole who had created music life of the country before WWII was Jerzy Waldorff. He recalls attempts to resume the work of the Polish Radio, which started operating in the spring of 1945 and whose seat was at the beginning located in a private house at Targowa Street, in the district of Praga. Waldorff's notes contain a mention of the then musical director of the Polish Radio, Roman Jasiński, who was living in the bathroom next to the recording studio for many post-war years, sleeping in a bath tub. The author of the mention himself shared two sleeping places with Władysław Szpilman under a surviving *Bechstein* piano till he could move into a rented room in the district of Saska Kępa.<sup>3</sup>

Everyday needs brought along the need to revive Polish culture. The concert hall of the Warsaw Philharmonic Hall, bombed by the Nazi army during the uprising battles, could not be used. However, various concerts, both piano recit-

<sup>1</sup> A. Teichman, *Jan Ekier*, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, Warszawa – Kraków 2013, p. 78.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 70.

<sup>3</sup> J. Waldorff, *Wielka Gra. Rzecz o Konkursach Chopinowskich w Warszawie*, Iskry, Warszawa 1980, pp. 88–89.

als, symphonic and chamber music performances had been organized all the time during the German occupation in private flats made available by their owners. The institution of the Warsaw Philharmonic Hall under the management of Grzegorz Fitelberg<sup>4</sup> came back to life only in 1947. Then, its seat was organized in a building that had hosted *Roma* cinema at Nowogrodzka Street. The building, the sole one not reduced to ruins, easily fitting a large audience and a complete symphony orchestra, *Roma* was used for sittings of the City Council, lectures, ballet performances, conventions, song and piano recitals<sup>5</sup>. On the other hand, Warsaw Opera was already revived on 4<sup>th</sup> December 1945 thanks to the initiative of the Grand Theatre artists. For the Opera seat the artists chose a house at 8 Marszałkowska St., which altogether had about four hundred places on the ground floor and a small balcony. Despite the fact that the small stage made it possible to organize only small shows, the Opera initiated its post-war activity with *Verbum Nobile* by Moniuszko and Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*.<sup>6</sup> Already in 1945, thanks to the efforts of professor Stanisław Kazura, the Higher School of Music was organized in two villas at Górnośląska St. in Warsaw. Among all, it was equipped with twenty grand pianos transported from all over the country by Kazura. The Conservatory building was also a post-war shelter for musicians and their families, e.g. for Barbara Hesse-Bukowska, a student of Margerita Trombini-Kazuro, professor Kazura's wife<sup>7</sup> We owe the revival of the State Higher School of Music (PWSM) in Cracow to Zbigniew Drzewiecki and the Director of the Music Department in the Ministry of Culture and Arts, Mieczysław Drobner. The Higher School of Music, with its initial seat in the barracks at Warszawska St., and next at Basztowa St., gathered many renowned teachers such as Henryk Sztompka and Jan Hoffmann from the Piano Faculty, Walerian Bierdiajew, Witold Krzemiński, Artur Malawski and Edward Bury from the Conducting Faculty, Stefania Łobaszewska who, at the school's very beginning, taught the theory and history of music. The first graduates of the PWSM in Cracow were Waldemar Maciszewski, Barbara Muszyńska and Regina Smendzianka<sup>8</sup>. The musicians who survived the war with their health unscathed, played again in orchestras, got engaged in musicians' organizations and worked in social verification committees created to audition musicians for emerging symphony orchestras. The first, symbolic concert of the symphony orchestra in Cracow was conducted by Zygmunt Latoszewski in the cinema auditorium at Zwierzyniecka St. Chopin's *Concerto in F minor* was played by Zbigniew Drzewiecki<sup>9</sup>. The Polish Music Publishing

<sup>4</sup> Z. Drzewiecki, *Wspomnienia muzyka*, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, Kraków 2010, p. 112.

<sup>5</sup> J. Waldorff, op. cit., p. 91.

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, p. 90.

<sup>7</sup> A. Rozlach, *Spełnione marzenia Barbary Hesse-Bukowskiej*, Apla, Warszawa – Busko-Zdrój 2010, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Z. Drzewiecki, op. cit., p. 110.

<sup>9</sup> Z. Drzewiecki, op. cit., p. 109.

House (PWM) managed by Tadeusz Ochlewski also continued its activity in Cracow. Tadeusz Ochlewski's efforts contributed to the creation of the editorial team of the Pedagogical Piano Library with Zbigniew Drzewiecki, Jan Ekier, Jan Hoffmann, Adam Rieger. The team created post-war methodology bases of early piano education, producing selections of études and exercises, initiating in this way a long-running cycle of PWM pedagogical publications<sup>10</sup>. During the first months after Poland's liberation, the Frederic Chopin Association<sup>11</sup> was also reactivated and located in the ruins of Ostrogski Palace on Tamka Street, burnt by the Germans during the Warsaw Uprising. These pioneering efforts organizing music life in the capital and Cracow were crowned in October 1945 by bringing back the urn with Chopin's heart from Milanówek, where it had been hidden since the Warsaw Uprising. The whole event of "Chopin's Heart Comeback to Warsaw" was organized under the patronage of Bolesław Bierut, President of the State National Council, and accompanied by concerts in Żelazowa Wola and *Roma*, with piano recitals given by Zofia Rabcewiczowa, Jerzy Żurawlew, Bolesław Woytowicz and Jan Ekier<sup>12</sup>.

The flourishing development of music life in the country did not fade in the following years. Pianists and orchestra musicians started to go abroad, not only to the Soviet Republic but also to the west of Europe. Zbigniew Drzewiecki gave his recitals in Glasgow, Edinburgh, London,<sup>13</sup> and the Katowice Radio Orchestra conducted by Grzegorz Fitelberg gave its guest concert in the Smetana Hall in Prague, playing, among all, *Mazurka* from *Halka* opera by Moniuszko<sup>14</sup>. In 1949, on the territory of the so-called Regained Territories, a piano and grand piano manufacture "Legnica" was open, providing schools, youth clubs and kindergartens with new instruments<sup>15</sup>. Due to increased access to instruments, cycles of programmes popularizing music in blue-collar workers plants were initiated. Young pianists, and among them Halina Czerny-Stefańska, took part in such initiatives. This way of earning money gave young artists-beginners an opportunity to perform with a diversified repertoire up to five times a week. Despite poorly-heated rooms where concerts took place and the working-class audience that was not very trusting at the beginning, the project of introducing classical music to different social classes was a success<sup>16</sup>.

An inseparable element of the communist doctrine more and more intensely present in the life of Poles was the Stalinism propaganda penetrating all areas of

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<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, p. 111.

<sup>11</sup> Contemporary Frederic Chopin Institute

<sup>12</sup> A. Teichman, op. cit., p. 81.

<sup>13</sup> Z. Drzewiecki, op. cit., p. 113.

<sup>14</sup> *Koncert pod dyrekcją Grzegorza Fitelberga w Sali Smetany w Pradze*, Polska Kronika Filmowa (Polish Film Chronicle) (henceforth: PKF) 02/1949, O. Borzechowska (ed.), time 8:41.

<sup>15</sup> *Produkujemy fortepiany. Produkcja pianin i fortepianów w Legnicy*. PKF 03/1949, O. Borzechowska (ed.), time 4:36.

<sup>16</sup> S. Dybowski *Czerny-Stefańska – epizody z życia chopinistki*, Selene, Warszawa 2006, pp. 38–39.

life. In order to set new rules for showing Marxist ideas in music, the National Convention of Composers and Music Critics was organized from 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> August 1949, in Łagów Lubuski. The main task of all the composers, musicologists and music critics gathered in Łagów was developing the definition of formalism, that is programmatically incorrect compositional means existing in music<sup>17</sup>. Włodzimierz Sokorski, the then minister of culture and arts, gave a speech in which he warned against “political nihilism” and “Pan-American culture”, and Witold Lutoslawski, the author of *Symphony No 1* was described by him as “a composer that should be thrown under the tram”<sup>18</sup>. The resolutions of the convention led to the closure of a biweekly magazine from Cracow, “Ruch muzyczny,” and the suspension of the activity of the International Contemporary Music Society, whereas the works of a musicologist, Zofia Lissa, *Niektóre zagadnienia estetyki muzycznej w świetle prac J. Stalina o marksizmie w językoznawstwie* (*Some Aspects of Music Esthetic in the light of works by J. Stalin on Marxism in Linguistics*) and *O specyfice muzyki* (*On the Character of Music*) published during the following years, became the ideological basis for many composers<sup>19</sup>. In fact, many composers tried not to give up their style and own music language developed so far, adjusting their professional activity to the existing political doctrine only with the help of musical piece titles such as *Harvest Cantata*, *The Warsaw Bricklayer* or *On Stalin*. A stronger interest in classical music in 1949 derived also from a hundredth anniversary of Frederic Chopin’s death falling this year and the fact that the authorities of the Polish People’s Republic planned to celebrate it on a grand scale.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Chopin Piano Competition was planned to take place in 1942, yet the German occupation made it impossible to organize such a big gathering of Polish people, not to mention the organization of state and cultural events. After the liberation of 1945, the whole country tried to recover the years lost, yet till 1949 it was impossible to organize such a big cultural event as the Chopin Piano Competition was. The fame and prestige of these competitions, growing in popularity in the twenties and thirties of the twentieth century, was quite a challenge for the cultural environment of the country which had just experienced the ordeal of war.

## 2. Chopin Year Celebration

As mentioned earlier, 1949 was the hundredth anniversary of Frederic Chopin’s death. Due to that fact, the 4<sup>th</sup> Chopin Piano Competition was to be organized on an unprecedented scale. The competition was accompanied by

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<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, pp. 55–56.

<sup>18</sup> Source: [www.dzieje.pl/artykulyhistoryczne/lagow-1949-zjazd-z-wysokiego-c](http://www.dzieje.pl/artykulyhistoryczne/lagow-1949-zjazd-z-wysokiego-c) [as of 22.01.2020]. All translations – Patrycja Czarnecka-Jaskóła.

<sup>19</sup> S. Dybowski, *Czerny-Stefańska*..., p. 56.

countless events. Zdzisław Śliwiński, the then Vice-Director of the Poznań Philharmonic, was appointed the head of the Chopin Year bureau.<sup>20</sup> Bolesław Bierut, President of the Polish People's Republic, inaugurated Chopin Year, in his speech focusing on the elements of Mazovian folklore music in the oeuvres of Frederic Chopin and associating these melodies with the expression of Poles' most profound feelings, their worries and joys. He emphasized that Chopin had enriched and ennobled traditional folklore melodies, turning them into meaningful, thoroughly national pieces. The president's speech was followed by a recital of Henryk Sztompka<sup>21</sup>. In London, to commemorate the first performance of Frederic Chopin in the city (23<sup>rd</sup> June 1848), a plaque was unveiled. The event was accompanied by a recital of Natalia Karp, who played, among others, *Nocturne in C sharp minor* op. posth., using the grand piano that Chopin had used while performing in London<sup>22</sup>. The National Museum in Warsaw organized an exhibition devoted to Frederic Chopin. Prime Minister, Józef Cyrankiewicz, and minister of culture, Włodzimierz Sokorski, were at its opening. The exhibition presented, among others, the manuscript of *Etude* op. 10 no 12<sup>23</sup>. In Szafarnia, where young Chopin used to be invited by his friend's, Dominik Dziewianowski's parents, the Chopin Festival was organized, hosting such events like a recital by Stanisław Szpinalski<sup>24</sup>. There was also an initiative of *The Oeuvres of Frederic Chopin Live Editions* that consisted in the participants of the 4<sup>th</sup> International Chopin Piano Competition, teachers and well-known pianists giving their recitals and concerts whose programmes covered all the compositions of Frederic Chopin. The whole cycle of fourteen concerts<sup>25</sup> took place in major Polish cities, but distinguished pianists also visited smaller places whose inhabitants had an opportunity to take part in a high-level piano recital for the first time<sup>26</sup>. Within the framework of this project, whose Warsaw edition took place from 23<sup>rd</sup> February to 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1949, in *Roma* building, at 49 Nowogrodzka St., the following pianists gave their piano recitals: Henryk Sztompka, Jan Berezyński, Józef Śmidowicz, Paweł Lewicki, Jan Ekier, Władysław Kędra, Margarita Trombini-Kazuro, Bolesław Woytowicz, Maria Wiłkomirska, Zbigniew Drzewiecki. Ryszard Bakst, Halina Czerny-Stefańska, Jan Drath, Barbara Muszyńska, Julita Śledzińska and Ludwik Stefański presented Frederic Chopin's oeuvres not known to a wider audience so far. Jerzy

<sup>20</sup> S. Wysocki, *Wokół Dziesięciu Konkursów Chopinowskich*, Wydawnictwa Radia i Telewizji, Warszawa 1982, p. 50.

<sup>21</sup> *FRYDERYK CHOPIN. Rok Chopinowski w Warszawie*, PKF 10/1949, H. Lemańska (ed.), time 0:19.

<sup>22</sup> *Anglia – odświeżenie tablicy pamiątkowej na domu, w którym grał Fryderyk Chopin, występ Natalii Karp*, PKF28/1949, H. Lemańska (ed.), time 6:35.

<sup>23</sup> *Fryderyk Chopin: otwarcie Wystawy Chopinowskiej w setną rocznicę śmierci kompozytora*, PKF 42/1949, H. Lemańska (ed.), time 7:25.

<sup>24</sup> *Festiwal Chopinowski w Szafarni*, PKF 42/1949, H. Lemańska (ed.), time 8:50.

<sup>25</sup> A. Teichman, op. cit., p. 82.

<sup>26</sup> S. Wysocki, op. cit., p. 50.

Lefeld gave his concert accompanied by a chamber orchestra. Władysław Kędra, Waldemar Maciszewski, Regina Smendzianka and Tadeusz Żmudziński<sup>27</sup> performed during a symphonic concert accompanied by the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra.

### 3. Internal preliminaries to the 4<sup>th</sup> International Chopin Piano Competition

All Polish pianists that were willing to participate in the 4<sup>th</sup> International Chopin Piano Competition belonged to the “Generation of Columbuses” as they were born in the 20s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Their first years of adulthood were taken from them by traumatic war memories. Barbara Hesse-Bukowska recollects a mini-recital given during the occupation to the command of the Home Army. The young pianist’s pay was half a loaf of bread rationed from military provisions<sup>28</sup>. In search of food, together with her father, Halina Czerny-Stefańska went on a journey through local villages, more than once staying in the forest or in a barn for the night. For her “nice play” Czerny-Stefańska also got half a loaf of bread<sup>29</sup>. Determination of these young pianists and very often help and support of their parents made it possible for most surviving Columbus-pianists to resume regular piano practice, sometimes with the use of instruments found in burnt-down houses or those bought from the Red Army<sup>30</sup>.

As nineteen Polish pianists applied for the participation in the 4<sup>th</sup> Competition, there were preliminaries organized, between 19<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> June 1948, in Warsaw YMCA Room at Konopnickiej St. The young musicians presented the whole obligatory programme of the 4<sup>th</sup> International Chopin Piano Competition in front of the jury headed by Zbigniew Drzewiecki, and consisting of Marcelina Kimontt-Jacynowa, Margerita Trombini-Kazuro, Roman Jasiński, Raul Kochalski, Jerzy Lefeld, Piotr Rytel, Stanisław Szpinalski, Henryk Sztompka, Adam Wieniawski and Bolesław Woytowicz. In the first part of the preliminaries, the participants performed Chopin’s solo pieces, whereas in the latter one they were supposed to play one part of a piano concerto with the accompaniment of the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra. The auditions were blind as the participants played the grand piano placed behind the round partition which made it impossible to see a person being currently on stage. Eleven pianists were qualified to take place in the 4<sup>th</sup> International Chopin Piano Competition: Ryszard Baksta<sup>31</sup> (born

<sup>27</sup> S. Dybowski, *Czerny-Stefańska...*, p. 62.

<sup>28</sup> A. Rozlach, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> S. Dybowski, *Czerny-Stefańska...*, p. 27.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Anna Radziwonowicz, Warsaw, 12.01.2010 r.

<sup>31</sup> S. Dybowski, *Laureaci Konkursów Chopinowskich w Warszawie*, Selene, Warszawa 2005, p. 167.

on 4<sup>th</sup> June 1926 in Warsaw, student of Henryk Neuhaus in Moscow), Janusz Drath (born on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1923 in Toruń, student of Władysława Markiewiczówna), Barbara Hesse-Bukowska (the youngest participant, born on 8<sup>th</sup> February 1930 on Łódź, student of Margerita Trombini-Kazuro), Tadeusz Kerner (born on 18<sup>th</sup> September 1926 in Warsaw, student of Zbigniew Drzewiecki), Władysław Kędra<sup>32</sup> (born on 16<sup>th</sup> September 1918 in Łódź, student of Magda Tagliaferro), Waldemar Maciszewski (born on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1927 in Warsaw, student of Zbigniew Drzewiecki), Regina Smendzianka (born on 9<sup>th</sup> October 1924 in Toruń, student of Henryk Sztompka), Halina Czerny-Stefańska (born on 13<sup>th</sup> December 1922 in Cracow, student of Zbigniew Drzewiecki), Zbigniew Szymonowicz (born on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1922 in Lviv, student of Stanisław Szpinalski), Julitta Śledzińska (born on 31<sup>st</sup> July 1927 in Vilnius, student of Zbigniew Drzewiecki) and Tadeusz Żmudziński (born on 9<sup>th</sup> June 1924, in Chorzów, student of Władysława Markiewiczówna). Each winner of the preliminaries obtained the scholarship of the Ministry of Culture and Arts in the amount of PLN 25,000 paid monthly from June 1948 to October 1949.<sup>33</sup> This financial support was to facilitate the preparations for the participation in the 4<sup>th</sup> International Chopin Piano Competition. A Pedagogical Committee was created at the Ministry of Culture and Arts, whose aim was special care for young people demonstrating musical talent. The Committee was made-up of Zbigniew Drzewiecki, Jan Hoffman, Henryk Sztompka and Bolesław Woytowicz. Every two or three months there were auditions of the Polish group candidates. Eleven participants presented the competition programme pieces and other works given to work on in order to eliminate their weaknesses before the competition took place.

Apart from Chopin repertoire, Halina Czerny-Stefańska also worked on Ravel's *Le tombeau de Couperin*, and Barbara Hesse-Bukowska practised *the Joyful Island* by Debussy<sup>34</sup>. After each audition, the committee had its sitting and decided on the configuration of places the participants occupied after their subsequent shows. The system in which the Pedagogical Committee worked was to motivate the competition participants to increase their efforts, boost their ambition and widen their knowledge on their own play by a series of remarks, notes and pieces of advice. During the last audition which took place in June 1949, the Committee divided the Polish representation into three categories, depending on their competencies at that time. In the first category one could find Regina Smendzianka, Zbigniew Szymonowicz and Halina Czerny-Stefańska, the second one comprised Barbara Hesse-Bukowska, Władysław Kędra, Waldemar Maciszewski and Ryszard Bakst, and the third one included Julitta Śledzińska, Tadeusz Kerner and Janusz Drath. Tadeusz Żmudziński, due to his journey to Paris

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<sup>32</sup> Ibidem, p. 163.

<sup>33</sup> S. Dybowski, *Czerny-Stefańska...*, pp. 48–51.

<sup>34</sup> A. Rozlach, op. cit., p. 9.



competition, was not taken into account in the classification.<sup>35</sup> The commitment of the most distinguished Polish pianists with which they prepared the young artists for their participation in the 4<sup>th</sup> International Chopin Piano Competition shows how important this Polish representation was for the authorities of the Polish People's Republic. Jan Ekier, one member of the Pedagogical Committee, emphasized excellent results of this method to maximize the young artists' achievements. The cooperation of active pianists, whose views on one's play were sometimes completely opposite, resulted in accurate guidelines for particular teachers and their students<sup>36</sup>. According to Zbigniew Drzewiecki, the members of the Pedagogical Committee of 1948 and 1949 restrained their own ambitions to offer their talent to team work, for the benefit of their students. Such an atmosphere influenced the following years of Polish piano playing development and helped to create the foundations of Polish School of Chopin.<sup>37</sup>

#### 4. A training-coaching piano camp in Łagów Lubuski

Three months before the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> International Chopin Piano Competition in Warsaw, the Ministry of Culture and Arts decided to organize a two-month training-coaching piano camp in Łagów for the whole Polish Chopin team and their teachers: Zbigniew Drzewiecki, Jan Ekier, Jan Hoffman, Stanisław Szpinalski, Henryki Sztompka, Margerita Trombini-Kazuro, Bolesław Woytowicz and Jerzy Żurawlew<sup>38</sup>. In 1949, a little place in the Lubusz Province, whose centre is the historic castle of the Order of St. John surrounded by two great lakes and forests, became the centre of team music workshops and relaxation. The then artistic director of the Poznań Philharmonic, Stanisław Wisłocki, was enchanted with the beauty of the place, and he was the first one to suggest organising a training camp for the Philharmonic musicians in 1948. At that time Łagów did not have many inhabitants and accommodating nearly one hundred musicians posed a certain organisational challenge. That trial training camp of 1948 was a success and the decision to organise a training piano camp for young musicians preparing for the 4<sup>th</sup> International Chopin Piano Competition followed immediately. Zdzisław Śliwiński was the organiser of Łagów camp. He was obliged to find accommodation not only for the musicians of the Poznań Philharmonic and its conductor, Stanisław Wisłocki, who were to provide accompaniment to the Polish team practising for the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage of the competition, i.e. a concert with an orchestra, but to accommodate somewhere the whole Polish team and Jury members. Eleven participants of the 4<sup>th</sup> Competition were living in small

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<sup>35</sup> S. Dybowski, *Czerny-Stefańska...*, pp. 52–54.

<sup>36</sup> A. Teichman, op. cit., pp. 83–85.

<sup>37</sup> Z. Drzewiecki, op. cit., p. 112.

<sup>38</sup> J. Waldorff, op. cit., p. 95.

houses located along the main road to Łagów, whereas their teachers were accommodated in the castle of the Order of St. John. Each young pianist had a concert piano in their house. There existed various ways of obtaining pianos, at times bordering on the miraculous, in post-war Poland. Zdzisław Śliwiński, who used to get them from private houses of his friends, colleagues and Poznań schools, describes this procedure. Having collected twenty six instruments in total, he transported them from Poznań to Łagów in a cavalcade of cars with platforms. Pianos were also in the teachers' rooms and in a ballroom of Łagów castle<sup>39</sup>. There were more in the restaurant, which served as a concert room to the inhabitants of Łagów<sup>40</sup>. The atmosphere that reigned in Łagów during the summer of 1949 can be described as filled with the spirit of team work, yet with respect towards individual pianist development of each candidate. In her memories, Halina Czerny-Stefańska remarks that:

[...] the Chopin team was a group of sincere and dedicated friends. We practised a lot, really a lot. It seems to me that apart from our effort, it was that atmosphere that contributed to such a big success at the competition.<sup>41</sup>

For two months, the teachers were at the disposal of eleven candidates preparing for the competition. They were ready, like Zbigniew Drzewiecki, give a lesson to Ryszard Bakst at one a.m., working on new interpretation aspects. Every day, the young pianists presented the effects of their work to their teachers and each other. The castle hosted auditions of the competition programme in the form of concerts given to local people and the board consisting of the teachers. The Polish team members motivated each other, which resulted in more hours of practice and polishing up their repertoire. As Poznań was not far, the camp members went there for concerts, such as the one mentioned by Barbara Hesse-Bukowska, accompanied by the recording of Chopin's *Sonata in B flat minor* in a radio studio<sup>42</sup>. The concert at the castle of the Order of St. John, summarizing the camp in Łagów, was honoured by the presence of minister Włodzimierz Sokorski.<sup>43</sup>

Already after the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chopin Competition, Edmund Rudnicki, the pre-war director of the Polish Radio, together with Jerzy Żurawlew, suggested that Polish participants of the Competition should have favourable conditions for regular practice, performing the competition programme in front of an audience, and rehearsals with an orchestra. Their idea came into practice after eleven years, during which the Polish went through the war tragedy and were stripped of many elements of native culture.

<sup>39</sup> S. Dybowski, *Czerny-Stefańska...*, pp. 54–55.

<sup>40</sup> S. Wysocki, op. cit., pp. 51–52.

<sup>41</sup> S. Dybowski, *Czerny-Stefańska...*, p. 60.

<sup>42</sup> A. Rozlach, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> S. Dybowski, *Czerny-Stefańska...*, p. 59.

## 5. The 4<sup>th</sup> International Chopin Piano Competition – preparations, course, ending

The competition of 1949 took place from 15<sup>th</sup> September to 15<sup>th</sup> October. As the building of the Warsaw Philharmonic was burnt to the ground, it was organized in *Roma* room. An honorary committee was appointed by resolution of the Council of Ministers and it was headed by prime minister Józef Cyrankiewicz accompanied by deputy prime ministers, Władysław Gomułka and Antoni Korzycki, the Speaker of the Sejm, Władysław Kowalski, the minister of defence, marshal Michał Rola-Żymierski, the minister of culture and arts, Stefan Dybowski, general Marian Spychalski, the President of the Polish Composers' Union, Zygmunt Mycielski, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz and the president of Warsaw, Stanisław Tołwiński.<sup>44</sup> The Executive Committee of the 4<sup>th</sup> International Chopin Piano Competition was headed by the minister of culture and arts, Stefan Dybowski, together with Undersecretary of State, Włodzimierz Sokorski. The organization of the first post-war competition was in the hands of Edmund Rudnicki, the minister's plenipotentiary. After the experience of organizing the camp in Łagów, Edmund Rudnicki appointed Zdzisław Śliwiński to organize instruments and advertising for the competition. Among the ruins of Warsaw that in 1949 were a daily sight for its inhabitants, Edmund Śliwiński searched for instruments at private owners' places, transported pianos from city-centre music schools and the Higher School of Music.<sup>45</sup> Each participant chose an instrument to present their programme among four piano makes: *Bechstein*, *Bluthner*, *Ibach* and *Steinway*. The Polish participants of the 4<sup>th</sup> competition were accommodated in *Polonia* hotel. Each of them could come with their closest family, each had an instrument to practise at their disposal. Russian candidates were staying in *Bristol* hotel. The Ministry of Culture and Arts offered each participant from the Polish team two complete outfits: men got tailcoats, white shirts and shoes, women got two dresses, a formal one and a long concert one, accompanied with shoes, handbags and belts. In post-war Poland such clothes were luxury items, almost inaccessible, which showed how the Polish state cared for its young pianists.<sup>46</sup>

Due to civilian losses during WWII, the upper age limit for competition candidates was increased to the age of thirty two<sup>47</sup>. In comparison with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chopin Competition, the number of participants decreased significantly as sixty three candidates from fourteen countries applied and fifty four of them were admitted to the first stage. Two citizens of France, two Englishmen, one Italian person, eight Austrians, six Brazilians, two Americans, two Mexicans and six pianists

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<sup>44</sup> Ibidem, p. 76.

<sup>45</sup> S. Wysocki, op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>46</sup> S. Dybowski, *Czerny-Stefańska...*, p. 64.

<sup>47</sup> A. Teichman, op. cit., p. 83.

from the Soviet Union came to post-war Warsaw despite difficulties deriving from the lack of civil transcontinental aviation and the hazard of explosion posed by water mines not removed yet from the bottom of the ocean.

The international Jury comprised representatives of fourteen countries: Joseph Marx from Austria, Lucette Descaves, Lelia Gousseau, Lazare Levy and Marguerite Long from France, Blas Dimas Galindo from Mexico, Alfred Mendelssohn from Romania, Godfrid Boon from Sweden, Lajos Hernady from Hungary, Carlo Zecchi from Italy, Paweł Sieriebriakow from the Soviet Union, vice-chairmen were: Lev Oborin from the Soviet Union, Magda Tagliaferro from Brazil and Arthur Hedley from Great Britain. Among Polish jurors one could find: chairman of the Jury Zbigniew Drzewiecki, vice-chairman Marcelina Kimonnt-Jacynowa, secretary Bolesław Woytowicz, Jan Ekier, Jan Hoffman, Roman Jasiński, Stanisław Szpinalski, Henryk Sztompka, Margerita Trombini-Kazuro and Jerzy Żurawlew.<sup>48</sup>

For the first time, the Chopin Competition consisted of three stages. The first stage had a nature of preliminaries and candidates qualified to the competition as a result of state preliminaries did not have to go through it. If a given candidate arrived at the competition without any preliminaries, they had to present three pieces from the second stage of the Competition, selected by the Qualification Committee. In the second stage, a given candidate played one freely selected nocturne, two études (selected from op. 10 or op. 25), one of three selected polonaises (*F sharp minor* op.44, *A-flat major* op. 53 or the *Polonaise-Fantasy*, Op. 61), any two mazurkas and one of two sonatas (*B flat minor* op. 34 or *H flat minor* op. 58). Instead of a sonata, a given candidate could choose two oeuvres from the following ones: *the Fantasy in F minor*, op. 49, *Barcarolle in F sharp major* or any ballad accompanied with a selected scherzo. The third stage meant playing the whole *Concerto in E minor* op.11 or *F minor* op.21 accompanied by an orchestra. The Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra was conducted by Zdzisław Górczyński, Jan Krenz, Mieczysław Mierzejewski, Tadeusz Wilczak and Stanisław Wisłocki.<sup>49</sup>

For the first time and the only one so far in the history of Chopin Competitions, the Jury listened to the play of the candidates who were hidden behind the blinds. It was to prevent potential string pulling for one's students and ensure higher results for real favourites. Jerzy Lefeld who was chosen to be the so-called shop-steward, knew the candidates' names and the numbers they had drawn. He controlled number drawing in such a way that no participant knew which number they had chosen, then he provided the jurors with the candidates' numbers to be assessed, next he informed the participants about the order of their performance which depended on that chosen number. Due to a high number of participants whose teachers were in the jury, while collecting points with assessment of par-

<sup>48</sup> J. Waldorff, op. cit., pp. 91–92.

<sup>49</sup> S. Wysocki, op. cit., pp. 58–60.

ticular performances, Jerzy Lefeld crossed out the assessment of this juror whose students was currently performing. Placing the Jury members behind the blind, an idea introduced by the Ministry of Culture and Arts in order to obtain a fully objective verdict,<sup>50</sup> made it impossible for them to appreciate the whole artistic phenomenon i.e. a young pianist's performance on stage, the arrangement of their hands on the keyboard, the way they used the pedals, their body posture.<sup>51</sup>

Whole Warsaw was talking about the struggles of competition during the 4<sup>th</sup> International Chopin Piano Competition. Talks about competition concerts taking place in the morning or in the afternoon were filled with theories about the most important interpretation features of Chopin's music. Interviews of Tadeusz Żmudziński with Halina Czerny-Stefańska and Barbara Hesse-Bukowska run during competition days gave the impression that casual improvisation style combined with rhythmic discipline, perfect autograph text together with dynamics and agogics opened the door to sincerity and simplicity of musical message.<sup>52</sup> Many distinguished pianists taking part in the 4<sup>th</sup> competition did not make it past the second stage as apparently they could not grasp Chopin's style putting their daring demonstration of technique first. On the first day of the competition, prime minister Józef Cyrankiewicz listened to performing participants, including Tadeusz Żmudziński and Barbara Hesse-Bukowska who presented Étude Op. 25, No. 6, in G-sharp minor.<sup>53</sup> To honour the beginning 4<sup>th</sup> Competition, the second audition day (with Waldemar Maciszewski's performance) was accompanied by a recital by Paul Badura-Skoda, who played Chopin's *Piano Sonata No. 3 in B minor* and selected études. Halina Czerny-Stefańska presented her skills on the fourth day of the competition playing *Ballade in G minor*, *Nocturne in C minor*, *Scherzo in B minor* and two études. On 6<sup>th</sup> October, the competition organizer, Witold Rudziński, announced the list of participants qualified for the third stage. This group counted eighteen pianists, including eight Poles. Allowing such a big number of candidates to play a concert with an orchestra proved that the level of their performance was quite even. All the members of the Russian group were qualified for the second stage: Jerzy Murawlew,<sup>54</sup> Tamara Guseva, Yevgeny Malinin, Lyudmila Sosina, Bella Davidovich and Victor Merzhanov. Among the Poles, these were: Tadeusz Żmudziński, Barbara Hesse-Bukowska, Waldemar Maciszewski, Halina Czerny-Stefańska, Regina Smendzianka, Władysław Kędra, Ryszard Bakst and Zbigniew Szymonowicz. The following musicians also reached the finals: Oriano de Almeida and Carmen Vitis Admet from Brazil, Imre Szendrei from Hungary and Carlos Rivero from Mexico.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibidem, p. 59.

<sup>51</sup> J. Waldorff, op. cit., pp. 93–94.

<sup>52</sup> S. Dybowski, *Czerny-Stefańska...*, pp. 64–67.

<sup>53</sup> *IV Konkurs Chopinowski. Występ Tadeusza Żmudzińskiego*, PKF 40/1949, H. Lemańska (ed.), time 0:17.

<sup>54</sup> S. Dybowski, *Laureaci...*, p. 157.

During the final of the Competition, the participants were matched in pairs so that two different Frederic Chopin concerts could be presented every day, but due to an uneven number of concerts there were sometimes three performances of the same concert on the same day. On 8<sup>th</sup> October, the following pianists presented their skills: Ryszard Bakst with the second *Concerto in F minor op. 21*, and Zbigniew Szymonowicz with the first *Concerto in E minor op. 11*. On 9<sup>th</sup> October one could hear Oriano de Almeida, Waldemar Maciszewski and Jerzy Murawlew, all three with concerto no 2, whereas 10<sup>th</sup> October saw the performance of Carlos Rivero and Tamara Guseva with concerto no 1, Władysław Kędra with concerto no 2. On 12<sup>th</sup> October, concerto no 2 was played by Regina Smendzianka and Carmen Vitis Admet, and concerto no 1 by Halina Czerny-Stefańska. 13<sup>th</sup> October was the day of Barbara Hesse-Bukowska and Yevgeny Malinin playing concerto no 1, and Imre Szendrei playing concerto no 2. On 14<sup>th</sup> October, Tadeusz Żmudziński and Bella Davidovich played *Concerto in F minor*, and *Concerto in E minor* was played by Lyudmila Sosina. On Saturday, 15<sup>th</sup> October, the last competition day, Victor Merzhanov<sup>55</sup> played *Concerto in E minor*.

The public concluded that *Concerto in E minor* was a thoroughly feminine oeuvre, filled with folk dance, melodiousness and delicate passages intertwined with pulsating rhythm. In this context, the performances of Halina Czerny-Stefańska and Tamara Guseva were assessed, the first one being described as endowed with captivating temperament, and the latter being called the piano lyricist.<sup>56</sup> According to Maria Dąbrowska, who devotedly listened to radio broadcasts of the pianists' final performances, the play of Tadeusz Żmudziński was interesting, whereas she described Bella Davidovich's play as "dry, boring, barely acceptable."<sup>57</sup> Victor Merzhanov's performance drew her attention by excellent technique, but she accused the pianist of:

[...] overusing the pedal, because of which the "angel" motif in the first part [*Concerto in E minor*] was spoiled.<sup>58</sup>

Dąbrowska appreciated the play of Carmen Adnet Vitis because of:

bright, resonant and soft strokes precisely making the tone.<sup>59</sup>

However, she did not fail to point out the pianist's mistake during her play of the theme of the 3<sup>rd</sup> part of *Concerto in F minor*.

[...] the intricacies of the rondo made her trip in one place, she tripped against a key, which I heard well though it lasted a fraction of a second.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>55</sup> J. Waldorff, op. cit., p. 93.

<sup>56</sup> S. Dybowski, *Czerny-Stefańska...*, pp. 66–71.

<sup>57</sup> M. Dąbrowska, *Dzienniki Powojenne 1914–1965*, vol. 2: 1945–1949, Czytelnik, Warszawa 1997, p. 469.

<sup>58</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>59</sup> Ibidem, p. 470.

<sup>60</sup> Ibidem.

On 16<sup>th</sup> October 1949 the results of the 4<sup>th</sup> International Chopin Piano Competition were announced. The first prize of the President of Poland and the Prime Minister went *ex aequo* to Halina Czerny-Stefańska and Bella Davidovich, the second prize of the Ministers Committee for Culture and Arts went to Barbara Hesse-Bukowska, the third prize of the Minister of Foreign Affairs went to Waldemar Maciszewski, the fourth one was granted to Jerzy Murawlew, the fifth prize funded by the Central Commission of Trade Unions was given to Władysław Kędra, the sixth prize funded by the Executive Committee of Chopin Year went to Ryszard Bakst, the seventh prize was granted to Yevgeny Malinin, the eighth prize of the Polish Radio went to Zbigniew Szymonowicz, the ninth one went to Tamara Guseva, the tenth one to Victor Merzhanov, the eleventh one to Regina Smendzianka, the twelfth one to Tadeusz Żmudziński.<sup>61</sup> The prize of the Polish Radio for the best mazurka performance and a distinction in the form of a silver wreath went from the hands of Jerzy Żurawlew to Halina Czerny-Stefańska, whereas Bella Davidovich<sup>62</sup> received a silver mask of Chopin, a gift of the Frederic Chopin Institute.

On 17<sup>th</sup> October, there was an official ending of the 4<sup>th</sup> Competition. At noon, during a ceremonial concert, the winners of the 4<sup>th</sup> competition played Chopin's short pieces. Halina Czerny-Stefańska presented *the Fantasy-impromptu in C sharp minor* op. posth, Bella Davidovich was replaced by Jerzy Murawlew.<sup>63</sup> In the evening, in *Roma* building, medals and distinctions were distributed. In the audience, there was Bolesław Bierut, the jury members and Competition participants. Zbigniew Drzewiecki played *Sonata in B flat minor* by Frederic Chopin and that is how he initiated the ending celebration. The first speech was given by Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz, who emphasised the success of the Russian and Polish piano school, which was:

[...] the outcome of great care of both countries about artistic development of talented young people [...].<sup>64</sup>

Next, the floor was given to Lev Oborin, and then Arthur Hedley. Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz gave diplomas to Bella Davidovich and Halina Czerny-Stefańska. The other winners received their diplomas from the hands of Stefan Dybowski. The winners of the 4<sup>th</sup> competition also received medals and envelopes with cheques.<sup>65</sup>

The triumph of the Polish team at the 4<sup>th</sup> competition is undeniable and strengthened by information deriving from research by a pianist, Jerzy Skarbowski, student of Zbigniew Drzewiecki. The documentation left by Zbigniew

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<sup>61</sup> J. Waldorff, op. cit., p. 94.

<sup>62</sup> S. Wysocki, op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>63</sup> S. Dybowski, *Laureaci...*, pp. 147–150.

<sup>64</sup> *Zakończenie Konkursu Chopinowskiego*, PKF 44/1949, H. Lemańska (ed.), time 0:17.

<sup>65</sup> S. Dybowski, *Czerny-Stefańska...*, pp. 73–74.

Drzewiecki after the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> competition shows that after the second stage Halina Czerny-Stefańska obtained 0.20 point less than Bella Davidovich, whereas at the third stage the Polish pianist was assessed better than her rival from the Soviet Union as she obtained 24.53 points and Bella Davidovich 24.16 points. Once the points from the second and the third stage were added according to the Competition Rules, it turned out that the Pole got the advantage of 0.17 point, which ensured her undisputed victory in the 4<sup>th</sup> competition with the result of 47.88 points. Bella Davidovich ended the 4<sup>th</sup> competition with the result of 47.71 points. On 15<sup>th</sup> October, the Executive Committee in the person of the vice-minister of culture and arts, Włodzimierz Sokorski talked to the Presidium of the 4<sup>th</sup> Competition Jury. The minutes of the meeting, based on Report no 34, show that due to very similar results between the first two places, the Executive Committee decided to combine the first and the second prize, and elevate the second prize to the sum of one million Polish zlotys.<sup>66</sup> Manipulation of a political nature, violating the Rules of the 4<sup>th</sup> Chopin Competition which did not take into consideration combining the prizes was a manifestation of pressure from the Soviet Union. The consent to contravene the Competition Rules given by the head of the Jury, Zbigniew Drzewiecki, was dictated by fear of potential repression – everyday reality in Stalinist Poland.

## Recapitulation

The first post-war International Chopin Piano Competition was the only event in the history of Polish pianism where all governmental bodies were thoroughly devoted to the preparation of both the Polish participants and the giant public event, which the Chopin Piano Competition in Warsaw had been for years. The fact of big financial support of the Polish pianists and providing them with the basis for over a year preparation was quite a phenomenon in the history of Polish music development. Contradictory ambitions of some teachers, including Henryk Sztompka, whose separatism towards the rest of the pianists of the Pedagogical Committee was obvious and noticeable already during the preparatory camp in Łagów led to friction and put an end to cooperation of teachers from various piano schools.<sup>67</sup> The efficiency of the Pedagogical Committee confirmed by the results of the 4<sup>th</sup> Chopin Piano Competition was appreciated by the authorities of the Polish People's Republic in 1950. Each teacher received the State Award of the First Degree. The Pedagogical Committee, whose composition kept changing, was still working in 1953 and 1954, but before the 5<sup>th</sup> Chopin Piano Competition, the members of the Committee were informed by the minister of culture and arts,

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 77–78.

<sup>67</sup> Z. Drzewiecki, *op. cit.*, p. 112.



Włodzimierz Sokorski, that they should immediately cease their work. During the meeting with the minister, Jan Ekier expressed his surprise with the following words:

So what were we [the Pedagogical Committee] awarded for by you five years ago?<sup>68</sup>

His words cost Ekier his withdrawal from the jury of the 5th Chopin Piano Competition. In the following years, the framework of the guidelines for the Polish piano school, created in 1949, became more and more blurred, the individuality of a given teacher and a young pianist prepared for competition performances became superior to the development of Polish pianism *sensu stricto*. The following Chopin Piano Competitions did not bring such a spectacular success of Polish pianists. The fact that Adam Harasimowicz won the 5<sup>th</sup> Competition is the result of Zbigniew Drzewiecki's work and the first prize winner's participation in camps organized in Łagów in the 1950s.<sup>69</sup> The following years did not bring any spectacular success to Poles in Chopin Piano Competitions, but teaching individualism grew.

The four-year preparation to the 4<sup>th</sup> International Chopin Piano Competition in Warsaw, the city which was reduced to ruins due to fighting during the occupation and the Warsaw Uprising, demonstrates heroic behaviour and realization of the project almost impossible to execute. Longing for life before WWII was stronger in the Polish than their despair after the war trauma. The young pianists, whose triumph at the 4<sup>th</sup> Competition was undeniable, created a certain role model for future generations of musicians, a model that was not followed so strictly in the years to come. The success of the pianists and their teachers in 1949 was strengthened by the fact not long after experiencing the events that many people would find difficult not to suffer from till the end of their lives, they began hard work aimed at cultivating (and thus saving) higher values, among which Frederic Chopin's music occupied an honourable place.

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<sup>68</sup> A. Teichman, op. cit., p. 86.

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## Kulturowe znaczenie IV Międzynarodowego Konkursu Chopinowskiego w kontekście odradzającego się po II wojnie światowej polskiego życia muzycznego

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**Słowa kluczowe:** Konkurs Chopinowski, II wojna światowa, Jan Ekier, Halina Czerny Stefańska, Zbigniew Drzewiecki.