

FINZI REPORT – POLISH MUSIC 1938-48

by Jane Rogoyska

The purpose of my research was to examine the fate of music and musicians in Poland during the crucial ten-year period that encompassed the Second World War and its immediate aftermath. My interest had been sparked by research I was conducting on the Katyń massacre (the murder of some 20,000 Polish officers by the Soviet NKVD in 1940, subsequently blamed on the Nazis). One of the most eloquent survivors of this massacre was Bronisław Młynarski, the son of an eminent musician, Emil Młynarski, and brother-in-law to the famous Polish pianist, Artur Rubinstein. His memoir, *The 79th Survivor*, provides a unique insight into life in the camp of Starobielsk where approximately 4,000 Polish officers were imprisoned between October 1939 and May 1940. Almost all of these men were murdered by the NKVD.



Bronisław Młynarski

A sensitive, highly cultured man and a gifted musician, Młynarski's descriptions of the importance of music to him whilst in the camp are particularly striking. In one passage, he describes the high-quality concerts of classical and popular music that were broadcast on the camp loudspeakers, which for most of the rest of the time blared out propaganda to the inmates:

"Hunched on my upper-tier bunk I would push myself as near as possible to the speaker so as to be in the best position to listen to the music without missing a single bar and to forget for a moment all our misery and sorrows. It was not easy to secure silence even during the most interesting musical programme. Down below, the place was always full of conversation, of heated, unrelenting debate and explosions of gaiety. [...] Here, in the darkness of my bunk [...] I succeeded in alienating myself completely from reality and learned to attain a maximum capacity for concentration. I drank in the sounds of music as a lost traveller in a desert oasis would drink cool refreshing water." (p195-6, *The 79th Survivor*, Bachman & Turner, London 1976)

It was these descriptions that set me thinking about the situation of Polish musicians during the war. From Młynarski I learned that before the war Poland's musicians had enjoyed a professional life as full and varied as anywhere in western Europe. But whilst he was incarcerated in Soviet Russia, what fate had befallen his fellow musicians back home?

My report offers a tiny and very incomplete glimpse into the complex history of Poland's musicians during this ten-year period. As I am not a trained musician but a writer and

filmmaker, my focus has been less on the music produced by this most unfortunate generation but on their varied and extraordinary stories. It is safe to say that I do not feel that the work I have done approaches anything near completion: I have scratched the surface of a profoundly interesting period of history and little more, but I will attempt to give a brief portrait of what I have discovered.

In 1939 Poland had only recently reemerged as a nation state after nearly 200 years of occupation, having since the 18th century been partitioned several times and in several different configurations by the three great pre-twentieth-century powers: Austro-Hungary, Prussia and Russia. Following the First World War and the collapse of these entities, Poland was reborn. Thus, in 1939, when the Second World War broke out, Poland had been independent for a mere twenty years.

Musical life in pre-war Poland reflected the country's recent past as well as its present: classical musicians were as likely to have received their formation in the great schools of St Petersburg, Vienna or Berlin as in Warsaw or Kraków. France, traditionally the country to which many educated Poles felt the closest, attracted large numbers of classical musicians who flocked to Paris to learn from some of the most eminent teachers of the twentieth century. This was a generation of cosmopolitan, outward-looking men and women, many of them fluent in Russian, French, or German. It was also a generation that represented the ethnical mix of pre-war Poland, most particularly in the prominent role played by musicians of Jewish origin in Polish musical life.

As well as producing classical musicians of outstanding quality, Poland also had a thriving popular music scene, with its first record label Syrena, founded in 1904, bringing out popular dance music in Polish and Yiddish and producing huge stars such as Artur Gold, Hanka Ordonowna and Mieczysław Fogg. Some of these musicians were as well-known in Germany as they were in Poland. The last record produced by Syrena was a foxtrot, brought out just weeks before the German invasion.

The picture one gains of pre-war Poland is of a country determinedly looking westward, just as it does today. It was a nation whose political and intellectual élite were sophisticated, cultured, highly-educated, enlightened and cosmopolitan. There were, of course, elements of brashness and over-confidence in some parts of its society, an inferiority complex nurtured through two centuries of oppression; similarly, the strident voices of the nationalist parties, with their anti-semitic, anti-Ukrainian, anti-everything-that-wasn't-Polish were no different to the unpleasant nationalist movements prevalent across Europe at the time. Poland wasn't perfect. For musicians of all types and of all origins, however, it was a pretty pleasant place to be. A young musician starting out in Poland in the 1930s ought to have had everything to look forward to.

On September 1st 1939, the Nazis swept across Poland from the west. On September 17th the Soviets marched into Poland from the East, helping themselves to half of the country according to an agreement (the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) concluded with their new allies only weeks earlier, yet never officially declaring war. Despite a valiant military campaign, by the end of the month Poland had been partitioned once more.

In the Soviet zone of occupation, musical life was allowed to continue more or less uninterrupted, although inevitably those who were prepared to collaborate with the new authorities were given the best positions while those who showed signs of “Polish nationalism” or “bourgeois” tendencies were swiftly sent to labour or prison camps. Several hundred thousand Poles - men, women and children alike, usually those with the highest levels of education – were consigned to camps in Siberia and other parts of the Soviet Union. Many never returned. There was a high population of Jews living in eastern Poland, with many musicians concentrated particularly in cultural centres such as Lwów. Some musicians of Jewish origin fled east from the Nazis in 1939 and managed to continue working in the Soviet zone, only to be captured and killed later, once the Germans had turned against their former ally and swept across eastern Poland. Szymon Kataszek, for example, was a Polish Jewish composer, bandleader and pianist. He fled Warsaw in 1939 for Lwów, where he found safety until, in 1941, the Soviet-German war erupted. At this point, for reasons unknown he returned to Warsaw where he was captured and taken to the ghetto, where he led the Ghetto Jewish Police Orchestra. Somehow he escaped the deportations and managed to return to Lwów but he was recognised by an SS officer and was shot in 1943.

Two other prominent popular musicians, Henryk Gold and Jerzy Petersburki, both well-known composers and arrangers of popular and jazz music, were more fortunate. They escaped to the east, where together they formed a big band which toured the Soviet Union for much of the first part of the war, before joining the army of General Anders in the Soviet Union in 1941.



Henryk Gold and Jerzy Petersburki with their band, 1930

Gold, like many Polish musicians, came from a musical family: his mother belonged to a prominent klezmer family, while his father was first flautist with the orchestra of the Warsaw Opera. Jerzy Petersburski also came from a prominent musical family and had studied classical music in Vienna; he chose to devote himself to popular music and was particularly known for his tango compositions. He served with the Polish Air Force during the September campaign, then escaped to the east, where he formed a jazz orchestra in Belorussia before joining forces with Gold to form their touring big band. Gold later emigrated to Israel, then New York; Petersburski lived in Argentina until the 1960s, when he returned to Warsaw.



Józef Koffler

One of Poland's foremost pre-war avant-garde composers, Józef Koffler, lived in Lwów. When the Soviets invaded eastern Poland, all Polish citizens of non-Polish ethnic origin – whether Jews, Ukrainians or Belorussians - were automatically considered Soviet citizens. Koffler's avant-garde music immediately fell victim to criticism from his new Soviet "colleagues", making him arguably the first Polish composer to have to find a way to compromise with the

diktats of 'socialist realism'. Since he had to survive somehow, Koffler duly wrote several Soviet-inspired works, including 'Uwertura Radosna' (Joyful Overture, 1940) to celebrate the Red Army's annexation of Poland's eastern lands, and 'Szkice Ukraińskie' (Ukrainian sketches, 1940) for string quartet. However, when the Nazis reached Lwów, he was taken to the ghetto in Wieliczka and died in the holocaust. Most of his unpublished scores vanished in the war.

Limited as the possibilities were in the Soviet-occupied zone of Poland in the first half of the war, Nazi-occupied Poland offered none of these small freedoms for musicians. After Poland's surrender, the Germans immediately divided the occupied zone into two distinct areas: western Poland was directly incorporated into the Reich and was to be considered part of Germany; the rest of the occupied zone was to be known as the General Government and was placed under the command of Governor-General Hans Frank, a man later notorious for his brutality.

Nazi policies in these zones were similar, with subtle distinctions, mainly of degree: in the western zone, the aim was to simply obliterate Polish culture. Thousands of Poles were sent east, to the General Government, and replaced with German settlers. The Nazis then closed down all Polish scientific and cultural institutions, press, radio, cinemas, theatres; they closed down the entire network of Polish schools; they closed archives and libraries, museums and art collections, periodicals and newspapers; relics and monuments of Polish culture and art

were destroyed. Any person deemed capable of leadership or resistance was liquidated: priests, professors, scientists, teachers, judges, lawyers, doctors, engineers and other representatives of the intelligentsia. Those who were fortunate enough to survive were deprived of all their property, then deported to the General Government to survive as best they could. It was forbidden to print books in Polish; the sale of music by Chopin and other Polish composers was banned.

In the General Government the aim was subtly different: Hitler's intentions for the Poles – an inferior race only one step above the Jews, according to the Nazi hierarchy of racial purity - was to use them as a mass labour force in the service of their German masters. With the attention to detail so characteristic of Nazi thinking, a plan was set out, the purpose of which was to ensure that the Poles were reduced to a kind of primitive, uneducated *lumpenproletariat*, incapable of independent thought or – crucially - resistance. To this end, schooling was to be restricted to primary schools only; secondary schools were to be restricted to 'useful' trades; independent Polish newspapers and periodicals were replaced by German newspapers in Polish which spewed forth reams of virulently anti-Semitic, anti-Polish propaganda.

For musicians, the consequences of these policies were devastating as all their means of survival were removed in turn: orchestras and choirs were disbanded; Polish Radio was closed down, the film industry and the recording companies ceased to operate. No Polish classical music was to be published, no Polish music to be performed. Possession of a radio was punishable by death or concentration camp.

The Nazi's plan for the Jews is well known. They were separated from their Polish compatriots and herded into ghettos. Here, musicians were allowed to do more or less what they wanted: the Nazis were indifferent to what the Jews did within the ghetto, provided they did not play Aryan music. Here was neither food to be had nor money to be earned; the Jews were being steadily starved to death. This was all that counted.

In this desperate situation the priority for Polish musicians, as for everybody else, was to survive. Deprived of all the normal means of earning their living, unable to make money from commissions, teaching, radio or film recordings, they were forced to take what work they could.

There were few options available: musicians could play at funerals, of which there were inevitably many; they could take on private teaching if they could find pupils able to pay, or they could play in cafés. The Nazis permitted cafés to remain open and even allowed music to be performed in them, although all programmes had to be vetted by the censors before permission would be given for a performance to go ahead. The logic behind this policy was

that it was on balance better to keep the Poles in view rather than ban all forms of public gathering and have them conspire in their homes. In most of these cafés the emphasis was on 'light' music – mainly cabaret and operetta. Where classical music was allowed, it was restricted to a limited canon: nothing highbrow, nothing Polish, nothing by Jewish composers, absolutely no Chopin. There was much competition for this limited pool of work, not only among musicians but among Polish actors and actresses, the large majority of whom refused to perform in German-controlled theatres, which meant that they were forced to turn to singing or performing in cafés to survive. The fact that many of the staff working in the cafés were well-known actors and actresses, as well as artists, poets and young aristocratic woman desperately trying to earn a living, lent them a certain air of glamour. Customers would come, not for the pleasure of drinking ersatz coffee, but to be able to say that they had their coat taken by a famous stage actor or been served by one of their screen idols.

One of the best-known partnerships to flourish in these circumstances was that of the composers Andrzej Panufnik and Witold Lutosławski.



Andrzej Panufnik (left) and Witold Lutosławski

Lutosławski had fought in the army during the September campaign. Arrested by the Nazis, he escaped and walked hundreds of miles back to Warsaw. Here, he formed a piano duo with Panufnik and they performed together throughout the war, playing

arrangements of standard repertoire, sometimes accompanying singers, first at the Aria café, then at U Aktorek and, later at Sztuka i Moda. The two composers found a profound enjoyment in improvising together and finding ways of sneaking forbidden music into their performances. The only surviving composition by Lutosławski from that period is his *Variations on Paganini* (1941) for two pianos; other pieces were improvised, or else destroyed at the end of the war. Once, during one of the frequent café roundups with which the Nazis regularly terrorized the population, all the male customers in the café where the two composers were playing were arrested and sent to the Pawiak prison. Panufnik and Lutosławski were spared thanks only to the intervention of the café's manager, who claimed that they were paid members of his staff. Another of Panufnik's wartime activities was to work with a poet to compose patriotic songs to bolster the spirit of resistance. Many of these songs were widely sung on the streets of Warsaw, sometimes by cheeky, too-brave children (since the penalty for singing patriotic songs was harsh). One of these compositions, "Warszawskie Dzieci" (Warsaw Children), became one of the most popular anthems of the Warsaw Uprising.

One well-known café owner, the distinguished pianist and composer Bolesław Woytowicz , who ran Dom Sztuki, was one day arrested and sent to the notorious Pawiak Prison in Warsaw. Most of the inmates at Pawiak were members of the resistance, political prisoners or civilians who had been rounded up on the streets. At Pawiak they were beaten, tortured and either executed on the spot or sent on to concentration camps. Woytowicz had no idea why he had been arrested, but it soon became clear to him that if he remained there for long his chances of survival were minimal. He was saved by the intervention of an unknown benefactor who arranged for him to be sent to the prison hospital on the pretence that he had a serious heart problem. Here he remained, with the Polish prison doctors courageously maintaining the pretence of his serious illness until his release (equally unexplained) some weeks later. The prison medical staff frequently risked their lives in this way, feigning illness in an inmate in order to effect his or her rescue. Woytowicz later realised that his arrest was most probably linked to a disgruntled Komandant named “Otto” whose orders concerning the ban on playing Chopin had been countermanded by a culture-loving Luftwaffe General. Since the humiliating scene had been played out in front of Woytowicz, he soon understood that his arrest was linked to “Otto’s” need for revenge. He never knew how his release had been arranged except that it was the Polish underground that had somehow engineered it.

Prior to opening Dom Sztuki, Woytowicz – desperate for work - had been offered a job performing popular music, but as a serious classical musician he had hated the experience so much that after three performances he refused to do it again, preferring, he declared, to starve to death. Thus, when he was approached to run Dom Sztuki, Woytowicz was determined that it should be a venue for serious classical music only. He managed to obtain permission for this by the unusual but successful psychological ploy of telling the German authorities that he insisted that only popular music be performed in the café, which somehow convinced them to insist in turn that it was serious classical music they wanted. As with all cafés, Woytowicz had to provide a programme of proposed music and the names of players for each performance. He employed a large number of musicians, especially young ones, as regularly as possible: engaging young men to play music meant that they would receive the all-important work permit, the “Kennkarte”, which would save them from the random round-ups when the Nazis took able-bodied young men from the streets and sent them to work or, worse, executed them. Many staff members at the café were members of the underground. Such was the secrecy of underground operations that very often Woytowicz himself had no idea which of his staff were involved in resistance activities, and if somebody failed to turn up for work one day he had no way of knowing if they had been captured, had been sent on clandestine work elsewhere, or were dead. Although he himself was not an active member of the resistance, nevertheless Woytowicz allowed staff to store weapons and other forbidden items at the café and more than once had to cover for them with the authorities.

In the autumn of 1940, Governor-General Hans Frank decided to set up two classical orchestras: the Kraków Philharmonic and the Theater der Stadt Warschau (Theatre of the City of Warsaw). These orchestras were to feature Polish musicians under German conductors, playing for German audiences. Many Poles viewed musicians who agreed to play in these orchestras as collaborators, no better than those actors who performed in German-sponsored theatrical productions. However, this was not an entirely fair accusation: many of the musicians played in the orchestra because they had no other choice. For some it was their only means of survival, particularly if they had young children to feed; others were threatened with death or were forced to participate in exchange for protection of a husband or a wife of Jewish origin. Many of those whose lives or family were endangered participated in the orchestras with the agreement of the Polish Underground. Collaborators were usually dealt with harshly by the underground, so to have their approval for any activity that could be interpreted as collaboration was vital. After the war, when accusations of collaboration were being aimed at many of these musicians, it was hard to establish the truth since nothing concerning the underground was ever written down and everyone was eager to justify their actions.

The underground movement played an enormous role in the wartime existence of almost all Poles, particularly in the cities. After nearly 200 years of occupation, Poles had had plenty of practice in developing habits of clandestine operation. You might almost say it was something of a national speciality. Polish culture had frequently been forced underground and this latest, most brutal manifestation of oppression resulted in one of – perhaps *the* - most sophisticated underground resistance operations of wartime Europe.

The Polish government had fled in September 1939 as the Nazis marched into Warsaw and had reformed first in Paris, then in London. This “government-in-exile” then became the head of an entire underground military and civil structure based in Poland, the fighting arm of which was known as the AK (Armia Krajowa, or Home Army). The Polish underground existed not only to carry out the type of activities we most associate with resistance movements – gathering intelligence, disrupting communications, sabotage etc – although it did all of these things in abundance; it also performed the functions of civil government. In addition to this, a whole host of other clandestine civilian organisations sprang up, including schools and universities. Secondary school classes and university lectures were held in apartments all over the country. Qualifications were bestowed in code. Elaborate measures were taken to disguise the true nature of these activities: if caught, professors and teachers were arrested by the Gestapo, interrogated and either executed or sent to concentration camps.

Although music was harder to hide from prying ears and certain instruments did not lend themselves to easy transportation, nevertheless, music lessons continued throughout the war, organised by the Clandestine Union of Musicians. This organization was responsible for a

whole host of resistance activities, from teaching to putting on secret concerts to preserving musical scores. One of the union's most significant activities was hiding musicians whose lives were in danger, either because they were Jewish or because they had engaged in resistance activities and were wanted by the Gestapo. Perhaps the best-known example is the pianist and composer Władysław Szpilman, whose memoir of his extraordinary survival of the Warsaw ghetto was made into an acclaimed film, "The Pianist", by Roman Polanski.

Szpilman came from a family of musicians and had been classically trained. He was best known before the war as a concert pianist and writer of popular and film music. He survived the Warsaw Ghetto partly through a series of extraordinary pieces of good luck, but also because of the efforts made by other musicians to help him, including friends such as Edward Rudnicki, director of Polish Radio before the war, and the composer Piotr Perkowski. Both of these men were deeply involved with the Clandestine Union of Musicians, as was Perkowski's sister Felicja Krysiwicz, a singing teacher from Bydgoszcz. They, together with a huge network of volunteers spread all over Warsaw, fed and hid Szpilman and many other musicians like him. Perkowski was formerly director of the music conservatory of Toruń. As part of his clandestine activities he organised secret concerts whilst also teaching theory and composition. Witold Lutosławski was also a good friend of Szpilman; when he played concerts in Warsaw some of the money went towards helping his friend. Later, after the war, Szpilman returned the favour by giving Lutosławski commissions for Polish Radio.

Another example of resistance activity among musicians is provided by composer, pianist and critic Konstantin Regamey. Regamey was fortunate in holding Swiss citizenship. This meant that he was not under Gestapo control and had a little more freedom than most of his compatriots. He took part in many of the activities of the Clandestine Union of Musicians, making his debut as a conductor in secret concerts and playing the piano in cafés. Like many younger musicians, his resistance activity went further: he acted as a courier for the AK (under the pseudonym Czesław Drogowski), and frequently hid people in his apartment. As a Swiss citizen, he was allowed to have a radio. He listened to Rumanian stations as they were less likely to be interrupted or scrambled by the Nazis than the BBC or other western stations, and wrote bulletins for the AK. At one point he was caught and sent to the Gestapo. Fortunately for him, he was able to see what the officer had written down on his charge sheet (by reading it upside down) and saw that he was suspected of keeping a radio set. This enabled him to return home and get rid of the radio before the Gestapo could institute a search of his flat. Andrzej Panufnik's brother Mirek was also active in the resistance – formerly head of the technical department at Polish Radio, he worked as a radio operator for the AK throughout the war. This was an extremely dangerous occupation as the Nazis were extremely effective in finding operational radio sets, using special antennae that enabled them to locate the source of a signal with unerring accuracy. Anyone found operating a radio set was summarily executed. After the Warsaw Uprising, Konstantin Regamey and his mother

were sent to concentration camp near Gdańsk, then to another camp near Hamburg, whence he was freed as a Swiss citizen. In 1945 he moved to Lausanne, where he remained for the rest of his life.

In an account of his wartime experiences, Bolesław Woytowicz tells of an incident involving a radio which preceded his arrest. Two German 'secret police' turned up at the café one day on the somewhat flimsy pretext of investigating a postcard that had apparently been sent in code to Woytowicz's secretary. Since this young woman was heavily involved in the underground, Woytowicz was concerned for her. He read the card, which appeared to be a letter from a man in Gdańsk enquiring about an antique desk that had been for sale. Since Dom Sztuki had previously sold antiques and continued to do so, there was in fact nothing suspicious about this card. Woytowicz suspected, probably correctly, that the men had been sent by the resentful Commandant "Otto" to find a reason to arrest him, and that the secretary was simply being used as a pretext. When the men suggested that they accompany the secretary to her apartment where they would institute a search, and that Woytowicz should come too, he began to be seriously worried since the secretary's brother was a radio operator for the AK and kept a radio set in their flat. As Woytowicz, the secretary and the two German policemen left the café to go to the secretary's apartment, it was left to the café's loyal book-keeper, Emilia, to save the day. With extraordinary presence of mind and considerable courage, Emilia - knowing that she could not telephone from the café since the line was tapped - instead went next door to the shop that was "for Germans only". Since she spoke exquisite German, she was allowed to make a call from the shop's telephone. She then proceeded to shout into the receiver in Polish at the top of her voice: "Get rid of the radio, get rid of it immediately! In three minutes there's going to be a search! Search! Get rid of it! Search!" Everybody in the shop stared at her in astonishment. The Germans who were there could not understand why this elderly lady, previously so calm, was suddenly shouting, nor did they understand what she was trying to say; those who did understand were so astonished they couldn't utter a word. Emilia then calmly thanked them in her excellent German and left the shop. Nobody stopped her. The search of the secretary's apartment yielded nothing, since thanks to Emilia's warning the secretary's brother had managed to flee with the radio set. It was shortly after this that Woytowicz was arrested.

Nazi policy towards the Jews found its most terrifying expression in the so-called "Final Solution". From 1942 onwards, Jews were deported from the ghettos to concentration camps, where they were exterminated. As we have seen, some Jewish musicians were able to escape this fate either by fleeing east – often only a temporary solution - or by hiding with the help of friends and colleagues. Some very courageous individuals managed to survive by adopting a false name. Zdzisław Gorzyski (whose real name was Grünberg) was an outstanding Polish conductor who had worked at the Warsaw Opera House, in Lwów, and at other theatres, and directed the Small Orchestra of Polish Radio from 1935 to 1939. As in

other European countries with a long-standing Jewish population, there were many Poles whose Jewish origins were distant or whose 'Jewishness' had been a matter of irrelevance to them before the war. They had assimilated fully, with many families inter-marrying or polonizing their names. This made no difference to the Nazis, of course, who went to extraordinary lengths to discover any Jewish links in a person's family past. During the occupation Gorzynski hid under the name Jan Zbigniew Michalczyk. He gave music lessons and played piano accompaniment at secret concerts, and was helped by musicians who belonged to the Clandestine Union of Musicians, especially Piotr Perkowski and Felicja Krysiewicz. After the war, Gorzynski continued his long and distinguished career as both conductor of orchestras and opera, and as a teacher in Łódź, Warsaw and Poznań.

Examples of musicians who were not fortunate enough to survive the holocaust are, sadly, many. Literature on the subject of the holocaust and the role of music within the camps is abundant and this report is not the place to go into detail on the subject. What is clear, however, is that the Nazis deliberately used music as a particularly cruel form of psychological torture, aimed at increasing the agony suffered by their victims. Music was played during interrogations in Gestapo prisons. Children's songs were broadcast over loudspeakers during the deportation of children to death camps. Auschwitz orchestra members were forced to play to accompany the trains arriving with new transports, as work details were marched in and out of the camp and during selection for the gas chambers.

At Treblinka the élite of Jewish musicians perished: former members of the Warsaw Philharmonic as well as popular music composers and performers such as Artur Gold, brother of Henryk Gold and one of the greatest stars of the Syrena record label. Finding himself in Warsaw at the outbreak of war, Gold was confined to the ghetto, where he played in an orchestra. At Treblinka, he was so famous that his German captors made him perform wearing a clown suit before they murdered him. Distinguished musicians such as the composer Jakub Mund, Józef Herman, and the conductor Leon Striks were also forced to play in the camp orchestra.



Szymon Laks

One of the most notable Polish musicians of Jewish origin to survive the camps was the composer and violinist Szymon Laks. Born in Warsaw, Laks studied at the Warsaw Conservatory, then in 1926 travelled to Paris to study. Here, he joined the Association of Young Polish Musicians, founded in the same year by Piotr Perkowski.

Still living in Paris when France fell to the Nazis, in 1941 Laks was arrested and deported to Auschwitz and, later, Dachau. His memoirs, written soon after the war, caused some

controversy because he argued against the popular belief that music provided some kind of hope and solace for the prisoners. Laks claimed the opposite: music was an integral part of the mental and emotional degradation to which camp inmates were subject.

When Laks first joined the camp orchestra, the conductor was his compatriot Jan Zaborski. A kind and conscientious musician, Zaborski had been arrested for giving fake birth certificates to Jews. After Zaborski died, Ludwik Zuk-Skarszewski was put in charge of the orchestra. After he was deported, Franz Kopka took over. Throughout these changes, Laks made himself increasingly indispensable to the orchestra: in addition to playing the violin, he became the main copyist and arranger, skilfully writing arrangements that could easily allow for the substitution of soloists as they died or were deported. Because of his language skills he also served as a translator for those musicians who didn't understand the Polish-speaking conductor. Eventually, Laks was appointed conductor.

The deputy camp commander at Birkenau, Johann Schwarzhuber, was extremely fond of music and considered himself to be knowledgeable on the subject. Exigent and demanding, Schwarzhuber's perfectionism gave Laks the opportunity to negotiate with him on behalf of the musicians, requesting increased rehearsal time (thus decreasing the hours of physical labour the musicians were forced to perform), obtaining a separate music room for rehearsals, gaining improved rations and arguing that the orchestra should not longer be required to play outdoors during bad weather. Laks was only too aware of the unfairness of these so-called privileges. The sense of terrible guilt was only part of the price paid by those who survived.

Finally liberated by the Americans in May 1945, Laks immediately returned to Paris. He became a French citizen in 1947 and lived there until his death in 1983, becoming a successful composer of orchestral, vocal and chamber works. In his compositions, he frequently tried to unite Polish musical traditions, French chansons and Jewish folk melodies. Many of Laks's texts deal with the trauma of war, suffering and loss.

After the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, a certain shift in Nazi cultural policy could be observed in the General Government as the authorities sought to hedge their bets by simultaneously underlining the enmity of the Russians and their own benevolence towards Polish culture. The performance of some Polish music was permitted, while a ban on performing Russian music was enforced. Whilst previously Chopin's music had been prohibited, in 1942 the ban was lifted. This was not quite the concession it might initially have appeared to be, since at the same time Chopin – like many other Polish cultural icons whom the Nazis considered worth appropriating – was being celebrated for his so-called 'Germanic' origins. His family name was Schopping, apparently; his origins were in Alsace, and his music was Germanic to the core.

There were also, it must be stated, many individual Germans whose love of music did not always go hand-in-hand with an obsessive commitment to Nazi ideology: Bolesław Woytowicz describes how German officers - professional soldiers rather than Gestapo or SS - medical staff and other music-lovers would find their way into his café to listen to the concerts given there. Most of these men behaved discreetly and politely, showing due respect for the audiences of Poles who gathered regularly for these brief moments of cultural respite.

The Poles had waited patiently for five years for a chance to enter into active engagement with the enemy. In August 1944, with the Russians closing in on Warsaw and the German forces in retreat, the moment finally seemed propitious to act. However, if the uprising were to be successful, the Poles would need Russian support. They were not only assured that this would be offered to them but were actively encouraged by the Russians to go ahead. On that basis, the order for the biggest quasi-military operation since September 1939 was duly given and on August 1st 1944 the Warsaw Uprising began.

Hundreds of thousands of Poles - AK fighters, civilians, men, women and children alike - rose up against the Nazis, who fought back ferociously and brutally. The Soviet army, meanwhile, having reached the other side of the river on the outskirts of Warsaw, simply stood and watched while the Nazis massacred the Poles. The uprising lasted two months before the Poles finally accepted defeat. With the Russians now on the move, the Germans retreated, burning Warsaw to the ground as they went.



Warsaw 1945

The Warsaw Uprising was to claim not only thousands of lives of young – sometimes tragically young – Poles, but the burning of the city also led to the destruction of those institutional buildings which had not already been destroyed in the campaign of 1939, and to the loss of hundreds of musical instruments and original musical scores which had until then survived the war.

Witold Lutosławski had left Warsaw just before the Uprising, leaving most of his scores and compositions behind. Almost all of them were destroyed. Likewise, Andrzej Panufnik had fled Warsaw with his sick mother shortly before the Uprising began. His father, a violin maker whose obsessive love for his creations had already caused Andrzej to have several uncomfortably close encounters with the Nazi authorities, remained behind in Warsaw to guard his collection. Panufnik's brother Mirek, who was active in the AK, was killed during the Uprising. When Panufnik returned to Warsaw some months later, he went to the flat belonging to his former girlfriend where he had left all of his music, literally everything he had composed since childhood. To his amazement, amidst the flattened rubble of Warsaw, the building was still standing. When he went upstairs to his former girlfriend's apartment, however, he found it occupied by a woman of humble origins who had, she eventually confessed to him, thrown away his papers when she had "tidied up" the chaotic flat on moving in. The scores had been thrown on a huge pile of rubbish and subsequently burnt.

Many younger musicians who had been involved throughout the war in resistance activities also took an active part in the Uprising. One of the most vivid and tragic stories is that of Roman Padlewski.



Roman Padlewski

Padlewski was a composer, violinist, conductor, musicologist and music critic, the son of a well-known pianist and teacher and an eminent bacteriologist, professor at the University of Poznań. When the Second World War broke out, Padlewski, then aged 24, fought in the September campaign. After the defeat of the Polish army he remained in Warsaw, where he dedicated himself to musical life,

participating in both public and secret musical activities. He studied, gave concerts as a soloist and chamber musician, and composed. He organized and led an orchestra in the Philips factory in the Wola district of Warsaw and participated in the work of the Clandestine Union of Musicians (working, amongst others, with the education commission, the concert commission, and the commission concerned with the rebuilding of the Warsaw Philharmonia and Opera). During the Warsaw Uprising Padlewski fought under the pseudonym 'Skorupka' and 'R.Kasztan' in the Wola and Muranów districts of Warsaw in the 'Broda' battalion under the command of Colonel 'Radoslaw' (Jan Mazurkiewicz), distinguishing himself particularly in fighting near the school on ulica Okopowej. The writer and painter Monika Żeromska was a close friend of Padlewski and had fallen deeply in love with the good-looking young musician. In her memoirs, she describes the sense of feverish excitement that had taken hold of the young composer:

“He sits next to me and talks and talks; he tells me what it’s like in Wola. He captured a tank. He couldn’t get it to move, even though the tank was undamaged. How, I think to myself, could he get a tank moving with those fingers, fingers used to touching a piano, a violin, strings? Then, from the other end of the street comes a second tank: they either have to leave this one or destroy it. But then Krzyś Tyszkiewicz comes running across the road. In no time the pair of them get the tank and its gun working and they destroy the second tank. Suddenly, [Roman] stops talking and I feel his head heavy on my shoulder. He is asleep. He has fallen, stumbled into a dream. ...” (Monika Żeromska, *Wspomnienie*)

On August 14th 1944, Roman Padlewski was attempting to disarm a goliath tank (a radio controlled vehicle filled with explosives). His delicate musician’s fingers – mentioned by Żeromska as being so ill-suited to handling a tank - were particularly well-adapted to working on the delicate mechanism he was trying to disarm. He was shot in the back by a German sniper as he worked.

Fatally wounded, Padlewski would not allow his comrades to carry him to the nearby hospital but asked to be taken to Krzywe Koło Street, where Monika Żeromska was staying. For the next two days she remained by his side:

“In the harsh electric light I see him: he is so awfully pale; they put the stretcher on the ground, we take him from it, caked in blood. Doctor ‘Przemysława’, myself and someone else lay him on a mattress on the ground; the doctor examines him, very gently she lays on dressings, bandages him; he has lost such an awful lot of blood, he is white as paper. He has a gunshot wound, you can see the entrance and exit points, the bullet probably passed through his spine and nerves (...). He regains consciousness but he has a fever, he says to us: ‘Hurry, hurry, as soon as it’s healed, I need to go back there, I must be there. (...) When he seems a little more alert, I tell him that we are going to make him better soon, I tell him to listen: there are planes circling overhead, our planes dropping supplies. He smiles, but he clutches my hand; he is in pain. I don’t leave him, even for a moment; today nobody complains, nobody makes a fuss - everybody turns to look towards his bed. He is so beautiful, his hands lie on his breast, black from the dirt of fighting, his beautiful pianist’s hands.” (*ibid.*)

Roman Padlewski’s death is all the more tragic not just because of his youth but because the destruction of Warsaw also destroyed most of his work. There are only a few examples remaining: a few songs, some choral motets, a Stabat mater, a sonata for solo violin. His greatest works are gone.

During the war Padlewski’s family were imprisoned in a concentration camp, released, then his father was arrested again and held hostage. After his release the family worked in

Warsaw – Roman’s mother Nadzzejja ran a secret music school and performed in Bolesław Woytowicz’s café; her husband gave lectures in microbiology in the Medical department of the Clandestine University. Roman’s older brother, Jerzy, an architect, worked for the intelligence service of the AK. He was arrested on March 3rd 1942; after two months in Pawiak prison he was taken to Moabit Prison and on February 3rd 1943 was executed in Brandenburg.

The Poles hold the dubious honour of being the only nation in Europe to fight from the very first day of the Second World War until the very last. When the conflict finally drew to a close, six years of horror had left the country exhausted, starving, brutalized, and desperate for peace. Although few Polish musicians actively welcomed the arrival of their Russian ‘liberators’, most were simply glad of the opportunity to return to something resembling normal life: many of the country’s most talented musicians had perished – as soldiers in the AK, as civilians and in the death camps; the Warsaw Uprising had resulted not only in the death of many talented artists but of much of their work as well, and the city lay in ruins. There had been no publication of scores during the war (except by the underground and that was only on a small scale) unlike in other occupied countries, where it had been allowed. It is small wonder, then, that those who had endured such hardship for so long were eager to start rebuilding musical life: there were orchestras to be reestablished, schools to be rebuilt, classes and institutions to organise.

In the first two years following the end of the war, musicians and composers were relatively free to get on with their work without undue political interference. They set to their task of trying to recreate the nation’s orchestras and music schools with an enthusiasm that was born of a sense of desperate optimism and hope.

It was really not until 1948 that things changed significantly for the worse. By this time the Polish elections had been ‘won’ by the Soviet-controlled Polish communists; all opposition had been quashed; Stalin was confident that the Allies would do nothing to intervene. This was the moment when ‘Sovietisation’ proper began. Composers in particular began to find that if their music did not follow the dictates of the new authorities, it would not be performed.

It was at the notorious 1949 Łagow conference that the musical authorities declared the primacy of ‘socialist realism’, the doctrine that dictated that art had to be socialist in content and national in form. Polish composers and musicians living abroad – which included a number of notable figures, including Szymon Laks, Roman Palester and Konstantin Regamey – were to be excluded from future competitions and funding opportunities. Public bodies, including Polish Radio, were to be subject to political pressures. At the conference several composers, notably Witold Lutosławski, Artur Malawski, Stefan Kisielewski and Zbigniew Turski, were condemned for succumbing to “formalistic, elitist, difficult” pro-Western trends. Turski had in 1948 received the gold medal at an international composers competition in

London for his Olympic Symphony, but after his condemnation by the authorities, for years he had to confine himself to writing stage music; Kisielewski was black-listed and could not get any work.

Although outside the scope of this report, it is worth returning to three of the figures mentioned above to illustrate the conflicting demands placed upon musicians in communist Poland.

Andrzej Panufnik, who after the war was invited to direct the newly re-established Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra, soon established himself as one of the leading – if not the leading – composers of post-war Poland. After becoming vice-president of the Union of Polish Composers, Panufnik found his life more and more involved with the political demands of the communist authorities. His 1948 'Sinfonia Rustica' won a prize at the 1949 Chopin composing competition and was then banned by the communist government. He then 'revised' his techniques and wrote several works which won him accolades and official honours from the state. Panufnik's style was generally more accessible to the communists and closer to the social realist style. This was true of many composers who were born during the first twenty years of the 20th century. Their music was often rooted in Polish folklore, neoclassicism or neo-Baroque, which perhaps made their music more easily acceptable to the authorities.

Panufnik eventually found the political demands placed upon him too much to bear. He felt that his creativity was being compromised as well as his own integrity. His defection from Poland in 1954 was deeply shocking to the entire Polish musical community, not least because he had occupied such a prominent position within the regime and had gone to such lengths to accommodate their demands. After he left Poland, Panufnik's name was immediately erased from concert programmes and publications. His music was not performed in Poland until 1977. His defection left a legacy of considerable bitterness towards him from fellow musicians who had remained in Poland, including his close friend Witold Lutosławski, who for many years refused to meet him. Of course, the communist authorities enjoyed spreading slander about Panufnik's reasons for leaving, claiming – amongst other things – that he had run up enormous debts, but for a long time there was also a general sentiment among Polish musicians that Panufnik had supped with the devil and then betrayed his country by deserting it when things got tough.

Witold Lutosławski himself trod a delicate path between his need to survive financially, the need to placate the authorities, and his need to compose his own works. After the war he worked for Polish Radio, where his old friend Władysław Szpilman helped him by giving him commissions. The aggressive reaction of pro-Soviet critics to his 1947 1st Symphony prompted him to take his time before presenting his next piece of properly creative work. In fact, he did not produce a truly significant piece of orchestral work - his Concerto for

Orchestra – until 1954. With this work, it was felt that he had somehow managed both to adhere to the demands of communist ‘requirements’ and go way beyond them in defining an individual musical style. His skill in so doing earned him huge admiration from fellow musicians. In the meantime, Lutosławski needed to earn his living as much as any other musician. To this end, he composed folk songs, jingles, many children’s songs and popular music – what he termed ‘functional’ music – using the pseudonym ‘Derwid’. He always claimed that none of these songs were political in the sense of actively supporting communist ideology, but rather kept to subjects that were acceptable to the authorities but also uncontroversial. However, it is probable that the compromises he made with the system were considerably more political than he ever cared to admit. He was, for example, not above writing mass songs such as “Comrade”, “Our Duty to Poland” or “The Road of Victory”. In Lutosławski’s own view there was a big difference between the music he composed ‘to order’ and his own creations, but that did not mean he was only composing because he was forced to – he enjoyed experimenting with all forms of music, in all styles.

The story of Władysław Szpilman ends, as far as the wider public concerned, with his moving and highly symbolic post-war broadcast at the Polish Radio of the same Chopin nocturne (Op.20) he had played at the outbreak of the war. In fact, Szpilman continued to work for the radio until 1963, holding a prominent position there. He also wrote a large number of mass songs – some of them extremely popular – in the 1950s, one of the best-loved of which was ‘Czerwony Autobus’ (The Red Bus) in 1952.



Władysław Szpilman

Some people accused Szpilman of collaborating with the communists, while his family always felt that he was not taken sufficiently seriously as a classical musician. In the complex fabric of resentments and bitterness woven through the many decades of communist rule, it is hard to see where the truth really lies. One can only note that Szpilman had always been better known as a composer of ‘light’ rather than serious music; his music was popular but not simple because he was classically trained. He also had a great love of jazz and was the originator of the Sopot jazz festival. From a modern perspective, the jaunty spirit of ‘The Red

Bus' provides a rather interesting contrast to the weighty symbolism of his Chopin performances as portrayed in Polanski's film. Perhaps, in an odd way, this cheerful, optimistic song serves to express some small remaining element of the spirit of pre-war Poland, when the strains of jazz, tango and foxtrots, played largely by musicians of Jewish origin, could be heard on every street corner of Warsaw.

All Polish musicians, but particularly composers, had to find a way of accommodating the cultural demands of the communist authorities. Those who, like Panufnik and Lutosławski, occupied a position of prominence, were under the greatest scrutiny. Understandably, they both felt that they had done what they needed to do in order to survive and those who pointed the finger in later years, accusing them of unacceptable compromises, could know little of the pressures under which these musicians had to operate. The war had perhaps offered easier decisions to the Poles: the enemy was a brutal, foreign force of occupation; resisting the Nazis was a patriotic duty. Survival under a home-grown, if Soviet-controlled, peacetime government presented a far more difficult terrain to navigate and involved a much more subtle series of compromises.

In truth, the policy of socialist realism lasted only a short time in Poland, from 1948 to 1953, a period of six years. Even at its height, it bore little resemblance to the severe restrictions imposed on Soviet composers. Nevertheless, it left Polish composers and musicians feeling constrained and depressed, suffering particularly from the sense of being cut off from the musical life of the West. Everyday existence was hard, and composers in particular struggled to survive financially. Many younger composers who were unwilling or unable to conform to the demands of socialist realism turned to writing film music, while others wrote for the stage.

After Stalin's death in 1953, a period of gradual cultural 'thaw' began. This was followed in 1956 by the Warsaw Autumn – the first of the now-annual festivals of contemporary music, organised by the Union of Polish Composers. From its inception it was a highly successful event and for many years was the only festival of its kind in eastern and central Europe. For musicians, the period after 1953 meant a gradual shifting of emphasis on the part of the communist authorities: on the one hand, certain styles of music – whether avant-garde, classical or jazz - were considered to exemplify the sins of the capitalist West; on the other, the authorities realised that it was in their interest to allow a certain degree of freedom to musicians in order to show the West how tolerant and supportive the communist state was to its artists and that there was prestige to be gained from their international success. Music, as an abstract art form, was considered less 'dangerous' than other art forms such as film or literature and received generous funding from the state. In the end, Polish musicians suffered relatively little from the oppression that kept literature, poetry and film unseen and unheard for decades.

SUMMARY

I am extremely grateful to the Finzi Trust for allowing me the opportunity to conduct this research and am particularly grateful to have been permitted to do so with no defined purpose other than curiosity and a desire to deepen my knowledge of a particular period of history. I have found it a fascinating subject and am conscious of being only at the beginning of a long process of further discovery. My immediate focus now is to complete a prior project before I approach this subject again. Since this present task is to finish my book on Katyń, the knowledge I have acquired is already proving of great use to me, deepening my understanding of the context in which personalities exist and historical events take place. I return to Bronisław Młynarski, whose love of music inspired this research. Once the work on Katyń is concluded I am determined that the stories I have encountered in my research will find their way into my work.

I would also like to express my thanks to the many Polish and British academics, musicologists and friends who have helped me in this research, most particularly to Katarzyna Naliwajek-Mazurek of the University of Warsaw, whose speciality – the fate of Polish composers during the Second World War - made her my primary point of contact in Poland. She gave me her time and shared her knowledge with me freely and with extreme generosity. I am truly grateful to her and hope that I will be able to repay her properly one day.