

SZYMANOWSKI ~ BRUCKNER ~ SCHUMANN
A Choral Anthology

Karol SZYMANOWSKI : Stabat Mater

Karol Maciej Szymanowski was born in 1882 into a wealthy family of Polish landowners in Tymoszkówka, at that time in Russia. He and his siblings had their initial music studies with their father, a devotee particularly of Mozart and Beethoven. He suffered a leg injury when he was four which prevented him from taking part in and enjoying usual outdoor activities for several years. In 1892 he entered the school of his relative Gustav Neuhaus at Elisavetgrad. After studying piano and theory under Neuhaus he moved to Warsaw where he continued his studies under Noskowski and Zawirski. He had already a considerable number of compositions to his name, one of which, when taken up by Paderewski, brought him a considerable measure of fame. In Warsaw he, Gregor Fitelberg the conductor, Paul Kochanski the violinist and Arthur Rubinstein the pianist became a close-knit group of friends.

He travelled extensively, composing music and writing poetry as he went, in Europe, the Middle East, North Africa and North America.

In 1919 Szymanowski took up residence in Warsaw and in 1926 he became director of the conservatoire at which he had himself studied. He became ill in 1928 and was discovered to have tuberculosis. In 1929 he travelled to Davos in Switzerland hoping to be cured. He returned to Warsaw and took up his duties again at the conservatoire, but shortly after the institution was shut by the government.

He moved to Zakopane and entered a period of intense composition. Further treatment for the tuberculosis in 1936 was ineffective and the next year he died in a sanatorium in Lausanne. His body was returned to Poland for burial in the national panthéon at Kraków.

Szymanowski's music shows a considerable variety of influences, notably of Chopin, Debussy, Ravel, Reger, Scriabin, Richard Strauss and Wagner. In addition there are strong ties with the folk music of Poland.

His works include the operas *Hagith* and *Król Roger*, a ballet, six choral works and three symphonies, the last of which is also one of the choral works. There are also two violin concertos, two string quartets, a violin sonata and a quantity of shorter pieces.

The poem *Stabat Mater*, often attributed to Fra Jacopone da Todi, ne Jacopo dei Benedetti (c.1230-1306), was not originally part of any liturgy. However, during the thirteenth century it became a frequently used devotional text, recital of which could be rewarded with indulgences. Later still it was included in liturgical compilations and acquired accompanying music. In 1727 it first appeared in the Roman Missal. Early polyphonic settings include those by Josquin des Prés and

Palestrina whilst notable later settings are those by Dvorák, Haydn, Pergolesi, Rossini, Stanford, Szymanowski and Verdi.

Andrzej Panufnik was born in 1914 at Warsaw, the son of a violin maker and a violinist. His childhood interests were aeronautical engineering and music. Contrary to his father's wishes, he began to study music. He entered Warsaw Conservatoire as a percussion student, having failed the piano exams, but soon turned to composition in which he graduated, cum laude, in 1936. He moved to Vienna to study the Second Viennese School and to learn conducting under Weingartner.

Despite the advice of friends he returned to Warsaw. Under the occupation, he wrote songs for the resistance and with Witold Lutoslawski he formed a piano duo. Immediately before the uprising of 1944 he fled from Warsaw with his sick mother. After the war he returned to discover that the tenant who succeeded him had burned all his music to keep warm.

For a while he composed for the Army Film Unit then he became conductor of the Kraków Philharmonic Orchestra. He was given the task of rebuilding the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra, including engaging players and locating a suitable hall.

He was able to rewrite from memory much of the lost music, thus as a guest conductor with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra he was able to play his *Tragic Overture* as a reminder to Berlin of what his own country had been through.

Compositions on which he now worked included: *Circle of Fifths*, *Lullaby* and *Sinfonia Rustica*.

At conferences he met Alan Bush, Benjamin Frankel and Zoltán Kodály. The latter especially joined him in feeling uncomfortable with "Soviet Realism". In 1950 in the Soviet Union he met Khachaturian and renewed acquaintance with Shostakovich. At home his works were denigrated as "formalist"; outside the Communist area he was a cultural export.

By 1954 conditions were so onerous that patriotism no longer sufficed to keep him in Poland. He defected to England. At home he became a non-person.

He never forgot the support, both moral and financial, he received from Arthur Benjamin, Ralph Vaughan Williams and others.

From 1957 to 1959 Panufnik conducted the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. Whilst this helped financially, the heavy schedule of concerts left him insufficient time to compose. At this time he accepted the suggestion that Camilla Jessel should become his personal assistant. She found numerous letters containing offers of commissions and engagements lying around unanswered. As she dealt with these both his income and the time he could devote to composition increased. Subsequently they were married.

In 1963 his *Sinfonia Sacra* was awarded first prize for an orchestral score at an international competition in Monaco.

Works by Panufnik were now being commissioned and performed by the likes of Yehudi Menuhin, Mstislav Rostropovich and Leopold Stokowski.

Panufnik received a knighthood in 1991 and he died later the same year at Twickenham, near London.

Anton BRUCKNER : Abendzauber

Anton Bruckner (1824-1896) and Gustav Mahler (1860-1911) have certain features in common. They are the last in the great tradition of Austro-German classical symphonists, some would say of all symphonists. Each wrote nine symphonies which are by far the most significant parts of their works. Each, being of a deeply superstitious nature, sought to escape the fate of Beethoven and Schubert by disguising their "ninthness". Bruckner numbered an early work his "Zeroth" Symphony (Die Nullte) as if to make his ninth symphony his tenth and Mahler put his *Das Lied von der Erde*, ambiguously after his eighth symphony, as if to avoid writing a ninth Symphony. But Fate is not so easily fooled; each died with his last symphony incomplete. More interesting musically is that only in the 1960s did their works begin the climb to their rightful places at the centre of the concert repertoire.

Bruckner, unlike Mahler, wrote a considerable quantity of choral music of which, amongst the short pieces, "Abendzauber" ("Evening Magic") is particularly beautiful. Written in 1978 to words by Heinrich von der Mattig, it invokes communion with nature in a majestic moonlit landscape. It is scored uniquely for baritone solo, male voice chorus, 3 yodellers and 4 horns in G flat. This performance was probably the first to be recorded.

Robert SCHUMANN : Szenen aus Goethes Faust - Part III

The earliest known surviving reference to Magister Georgius Sabellicus Faustus Junior is from the year 1507. There is much unverifiable material, but on balance it is not unreasonable to suppose that some such individual did exist. According to one report he was born at Kundling, Kundlingen or Knittlingen bei Bretten and he studied magic at the University of Krakow. However, despite a university education, he is recorded as a magician and charlatan, fatuum non philosophum—a fool not a philosopher and among "the wicked, cheating, useless and unlearned doctors." Fairly soon he was believed to be in league with the devil who carried him off. It must be remembered that at that time probably the majority of people believed in the devil. He could react with people during their lifetimes by tempting them to evil and he would punish the wicked in the afterlife. It was widely held that the devil had actually appeared to many people in one form or another. He could also inhabit a person's body. A sneeze indicated that a person was inhabited by the devil. Hence "bless you", a prayer for it to be exorcised, and "touch wood", touching a piece of wood from the original cross to drive out the Devil. More serious cases could be cured by exorcism and, of course, one could always resort to a charge of heresy followed by the stake. In 1587, at the time of the earliest book on Faust, the Faust legend was virtually complete. The notion of selling one's soul to the devil goes back to earliest Christian times, but the Faust story is of the era of the Renaissance and the Reformation. The Reformers are now promoting "the pure Word of God" against a church defiled by the devil and the world. Thus, Marlowe's play is heavily laced with crudely anti-papist

polemicalising. The early Faust is irrevocably damned for preferring human to divine knowledge. The literary revival of the 18th century sees German writers searching for national themes for national literature. Lessing, not Goethe, set the tone of a stern orthodox attitude for theologians of the new religion. 18th century man, to be saved, must face deep problems of human life; error and heresy are no longer crimes. Goethe injects his version with a diametrically opposite spirit. For Goethe, in more tolerant and enlightened times, Faust becomes an expression of unsatisfied yearning by the human intellect for more than earthly meat and drink. Goethe adds two things to the mix: The nature of the pact between Faust and Mephistopheles and the character of Mephistopheles. "Es irrt der Mensch so lang er strebt-Man errs so long as he strives"; a one line précis of the spirit of Goethe's Faust and the birth of modern science.

The Faust legend became the very stuff of music. Grove (*Dictionary of Music and Musicians*) offers half a column of works based on Goethe's Faust alone; the following sample of the better-known works, will suffice:

Spohr (1754-1859) *Faust*; Donizetti (1797-1848) *Fausta*; Berlioz (1803-1869) *La Damnation de Faust*; Schumann (1810-1856) *Szenen aus Goethe's "Faust"*; Liszt (1811-1886) *A Faust Symphony*; Wagner (1813-1883) *Eine Faust Overtüre*; Gounod (1818-1893) *Faust* (*Marguérite* in France, *Margerethe* in German-speaking countries); Boito (1842-1918) *Mefistofele* and Busoni (1866-1924) *Doktor Faustus*.

Schumann's works for soloists, chorus and orchestra show him at his most daring and furthest remove from his pianistic home. His models are the latest German romantic operas by, for example, Marschner and Wagner. The scenes from the second part of Goethe's Faust are a collection of compositions from the years 1844 to 1853. Apart from their being all of them settings of portions of the same drama they are unconnected. Some parts seem to be suitable for stage performance, some not. Possibly the first two sections were intended for an opera. The work, i.e. the group of nine pieces, was first performed in Cologne in 1862.

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