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# Between Romanticism and Modernism

Ignacy Jan Paderewski's Compositional Œuvre

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# Introduction

Creation [...] is the only thing that gives a person complete satisfaction: ideas are eternal values, and in expressing them one scales the loftiest heights, regardless of the medium through which they are expressed [...] Creation vanquishes death.<sup>1</sup>

The compositional output of Ignacy Jan Paderewski made a lasting impression on European music of the period straddling romanticism and modernism. Sensitive to all manifestations of change in the arts, and at the same time a seeker of immutable values, he was a composer whose work displays a strong stylistic diversification. Paderewski's greatness is reflected in the range of ideas he employed, which lends his works, irrespective of the kind and scope of influences they reflect, a genuine quality. Thus his creative output reconciles a number of apparent paradoxes: it is both original and eclectic, of the salon (functional) and artistic, native and universal, confounding the antithetic nature of the aesthetics of German and French modernism, of programme and absolute music. In this context, the oft-emphasised ethical dimension to Paderewski's stance during tempestuous times of reevaluation in Polish and European art takes on particular value.

This first comprehensive study of Paderewski's entire compositional output (including his exercises, student works, sketches and projects) satisfies the postulate according to which an oeuvre is perceived not just as a collection of compositions, but above all as an integral structure, fully reflecting, in its dynamism, the changes to the composer's artistic personality. Understood in this way, Paderewski's output, taking into account the multi-faceted character of the technical, stylistic and aesthetic changes to his musical language, will be afforded a full, rounded presentation, within the cultural context, for the very first time. This is unlikely to have any fundamental effect on its functioning in concert life, but it may alter the way that his oeuvre is perceived in music historiography. Although for the most part the compositions uncovered quite recently do not oblige us to undertake a thorough reevaluation of Paderewski's oeuvre (only to some extent the Violin Concerto), they do enable us to penetrate the nature of that oeuvre.

The author also aims to popularise Paderewski's complete output. The present study may serve as a natural complement to source research, audio recordings and other artistic events. Before the oeuvre of the 'maestro from Morges' was subjected to analysis and appraisal, some works were verified by time. Part of his

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1 Brodniewicz, 'Ignacego Jana Paderewskiego myśli', 22.

output still awaits such verification, since it represents strands of Paderewski's compositional work which are little known or entirely non-existent in contemporary culture. The present treatise will not replace the natural formation of the canon of works in music history, but given the difficulties some works have experienced in reaching their audience one may doubt whether that music has been subjected to such verification. That would seem to be occurring only now, before our very eyes, as an edition of his complete works is being published<sup>2</sup> and successive recordings of unknown works, many of them only recently rediscovered, are being made.

There is no doubt that each of his works sets us research problems of a different kind. With regard to the notion of creative output, they already function as if removed from their original context, taking on the significance of ideas.<sup>3</sup> The contextual significance increases as the content of the unique source is eclipsed. For the first time, Paderewski's oeuvre is subjected to historiosophical reflection in its ontological plenitude. The monograph which the present treatise is designed to represent exceeds the scope of the *tönende Biographie*, as it considers the ideas, style, aesthetics and value of the analysed works. Those categories, illuminated for the reader within a specific context, are only now being fully objectivised in relation to the European music of those times. The specificity of Polish compositional output forms part of that European landscape. Thus the title of our study brings together the 'three dimensions' of history, in the context of which Paderewski's oeuvre is considered.<sup>4</sup> From the point of view of both 'art history without names' (*Kunstgeschichte ohne Namen*) and research in music history accentuating the role of the composer (*tönende Biographie*), Paderewski's oeuvre represented a problematic object of study: from the former perspective, it has usually been overlooked; from the latter, it has taken a back seat to the artist's concert work, and even his socio-political activities. As a result, it has remained in limbo – a state of affairs that is reflected in such things as the presence of Paderewski's works in concert life. Still today, that music is alternately either part of concert life or externally ennobled – with regard to Paderewski's outstanding achievements or the extra-musical dimension to his works.

The contents are diachronically arranged, making it easy for the reader to follow the stylistic changes in Paderewski's output, which – as signalled in the book's title – extends between the ideology of romanticism and modernist tendencies.

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2 *Dzieła wszystkie Ignacego Jana Paderewskiego*.

3 Dahlhaus, *Ludwig van Beethoven*, 59.

4 Those three dimensions are the temporal (diachrony), social and ethnic/regional (synchrony). See Dahlhaus, *Foundations*, 161.

The modernist experiments occupy a much shorter period than the Romantic output, yet the creative tension engendered by Paderewski's modernising of his musical language during a period of reevaluation in European music brought works of significance both for his own oeuvre and for turn-of-the-century Polish music; in the historiosophical and artistic sense, this evens out that disproportion. The early Romantic output covers two stages, divided here into distinct chapters: the period of his education within the Polish musical environment (chapter II) and his studies in Berlin (chapter III). Those studies abroad do not mark a watershed, particularly since the young composer had not lost contact with the Polish milieu, but a strand of continuation (historicism, folklorism in a national spirit) is accompanied during the Berlin period by new tendencies (programme-orientated lyrical elements, forays into large instrumental forms – chamber and orchestral output). If those two stages might be termed 'initial', in the sense of shaping the composer's technique and style, the next period brings fully-fledged Romantic output.

The search for a new musical language – effected now through the German, now through the French idiom of the modernist style, which were so strongly differentiated at that time, including in ideological terms – and the failure to develop a highly individualised style resulted in a sort of stylistic schism during the last period in Paderewski's oeuvre. Although that could have justified highlighting those nationally differentiated profiles of turn-of-the-century modernism in the structure of chapter 5, the author followed the chronological order adopted at the start.

Aesthetic issues were approached from the angle of the composer's views on the subject, although in Paderewski's case they consist more of loose utterances, enabling us to reconstruct a profile of his aesthetic preferences, than comprising a normative aesthetic. The pianistic repertoire, meanwhile, represents a complementary strand of the implied aesthetic in relation to that outlined above, since it reflects Paderewski's aesthetic preferences. With regard to the aesthetics and poetics of Paderewski's oeuvre, we discuss the issues that are most crucial to the nature of that oeuvre: historical currency (the diachronic perspective) and personal style (the synchronic perspective). Closely related to the question of acquired style are two issues, the explanation of which has been hindered in particular by the aura of Paderewski's greatness and importance beyond music: the links between Paderewski's music and that of Chopin and the significance of his oeuvre.

The present text is slightly altered from the Polish version, which was the author's doctoral dissertation, written under the guidance of Professor Maciej Gołąb and defended at the University of Wrocław in 2008. The typical academic

apparatus of the description of methodological procedures has been reduced, as has the formal aspect of the arrangement of a doctoral work – the complex hierarchy of chapters, sub-chapters and notes, the content of which has mostly been incorporated into the main text. Enhanced, meanwhile, is the material relating to the socio-cultural context of Paderewski's musical activities, in particular the Polish art scene of those times.

I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Maciej Gołąb for his contribution to the present monograph; his academic discipline not only shaped the character of my research, but also repeatedly guided its orientation. I am also grateful to Dr Małgorzata Perkowska-Waszek for providing access to many sources and for her inestimable assistance with their classification.

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*For my parents*