

TADEUSZ SZELIGOWSKI

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The country of Poland has a chequered and troubled history having been invaded and governed by other countries down the years and, as a result, many of its composers have had no real nationality and those who have been Polish are not well-known apart from Chopin. In our times Szymanowski, Penderecki and Lutoslawski have become known along with Grazyna Bacewicz. One of the most exciting symphonies I have heard is the award-winning Symphony no 3 by Tadeusz Baird.



Tadeusz Szeligowski was born in Lvov in the Ukraine, a Polish town ruled by the Austrians, on 13 September 1896 and became a composer, teacher, lawyer and writer on music and was highly respected. He studied first with his mother and then at the Lvov University and piano with Vilem Kurz. Szeligowski also studied and graduated with a law degree from Jagiellonian University in 1922. He also studied at Krakow University with Boleslaw Wallek-Wallewski and became repetiteur at the Krakow Opera.

He was the originator of the Poznan Philharmonic Orchestra and was its first director. By 1926 he was in Vilnius practising law. He met Szymanowski and admired his work and on Szymanowski's death wrote an Epitaph in memory of him. Szeligowski lived in Paris from 1929- 1931 and had lessons with Boulanger and Dukas. He met Honegger, Milhaud and Prokofiev and attended performances by Heifetz, Paderewski, Rubinstein and Toscanini. He returned to Poland in 1931 working at the Poznan Conservatory. He went back to Vilnius where he taught at a school.

He was the founder of the Poznan Philharmonic Orchestra in 1947 after a short stay in London. He was one of the founders of the Wieniawski Violin Competition and of the Poznan Musical Spring which championed modern music of that time. Among his works are two violin concertos.

The Concerto for orchestra is a good but uneven piece. The first movement contains a major solo for the violin which gives it the feel of a violin concerto.

Some musicians have strongly advocated that you cannot be a Polish composer without revering Chopin and this is why Szeligowski wrote a Nocturne for orchestra in 1947. This reasoning is completely untrue as is the assumption that Chopin invented the nocturne. He did not. John Field did.

Szeligowski's Nocturne is more akin to Bartok's superior Night Music.

His Comedy Overture will find many friends if it could be heard. It has a catchy tune, varied rhythms, fine and clever orchestration and is highly entertaining. The main theme is one you can whistle. It is a truly memorable piece. While it is light-hearted, there are a few moments of discontent perhaps brought about by being under the reign of Stalin. The piano concerto is also unashamedly tonal and very well-written for the piano. It is virtuosic. The first movement is a real allegro bustling with panache and high spirits. It sparkles and is a strong romantic piece. The passages of brilliance have a contrasting second subject and reflective sections and I am definitely not back stabbing when I say it is nothing like Chopin!

The Andante is a wistful piece with a profound melodic line, not just atmosphere. It is an interesting movement and never too slow and certainly not dull.

The finale Allegro risoloto is the shortest movement and does not disappoint albeit somewhat episodic.

The Sonata for flute and piano and the ballet The Peacock and the Girl are highly thought of.

From 1951- 1962, he worked in Warsaw mainly at the Chopin University of Music. He was also the Director of the Polish Society of Composers.

He died in Poznan on 10 January 1963.

Among his other works are:

String Quartet no 1 (1929)

Concerto for orchestra (1930)

Clarinet Concerto (1935)

String Quartet no 2 (1935)

Piano Concerto (1941)

Stabat Mater (1943)

Nocturne for Orchestra (1947)

Ballet: Peacock and the Girl (1948)

Piano Sonata (1949)

Opera Student Rebellion (1951) sometimes called The Students Revolt

Comedy Overture (1952)

Flute Sonata (1953)

Opera Krakatuk (1954)

Four Polish Dances for orchestra (1954)

Opera Theodore Gentleman (1960)

Ballet Mazeppa (1958)

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