

## A NEW GENERATION IN POLAND

FELIX RODERIC LABUNSKI

**I**N Poland today there is a new generation of composers who, aware of the importance of modern music in the life of their country, have decided to fight for their cause by taking the organization of the musical movement into their own hands.

The start of common action was made by four young men who founded the Association of Young Polish Musicians, in Paris in 1927.\* Their purpose was first to help the musicians who came to Paris for the study of modern technic and to hear modern music, and second to introduce Polish music and musicians to the Paris public. During the first eight years of its existence this Association has played an important role in the development of Polish music, serving as intermediary between the composers and Paris, also between their works and the international public. Members of this Association, returning to their country, organized themselves in similar groups and so continued at home the work they had begun abroad.

Today this generation possesses its own music publishing house "Two Wydawnicze Muzyki Polskiej," its own magazine *Muzyka Polska* and its own organization of concerts "Ormuz." It has representatives on the professorial staff of the conservatories and musical schools, and in the Polish Radio. Six of the group are music critics on the leading newspapers.

The most interesting of its activities is the Ormuz, whose purpose is the production of music in the small cities and in towns in the country, the majority of which, until the last few years, were deprived of regularly and well organized concerts. During the two years of its existence Ormuz has arranged about five hundred public and four hundred school concerts at which contemporary and other music has been performed by the best artists.

---

\*Piotr Perkowski, Stanislaw Wiechowicz, Stanislaw Czapski and myself.

The majority of the composers in this Association are still in the middle of their development. Most of them are between thirty and forty years of age and so have not achieved full maturity. Still I will try to briefly analyze their tendencies and to characterize their work.

Native folklore was their first source of inspiration. The folk songs and dances of Poland possess great richness and variety of melody and rhythm and so proved tempting to the young generation, which sought new national musical material to achieve artistic independence.

Unlike their predecessors, they were not satisfied merely to discover unknown folk themes and harmonize them. They chose to incorporate this music into creative work by a free stylization of the folk melody. This way had already been indicated by Szymanowski in his later works (the *Mazurkas*, the *Second Violin Concerto*, the *Symphonie-Concertante*).

Most striking and interesting examples of this tendency are the *Green Songs* by T. Szeligowski, the *Mountaineer's Symphony* by M. Kondracki, *Le Houblon* by S. Wiechowicz and the *Dance of Osmoloda* by R. Palester.

There was also a new display of interest in the "orchestral palette;" the majority of our young composers write almost exclusively for the orchestra. The style is closer to the French modern school than to any other, and the scoring is either for an orchestra of normal size or for a chamber orchestra, never for the big Wagnerian-Strauss ensembles which were used so often by their predecessors (Karlłowicz, Noskowski, Rozycki, and by Szymanowski in his earlier works). Many have studied in Paris with such masters of orchestra as Paul Dukas or Albert Roussel, and believe in economy of means for maximum results.

Another trait common to this generation is the important place of emotion in their music. This is of course characteristic of all Polish music since the sixteenth century. Though one will not find in these new works the "emotionalism" of the romantic, or post-romantic period, lyricism still plays an important role.

The composers do not fall readily into schools or groups; still one can already distinguish three definite tendencies which divide them somewhat as follows:

1) Neo-romantic: Alfred Gradstein, Tadeusz Z. Kassern, Michal Kondracki, Jan Maklakiewicz, Piotr Perkowski and Kazemierz Sikorski. Coming first strongly under the domination of Szymanowski (whose pupils most of them were), they have recently emerged from this influence, though they continue to develop along the line of evolution traced by that outstanding Polish musician.

2) Neo-classic: Tadeusz Szeligowski, Stanislaw Wiechowicz, Tadeusz Woytowicz, and myself. All have studied in Paris and have a preference for purity of melodic line, simplicity of expression, and classical forms.

3) Independent: Jerzy Fitelberg and Roman Palester. Both display a more radical tendency in their work, a leaning towards atonal and polytonal music, Fitelberg being nearer to modern German music (Hindemith), Palester to modern French and Russian (Milhaud, Stravinsky).

Of the first group Gradstein, being in poor health, is not prolific. His most important and recent work is a piano concerto with orchestra; he has also written a number of short pieces for piano and violin. Kassern's greatest success has been a concerto for voice and orchestra, performed in many cities of Europe; he has also written a *Dies Irae* for orchestra, a sinfonietta for string orchestra, a trio for flute, clarinet and bassoon, several piano pieces and songs. Kondracki writes almost exclusively for orchestra. His best works are *The Soldiers*, a march, and *Match*, a symphonic poem, and he has composed a one-act opera, *Popieliny*, performed in 1934 in Warsaw. Works for orchestra have also been written by Maklakiewicz, among them a concerto for cello and orchestra. Perkowski's best work is a sinfonietta for orchestra and a ballet, *Swantewid*. The eldest of these "neo-romantics," Sikorski, is one of the leading authorities on counterpoint in Poland. He has written two symphonies, but his best works are a string sextet, two string quartets and several choral pieces.

Among the best neo-classic works are Szeligowski's *Green Songs* for soprano. His orchestral music has been much influenced by folklore and is markedly contrapuntal in style. Woytowicz has written several works for orchestra and chamber music; his

*Suite de Concert*, composed two years ago, has been performed many times with outstanding success in Poland and abroad. Wiechowicz is the author of several choral works very popular in his own country; his orchestral suite *Le Houblon* (Polish wedding dance) belongs to the steady repertoire of Polish music.

Fitelberg, the independent, is one of the most prolific young composers. He has written many works for orchestra, two concertos for violin, two for piano, music for two pianos, two ballets, two string quartets, a quintet for wood instruments, and several smaller works. All these possess a great variety of form and rhythm and a masterful technic. His latest success is the *Second Violin Concerto* performed last spring in Paris, Brussels, and Luxembourg.

Palester on the other hand writes exclusively for the orchestra, whose technic he thoroughly comprehends. His *Dance of Osmoloda* was successfully presented this year at the I.S.C.M. Festival in Barcelona. His latest *Symphony* will soon be heard in Warsaw.

Before closing let me mention a few others who, although outside of this Association, still must be considered when speaking of the modern Polish movement. One is Josef Koffler—the only Polish composer who has studied with Schönberg and employs his twelve-tone system. He has written several works for orchestra and some chamber music. Another is Ignacy Lilién, a specialist in vocal music, the author of two operas, *Beatrice* and *The Great Catherine*, both now being produced in Belgium and Germany.

I must also include three very young composers who, despite their lack of years, have already produced works which give great promise for the future. They are: Antoni Szalowski, Roman Maciejewski and Grazyna Bacewicz (the only woman-composer of importance in our country). For the present they all write chamber music.