

**POLISH-AMERICAN ARTS ASSOCIATION**

of Washington, DC.

***NEWSLETTER***

Spring Issue 2011

Member of The American Council for Polish Culture, Inc. Since 1966



## **WIANKI June 25, 2011**

At the Reflecting Pool in front of the US Capitol Building

Wianki Pageant, Wreath making, Folk Dancing performances

6:00—10:00 pm.

Live Band for Dancing **FREE!** Bring your picnic basket

## ***Message from the President***



Greetings! I have heard that *“writing is not necessarily something to be ashamed of. But do it in private and wash your hands afterwards.”* My hands are clean because in this letter I want to remind you that you are fortunate to have a talented and dedicated Board of Directors. They really make a President’s job easy!

*“God must love the common man, He made so many of them.”*

**Dr. Wanda O’Brien-Trefil**, is definitely uncommon. In addition to being a terrific pianist, she has embraced editing responsibilities of our Newsletter, and chairing the Scholarship Committee with enthusiasm and passion. She also adds helpful insights on how to better organize and operate activities.

*“If it can’t be expressed in figures, it’s not science, it’s opinion.”* That *does* describe **Ted Mirecki**, our Treasurer. Ted always knows the finances, is integral to the successful planning of our events, and can always be counted on to do the job.

*“Anyone who feels that it is immoral to pay someone to pretend to care about you has no business going to the doctor.”* That is not true of **Dr. Estelle Wachtel-Torres**. She applies the same discipline and personal care in considering worthy candidates on the Scholarship Committee.

*“You should always listen to experts. They’ll tell you what can’t be done and then do it.”* **Alice Laning** is an expert in planning special events. She played a large part in making our recent Wigilia a financial success, and is chairperson of our upcoming plans to celebrate our 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

*“If you don’t like yourself, you can’t like other people.”* **Ed Pawlowski** likes people and the PAAA so much that he is an ambassador who brings in new members and acquaints many others with our events.

*“You should place your weapons and clothes where you can find them in the dark.”* **Richard and Bernadette Wiermanski** are definitely prepared and drive a long way to faithfully attend our Board Meetings. They have a broad knowledge of our affiliated organizations and offer great insight on how our activities can synergize with Polonia.

*“You live and learn, or you don’t live long.”* **Marianna Eckel** and **Sharon Brzostowski** have learned a lot, and they contribute their know-how and appreciation of Polish culture in organizing our two big annual cultural events, Wianki and Wigilia, with great artistic attention to details. Secretary **Irene Sowa** keeps track of the board discussions and gives us detailed minutes to refresh our memories at the next meeting.

*“Cheap, fast or good – you can only pick two.”* Then I would say **Dr. Richard Okreglak** is fast and good. He brings unique Polish humor to our meetings and has cultivated many long-lasting special relationships in the Polish community that benefit our organization. He also provides a great brunch!

These are the people serving you, and I encourage our other members to get involved in our activities; talk to one of us about why we love this organization! *“A motion to adjourn is always in order.”* So I encourage you to look in our Newsletter, in our mailings, and on our website, and attend the events ahead!

THE POLISH-AMERICAN ARTS ASSOCIATION OF WASHINGTON, DC, INC.

Editor: Wanda O’Brien-Trefil, Ph.D.

The PAAA Inc is a Non-Profit Organization Charter under US Law c3 since 1966

[www.paaa.us](http://www.paaa.us)

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Layout by Wanda O’Brien-Trefil, Ph.D.

**Annual Chopin Concert at the  
Embassy of the Republic of Poland  
February 12, 2011**

This year's concert juxtaposed the music of Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849) and American composer Samuel Barber (1910-1981), celebrating the bicentennial of Chopin's birth and the centennial of Barber's. The pianist was Lara Downes, who is Artist in Residence at University of California Davis. Lara was born and raised in San Francisco in a musical family; her roots are Eastern European Jewish and Jamaican.

The opening work was Chopin's Nocturne in B-flat minor, Op. 9 no. 1, the first of Chopin's Nocturnes to be published. This was followed by Barber's Nocturne, Op. 33, subtitled "Homage to John Field." The Irishman John Field was Chopin's contemporary, and the first to use the title "nocturne" for a keyboard piece. The pair of Nocturnes created an interesting contrast – Chopin's long, flowing lines of melody juxtaposed with the spiky atonality of Barber's neo-Romantic style.

The centerpiece of the program was Chopin's Sonata in B minor, Op. 58. In the first two movements, Lara's disciplined approach skillfully brought out the counterpoint - the simultaneous sounding of multiple musical lines. The most prominent practitioner of counterpoint was Johann Sebastian Bach, whom Chopin greatly admired. It takes a very clean approach to phrasing and fingering to bring counterpoint out, and Lara certainly succeeded. The soft passages of the sonata's Largo and the Andante were not soft enough for the cameral scope of the Embassy's salon, detracting somewhat from the dramatic effect and full expressive range that Chopin's works should have. The virtuosic finale, marked *Agitato*, was a truly bravura performance. The right-hand descending runs were taken at breakneck speed, but cleanly, with no slurring – each note was plainly distinct and the inner voicing was clearly brought out.



Next on the program were two of Barber's four Excursions for Piano, Op. 20. As in the Nocturne, the atonality added a piquant accent to the music, without harshness. Downes demonstrated her penchant for performing modern music in the spirited variations on the American folk song "The Streets of Laredo," included in the Excursions.

Lara Downes' final number, Chopin's Andante Spianato and Grande Polonaise in E-flat major, was dedicated to Poland's solidarity with Belarus and the Belarusian people in their struggle for democracy. The Andante is a slow, melancholy piece, which was played somewhat too energetically. The ensuing Polonaise was originally written with accompanying orchestral flourishes; it is usually performed, as it was here, with the flourishes transcribed into the keyboard part. Lara did justice to this virtuosic showcase.

PAAA wishes to thank Ms. Malgorzata Szum and Mrs. Krystyna Sikorska of the Cultural Section of the Embassy of the Republic of Poland for their cooperation in organizing and executing this concert.

Ted Mirecki

## ***Wigilia, December 5, 2010***

„Wesołych świąt Bożego Narodzenia! The first star, the Gwiazdka, has appeared in the eastern sky. Let us begin the celebration of the birth of the Christ Child.” With these words of welcome the Wigilia supper commenced at 4:00 at the Embassy of the Republic of Poland. The evening was a true celebration, beginning with a social with a



reception, which established the highly congenial mood that ran throughout the evening. President Tom Payne welcomed the attendees as well as guests from the Cultural Division of the Embassy, Counselor Małgorzata Szum and Krystyna Sikorska, as well as Michał Sikorski and Włodzimierz Sulgostowski from the Consular Section. The assembled listened to Rev, Canon Philip Majka’s blessing of the traditional Polish opłatek. While breaking the opłatek, best wishes were exchanged with many hugs, and established the warmth of a real family celebration. The closeknit atmosphere continued around the

round dinner tables, laden with mushroom soup and creamed herring. Wigilia Chair, Sharon Brzostowski invited all to the buffet table to share pierogi, a variety of fish dishes, fruit compote, and the delicious kutia. After coffee, makowiec, and a wide selection of deserts, everyone was invited to the performance hall for a brief concert and the communal singing of traditional Polish kolędy.

In keeping with the 2010 celebration of Fryderyk Chopin’s birth, the musical program consisted of three art songs by Chopin. Chopin’s vocal music output is small and not nearly as well known as his piano music. Baritone, Józef Surowiec beautifully rendered the songs of Chopin’s youth, accompanied by Dr. Wanda O’Brien-Trefil on the piano. The first song, “Precz z moich oczu” (Out of my sight!) was published in 1829 (possibly 1827) when Chopin was 17 or 19, and in the angst of a teenage infatuation. The second song, “Pierścień” was composed by Chopin for Maria Wodzińska, to whom he proposed marriage in 1836. The third song, “Hulanka,” was translated as “Wild Time” by Dr. O’Brien-Trefil, who announced the history of each



song and its place in the life of Chopin. Transitioning from the secular to the sacred, Surowiec sang “O Holy Night,” after which everyone joined in singing the kolędy. Participation was heartfelt; the words of the kolędy were printed in a souvenir program, the first verse in Polish, and the second in English.



The PAAA owes thanks to the Embassy of the Republic of Poland for hosting this event each year, so that the Wigilia can be held “on Polish ground.” Feeling this closeness to Polish soil makes all the difference to the participants who enjoy a magical evening. Chairperson Sharon Brzostowski deserves kudos for a well-orchestrated event. Truly, the Wigilia was a “food fest” and a “love-in.” Plan on attending this coming December!

Dr. Wanda O’Brien-Trefil

## ***Annual Youth Leadership Conference, June 19-25, 2011***



Atrium of the International Monetary Fund. At center is Dr. Andrzej Raczko, Alternate Executive Director from Poland. Front Left: Patricia Wnek, sponsored by PAAA.

This year, the Youth Leadership Conference (YLC), organized by the American Council for Polish Culture, will be June 19 to 25. It is a week-long program in Washington DC in which young people of Polish descent meet professionals of Polish descent in leadership positions in politics, business, media, academia and arts.

The program is being organized by Irena Mirecki, YLC Chair, and her husband Ted, who together with Janet Beane organized last year's successful conference. The sessions included a visit and lunch at the Embassy of the Republic of Poland; a visit to the Library of Congress where several objects from Poland were displayed (including the first edition of Copernicus' treatise on astronomy); presentations at the Institute of World Politics - a graduate school for training government service and military personnel for leadership positions; a tour of Washington led by a sculptor who pointed out the characteristics of architecture and artworks, including several of his own in prominent places around the capital; visits to the International Monetary Fund to meet with Alternate Executive Directors from Poland; a projection of the film "Nine Days that Changed the World" about Pope John Paul II's first pilgrimage to Poland in 1979; as well as presentations by several speakers on developing leadership qualities and addressing issues facing the Polish-American community. A full report of all sessions is online at [www.polishcultureacpc.org/ylc/ylc-10](http://www.polishcultureacpc.org/ylc/ylc-10).

Efforts are underway to organize a similarly exciting program for this year. The cost of participation is \$500, plus the cost of travel to and from Washington. Housing, travel between conference sessions and one meal per day are provided by the conference. In the past, several organizations have sponsored their members or children of members to the conference. For example, in 2010, PAAA sponsored its top scholarship grant recipient, Patricia Wnek. Participants must be high school graduates as of June 2011, not older than 26, and of Polish descent through at least one grandparent. Application deadline is May 1, 2011. Full details and an application form can be found online at [www.polishcultureacpc.org](http://www.polishcultureacpc.org).



***Please suggest to your organization to sponsor this wonderful opportunity to someone from your group. A trip to the Youth Leadership Conference would make a wonderful graduation gift to a young person graduating from high school or university!***

Irena and Ted Mirecki  
Youth Leadership Conference Chairs

## **Great Polish Scientists:**

### **Ryszard Michalski (1937-2007)**



We are used to thinking of great scientists as men and women who lived centuries ago, so it may come as a surprise to learn that a man who was a member of our own community belongs in those ranks. Many of us remember Dr. Ryszard Michalski as a genial friend and the ‘life of the party.’ Yet he was one of the founders of an important field in computer science—the field of Machine Learning—and the impact of his ideas will influence our society for decades.

Ryszard was born near the town of Lvov which was still part of Poland. He received his undergraduate education at Warsaw Polytechnic and his Masters at Leningrad Polytechnic. He split his doctoral work between the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, where he did his research, and the University of Silesia, where he received his doctorate. Since the 1940s, the University of Illinois has been a major center for computer development, and in 1971 they invited Michalski to come to the US and join their faculty. (Some of us may remember that in the movie “2001: Space Odyssey,” when the computer HAL died, his last words were “I was born in Champaign-Urbana”). In 1988, Ryszard came to George Mason University.

So what is Machine Learning, and why is it important? Machine Learning, a branch of Artificial Intelligence, refers to techniques that allow computers to learn how to modify their own programs in response to the kinds of results they get. In the process, computers look at lots of data and figure out the rules that govern complex systems, even though there may be thousands of variables. Michalski liked to use the analogy of tuning in to a radio station by turning a knob. With limited dials, it’s easy to get good reception. “But what if there are 87+ dials?” he would ask. Only a computer could handle that sort of complexity and sort out the best reception available at any moment.



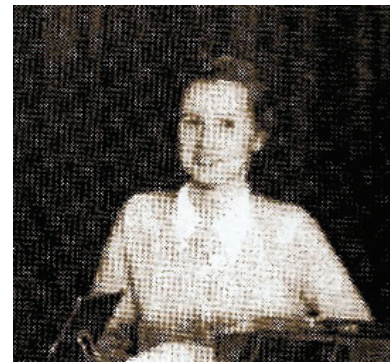
Michalski insisted that the rules his programs generated had to be transparent, so that human beings who saw them could understand what they were. Early in his career he designed programs to deal with complex problems of diagnosis in medicine. His former student Dr. Janusz Wojtusiak, is carrying on Michalski’s research at George Mason University. As scientists move into examining more and more complex systems, who knows what other problems our dear friend’s ideas will address in the future? And all of this from someone most of us knew as a man who played a mean accordion!



Dr. James Trefil, Clarence J. Robinson Professor of Physics, GMU  
In *Are We Unique* (1997) Trefil describes his visit to Michalski’s laboratory at GMU

## ***In Memoriam: Edwina Conrad 1908-2010***

The Polish American Arts Association of Washington DC gratefully acknowledges the outstanding and dedicated service and contributions of Edwina Conrad. She was a Founding Member of the Polish American Arts Association in 1966 and served as its President in 1975-1976 and 1991-1992. Edwina was the originating producer of "Wianki on the Mall," which has been repeated annually, and continues this year. Over the years, this Festival of Wreaths, which displays a part of Polish culture, has been held in front of the Lincoln Memorial, Constitution Gardens, and the US Capitol Building. The symbolism of Polish Americans celebrating their unique culture, presenting their styles, and colors against the background of the United States Capital is beautiful and striking. This was first ethnic event which was funded for many years by the Mayor's Committee to Promote Washington DC. Continuing Edwina's legacy, this year, Wianki on the Mall will be held at the Reflecting Pool in front of the US Capitol Building on June 25th. Edwina was awarded the title of "Honorary Lifetime Member" by the Board of Directors of the PAAA on May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1995.



Edwina Conrad at Catawba College

Edwina Conrad received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Catawba College, Salisbury, N.C., with additional graduate studies in English, Drama and Education at the University of California, Berkeley and The American University, Washington D.C. A major focus of the dramatic arts program at Catawba College, where she attended, was the writing and producing of new plays by the Blue Masque Society and the formal competition for the Playwriting Cup, established in 1929. Edwina Conrad became the first winner in the spring of 1930 with her play "Mariska," and also won the role of Juliet in the play, "Romeo and Juliet."

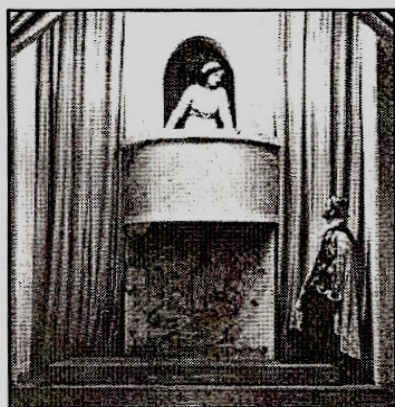
Edwina remained a leader in her lifetime career. She was known for extensive work on the national level with Parent Teacher Associations, and was a founding member of the National Women's Political Caucus. She was Dean of Women and advisor to the Polish Club at Alliance College. Edwina was a member of the National Advisory Board for Women's Rights – Edward Muskie Committee, and involved in long-term planning on the National Council of the Kosciuszko Foundation.

Edwina Conrad Mooney died peacefully in her sleep on October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2010 at the age of 102. It has been honor for us to know, and work with Edwina for so many years. For all this, Edwina, we thank you and salute your memory.

Marianna Eckel  
Wianki on the Mall Festival, Chair

**Donations in Memory of Edwina Conrad should be sent to :**

**PAAA Scholarship Fund  
PO Box 9442  
Washington DC 20016**



"Charles Frank, '33 and Edwina Conrad, '30, in *Romeo and Juliet*, 1930"



**Save the Date! Wianki Festival - June 25, 2011**

Make a wreath and float it in the Reflecting Pool. Hope it floats to the girl you love!

6:00-10:00 pm. Fun Dancing Picnic

**SAVE the Date!**

**General Membership Meeting**

**May 22, 2011 2:00-5:00**

Knights of Columbus Hall - 2nd floor  
5034 Wisconsin Ave. NW  
Washington, DC

