



POLISH AMERICAN ARTS ASSOCIATION of Washington, DC

Spring-Summer 2016

NEWSLETTER

Member of the American Council for Polish Culture, Inc. since 1966

50 Years of PAAA



Celebrating Polish Culture and Traditions in the Nation's Capital

The photo you see at left exemplifies the celebration of an age old Polish custom in the very center of the nation's capital. A brightly clad young *Krakowiak* proudly steps out near the reflecting pool, the peacock plume on his hat aligned with the distant needle of the Washington Monument as he faces the audience gathered on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. He is one of the many dancers and singers, here to perform to the lively

Polish melodies throughout the evening. As the skies begin to darken, dozens of young girls will bring flowery wreaths to the edge of the water, tiny lights among their greenery competing with the rising stars. This is the essence of the Festival of Wreaths or *Wianki*, an event held each June at the National Mall by the Polish American Arts Association (PAAA) to celebrate the old tradition of St. John's Night with throngs of visitors - Polish, American and international - who come from near and far, from different states and from all over the world.

The event is part of the PAAA's mission to promote Polish arts and culture in America. There are other ones, less outwardly showy but giving an opportunity to contemplate the many rich and varied facets of Polish culture: literature, music, theater and visual arts. The annual Chopin Concert presents performances by acclaimed artists of music by Fryderyk Chopin and other Polish composers and benefits the PAAA's Scholarship Program for talented and scholastically accomplished students of Polish descent. Recent general membership meetings featured poets reading their works, presentations on Polish art, a performance by a local Polish theater group, talks on music and musical performances. Each December, a traditional *Wigilia* brings together members with their families and friends to share *opłatek*, partake of delightful Polish food, sing *kolędy* and observe some of the age old holiday customs.

There were special ceremonies to commemorate historical events and place markers that make a lasting record of the accomplishments of Poles in American arts and history. The PAAA Newsletter keeps members informed of all the events and features informative articles on cultural topics.

All this has been going on for half a century since the day when a group of like-minded people got together and established the PAAA. Looking forward to the next fifty years, we will celebrate what has been done thus far and honor those that made it possible with a festive Gala event on September 24 at the Congressional Country Club in Bethesda, Maryland. Please plan to be there to make this important milestone a very special occasion. There is much to celebrate.



Message from the President

Dear fellow PAAA members and friends,

It has been three years now since I started editing this newsletter and it seems like I've done it all, from taking and formatting photographs, through editing and writing articles to putting it all together in a page layout. The only thing I didn't have to worry about was the PAAA President's Message, which always was delivered on time and ready to be placed under the president's photo. With

this issue, I realized that now this has become my job. First, let me say that I feel deeply honored to be given this task. Being named president entails an awesome responsibility but it also holds a promise and opportunity. I thank you for entrusting me with this role and I can only hope to live up to the example of the thirty five extraordinary individuals who have held this office during the PAAA's fifty year history.

This is an exciting year for our organization as we celebrate a half century of our existence. We can be proud of what has been accomplished since that day in 1966, when some twenty people gathered to establish an association "dedicated to creating public awareness of the richness of Polish culture and to supporting greater cooperation and understanding between the United States and Poland in the fields of art, culture and education." This was done over the years with many events such as concerts, art exhibits, lectures, holiday celebrations, showcase festivals such as *Wianki* on the Mall, and a robust scholarship program.

As transitions go, this should be a seamless one. We are fortunate that Tom Payne has agreed to take the position of the First Vice President. Tom and I have worked as a team over the past few years and will continue to do so. We have already discussed some new initiatives and will endeavor to implement them with the help of our hard-working board. Of course, the president and the board can only do so much. In order for our organization to continue its mission, we must look to the membership. Ideally I would like to hear from each one of you to tell me what you expect of the PAAA as it enters its second half century. Also, please send your experiences from the past, your memories and what being a PAAA member means to you. We are all in it together and it's up to all of us to make the future bright, productive and enjoyable as we go about the job of celebrating Polish culture and traditions in the nation's capital.

And now I'd like to ask you one thing. Please come to our 50th Anniversary Gala on September 24 at the Congressional Country Club in Bethesda, Maryland. Gala Chairman, Marianna Eckel, and her committee are hard at work to organize a memorable evening. You have already gotten email announcements, and more details will come from us directly, through Polish Global Village and on posters displayed throughout the metropolitan area and on our website. It is not too early to make reservations. Share emails and make copies of the posters to pass to your friends. Also, consider placing an ad in the Gala Program Book. Let's make our golden anniversary celebration the best ever!

I send you all my best and look forward to seeing you at the Gala and at other PAAA events in the coming year.

Cecilia Larkin

PAAA OFFICERS

President
Cecilia Larkin

1st Vice President
Thomas Payne

2nd Vice President
Dr. Richard Okreglak

Treasurer
Thaddeus Mirecki

Recording Secretary
Irene Sowa

Corresponding Secretary
Vacant

Board of Directors
Janet Beane
Sharon Brzostowski
Bozenna Buda
Dr. Renata Greenspan
Dr. William Klepczynski
Rose Kobylinski

PAAA NEWSLETTER

Editor
Cecilia Larkin

Editorial Assistant
Rose Kobylinski

Reprints are permitted, provided credit is given to the PAAA Newsletter, and a copy is provided to the editor.

Contact
paaanewsletter@gmail.com

The PAAA is a Non-Profit Organization tax exempt under Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)(3) since 1966

New Officers Elected at the PAAA General Membership Meeting on May 22, 2016

Polish Drama Club Presents Famous Poles, Poetry and Song

For the third year, the PAAA General Membership and Election Meeting was held at the historic mansion of the Arts Club of Washington on May 22, 2016. The main items on the agenda included the election of new officers and presentation of scholarships to three outstanding Polish America students. Following reports from President Tom Payne and heads of various committees on the accomplishments of the past year and plans for the future, participants were treated to a mini concert of music by Fryderyk Chopin performed by one of the scholarship winners, pianist Tomasz Sławomir Robak. Tom Payne then presented Tomasz and two other grant recipients, Mary Margaret Donnelly and Małgorzata Dymerska, with scholarship certificates. They were selected from among the applicants by a committee which was headed by Dr. William Klepczynski and included Tom Payne, Janet Beane and Dr. Laura Kafka-Price.

Moving on to the elections, Tom Payne presented the slate of candidates proposed by the election committee - comprising Ted Mirecki, Irene Sowa and Bozenna Buda - and ballots were distributed. The result of the vote was as follows: President - Celia Larkin; 1st Vice President - Tom Payne; 2nd Vice President - Dr. Richard Okreglak; Treasurer - Ted Mirecki; Recording Secretary - Irene Sowa; Members of the Board: Janet Beane, Sharon Brzostowski, Bozenna Buda, Dr. William Klepczynski,

Rose Kobylinski and Renata Greenspan. The position of Corresponding Secretary is currently vacant to be filled later by the board. Immediately following the election, Reverend Canon Phillip Majka officiated at the swearing in ceremony as he has done for many years.

While votes were being counted, meeting participants recessed to the art-filled front parlors of the Arts Club where they enjoyed a wine and cheese reception and spirited conversation.

The afternoon ended with a wonderfully entertaining and inspired performance by the Polish Drama Club under the direction of Dorota Ponikiewska. First, the audience was introduced to three famous Polish women: discoverer of radium, Maria Curie Skłodowska, incarnated by Anna Kajkowska, talked about the difficulties faced by her as a poor student in Paris and then the challenges and triumphs of a scientist who was the first woman to win the Nobel Prize; the renowned Shakespearean actress, Helena Modrzejewska, played by Laura Migasiuk, recalled highlights of her life and successes on American stage; and Nobel Prize winning poet, Wisława Szymborska, whose poetry and persona was brought to life by Dorota Ponikiewska. More poetry was read in Polish and English by the very talented AJ Elkamel, Mirosław Podloch, Anna, Laura and Dorota and then all ended the program with several musical numbers that left everyone smiling and humming Polish melodies.



Reverend Canon Phillip Majka congratulates newly elected PAAA officers and board members: Irene Sowa, Richard Okreglak, Renata Greenspan, Bozenna Buda, Celia Larkin, Rose Kobylinski and Tom Payne.



Polish Drama Club members introduced meeting attendants to famous Polish women and gave a spirited performance of Polish poetry and song. Left to right: AJ Elkamel, Anna Kajkowska, Dorota Ponikiewska, Mirosław Podloch, PAAA President Celia Larkin and Laura Migasiuk

Piotr Gajewski: an Honest Musician of Two Lands

When maestro Piotr Gajewski steps onto the podium and raises his baton, members of the audience can expect to hear the closest approximation of what the composer of the piece about to be played would have wanted them to hear. Asked to describe himself as a musician, the founder and director of the National Philharmonic, uses the word "honest." He feels that as a conductor, his role is to serve the composer, that is, to study and convey the original intention. Of course, he explains, the music of Bach, for example, will not sound today exactly like it did to the audience in the eighteenth century. More powerful keyboard instruments, the fact that modern violin with its metal or synthetic strings requires different playing technique than a Baroque one, plus variants in other instruments and acoustics, make for a different sound. It is up to the conductor not only to reproduce the notes but to ensure that a Bach piece will have the mood and intricate nuance that Bach himself would recognize and be proud of as his own. Based on raves of many music critics, Maestro Gajewski is such a conductor. The Washington Post called him "Immensely talented and insightful conductor, whose standards, taste and sensitivity are impeccable." Buffalo News reported after one of his performances: "His courtly, conservative movements matched the music's mood. A flick of the finger, and a fanfare sounded. He held up his palm, and the music quieted. It was like watching a race car in the hands of a good driver."

Piotr Gajewski's musical training started with piano lessons at age four in his native Poland. His love of music emerged in his family. "My grandfather was a strong pianist, even if he wasn't professional. We would all go to symphony concerts in Warsaw," he says. After immigrating to the United States with his parents when he was ten, he studied at the Preparatory Division of the New England Conservatory, at Carlton College in Minnesota, and at the University of Cincinnati, College Conservatory of Music, where he earned his BM and MM degrees in orchestra conducting. In 1983, he spent the summer at the Tanglewood Music Festival in Massachusetts, where he was awarded a Leonard Bernstein Conducting Fellowship and where his teachers included Leonard Bernstein, Seiji Ozawa, André

Previn, Gunther Schuller, Gustav Meier and Maurice Abravanel. He lived in Savannah, Georgia, where his wife held an administrative position with the local orchestra and in 1984, moved to Maryland where he continues to reside and work. He taught at the American University and Catholic University of America, conducting orchestras there as well as for a short time at George Washington University.



Maestro Piotr Gajewski, founder, artistic director and conductor of the National Philharmonic Orchestra, regularly features Polish composers and performers at the prestigious Strathmore Music Center

It was his parents who pointed out to him the lack of a local orchestra in the area. This sparked an idea for a project and he started by organizing the Montgomery Chamber Orchestra in 1985 and later the National Chamber Orchestra, which eventually joined in 2003 with the Masterworks Chorale and became the National Philharmonic. Since 2005, the orchestra makes its home at the Strathmore Music Center in Bethesda, Maryland. The orchestra performs 10 subscription programs each year, playing 25-30 concerts. Gajewski was described as one of the select group of American conductors who feel equally at home in nearly all musical genres. So the orchestra's repertoire is varied and over the years included music ranging from classical by composers from Mozart and Beethoven to contemporary American like Steven Gerber, Joel Hoffman, Andreas Markis or Peter Ware. Which begs a question: how about Polish composers? The answer is, by all means. Audiences at Strathmore can hear music by Mieczysław Karłowicz, Witold Lutosławski, Henryk Górecki and other Poles. At Gajewski's suggestion, pianist Brian Ganz undertook an ongoing project to play all of Fryderyk Chopin's works at Strathmore. Polish guest artists featured with the National Philharmonic included pianist Piotr

Paleczny, violinist Mariusz Patyra, cellist Dariusz Skoraczewski, conductors Mirosław Jacek Błaszczyk and Michał Dworzyński, and soprano Iwona Sobotka. Polish born mezzo soprano Magdalena Wór is a regular at Strathmore, singing everything, from Bach and Vivaldi to songs by Chopin.

Piotr Gajewski is a sought after guest conductor and has performed with many world orchestras. He travels regularly to Poland where he was recently appointed Guest Conductor of the Silesian Philharmonic. He also performs

with the Warsaw Philharmonic, Kraków Philharmonic and many other important orchestras. Since 2007, he also regularly serves as the only American on the jury of the prestigious Grzegorz Fitelberg International Competition for Conductors.

So is he a Polish musician working in America and introducing Polish classical music to audiences in his adoptive country, or an American who brings music by American composers to his native land? Gajewski says both. He has an active interest in Poland and likes to go back there, mainly to conduct but also to listen and to keep up with old friends in the musical world and meet new ones, some of whom he invites to perform in the US. He includes American composers in his performances and introduces new works to Polish audiences. In 2010, Aaron Copland's orchestral work *Lincoln Portrait* was performed for the first time by the Warsaw Philharmonic. Written in 1942, *Lincoln Portrait* could not be performed in communist Poland because of the text used by the composer, which expressed high ideals of American democracy. After the fall of communism, it took another twenty years to stage a premiere under the direction of Maestro Gajewski with renowned filmmaker Krzysztof Zanussi reading the words of Abraham Lincoln in Polish.

Having spent most of his life in the United States, Gajewski feels perfectly at home here. He has many interests. In addition to his musical degrees, he also has one in math and science. He got a law degree at the Catholic University and passed the bar exams in two states. From 2007-2011, he served on the Rockville City Council. If this were not enough, he also continues to play competitive soccer. No wonder some call him a Renaissance man. Worthy of mention is his commitment to developing young artists and audiences with the ground breaking "All Kids, All Free, All The Time" initiative with the National Philharmonic, as well as summer institutes, competitions and annual concerts for the area second grade students he conducts.

Maestro Gajewski's many honors include Poland's Knight's Cross of the Order of Merit bestowed on him by the President of Poland and a prize at New York's Leopold Stokowski Conducting Competition. The Polish community in the Greater Washington area is proud to have this distinguished and dedicated champion of Polish music and culture in its midst. In 2011, at the convention sponsored by the Polish American Arts Association of Washington, DC, the American Council for Polish Culture recognized Maestro Gajewski with its Cultural Achievement Award. In 2013, he was honored at the annual dinner held by the Washington Division of the Polish American Congress. Later this year, he will receive the Kosciuszko Foundation's 2016 Pioneer Award at the organization's annual Gala Dinner.

Does the Maestro have any special dreams for the future? He confesses that he would love to stage a production of the Stanisław Moniuszko opera *Straszny Dwór* (The Haunted Manor) at Strathmore, perhaps with a diverse cast to show that Polish music can be truly international. This is the kind of dream we should all pursue. Bravo Maestro!

Celia Larkin

2016 PAAA Scholarship Recipients



Tomasz Sławomir Robak is pursuing doctoral studies in music at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore:

"As an undergraduate, I've used my musical knowledge and Polish-language skills to write an essay about the Renaissance composer Mikołaj Gomółka, which won a university wide research prize at Rice University in 2011. Nowadays, I am particularly interested in the music of Karol Szymanowski, as well as in the contributions of Polish-Americans to classical music in the twentieth century. One important collaboration which is already underway is a recording project of a Szymanowski song cycle with Polish-American soprano Laura Kafka-Price."



Mary Margaret Donnelly, is a student at the University of Virginia, majoring in Spanish and English:

"Polish culture has been a significant and influential part of my life, and my mother's family has always cultivated an appreciation for Poland. As active members of the Polish National Alliance, through Lodge 848, my family has participated in countless events - summer picnics, Christmas parties (where I played piano for the children's performances, or acted as a narrator in the Christmas plays), the PNA Spelling Bee (where I went to the 2010 National Competition in Chicago), and attended the PNA Summer Youth Program to engage in Polish language, arts, and culture."



Małgorzata Dymerska, is a medical student at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. She completed undergraduate studies at Harvard University where she was active in the Harvard Polish Society:

"Our group of 25-30 members served as the center of Polish life at Harvard. As a treasurer for the duration of one academic year, and a vice-president of the group for two years, I helped organize events that enabled us to keep strong ties to our culture, to celebrate Polish holidays, and to host distinguished Polish citizens, such as Mr. Radek Sikorski, Mr. Marek Belka and a number of other politicians, authors and musicians, for lectures and performances open to the entire student body."

PAAA Hosts ACPC Board Meeting in Washington, DC

The Polish American Arts Association (PAAA) began its Fiftieth Anniversary year activities by hosting a very successful American Council for Polish Culture (ACPC) Spring Board Meeting on March 11-12. Delegates from affiliate organizations throughout the country gathered at the Marriott Hotel in Rosslyn, Virginia, which offered splendid views of the District of Columbia across the Potomac. Friday evening and Saturday morning were devoted to reports from various ACPC committees and discussions of new business. Among others, Cecilia and Ray Glembocki, co-chairs of the ACPC Polish Perspectives Project, talked about the National Conference for the Social Studies (NCSS) planned for December 2-3, 2016, in Washington DC., where they will again present the exhibit on Poland. Cecilia also presented the book for children *Poland: A Portrait of the Country Through Its Festivals and Traditions*, which is co-sponsored by the PAAA.

Saturday afternoon many of the participants took part in a tour of the St. John Paul II National Shrine. The tour included a visit to the shrine's museum and a mass in the beautiful mosaic-decorated chapel.

The highlight event was the annual PAAA Chopin Concert which took place at the Embassy of the Republic of Poland on Saturday evening. Usually, we hear and are most familiar with the music of Fryderyk Chopin performed on the piano. In the past few years, the PAAA Chopin Concerts featured other instruments as well as the voice. This year, the star instrument was the violin, brilliantly played by the internationally renowned violinist and concertmaster of orchestras on both side of the Atlantic, Krzysztof Zimowski. The first part of the program was devoted to the music of Chopin transcribed for violin, including two nocturnes, two waltzes and three mazurkas. Even those among the audience who feel strongly that only piano can do justice to Chopin's music, were mesmerized by Zimowski's virtuoso renditions of the beloved pieces. Not that the Embassy's venerable piano, once owned by Ignacy Jan Paderewski, did not get a just workout. Polish born pianist and composer, Jarosław Gołombowski, accompanied the violinist and also performed two solo piano pieces, Prelude Op. 28 No 4 and Grande Valse Brillante Op. 34 no 1. Gołombowski's own composition, Melody Appassionato was featured in the second part of the program along with music by Felix Borowski, Henryk Wieniawski, Karol Szymanowski and Nicolo Paganini.

The performance was followed by a reception in the Embassy dining room, during which our out-of-town ACPC guests had an opportunity to mingle and get to know their Washington friends and the Embassy officials and staff. It was an evening to remember. A big thank you goes to the concert co-chairmen, Ted Mirecki and Dr. Wanda O'Brien-Trefil for their outstanding job.



1. Krzysztof Zimowski in concert; 2. PAAA President Tom Payne welcomes guests; 3. Mary Flanagan, Mary Ellen Tyszka, Mary Ann Mlynarski, Cecilia Glembocki and Judi Tompkins;
4. Sheryl Shreckengost and Christopher Siuzdak with friends;
5. Concert Chairman Ted Mirecki and Jarosław Gołombowski;
6. Concert Co-chairman Wanda O'Brien-Trefil, Barbara Lemecha, Henrietta Nowakowski, Consul Piotr Konowrocki, James Trefil, Krzysztof Zimowski and Jarosław Gołombowski;
- 7-8. Guests during concert and reception

Photos: Celia Larkin

More photos at www.paaa.us/photogallery.htm



Wianki 2016

On June 18, the waters of the Reflecting Pool at the Lincoln Memorial bloomed again with reflections of colorful wreaths, woven from fresh flowers by young girls, Polish and those that felt like they were. Lively Polish music, singing and dancing provided the atmosphere for the magical evening when PAAA presented its annual Wianki Festival. Olek Skrypczuk and Richie Popso, known as Szwegrowie or Brothers-in-Law, accompanied Stasia Skrypczuk who sang Polish songs between performances by Ojczyzna and Krakowiaki dance groups from Baltimore. The evening began with singing of the American and Polish national anthems by soprano Laura Kafka-Price. The PAAA President, Celia Larkin welcomed everyone and spoke briefly about the PAAA's fifty years of promoting Polish culture in the nation's capital. She then introduced Marianna Eckel, who over the years has made Wianki the showcase event of our organization. Marianna explained the Wianki tradition and announced the program, which then began with a performance by Ojczyzna of the stately Polonez, with Dennis Klima at the head, followed by more lively dances from different regions of Poland, also performed by the young Krakowiaki group. Director Melissa Kalinowska can be justly proud of her dancers, the sure steps of Eric Hryniewicz, seen on the cover of this issue, or the confident moves of the very young Luke Rybczynski who steals hearts all around. The evening culminated with a procession of girls, clad in white robes, with flowery Wianki on their heads and those in their hands that they placed by the water's edge.

If there is one word that describes the evening, it would be happiness. All present looked like they were having the time of their life, Polish and non-Polish, local and tourist from far away alike. And the legend of young couples meeting and falling in love while celebrating St. John's night? It had happened to Guadalupe and Walter Juras who were back at Wianki this year to celebrate their twentieth anniversary.

If a picture can say a thousand words, you can read 14 thousand of them on this page. To "read" more, you can find additional photos at:

www.paaa.us/photogallery.htm



PAAA 50th Anniversary Gala

**September 24, 2016
6:00PM**

**Congressional Country Club
Bethesda, Maryland**

Dinner, dancing, entertainment

**Music by Brothers-in-Law Band with Stasia Skrypczuk
Performance by Laura Kafka-Price, soprano**

**Watch your mail for the invitation or visit
our website for reservation forms.**

**Please support the PAAA by placing an ad in the
50th Anniversary Gala Program Book.**

Details at: www.paaa.us



Polish-American Arts Association
P.O. Box 9442
Washington, DC 20016

