



POLISH AMERICAN ARTS ASSOCIATION of Washington, DC

Newsletter

Winter 2014

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

My Journey as a Polish American Artist

By Carla Hazard Tomaszewski

My life as a professional artist has been basically divided in two parts – one is my regular paying day job as a graphic designer, and the other, my avocation of creating artwork revolving around my Polish heritage. The inspiration for my Polish work stemmed initially from my maternal grandfather's own hobby of creating woodcarvings. As children we watched *dziadzio* carve figurines of saints, birds, animals, crucifixes, *kapliczki* and nativity sets in his tiny basement workshop. Later, as a trained, college-educated artist, I looked down on his work as amateurishly crude and rough. It was only later, when I started to learn about the folk art of Poland, that I understood that his work was true folk art rooted in the Polish tradition. Learning more, especially as a graphic designer, I also realized that my own natural style and talent for graphics was also rooted in Polish tradition. It wasn't something I was taught, but a part of my genetic makeup!

As Polish Americans, we religiously practiced our holiday traditions, especially for Easter and Christmas. Luckily, since we were artists, we also loved creating Polish folk art associated with these holidays, so we made *pisanki*, *wycinanki*, *gwiazdy*,

dzbanki, etc. We shared our enthusiasm by putting on exhibits and giving workshops and demonstrations all around the District of Columbia, Virginia and Maryland region. For several years we were the featured Polish folk crafters at the Smithsonian's Holiday Celebrations at the Museum of History and Technology in DC.



Through the years I watched many of our local Polish folk artists fade away and die off. It distressed me that it became increasingly difficult to stage festivals and events because our local traditional artists were no more and there was nobody stepping in to fill the void. Pondering this dilemma, I saw an internet article about a Polish folk artist in Minnesota who was awarded a grant to promote and revitalize his art. Thinking this to be a wonderful idea, maybe Maryland's Arts Council might have something like it. Sure enough, it does, in their "Traditions Master/Apprentice" grant program. I drafted an apprentice, college student Alyssa Younger, one of our Polish American Heritage Association scholarship winners who demonstrated her loyal enthusiasm for her own Polish background. We were awarded a grant in 2010-11 to further and preserve the folk art of Polish-styled *pisanki*.

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Message from the President

Greetings fellow members! Since our last newsletter, we have entered the ice age and as I write this message in Washington, DC, we are currently experiencing the “polar vortex”, a euphemism for “it’s darned cold out there!” In Polish, you may describe it as “lodowato”, or “icy cold.” In the midst this cold winter, our spirits were warmed by the celebration of the traditional Wigilia this past December. While our attendance was a bit lower this year, the spirit did not diminish and we took advantage of the situation to celebrate and socialize more intimately, so we are grateful to those involved in the planning and coordination to make it a successful celebration. It is not the venue, but rather the people who attend that make this event so special.

We are moving ahead with a Chopin Concert on February 2, which is soon upon us, so please make your reservations and plans immediately. We are very fortunate, indeed, to have the renowned pianist, Brian Ganz, perform for us in an intimate setting as opposed to a great music hall where he is usually seen. You have already received your invitations and there are additional details about the artist in an article in this newsletter. Remember that this is our main fund-raising event of the year to benefit scholarships for outstanding Polish-American students. With the cost of attending college continuing to outpace the growth of the economy, it is a challenge for many to afford higher education and to avoid amassing considerable financial obligations upon graduation. While our scholarships can only help cover a small portion of a year’s tuition and living expenses, all of our recipients have expressed gratitude for these awards, which can help them with books and other expenses. So please continue your support of this program by attending our event and/or sending us a donation for this particular cause.

Please keep in your prayers our long-standing members, such as Bernadette Wiermanski and Ed Pawlowski, who are battling illnesses; perhaps you can send them a card or make a phone call. Addresses and phone numbers are in the PAAA Directory, which most of you have. And if you know of others who need similar encouragement, please let a Board member know so that we can respond in kind.

I look forward to writing the next Newsletter Message from the President in much better environmental conditions. Until then, have a safe and comfortable winter!

Tom Payne

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My Journey as a Polish American Artist

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This began my journey of rediscovery of the art of *pisanki*; specifically, in my case, the technique of *skrobanie* or scratching out a design on an eggshell with a sharp pointed knife. I learned this technique back in the '70s in Poland from Pan Jerzy Lipka, the foremost expert on folk art in the Opole region. Interestingly, since the grant program included Americans from numerous ethnic backgrounds, our Polish art was given exposure beyond the confines of the Polish community – opening up to a huge new audience. From this new appreciative audience came a folk curator from the Ward Museum of Wildfowl Art at Salisbury State University on Maryland's eastern shore. She was captivated by my goose egg *pisanki*, especially the designs featuring birds, geese and swans, and encouraged me to enter waterfowl art shows.

I've always loved nature, especially birds, and was able to do illustrations in my work for the National Wildlife Federation. This skill transferred over to my *pisanki* work, and now I have an entirely new audience apart from the Polish community – the wildlife art, decoy carving collectors who have their own art shows around the U.S. For the benefit of this non-Polish group, I call my craft "eggshell scrimshaw". I am promoting knowledge and appreciation of Polish style *pisanki* by elevating it to an art form. The eggs I create are unique, even though there are hundreds of fantastic egg artists out there producing. The combination of my drawing skills using the scratching technique, together with the subject matter of wildfowl and florals, is not duplicated by anyone.



Carla Hazard Tomaszewski presented her artwork during the PAAA General Membership Meeting on November 11, 2013. Above: Carla with PAAA President Tom Payne. Right and below: examples of *pisanki*



- Carla's upcoming shows:
- March 23-24, LaSalle Academy Egg & Art Show, Shillington, PA;
 - April 25-27, Ward World Championship Wildfowl Carving Competition & Art Fest, Convention Center, Ocean City, MD;
 - May 23-24, Potomac River Waterfowl Festival, St. Mary's County Fairgrounds, Leonardtown, MD.



Carla's tools include pointed knives, razors, and etching needles. A simple knife blade wrapped in cloth to protect the hand was made for her by a *pisanki* artist in Poland.

Brian Ganz to Perform at PAAA Chopin Concert

The Polish American Arts Association annual Chopin Concert, benefiting the PAAA Scholarship Fund will be held on Sunday, February 2, 2014 at St. Luke's Catholic Parish, 7001 Georgetown Pike, McLean, Virginia. We are fortunate to have Brian Ganz, a renowned pianist with a special affinity for Chopin's music, to perform for us at this event.

Brian, a Maryland native, is a graduate of the Peabody Institute of Johns Hopkins University, where he studied with Leon Fleischer, and is now on the faculty of that institution. He is also the artist-in-residence and member of the piano faculty of St. Mary's College of Maryland. He has appeared and recorded with world-class orchestras, including Washington's National Symphony, the St. Louis Symphony, St. Petersburg Philharmonic, National Philharmonic, Baltimore Symphony, and the City of London Sinfonia, and has performed with such conductors as Mstislav Rostropovich, Leonard Slatkin, Piotr Gajewski and Marin Alsop.

Here is what Brian wrote about his encounter with Chopin's legacy in Poland: "Recently I had the privilege of visiting Poland, the homeland of Chopin, for the very first time. I knew that Chopin was a national treasure, but had not known that he is THE national treasure. There are picture of him everywhere, sometimes with no caption of any kind. He is truly the spirit of his country. The trip was very moving to me, and intensified my connection with the man and his music."



According to the *Washington Post*, "There isn't much about Chopin that Brian Ganz doesn't know. The pianist has explored the nocturnes, the etudes, the sonatas and concertos and the rest in concerts, master classes and recordings for years now. His delight and wonder in this music seem to grow, apparently without bounds, as time goes on."

In 2010, the bicentennial year of Chopin's birth, Brian embarked on a decade-long project to perform all of the works of Fryderyk Chopin at the Music Center at Strathmore. Works for piano and orchestra will be performed with the National Philharmonic. The next

concerts in the series are scheduled for February 22 and March 8 and 9, 2014. The February concert features Chopin's solo piano works. The March program includes, in addition to Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 1, Moniuszko's "Fairy Tale" Overture, and Mozart's Symphony No. 39, under the direction of conductor Michał Dworzynski, the Principal Conductor and Artistic Director of the Kraków Philharmonic. Please support the Brian Ganz Chopin project by attending these events. Tickets can be purchased at www.strathmore.org

The PAAA Chopin Concert presents a rare opportunity for our members to hear the great pianist in an intimate setting and to be able to meet and talk with him in person. We are indeed fortunate that Brian has found time in his busy schedule to play for us in support of the PAAA Scholarship Fund.

Ted Mirecki, Chopin Concert Chairman

Principal Scholarship Donor: Leonard Karpinski

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Wałęsa: Człowiek z Nadziei

Film review by Laura Kafka-Price, PhD



Twenty-four years after his visit to Washington as the first freely elected President of Poland after the fall of communism, and a historic speech at the U.S. Congress, Lech Wałęsa returned for the screening of the film depicting his rise to that position and the events that led to it. The film, *Wałęsa: Człowiek z Nadziei* or *Wałęsa: Man of Hope* directed by the legendary director, Andrzej Wajda, was presented on December 4, 2013 at the U. S. Capitol Visitor Center under the auspices of the Ambassador of the Republic of Poland, Ryszard Schnepf. The screening was attended by numerous dignitaries and special guests, including U.S. Senator Barbara Mikulski, Congressman John Dingell, former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, and former Senator Chris Dodd, the Chairman and CEO of the Motion Picture Association of America. Also present was the actor who portrayed Wałęsa in the film, Robert Więckiewicz.

Andrzej Wajda's film depicts an extraordinary story of an extraordinary man. It traces the historic events of the early 1970s in Poland and the start of workers' protests in Gdańsk and moves to the events of a decade later when Wałęsa, an electrician at the Gdansk shipyard, shows himself a natural born leader in spearheading the strikes that led to the Solidarity Trade Union Movement and ultimately freed Poland from its communist Soviet Union shackles via peaceful resolution. The device Wajda uses to frame the story is the 1981 interview with Wałęsa by Italian

journalist Oriana Fallaci, played by Maria Rosaria Omaggio, a few months before martial law was declared and he was arrested by the communist authorities. The Wałęsa-Fallaci interview, to which Wajda comes back throughout the movie, powerfully underscores the unrelenting advocacy Wałęsa has for his fellow countrymen and helps us to understand his now famous slogan, "*Nie chcem ale muszem*" – "I don't want to, but I have to." Robert Więckiewicz excels at convincingly portraying Wałęsa with a first-rate performance. In certain scenes, Więckiewicz's face was superimposed on Wałęsa's when actual historic footage was used in the film resulting in a visually seamless portrayal of the film's main character. Equally excellent is Agnieszka Grochowska in the role of Danuta Wałęsa, the wife and mother of Wałęsa's eight children. The film stops well before Wałęsa becomes the President of Poland in 1990, but it does include the occasion of his wife, Danuta, traveling to Oslo in 1983 to accept the Nobel Peace Prize on her husband's behalf and enduring a strip-search upon reentry into Poland. There is a poignant moment in the film when she closes the case housing the Nobel Peace Prize medal before removing her undergarments as though not wishing to expose the award to the disgrace of this demeaning and unnecessary event.

Wałęsa: Man of Hope was Poland's official entry for the 2014 Academy Awards as the Best Foreign Film. Unfortunately, it did not receive a nomination. In 1983, when the film *Gandhi* won the Oscar as the Best Film, Polish director Zbigniew Rybczyński, also received the top award for his short film *Tango*. His acceptance speech was very succinct: "...I made this short film so I will speak very short. I feel very honored to receive this award. I am dreaming that one day I will speak longer from this place... on the occasion of the film like *Gandhi*, which will portray Lech Wałęsa in solidarity." It would have been prophetic for Andrzej Wajda to stand on the stage in March 2014 to accept an Oscar for a film about Wałęsa. The film is certainly top notch and well deserving of all the accolades it is receiving throughout the world.

To view a five-minute video from the Capitol Hill event on December 4, 2013, posted by the Polish Embassy, go to YouTube link: <http://tinyurl.com/lrlbpet>. The familiar voice you hear singing *Sto Lat* at the end of the video is that of the author of this review.

Polish Student Organization at American University



The Polish Community around the Washington, DC, area is very active, with a number of well established organizations, including our own Polish American Arts Association, nearing its fiftieth anniversary in a couple of years. All of them try to engage the younger generation in their activities, however, until recently, there was no organization here geared specifically towards students and young adults. A few years ago, a young student, Matthew Stefanski, arrived from Bayonne, NJ, to study at the American University. He had grown up in a home steeped in Polish tradition and was active in local Polonia. At Bayonne High School, he was the President of the Polish Cultural Society. In Washington, he sought to get involved in maintaining a link to Polish culture. He found a vibrant Polish American community but a link to Polish American youth simply did not exist. The summer after his first year of studies, Matthew attended the Quo Vadis III Conference in Toronto, Canada. The conference, an annual congregation of college and graduate students as well as young professionals aimed at creating a sustainable world-wide network of young members of the Polish Diaspora, empowered him to return to Washington and take concrete steps towards forming an organization for Polish American students. He met Kendra Kostek who had just returned from studying in Poland and together they founded the American University Polish Student Organization (AU PSO) in January 2012.

As the AU PSO passes its second year mark, it can be proud of what it has accomplished in such short a time. We asked Matthew to describe the organization and below is what he told us about his vision for AU PSO, its membership, activities and future plans. It should be noted that Matthew's impressive scholastic achievements won him a PAAA Scholarship Grant in 2011.

"Our vision behind PSO had always been two-fold; to provide Polish and Polish American students on campus with a community through which they can foster their culture and language, as well as a to serve as ambassadors of our ancestral homeland and inform the AU student body on topics relating to Poland. The events we hold range from movie screenings and hosting guest speakers, to networking opportunities or attending events around town together. One of our activities is the "Kawka Hour" networking series in which we host candid conversations with Polish professors on campus. We have held movie screenings, such as *9 Days that Changed the World* and *Afghanistan: Polish Soldiers*, the latter co-hosted with the Polish Embassy and the Kościuszko Foundation. We also hosted guest speakers who spoke on topics relating to Poland, among them, the then-Polish Military Attache to the US, Major General Andrzej Falkowski, Foreign Service Officer and AU alum, Thaddeus Kontek, and former Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Europe and NATO Policy, Ian Brzezinski. We held an event honoring Wisława Szymborska, the Polish poet who won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1996. (Note: The event was covered in the Fall 2012 edition of the PAAA Newsletter.)

"Although a relatively new member of the Polonia community, in Washington, DC, we have kept ourselves busy and even though our core membership remains modest, our activities grow. We have a fantastic, young executive board, ready to continue the great work AU PSO is doing. We have an exciting semester ahead filled with great events that we look forward to hosting."

AU PSO membership is open to all students at AU, regardless of ethnicity; and students from other universities are welcome to attend the organization's activities. Follow them on [facebook.com/aupso](https://www.facebook.com/aupso) or contact psoeboard@gmail.com.



*Top: AU PSO Eboard
Left to right: Matthew Stefanski, President;
Ania Skinner, Vice President;
Andrew Arrington, Secretary;
Monika Gasiorek, Treasurer.*

Left: AU PSO members celebrating Polish Independence Day at the Polish Embassy;

Right: Members and friends laying flowers at the foot of the Pulaski monument to commemorate Veterans Day and Polish Independence Day



Wigilia 2013

The PAAA 2013 Wigilia celebration was held on Saturday December 7, 2013 in the intimate setting of the Columbus Club in Arlington. Tables were lit with tea lights and adorned with elegant evergreen and Christmas ornament centerpieces donated by PAAA member Eve Marie Szczepanski. Each setting included a printed program, and hand-made angel ornaments made by Sharon Brzostowski for guests to take home. Treasurer Ted Mirecki greeted arriving members and guests.

The meal began with the sharing of *Oplątek*, blessed by Father Majka, by all present who circulated among the tables to extend special wishes to their friends for a happy Christmas and good fortune in the coming year. The meatless Wigilia meal, prepared by the Club staff, included such traditional Polish delicacies as pickled herring, mushroom soup, noodles with poppy seeds, pierogi, fish and rice. For dessert, there were little *Pierniczki*, honey spice cookies, and *Makowiec*, a poppy seed cake, provided by Pani Krystyna Ahrens of Kielbasa Factory in Rockville, as well as *Sernik*, a cheesecake, and fruit.

The evening was culminated by a musical program during which Matthew Waskiewicz, a 2013 PAAA Scholarship recipient, performed several trumpet solos that included the music of Guillaume Balay, Adolphe Adam, George Frederick Handel, as well as traditional Christmas music. Matt's performance was followed by everyone joining in the singing of *Kolędy*, led by the wonderful singer Stasia Skrypczuk, accompanied by her husband Olek on violin, both in colorful Polish folk costumes acquired by them during their most recent trip to Poland.

To top things off, a number of lucky guests took home prizes, provided by PAAA board members, from a raffle expertly handled by Sharon Brzostowski and Ben Filipczyk. The Wigilia Chairman, Marya Pickering, wants to thank the Wigilia Committee for their hard work, which contributed to the very enjoyable evening for everyone: Sharon Brzostowski, Marianna Eckel, Celia Larkin, Ted Mirecki, and Dr. Wanda O'Brien-Trefil, who organized the musical program.



Wigilia Chairman, Marya Pickering, with Eve Marie Szczepanski and PAAA President Tom Payne



2nd Lt. Justin James Rojek, on his way to new posting, came to Wigilia at the invitation of Alice Laning. They are chatting with Stasia and Olek Skrypczuk.



Following a performance of trumpet solos by Matthew Waskiewicz, guests joined Stasia and Olek Skrypczuk in singing of *Kolędy*

Upcoming Events

Chopin Concert

Benefiting the PAAA Scholarship Fund

Sunday, February 2, 2014 at 4:00 PM at St. Luke's Catholic Parish in McLean

Brian Ganz, Piano

See article on page 4 for details. For information and tickets call: 703-241-1149

PAAA General Membership and Election Meeting

Sunday, May 4, 2014. Location and speaker to be determined.

Wianki

Annual celebration of Polish traditions of St. John's night with dancing, singing and making of wreaths. On the National Mall, Saturday, June 22, 2014

Please remember to renew your PAAA Membership.

Polish-American Arts Association
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