



POLISH AMERICAN ARTS ASSOCIATION of Washington, DC

Winter 2019

NEWSLETTER

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

Year of Moniuszko

Celebrating the 200th Birthday of the Great Polish Composer

By Laura Kafka-Price

This year we celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of Stanisław Moniuszko, one of Poland's leading composers of the 19th-century. He is well-known for his operas and art songs beloved for their delightful melodies and patriotic folk themes. He is credited with successfully developing a Polish national opera. *Halka* and *Straszny dwór* (*The Haunted Manor*) continue to be revered and performed today.

Moniuszko was born on May 5, 1819 into a Polish *szlachta* noble family of land owners in Ubiel, in the province of Minsk (present day Belarus) that was formerly part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The area was annexed by Russia as the Minsk Region during the second partition of Polish territory in 1793. His father Czesław, who had served as an officer in Napoleon's army, was a celebrated poet and painter and his mother Elżbieta, was a talented amateur pianist who gave Stanisław his first piano lessons at the age of four. In 1827, the family moved to Warsaw where young Stanisław began lessons with August Freyer who studied with Józef Elsner at the Warsaw Conservatory along with Fryderyk Chopin.

In the summer of 1830, the Moniuszko family returned to Minsk due to growing financial pressures. Stanisław continued his studies with Dominik Stefanowicz, conductor of the local theater orchestra, and composed his first operetta. In 1834, Moniuszko went to Berlin where he enrolled in the Berlin *Singakademie* in 1837. It is quite likely that his parents sent him to Berlin instead of Moscow or St. Petersburg to further his musical studies to avoid the

growing Russian influence on formal education. His studies included choral conducting and staging theatrical works. The young composer widened his knowledge of opera hearing new works by Carl Maria von Weber, Heinrich Marschner and Albert Lortzing at the court opera. He also

had an early and unexpected success with three songs he composed to poems by the great Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz launching his compositional career in 1838 at the age of nineteen. It was during this time that he composed his first notable stage work, the operetta, *Nocleg w Apenninach* (*A Night in the Apennines*) and two string quartets.

In 1839, at the age of twenty, he went to Vilnius to marry Aleksandra Müller. There Moniuszko was an organist, private piano teacher, and occasional conductor of the theater orchestra. Stanisław and Aleksandra had ten children. The composer was an integral part of life in Vilnius and the surrounding area where he staged large choral works and conducted

orchestral performances. He became acquainted with the novelist Józef Ignacy Kraszewski and playwright-satirist Aleksander Fredro, which led to the composition of several operettas, including his most outstanding, *Loteria* (*The Lottery*) in 1843 for the Amateur Opera Society in Vilnius that was also performed in Warsaw three years later. While in Vilnius he also composed 267 songs published in six volumes in *Śpiewnik domowy* (*Home Song Book*) from 1843-59. The second six volumes of 93 songs were published posthumously in Warsaw for a total of 360 songs in all.



With its story of love, betrayal and sacrifice, scenes depicting the lives of the Polish nobility and highlanders, and highly melodic, deeply lyrical music, Moniuszko's Halka is part of the canon of Polish national operas.

Continued on page 7



Message from the President

Dear fellow PAAA members and friends,

You will notice on the cover and throughout this issue of the newsletter, music is its main theme. What better way to celebrate the bicentennial of the birth of the great composer Stanisław Moniuszko, creator of operas, songs, and a broad body of other music, than to take a closer look at the musicians in our midst. We live in the time when music is readily accessible to everyone twenty-four hours a day. And not just accessible when we want to hear it, but too often imposed upon us to the point where we can't get

away from it. Music at its best and music at its not so very good. There is always something playing in the store when we shop, in the elevator, on the street and in our own homes, where the sound even from a favorite music station, soon becomes just background noise. It stands to reason that to really enjoy music, it is best to hear it live in a setting separate from daily distractions. We are fortunate in our area to have many opportunities to hear live concerts performed by top-notch artists. For those who feel affinity to Polish music, it is especially gratifying to have musicians among us who can bring it to us in live performances right here at our doorsteps. We are so proud that quite a few of them are members of the PAAA. We are grateful for conductor Piotr Gajewski for establishing the National Philharmonic and including Polish composers and Polish performers in its repertoire; for pianist Brian Ganz for championing the music of Fryderyk Chopin; for singers from soprano Laura Kafka-Price to mezzo-soprano Magdalena Wór to our recent young scholarship winner, tenor David Cook, who is taking steps on stage with a local opera company.

Then there is Martin Labazevitch who will play at our Chopin Concert on March 24. Not only is he an excellent pianist but a promoter of music among the very young as you can see in the article on page three.

We have heard the highly talented young violinist Kinga Augustyn in Baltimore earlier this year and now await her appearance at the end of March at the Kosciuszko Foundation. The PAAA had supported financially the release of two of her recordings and you can see from the article by Ted Mirecki that she is worth watching as her career grows.

There are many other examples of the talent among us that are too numerous to mention. We have Stasia and Olek Skrypczuk who entertain us regularly at various events, especially the *Wianki* Festival in June. PAAA member, pianist Alvin Smithson has been part of our *Wigilia* celebration several times and performed as accompanist at our membership meetings; it was exciting last December to hear his own composition played for the first time before its recording on a CD hits international radio waves. Of our recent scholarship winners, pianist Tomasz Robak performed at our Chopin Concert in 2017 and is now studying in Poland on a Fulbright scholarship. We will again hear violinist Christopher Jasiewicz at an upcoming membership meeting. We look forward to our May 5 membership meeting where soprano Laura Kafka-Price, accompanied by pianist Alvin Smithson, will sing the premiere of a new composition, *Szklana góra* (Glass Mountain), an art song for voice and piano by Alexandria composer Dr. Sal Ferrantelli to the poetry of Lidia Kosk.

I think we can say with pride that music is a great part of what the PAAA is made of. So come to the Chopin Concert on March 24, membership meeting on May 5, and *Wianki* on June 29, where we will be part of the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. Let the music play!

Celia Larkin

PAAA OFFICERS

President

Cecilia Larkin

1st Vice President

Thomas Payne

2nd Vice President

Rose Kobylinski

Treasurer

Thaddeus Mirecki

Recording Secretary

Mary Beth Sowa

Corresponding Secretary

Vacant

Board of Directors

Honorary Board Member:

Piotr Gajewski

Artistic Advisor:

Laura Kafka-Price

Sharon Brzostowski

Bozenna Buda

Cecilia Glembocki

Gloria Klepczynski

William Klepczynski

Eve Marie Szczepanski

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

PAAA Chopin Concert

The Polish American Arts Association annual Chopin Concert, benefiting the PAAA Scholarship Fund will be held on March 24, 2019 at the Arts Club of Washington. This year, the featured performer is Martin Labazevitch known to many of us from his frequent performances in our area at Kosciuszko Foundation, the Polish Embassy and other venues. Mr. Labazevitch has performed throughout the world, appearing in many concert halls and festivals in Poland, Ukraine, Finland, Germany, Austria, Italy, Spain, Israel, Japan, South Korea and the United States. He is a recipient of many awards and recognitions in piano competitions in the U.S., Spain and Japan as well as recipient of the Honorary Ambassador Award in Stalowa Wola, Poland, Rina Menashe Award in Israel, Kosciuszko Foundation Award in New York as well as the Harold Bauer Award for the most promising pianist at the Manhattan School of Music.



*Martin Labazevitch,
featured pianist at the
PAAA Chopin Concert*

Born in Poland, Mr. Labazevitch studied at the Odessa Conservatory in Ukraine before immigrating to the United States, and obtaining scholarship to study at the Manhattan School of Music. He pursued his doctoral studies in Washington, DC, and

on January 31 of this year, performed his doctorate piano recital at the Catholic University of America.

Enthusiastic educator, Mr. Labazevitch shares passion for music with his students at the Levine School of Music in Washington, DC. Along with his career as a performer and a pedagogue, he is also working towards bringing high caliber piano art to the island of Puerto Rico by co-directing Puerto Piano, the Puerto Rico International Piano Festival, currently in its fourth edition (www.puertopiano.org). In addition to that, in 2018 Mr. Labazevitch, together with the Kosciuszko Foundation in Washington, DC, founded the Chopin Competition for Young Pianists and in 2019, the Chopin Piano Academy (www.chopincompetitiondc.org). Both events bring top world class musicians to Washington, DC, as jurors and teachers for the young aspiring pianists. So far, the roster of artists includes Piotr Paleczny, John O'Connor, Jeffrey Swan, Jose Ramos Santana, Stanislav Khristenko and Krzysztof Jablonski. The students, who have attended the competition and the master classes, came from all over the United States and top music institutions, such as Manhattan School of Music, New York University and the Juilliard School of Music.

Celebrating Maestro Piotr Gajewski's 60th Birthday

And His Passion, the National Philharmonic



Of late, Maestro Piotr Gajewski, Founding Director of the National Philharmonic, has been in a celebratory mode. From last June's presentation of a magnificent concert at the Music Center at Strathmore to celebrate the centennial of Poland's regaining independence, to concerts celebrating the 100th anniversary of the birth of his one-time mentor, renowned conductor and composer, Leonard Bernstein, Gajewski brings us the best in music of masters old and new, including a good offering of Polish composers and performers. It was at Gajewski's suggestion ten years ago that pianist Brian Ganz undertook to play all works ever composed by Fryderyk Chopin and the celebration continued last February with the performance of Chopin's songs, some little known, beautifully sung by mezzo-soprano Magdalena Wór.

So now is the time to celebrate the Maestro himself, who in January marked his 60th birthday. To mark this milestone, National Philharmonic friends, current and former Board members will match up to \$60,000 in donations in honor of Maestro Gajewski's 60th birthday and his contributions to classical music in our community. New and increased donations in honor of the campaign will be matched dollar for dollar through June 30th, 2019.

As founder of the National Philharmonic, Maestro Gajewski established two very important initiatives for the community: ALL KIDS, ALL FREE, ALL THE TIME and the 2nd Grader Concerts in partnership with the Music Center at Strathmore and Montgomery County Public Schools. Over the years, these programs have inspired more than 480,000 children with classical music in our community.

The Birthday Campaign will ensure that Maestro Gajewski's legacy continues for generations to come. Birthday wishes and campaign contributions can be made by going to: <https://www.nationalphilharmonic.org/birthday-fund/>

The PAAA is proud to have Maestro Gajewski as an Honorary Board Member and happy to have his valuable advice on ways to celebrate Polish music. STO LAT MISTRZU!

Kinga Augustyn: Growing Up with a Violin

By Ted Mirecki

In November of 2018 I sat down with violinist Kinga Augustyn at a coffee shop in Manhattan, where she lives, for an interview about her art.

Kinga grew up in a musical family in Wrocław, Poland. Her father was a bassoonist with the Wrocław Opera Orchestra, her mother Mariola is a spinto soprano. Kinga taught herself to read music and play it on the piano at age three, before she could read words!

"It is kind of a mystery how I figured out how to read music at that age," Kinga said. "Possibly the keys somehow got marked by my mom or dad. After all, I was surrounded by music all the time. My father also played the piano (though his main instrument was bassoon). My mom sang at home, checking her intonation at the piano... She says music just always came naturally to me. My brother's piano teacher wanted me to major in piano because I was just good at it but my heart has always been with the violin. On a separate note, my mom wanted me to be an opera singer, but that also was not that appealing to me. Just the violin."

Kinga admits that she did enjoy performing songs as a child – she was a born stage personality. She started formal violin lessons at an early age with a fraction-sized instrument, then as a teenager traveled to Germany every other week for serious study, living with a pastor's family in Hamburg. Her intention was to remain there to embark on a solo career, but a stalking incident caused her to return to Poland.

Kinga sent an application to the Juilliard School of Music in Manhattan, and travelled there for an audition. Despite arriving ill, with a high fever, she aced the audition and was accepted to this most prestigious educator of musicians. After obtaining bachelor's and master's degrees from Juilliard, she completed a doctorate in performance at Stony Brook University in New York. Instead of a doctoral dissertation, that school required a series of smaller

projects on various musical topics and Kinga concentrated on music by Polish composers.

Initially, it was her intention to complete her studies in the United States and return to Poland, but as she started to build a professional career here, performing as a solo and chamber artist and soloist with orchestras in the United States (including at the Carnegie Hall), Europe and Asia, she felt increasingly at home in America. Although now firmly established as a resident American, she travels often to Poland to perform and visit her mother (her father tragically died when Kinga was quite young – she barely remembers him; her younger brother, a jazz guitarist, lives in Germany). She is trilingual: fluent in English and Polish, and refreshing her German whenever she visits that country.

Today, Kinga Augustyn is an in-demand performer, teacher and an advocate of new music. She premieres and records new works, oftentimes written especially for her (at least ten at last count). Most recently, her interests lie in researching female composers, and she has been collaborating with the New York Women Composers organization.

But Kinga also champions the classics. She has twice recorded the complete set of Paganini's 24 Caprices for solo violin, arguably the supreme virtuosic test on that instrument. One of her ongoing projects is titled "Bach in NYC," which is a cycle of performances of the three Sonatas and three Partitas for solo violin by Johann Sebastian Bach, recorded on video to be posted on YouTube. "No violinist has done videos of all six of them – everyone does just audio," Kinga said. "I have always thought that Bach sounds best in church acoustics. I grew up hearing lots of music in Catholic churches, as well as in orthodox churches, where my mom often sang. At first I thought I wanted to do my Bach project solely in beautiful Catholic churches but then I realized that it didn't make



Kinga Augustyn has always wanted to be a violinist: "My brother's piano teacher wanted me to major in piano because I was just good at it but my heart has always been with the violin. My mom wanted me to be an opera singer, but that also was not that appealing to me.

Just the violin."

Kinga as a little girl with her first violin at left and as an accomplished and admired musician at right.



sense since Bach was Lutheran. Both Christian but not the same. Then I decided to add other religions to the project. I have not been able to secure a mosque but I do have a synagogue. The various religious venues in my project symbolize unity, which would be so nice to have in today's world."

Not everything always goes smoothly: "It is very exciting but it has its ups and downs. Dealing with noise has been tricky. I am often competing with cars racing outside the churches, where I perform and record. And the cars obviously win. As a result, I oftentimes have to make a decision to either repeat a whole movement or leave some noise in. It seems like I aim for high quality performances in places surrounded by noise. Well, that's NYC!"

PAAA has had the honor of financially contributing to the release of two of her recordings: violin concertos by Mendelssohn and Bruch, and a forthcoming disk of modern violin works, including many by Polish composers. But, Kinga says: "CD recordings are not money makers. We, the performers, make recordings because a) we want the music to be heard, and b) we want to be heard."

So, let the music and the music-makers be heard! Visit www.kingaaugustyn.com for listing of her recordings and to listen to her play excerpts from her favorite violin compositions.

Audiences in our area had the opportunity to hear Kinga Augustyn perform in Baltimore earlier this year and now she is scheduled to make an appearance in concert at the Kosciuszko Foundation at the end of March. Please see below ad for details.

Sunday, March 31st at 5 pm

Kinga Augustyn

Violin Recital

The Kosciuszko Foundation

**2025 O Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036**

TICKETS:

General Audience \$30

KF Members \$25

RSVP: kfdc@thekf.org

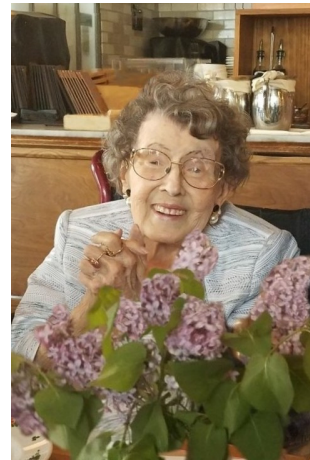
Reserve your tickets soon! Space is limited!

Light refreshments will be served.

Remembrance

Verna Lopatkiewicz

Past President Started the PAAA Scholarship Program



Of PAAA members and officers who will be remembered for making a lasting impact on the Polish American Arts Association, few can equal Verna Lopatkiewicz. For years, she was involved in every facet of our organization's life. And what involvement it was! She felt strongly about encouraging young people to become part of the organization, starting in her own family. Two of her sons, Stefan and Theodore (Ted), became the youngest presidents of the PAAA in 1978 and 1982 respectively. As president herself in 1998-99, she has many accomplishments to her credit, one of the most important being the inauguration of the scholarship program which continues as a key legacy of the PAAA. Her active involvement extended to the national level. She served as American Council for Polish Culture Recording Secretary for several years and in 1995, chaired the annual ACPC Convention in Las Vegas. She received the ACPC Founders Award in 1997.

Verna Lopatkiewicz was born in 1923 in Wilkes-Barre, PA, to Mary Mrozowski, and Inaldigo Sugaroff (Ossetian immigrant and World War I veteran). After graduating high school, she came to Washington, DC, to work in the war effort. She worked for the Navy Department editing films of the conflict for the news reels in movie theaters. During that time, she met Theodore Lopatkiewicz and they were married in 1943 in Shenandoah, PA. In 1949, Theodore was accepted to the Foreign Service as a consular officer. Verna followed him to posts in Warsaw, Vienna, Stuttgart, Paris, Mexico City, Kingston, Jamaica, Buenos Aires, and finally Poznań, Poland. After retirement, they lived for three years in Buenos Aires and then moved to Florida where they founded the Polish Arts Club of Orlando, which became an affiliate of the ACPC. In 1988, they moved to Virginia, where they joined the PAAA.

Verna died on February 26, 2019. In addition to Stefan and Ted, she is survived by children Karol and Viki, grandchildren Tasha and Seth and great grandchildren Ashley, Rachel, Emily and Ethan. She will rest next to her husband at St. Valentine's Polish National Catholic Church Cemetery in Philadelphia.

To honor Verna's devotion to the PAAA and faith in our youth, the family suggests that donations be made in her memory to the PAAA Scholarship Fund. Contribution in Verna's honor can be made by sending checks payable to PAAA to: Mr. Ted Mirecki, 900 N. Taylor St, No 617, Arlington, VA 22203.

PANA Wigilia 2018

The Polish American Arts Association of Washington, DC, members and friends enjoyed a traditional Polish *Wigilia*, held on December 9, 2018, at the Arts Club of Washington. As custom requires, there was sharing of *opłatek* blessed by Father Philip Majka, exchanging of wishes, and the traditional array of delicious Polish dishes, starting with barszcz with uszka and herring salad, and ending with poppy seed cake and dried fruit compote. Dinner was followed by a performance of Polish and American Christmas songs by tenor David Cook, accompanied by pianist Alvin Smithson who also treated the audience to one of his own compositions called *Thunder Canyon*. This was followed by *kołędy* singing by all, led by Stasia Skrypczuk with her husband Olek playing the violin. Young soprano Rosalinda Sherman, Laura Kafka-Price and Celia Larkin joined in with their separate *kołędy* renditions. The atmosphere of the evening can be seen in the photos shown here, with more to be posted on our website. Thank you to all who contributed to making this a truly enjoyable evening in traditional Polish atmosphere.

Photos: Dominik Mikołajczyk



Stanisław Moniuszko

Continued from page 1

Moniuszko's visit to Warsaw in 1846 was significant. There he met Polish music ethnographer Henryk Oskar Kolberg and the poet Włodzimierz Wolski, the future librettist of *Halka* and *Hrabina* (*The Countess*). The visit ignited the fire within him to compose a larger stage work, and he set out to work on *Halka* almost immediately. A two-act concert version of *Halka* was presented in Vilnius in 1848 and a fully staged production, augmented to four acts, was offered in Warsaw six years later and became an overnight sensation. Although the composer was already enjoying recognition in St Petersburg, *Halka* made him a national celebrity. He departed on a European tour meeting Bedřich Smetana in Prague and Franz Liszt in Weimar before arriving in Paris where he composed *Flis* (*The Raftsmen*), a one-act opera. Upon his return to Poland he accepted the post of director of Polish productions at the *Teatr Wielki* (*Polish National Opera*) and began to compose *Hrabina*. He again enjoyed great success with the premiers of these two works in 1858 and 1860. He collaborated with Chęciński on *Verbum nobile* and began working with him on *Straszny dwór* in 1861. The political climate took a decidedly unfortunate turn with the 1863 insurrection and Moniuszko lost his post. His only source of income was as professor of choral conducting at the newly founded Music Institute (later to become a reestablished Warsaw Conservatory). Nevertheless, Moniuszko persevered and completed *Straszny dwór* in 1864. The censorship in Warsaw in the aftermath of the

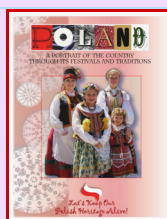
insurrection was exceedingly high which led to the withdrawal of the opera after only three performances at the *Teatr Wielki* in 1865.

Moniuszko died of a heart attack in Warsaw on June 4, 1872. Despite his many other compositions such as the masses, cantatas, orchestral works, chamber music, a substantial body of piano music, and a published textbook on harmony, Stanisław Moniuszko will first and foremost be remembered as the creator of Polish national opera and the composer of enormously popular Polish songs. He employed the rhythms of Poland's national dances in his works: the *polonaise*, *mazurka*, and *krakowiak* and stirred in the hearts of his fellow Poles a deeply resonating connection to the homeland; a connection during a time in Poland's history that deeply needed to be expressed. Moniuszko's music continues to resonate in our hearts today with its engaging melodies, the composer's choice of texts, and the quality of his compositions. His musical endeavors were clear when he stated in an issue of *Tygodnik Petersburski* on September 12, 1842 that: "I tried to select verses from our best poets...being of the conviction that these poetic works show the greatest national character and color...and that which is national or local, that



*Stanisław Moniuszko
conducting the Warsaw Musical
Society: lithograph from
'Biesiada literacka',
no. 36 (1892).*

which is an echo of our childhood memories, will never cease to please the inhabitants of the land on which they were born and raised."



POLAND - A Portrait of the Country Through its Festivals and Traditions, a children's book published by the Polish American Arts Association of Washington, DC., is a great gift for your family and friends. It is a resource for children, their teachers and parents to help them learn about the customs and traditions of Poland. It is being distributed to various libraries, Polish schools and organizations in the U.S. and in other countries.

To order your copy, please write to:

Mrs. Cecilia Glembocki

911 Saddleback Ct., McLean, VA 22102

Email: polandchildrensbook@gmail.com

Facebook page at:

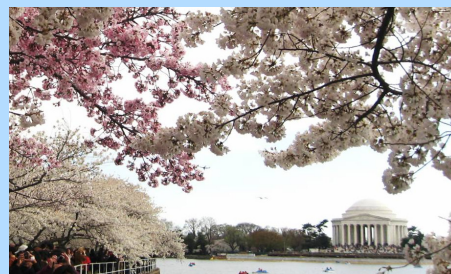
<https://www.facebook.com/PolandChildrensBook/>

Welcome ACPC Board Members

We wish you a successful

Spring Meeting

And a pleasant stay in the DC area.



Our spring is beautiful. Enjoy!

Upcoming Events

PAAA Chopin Concert

Benefiting the PAAA Scholarship Fund
Sunday, March 24, 2019 at 2:00 PM at the Arts Club of Washington
See article inside for details

PAAA General Membership Meeting

Sunday, May 5, 2019 at 2:00 PM at the Arts Club of Washington
Presentation of scholarship awards and artistic program

Wianki Festival

Celebration of Polish traditions of St. John's night, June 29, 2019 from 6:00-10:00 PM
The Reflecting Pool at the Lincoln Memorial
Representing Polish culture at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival

Details at: www.paaa.us

Please remember to renew your PAAA Membership

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

