

Letters in the Archives of Polish Composers at the University of Warsaw Library

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University of Warsaw Library

The story of the greatest Polish institute of higher education, the University of Warsaw, and its library, begins in 1816. At that time it was one of the few schools of its kind, where music was also taught at a tertiary level. This happened within the framework of what was known as the Main School of Music at the Department of Sciences and Arts. The school came into being owing to the efforts of Józef Elsner, an outstanding German (of Silesian origin) composer and teacher, who for most of his life was associated with Warsaw and who was both a patriot of his adopted homeland and a promoter of Polish national style. His students and graduates of the Main School at the Warsaw University included Frederic Chopin (whose parents lived on the historical campus, in a building which is still standing today). Unfortunately, no musical items from that pioneering period, nor any mementoes of the school's most famous student, have survived until our times. After the fall of the November Uprising against the Russian occupation, the University was closed in 1831, and the most valuable collections were taken to St. Petersburg, many of them subsequently lost forever. A significant part of the collections created later, after the re-establishment of Warsaw University, was burnt by the Nazis in 1944.

Thus the history of music collections at the University in Warsaw in their present shape does not start until after the Second World War, when the Section of Music Collections was established at the Warsaw University Library. Since the destruction of music libraries in Warsaw was so extensive as to include almost all of them, it was decided – in hindsight, controversially – to move to Warsaw the surviving collections of the Musicological Institute in Wrocław (Breslau; old prints and manuscripts from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, as well as a sizeable store of more recent printed sheet music and books from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries). These holdings have since been systematically extended by items purchased and added as legal deposits (the Warsaw University Library holds this privilege alongside the National Library and the Jagellonian Library). The year 1958 saw the establishment of the Archives of Polish Composers, linked to the Section of Music Collections. Since the year 2000 the Library has been housed in a modern building of architectural interest, which also ensures excellent conditions for both storing and using the collections for research. The head of the archives in the years 1973–2014 was Elżbieta Jasińska-Jędrasz, a musicologist and the author of many publications on music sources and archives.

The Archives of Polish Composers (formerly known as the Archives of Twentieth Century Polish Composers) at the Warsaw University Library form a collection which is unique in Poland and in the world, focused on maintaining a comprehensive documentation of sources relating to contemporary Polish music. Established in 1958 as a separate collection within the Music Department of the University Library, it boasts the heritage of many outstanding composers, musicians and musicologists. At present the Archives collection includes over 40,000 items: nearly 5,000 music manuscripts and 30,000 letters written or received by Polish composers, as well as several thousand photographs, posters and concert programmes. The remaining part of the collection covers various biographical documents (personal and family papers, texts and objects documenting musicians' professional activity, and objects of historical value).

The core of the collection grew in the 1950s and 1960s with the addition of the archives of Artur Malawski, Jan A. Maklakiewicz, Kazimierz Jurdziński, Roman Padlewski, Ludomir M. Rogowski, Karol Szymanowski and Stanisław Wiechowicz. During the 1980s the Archives were expanded further by including works by emigré composers: Tadeusz Z. Kassern, Michał Kondracki, Feliks R. Łabuński and Roman Palester. During the 1990s and since the year 2000 the collection has been enriched by the archives of composers (Tadeusz Baird, Andrzej Dobrowolski, Stanisław Janta-Połączyński, Tadeusz Machl, Karol Prosnak, Stanisław Prószyński) and Polish musicologists (Krzysztof Biegański, Michał Chomiński, Stanisław Golachowski, Tadeusz Kaczyński, Zofia Lissa).

The most valuable part of the Archives collection is the compositional and literary legacy of Karol Szymanowski (1882–1937) – the greatest Polish composer of the first half of the twentieth century, and co-creator of the group of composers known as ‘Young Poland in music’. Szymanowski’s legacy survived thanks to the extensive involvement of the musicologist Stanisław Golachowski who (in incredibly difficult and dangerous circumstances, which could provide a script for a thriller) spent the Nazi occupation of Poland and the immediate postwar period collecting numerous documents scattered among the composer’s family and friends. The collection was donated to the Archives of Polish Composers in 1961 and at present it constitutes the largest Polish collection of Szymanowski memorabilia, including his music, literary manuscripts, letters, personal and family documents, photographs, posters, concert programmes, newspaper clippings and objects of historical value (some of the latter have also been deposited at Villa Atma, the Karol Szymanowski Museum in Zakopane).

Karol Szymanowski’s extensive correspondence has been the object of many years of work and is the most thoroughly edited collection of letters in our holdings. Each item was catalogued individually on cards with references to the addressees, senders, and the more important individuals mentioned in the letters. This provided an excellent basis for a monumental, 16-volume critical edition of the whole of the surviving correspondence, under the editorship of Teresa Chylińska. Even today this collection (alongside the latest edition of the letters of Chopin prepared by Zofia Helman and Hanna Wróblewska) stands as the model for editing composers’ correspondences in Polish music literature. It provides an extraordinarily rich critical apparatus in the form of footnotes, extensive indices and biographies of the persons referred to, as well as iconography.

The remaining sets of correspondence are edited to a more general degree, in accordance with the principles adopted in archives; only selected letters and groups of letters have been published, mainly as part of monographs about composers, and articles. Many sets of particular importance and interest are available on microfilm, and some have been digitised. They are not available online within the network of Polish digital libraries, but are accessible at the library. (It is worth mentioning here that the correspondence of Frederic Chopin has been published online, with the option of searching the full texts, but without the extensive critical apparatus available in the printed edition.)

Other significant parts of the Archive’s collection include the legacies of Roman Palester and Tadeusz Baird. Roman Palester, an emigré composer as of 1946, left his personal archives to the Library in his last will. The impressive collection of 5,000 of the composer’s letters (including letters to and from Jan Lechoń, Kazimierz Wierzyński and Jan Nowak-Jeziorański) reflects the postwar

history of Polish citizens in exile. Another important part of Palester's legacy consists in his music scripts and recordings of music programmes which were broadcast by Radio Free Europe, Palester's long-term employer.

The legacy of Tadeusz Baird, one of the most outstanding Polish postwar composers and the co-creator of the Warsaw Autumn International Festival of Contemporary Music, is one of the most recent acquisitions of the Archives. The Library acquired it gradually, mainly as donations from the composer's wife, Alina Baird. Alongside Baird's works and letters, the collection includes extensive documentation on the staging of his works, as well as numerous certificates and awards received by Baird for his outstanding achievements in the field of music culture.

Important acquisitions of the Archives also include the documentation of the Association of Young Polish Musicians in Paris (1936–1950), primarily comprising an extensive collection of letters reflecting various aspects of the Association's activities.

Alongside the basic task of developing the collection, the Archives are focused on the preservation, professional cataloguing and popularisation of the acquired items. The most valuable collections – particularly music manuscripts – have been microfilmed, while selected items have been digitised and made available online. The Library's budget permitting, rare items from the collections regularly undergo a thorough preservation process (e.g. an impressive preservation of clean autograph copies of Szymanowski's works).

The Archives boast important scholarly publications – including source editions, and book-form catalogues of selected collections. The first volume of the alphabetical *Catalogue of music manuscripts of the Archives of Polish Composers*, from A to L, has recently been published (see below '3. Catalogues of collections'). The bibliographical descriptions collected for this purpose will also be gradually transferred to the electronic catalogue of the Warsaw University Library.

Among the letters, alongside some highly interesting private correspondences, which provide much valuable biographical information, as well as commentaries on composers' works, we also find extensive official correspondence. This might appear to be less interesting, but in fact it demonstrates to the contemporary researcher the difficult reality of the communist era, with its enormous bureaucracy (although today's can also be extremely frustrating at times) and its absurdities. There are also ominous letters, such as traces of struggles with censorship, or even denunciations from the communist party (e.g. that a composer writes too much religious music instead of music praising socialism and friendship with the Soviet Union).

As a final note I unfortunately have to admit that the Warsaw University Library cannot boast significant achievements in the area of electronic cataloguing of manuscript collections. The library is the leading centre of cataloguing in Poland, and hosts the NUKAT centre – the national central catalogue which constitutes the source of bibliographic records modelled on Online Computer Library Center (OCLC). However, we still lack national standards and instructions for cataloguing manuscripts in the MARC format; the National Library has been working on this for many years, but they still remain unpublished and have not been adopted as obligatory. At the most general level, archival collections are recorded in the national archivist database SEZAM, which is not however oriented towards cataloguing and searching for individual objects. I hope that this state of affairs will change during the coming years. In the meantime my team (as in many libraries – too small in relation to the enormity of the tasks) concentrates on electronic cataloguing of early music manuscripts, mainly from the eighteenth century, for the body well known to you all – the international RISM database. According to the original assumptions, its chronological range was to reach back to the eighteenth century, but numerous musical items from the nineteenth century are already finding their way into the database along with, occasionally, those from the twentieth century.

(Translated from Polish by Zofia Weaver)

PUBLICATIONS BASED ON THE ARCHIVES OF POLISH COMPOSERS THE UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW LIBRARY: A SELECTIVE LIST

1. Letters and Writings of Karol Szymanowski

Karol Szymanowski, *Korespondencja. Pełna edycja zachowanych listów od i do kompozytora* [*Karol Szymanowski. Correspondence. A Complete Edition of Extant Letters from and to the Composer*], ed. by Teresa Chylińska:

- Vol. 1, 1903–1919, Kraków: PWM, 1982, 672 pp.
- Vol. 2, 1920–1926, Kraków: PWM, 1984, 730 + 586 + 324 pp.
- Vol. 3, 1927–1931, Kraków: Musica Iagellonica, 1997, 406 + 500 + 690 + 236 pp.
- Vol. 4, 1932–1937, Kraków: Musica Iagellonica, 2002, 404 + 342 + 312 + 308 + 378 + 404 + 312 pp.

Karol Szymanowski, *Pisma* [*Writings*]:

- Vol. 1, *Pisma muzyczne* [*Musical Writings*], ed. by Kornel Michałowski, Kraków: PWM, 1984, 535 pp.
- Vol. 2, *Pisma literackie* [*Literary Writings*], ed. by Teresa Chylińska, Kraków: PWM, 1989, 454 pp.

2. Monographs

Adam Mrygoń, *Stanisław Wiechowicz*, Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 2 vols., 1982 and [1989], 198 + 166 pp.

Zofia Helman, *Roman Palester*, Kraków: Musica Iagellonica (Studia et dissertationes Instituti Musicologiae Universitatis Varsoviensis, series B, vol. VII), 1999, 417 pp.

Teresa Chylińska, *Karol Szymanowski i jego epoka* [*Karol Szymanowski and His Time*], Kraków: Musica Iagellonica, 2008, 3 Vols., 554+780+206 pp.

Barbara Literska, *Tadeusz Baird. Kompozytor, dzieło, recepcja* [*Tadeusz Baird. Composer, Work, Reception*], Zielona Góra: Oficyna Wydawnicza Uniwersytetu Zielonogóskiego, 2012, 766 pp.

3. Catalogues of collections

Elżbieta Jasińska-Jędrasz, *Rękopisy utworów muzycznych Karola Szymanowskiego* [*Music Manuscripts of Karol Szymanowski*], Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1983, 111 pp.

Elżbieta Jasińska-Jędrasz, *Rękopisy kompozytorów Młodej Polski* [Manuscripts of Young Polish Composers], Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1997, 159 pp.

Elżbieta Jasińska-Jędrasz, *Rękopisy muzyczne w zbiorach Archiwum Kompozytorów Polskich Biblioteki Uniwersyteckiej w Warszawie. Katalog* [*Catalogue of Music Manuscripts of the Archives of Polish Composers*], Vol. 1 (A–L), Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2014, 700 pp.