“Nature, which graced me with the gift of composing, gave me something in addition to that, which allowed me to cultivate this gift. Indeed I have a little, invisible engine, thanks to which, I can do in ten minutes what takes others one hour: thanks to it, I run rather than walk, can write fifteen letters in half an hour, even my pulse goes faster than other people’s and I was born at seven months.”

(Bacewicz 1974, pp.25-26, cited in Gąsiorowska 1999, p.239)

Profile

Grażyna Bacewicz is the most significant female Polish composer during the first half of the twentieth century and the first one to have gained an international reputation. She has to be credited with providing the groundwork for the recognition of female composers in a very conservative, patriarchally shaped Polish musical world.

Bacewicz was a multi-talented worker, who followed her career as violinist and composer simultaneously over a long period of time, and who left an oeuvre of over two hundred compositions in various genres and instrumentations. Naturally, her interest in string instruments, especially the violin, was on the forefront. She herself premiered many of her own works for violin and also for piano. She also gained a reputation as a teacher, her pedagogic violin literature is still used in Poland. As vice president of the Polish Composers Society (ZKP) she also supported the distribution of Polish music in Europe.

Cities an countries

Grażyna Bacewicz spent her childhood in Łódź. She had her first music lessons here. Warsaw became the centre of her life once she started studying. Due to her father’s Lithuanian nationality, Bacewicz had a deep connection to Lithuania and spoke the language. She gave several concerts in Kaunas, Lithuania. Numerous stays testify to Bacewicz’ affinity to Paris as a musical centre: in 1932 she belonged to Nadia Boulanger’s composition studio and André Touret’s violin studio at the École Normale de Musique. She returned to Paris on further occasions for concerts and competitions. Concert tours also took her to the then Soviet Union: Ukraine, Czechoslovakia, Latvia, Romania and Hungary, and later, in addition to France, also England and Belgium. Bacewicz also visited multiple European countries in her capacity as judge in various competitions and representative of the Polish Composers Society. In 1956 she visited India. She also worked as a...
professor at the conservatory in Łódź and Warsaw. 

Biography

Grażyna Bacewicz was born 5 February 1909 as third of four children to parents Maria and Vincas Bacewicz in Łódź/Lodz. The father was a Lithuanian teacher in exile, the mother came from a wealthy Polish family with aristocratic roots. All four children received violin and piano lessons from an early age as well as a basic education in music theory. Further education was taken on by composer Kazimierz Sikorski (1895-1986) at a music school in Lodz. First compositions date from that time. From 1928 to 1932 Bacewicz studied the following subjects at the academy of music in Warsaw: composition (Kazimierz Sikorski), violin (Józef Jarzębski), and piano for a few semesters (Józef Turczyński), for a short time also philosophy at the university. Following the completion of her diploma she attended composition classes in 1932 and 33 taught by Nadia Boulanger at the École Normale de Musique in Paris. She frequently visited the French capital later in life. Even before she was discovered as composer, Bacewicz became known as violinist. In 1936 she married physician and medical professor Andrzej Biernacki (born 1963); the couple had one daughter: Alina Biernacka, born 1942, is a famous painter today and administers part of the Bacewicz’s estate together Grażyna Bacewicz’s sister Wanda. Bacewicz was concertmaster of the newly formed Polish Radio Orchestra for two and a half years. Bacewicz spent most of the post-war era in Warsaw, where her compositions were played at secret concerts in cafés and private apartments. It was only after the Warsaw riot in 1944 that she had to leave the burning city. Bacewicz’s reputation grew during the post-war era, despite the general censorship resulting from political realisation of socialist cultural reforms. She was called on to judge various internal instrumental and composition competitions. In 1954 she was involved in a severe car accident, which caused her to retire from concerts and focus on composing. Bacewicz took advantage of loosened censorship regulations in 1956 to acquire expertise in the developments of Western European music that had been unattainable up to that point. As representative of the Polish Composers Society she undertook numerous journeys and her compositions were awarded prizes in competitions throughout Europe. She was vice president of the Polish Composers Society from 1960 up to her death. Having worked as lecturer for violin and music theory at the conservatory in Lodz in 1945, she took on a composition class at the academy of music in Warsaw in 1966, where she was appointed professor in 1967. Grażyna Bacewicz died on 17 January 1969. 

Parental home and first lessons

Grażyna Bacewicz was born 5 February 1909 in Łódź/Lodz. After two sons, she was the first daughter of Maria Bacewicz (nee Modlińska) and Vincas Bacewicz (the Polonised version of Bacevičius). Her mother had received a very good academic and musical education through her open-minded, wealthy Polish parents who came from nobility. This also included being brought up to be disciplined and independent, as the mother describes it in letters to her son Witold (Gąsiorowska 1999, pp.11-13; K. Bacewicz 1986, p.17). Her father was a Lithuanian teacher who had been exiled to Poland by the tsar due to his involvement in the Lithuanian nationalist movement. In 1923 he illegally returned to Lithuania to continue fighting for his home country’s freedom. The family remained in Poland, later two adult sons followed their father. The three older children as well as Wanda, the youngest daughter, received their first violin and piano lessons by their father from the age of five. The father hoped for a string quartet, thus, the oldest son Kiejstut also learned to play cello. In addition, they were taught basic music theory. Later the children attended Helena Kijeńska’s music school where the children were taught by composer Kazimierz Sikorski amongst others. The children soon had opportunities to present their special talents in concerts. The younger son Witold Bacewicz started interpreting his own compositions early on and went on to become a successful pianist and one of the most well-known Lithuanian composers. He died in 1970 in exile in America. Kiejstut Bacewicz became a pianist and frequently performed concerts with his sister Grażyna. Wanda Bacewicz gained a reputation as lyricist. Despite her talent as pianist and violinist, Grażyna Bacewicz chose a career in composing when she was only 13 years old (G. Bacewicz’s interview from the Polish Radio Broadcast in: “Ruch muzyczny”, issue 33. volume 3. 1989, p.7).

The earliest preserved compositions, mainly for violin and piano, date from her school years, including a double fugue for string quartet – an instrumentation that would play an important role in Bacewicz’s work.

Studies

After finishing school, she began studying at the Warsaw conservatory in 1928. She took courses in composition (Kazimierz Sikorski), violin (Józef Jarzębski), and piano.
Bacewicz studied philosophy at the capital's university and later discontinued the two latter subjects after a few semesters. Following his reformation efforts, the conservatory was awarded the status of academy of music in 1930. However, in and around the academy there were influential opposers of its director, so that Bacewicz's studies also remained overshadowed by these disputes right up to her composition exam in 1932. She left the academy with diplomas certifying her as composer and concert violinist. From then onwards until her severe car accident in 1954 Grażyna Bacewicz performed concerts as violinist.

Paris

Bacewicz went to Paris in 1932 on a stipend that Ignacy Paderewski had arranged for her, where she studied violin under André Touret and composition under Nadia Boulanger at the École Normale de Musique in 1932 and 33. The young, Polish composers who resided in Paris at the time, following Szymanowski's invitation, made up their own sizeable community. It was difficult for foreigners to be accepted at the Paris conservatory, so she studied at Vincent d'Indy's Schola Cantorum and (mainly) with Nadia Boulanger at the École Normale de Musique. Paul Dukas and Albert Roussel are also named as tutors (Mycielski, in Gąsiorowska 1999, p.65); in all likelihood this refers to private lessons with these composers, as Dukas taught at the conservatory and Roussel's engagement at the Schola Cantorum ended in 1914. Following her return from France in 1933 Grażyna Bacewicz took on compiling a piano extract from Karol Szymanowski's opera “Harnasie”. Additionally, she taught violin, counterpoint and harmony at the conservatory in Łódź. A second stay in Paris followed in 1934 to take up violin lessons with Carl Flesch. He prepared Grażyna Bacewicz for the First International Henryk Wieniawski Violin Competition (Warsaw, 1935), which earned her a commendation, though no prize. In 1936 Bacewicz married physician and medical professor Andrzej Biernacki, a great music-lover and amateur musician. For two and a half years Bacewicz played in the newly formed Polish Radio Orchestra under Grzegorz Fitelberg, a resolute supporter of contemporary Polish music, both to earn a living and to study instrumentation. The orchestra premiered Bacewicz’s first violin concerto, amongst others, which included the composer as soloist, at a public concert in Warsaw in March 1938 (Gąsiorowska 1999, p.110f). Bacewicz returned from her third Paris visit, which also saw the premiere of her first string quartet a few months before World War II began.

German Occupation

The beginning of the war put an abrupt end to Polish musical life, which had just been injected with new life following the restoration of the Polish state. Contact to the musical world in the rest of Europe was impossible. However, the Polish people’s will to resist in all aspects of social and cultural life was very strong. Secret concerts took place in cafés and private apartments. Bacewicz’s compositions were amongst those performed in Boleslaw Woytowicz’s legendary café and private rooms, including some premieres. Unlike some of her colleagues, Bacewicz didn’t participate in further political conspiracy. In 1942 her only daughter Alina was born. Bacewicz’s sole concern at the time was the survival of her family, which included her mother and her sister Wanda. However, colleagues and friends attest that Bacewicz always supported those suffering with advice and help and offered shelter in her apartment. In 1944 the family had to flee burning Warsaw, which had been destroyed by the German occupying forces. Due to the rushed escape, manuscripts of Bacewicz’s compositions were almost left in the family Biernacki/Bacewicz home, if it hadn’t been for a friend who rescued them against the composer’s wishes; however, the family home was one of few houses to escape the fire storm (Kisielewski, in Gąsiorowska 1998, p.17). The family spent the final war years in Grodzisk Mazowiecki, a town a few kilometres south-west of Warsaw, and in Lublin.

Post-war period

Soon after the end of the war, which had robbed Poland of a large part of its people as well as irreplaceable cultural treasures, Polish people put huge efforts into reviving cultural life, which hadn’t stopped until the rebellion. Bacewicz also began working with great energy after years of oppression. She had a violin studio at the state conservatory in Łódź in addition to teaching music theory. To earn a living, she gave concerts as violinist, transcribed and, in 1945 alone, composed no less than 10 works, including her first symphony and her second violin concerto. At the end of 1945 the family moved back to Warsaw. Although Bacewicz was, in addition to her concert activity, very productive as a composer, she found this double career a challenge. She considered retiring from concert activity to focus entirely on composing. In the ye-
ars that followed, she travelled to Paris twice as violinist, where she performed mostly her own compositions but also some of Szymanowski's works. She also gained a reputation as pianist performing her own piano pieces. Cultural activities under Soviet control were marked by a system of censorship and focused political support. Again, cultural exchange with the rest of Europe was extremely difficult. The alternatives to surrendering to the cultural dictatorship were confined to either retreating into unsuspicious areas (art for children, adaptations, pedagogy), abandoning publicity or emigration. Grażyna Bacewicz made use of opportunities but did not partake in paying homage to the representatives of the communist apparatus, instead finding a compromise that allowed her to work unobstructed. Her focus on purely instrumental compositions as well as the folkloric moments in her music, accommodated the demand for a musical language close to the people. Many compositions from these years – those by Oberek and Krakowiak, Polish dances, Polish rhapsody, etc. – make reference in the title or content to national tradition: their works were performed and enjoyed great recognition, while the cultural office's regulations restricted cultural activities to a great extent. The career of Andrzej Panufnik, one of the most significant Polish composers in the post-war era, is characteristic, as he initially allowed himself to be exploited by the prevalent cultural politics, only to then take the only way out and eventually emigrated. The early 1950s were marked by several blows of fate for Bacewicz: the death of her father and a car accident she only barely survived that forced her to re-evaluate her career. She subsequently retired from concert performances and focussed entirely on composing. Starting in 1952, she was called upon to join various international instrumental competitions' juries. The political 'thaw' in the Soviet Union in 1956 brought new freedoms to the Polish as well, which composers utilised as best they could. The Festival of Contemporary Music "Warsaw Autumn" originated here. Many Western European musicians and their music came to Poland for the first time with the festival. A flood of new opportunities and methods had to be explored by composers and integrated into their own works. Some of her colleagues integrated the new methods without question; in contrast, Bacewicz treated serial methods tentatively and in very much her own way. Bacewicz's reputation as composer grew. She received numerous prizes and awards and travelled as Polish music ambassador to Italy, France, Belgium, Egypt and India, amongst others. From 1960 onwards she was vice president of the Polish Composers Society (ZKP) and in that function travelled to Yugoslavia and Romania. The composer was troubled by depressive phases, despite the general recognition of her personality and her work, but she tried to conceal these from those around her. In 1963 her husband Andrzej Biernecki died. Contrary to her earlier decision, Bacewicz accepted another teaching appointment in 1966. She taught a composition class at the Academy of Music in Warsaw, her own training school. In 1967 she received a regular position there. She returned, greatly weakened from a journey to Armenia in 1968, and left her last composition, a ballet based on a Picasso play, unfinished when she died of a heart attack on 17 January 1969.

More on Biography

Appreciation

Grażyna Bacewicz was a multi-talent and worked as composer as well as violinist to an equally high standard, in addition to this she was an extraordinary pianist. Even before her concert exam, which she passed with honours at the Warsaw conservatory, she performed as violinist at concerts in Kaunas (Lithuania). She continued to perform as soloist on concert stages in multiple European countries right up to the 1950s, thus contributing significantly to dissemination of Polish music. While her popularity as a soloist initially outbalanced her reputation as composer, it was this popularity that allowed her to introduce audiences to her own works. Thus, she could prepare a career path she had favoured from the start: composing. Grażyna Bacewicz's catalogue counts more than 200 compositions. The main focus of her compositions was string music, which is unsurprising considering her own concert activities of several decades. However, her oeuvre includes a variety of instrumentations, mostly in classical models; works for large orchestras and chamber orchestras, solo concerts, solo sonatas, string quartets, songs for piano and orchestra, children's songs, secular and spiritual choir music all form part of the whole. In addition to neoclassicism, which Nadia Boulanger's school in Paris bestowed on Bacewicz's music, the composer developed her own independent musical language over the years. All the various influences and technical acquisitions were integrated into her own work little by little so that no drastic cuts occurred. The composer's personal touch can always be found in an increasingly complex tonal repertoire, even in her later compositions. The classical format as well as a relationship with tonality we-
re central subjects in Bacewicz’s musical discourse. She mastered both of these tasks with gradual, precise transformations. From an often neoclassical musical language Bacewicz developed the tone colour and sonority techniques for her later compositions. When considering the dramatic historical situation during which Bacewicz lived and worked in Poland, her own demands for her two vocations as well as her duties as wife and mother, the abundance, status and content of her compositional work becomes even more impressive. Grażyna Bacewicz smoothened the path for numerous younger female colleagues in Poland’s patriarchal musical world. Grażyna Bacewicz combined “—much like the great masters of baroque era — the talents of the creator and the interpreter to a harmonic whole.” (Lutosławski 1969, p.5)

Grażyna Bacewicz’s catalogue counts more than 200 works including five symphonies, seven violin concertos, two cello concertos, one viola concerto, one piano concerto and one for two pianos and seven string quartets. She also penned several adaptations and piano excerpts. Her literary works, apart from a selection of autobiographical narratives, is largely unpublished and consequently unknown. As a violinist, Grażyna Bacewicz performed on concert stages from early childhood until well into the sixth decade of her life. Grażyna Bacewicz was a multi-talent and worked as composer as well as violinist to an equally high standard, in addition to this, she was an extraordinary pianist. Even before her concert exam, which she passed with honours at the Warsaw conservatory, she performed as violinist at concerts in Kaunas (Lithuania). She continued to perform as soloist on concert stages in multiple European countries right up to the 1950s, and thus contributed significantly to dissemination of Polish music. While her popularity as soloist initially outbalanced her reputation as composer, it was this popularity that allowed her to introduce audiences to her own works. Thus, she could prepare the career path for the occupation she had favoured from the start: composing. The main focus of her compositions was string music, which is unsurprising considering her own concert activities of several decades. Thus, she wrote string instruments into her music, largely based on her own experience in playing the instrument. Yet, there is almost no classical genre, no common instrumentation, that Bacewicz didn’t tackle: compositions for large orchestras and chamber orchestras, solo concertos, solo sonatas, string quartets, songs for piano and orchestra, children’s songs, secular and spiritual choir music all form part of the whole. Furthermore, a radio opera, theatre, film and ballet music.

With works such as “music for string, trumpets and drums”, “incrustation” for horn and chamber ensemble or pieces for clarinet and string quartet she broadened the frontiers of her familiar instrumentation. In addition to the neoclassicism, which Nadia Boulanger’s school in Paris bestowed on Bacewicz’s music, the composer developed her own independent musical language over the years. All the various influences and technical acquisitions were integrated into her own work little by little so that no drastic cuts occurred. Bacewicz considered it her duty to address new trends and techniques. Yet, she never adopted anything uncritically: “The nature of Grażyna Bacewicz’s work is such that it doesn’t fit into the trends that accompany her, and I believe that is what kept her work from a more ephemeral existence.” (Lutosławski, in Gąsiorowska 1998, p.15.)

Her discourse with new musical methods is noticeable in transitional works. Insecurities regarding the handling of new methods are obvious in the attempt to cover these with string mannerism until the new tool has been correctly placed in her musical workshop. Thus, the development of Bacewicz’s style resembles more an overlapping of several transparent layers than the alteration of one style to the next. The personal touch is recognisable even in the increasingly complex tonal repertoire of her later works. Central subjects in Bacewicz’s musical discourse were the classical format as well as a relationship with tonality. The base of her tonal understanding can probably be best found in her violin repertoire. Bacewicz chose to use bi- and polytonality to free herself from historical tonality. Modal and pentatonic elements were added following her study of folkloristic material. On this musical path and via increased sequencing she moves closer to chromaticism. She studied dodecaphonic methods during the 1960s. Bacewicz used these in an unorthodox manner, and there is no fixed place for twelve-tone technique in her standardised musical body: “I always say that I find the serial system very interesting but it doesn’t quite suit me.” (Bacewicz 1958, in Bacewicz 1982, p.4)

She subsequently moved away from using vaguely tonal centres in her music and moved towards atonal areas. Her methods of dealing with problems of musical form also follow a path of gradual change. Starting with the cannon of standard forms, she combines individual elements according to her needs without devaluing the individual parts. She aims for symmetry. Her early compositions are shaped by neoclassical ‘motorism’ and typical forms for string instrumentation. This eloquence diminis-
hes little by little; the use of form becomes the starting point for tonal colour experiments that take up an increasing importance in Bacewicz’s compositions and run parallel to the sonorism trends in Polish music of the era. Folkloric material played an important role in all these developments. Bacewicz transported the more melancholy, darker aspects of her character, to which she otherwise denied much space, via folklore. Another side of her personality repeatedly shows itself in playful musical moments and humorous tonal arrangements.

Grażyna Bacewicz was a tireless, even obsessed worker with amazing discipline. This was the only way she could meet her own high expectations regarding her performance not only as a violinist but also as a composer and, last but not least, as a mother. The time and place of her life and work were rather adverse to these goals: following 120 years without its own state territory, Poland had just re-emerged as a sovereign country when it was invaded and devastated by Germans and held under forced Soviet control after the war. Art and culture were feared methods of resistance during this time: underground schools taught Polish literature during World War II; one school, which officially educated orchestra musicians, hosted an archive of Polish music (as well as a weapons arsenal and a printing press) and sheltered students and teachers from the occupying force’s capriciousness; secret concerts took place in private apartments and cafes. Dissident print media distributed works by restricted authors and ideas of resistance throughout the times Poland was controlled by fascist Germany as well as by the Soviet cultural dictatorship. The founders of Warsaw Autumn (Kazimierz Serocki, Tadeusz Baird, Józef Patkowski and others) in 1956 and all later organisers searched for and found opportunities to deceive and avoid censorship. Power of endurance and solidarity were strengthened but free creative expression was unthinkable, even after the time of the political ‘thaw’. Grażyna Bacewicz and her work have to be viewed in that context. The wide range, status, and content of her composing work is even more impressive in this context. She forced her male colleagues to take a woman seriously as composer (which wasn’t self-evident) and, thus, paved the way for many female Polish musicians.

More on Appreciation

Reception

Grażyna Bacewicz regularly gave concerts in Poland and other European countries as a violinist following her graduation. Amongst other things, these concerts meant an opportunity to present her own compositions. However, works for instrumentations other than violin and piano were also premiered shortly after their completion. Her works include a significant number of commissioned compositions, e.g. for the Polish Radio Orchestra. Bacewicz became the first Polish composer whose work found recognition across Poland’s borders.

Bacewicz’s work was reviewed in Polish magazines, such as “Ruch muzyczny” (Music Movement). She was awarded numerous prizes and commendations both nationally and internationally.

A large proportion of her compositions have been printed (see catalogue) and many have been preserved as recordings (see Discography).

As a violinist she earned an honorary commendation at the First International Henryk Wieniawski Competition. Many of her compositions were awarded prizes in international competitions. Her life’s work as composer, violinist and pedagogue was also highly honoured.

Her significance for Polish musical life was never in doubt in Poland, even during Bacewicz’s lifetime. Even today, her works form an integral part of many soloists’ and ensembles’ repertoire. However, international attention tends to focus on her male colleagues Witold Lutosławski, Krzysztof Penderecki, Tadeusz Baird and Henryk Mikolaj Górecki. Bacewicz’s compositions can be heard in Germany only in radio broadcasts with Polish focus. One can but hope that her versatile and extensive works will be rediscovered by soloists and orchestras.

Public attention initially focused on the violinist Grażyna Bacewicz, although her own compositions were performed in concerts even while she was a student. Performing in front of an audience became normality for the young soloist early on: Bacewicz’s brother Kiejstut writes in “Mój brat Witold”: “[our father] practiced public performances with us from childhood. The programme and press material of Grażyna, Witold and my debut in 1916 is preserved.” (K. Bacewicz 1986, p.17; see also Gąsiorowska 1999, p.29f).

Grażyna Bacewicz participated in this concert as a violinist and also played the piano. While still a student she gave concerts in Lithuania and shortly after passing her concert exam with honours again in Lithuania and Latvia. Reviews from 1930 and 1932 describe her technique, her tone and her expression as masterful (Gąsiorowska 1999, p.47 and 61ff.). Her role as composer was seconda-
ry in perception to that of a performer in this concert. The comments relating to this are short but positive; “unusually interesting” and “modernistic” are the adjectives used to describe Bacewicz. Following her first composition recital in 1934 she is more and more recognised as a composer. Her successes as violinist and composer developed in parallel and intertwined during concerts in Poland and other European countries. Her own fondness for Paris was matched by the positive reception by the local audience; she performed successfully in England and Belgium. The concerts also served as a forum for her own compositions. However, works for instrumentation other than violin and piano were also premiered shortly after their completion.

The war years meant a break in reception history, however, Bacewicz was an honoured entity amongst Warsaw’s composers even then, and was performed in secret concerts, also performing herself. She was able to perform her orchestra works in a timely fashion during the 1930s due to her participation in the Polish Radio Orchestra during the reconstruction years and her friendship with the ensemble’s conductor, Grzegorz Fitelberg, who tried to promote new music. Bacewicz’s position in Polish musical life after the war was one of such exposure that her compositions were regularly performed by the Polish Radio Orchestra, the National Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Warsaw and Krakow Philharmonics, amongst others, who also commissioned compositions, supported by the socialist culture office’s support programme. Thus, the premiere dates for her post-war compositions are rarely more than one year after the work’s completion.

Bacewicz’s works were consistently performed in concerts all over Europe and the USA during her lifetime. Commissions came from France (“Esquisse” for organ for Jean Guillou) and the USA (“Contradizione” for chamber orchestra for the Hopkins Center, Hanover, New Hampshire), amongst others.

Bacewicz received numerous prizes and awards. As a violinist she earned an honourable commendation at the First International Henryk Wieniawski Competition in 1935. This appears to be her only participation in a large violin competition.

Her first prize-winning composition was her wind quintet (1932) for which she received the “Aide aux femmes de professions libre” in 1933. Amongst the numerous following awards were first prize for her fourth string quartet (1951) at the Concours International de Composition pour Quatuor à Cordes in Liege in 1951 and in 1960 she won third prize at the Tribune Internationale des Composites UNESCO for Music for Strings, Trumpets and Drums (1958).

Grażyna Bacewicz’s life work was also repeatedly honoured with prizes and state medals, for example, she received the music prize of the city of Warsaw in 1949 for her career as a composer and soloist as well as for her organisational and pedagogical work.

Premieres of Bacewicz’s works were received with much interest in the Polish musical world and were reviewed, especially in music magazine “Ruch muzyczny”.

The majority of Bacewicz’s compositions have been published and are available in print (see catalogue). Many of her central works, including the string quartets, the concert for string orchestra and the seventh violin concerto, are available on sound recordings (see Discography).

Grażyna Bacewicz was the topic of a music academic conference of the Polish Composers Society (1989) after her death. The music magazine “Ruch muzyczny” published several issues commemorating the composer on the anniversaries of her birth and death: these included colleagues’ memories of the composer, essays discussing individual aspects of her work, letters, previously unpublished Bacewicz quotes. In 1999 a comprehensive biography of the composer was published in Poland (Małgorzata Gąszorowska) and in 2001 a thematic catalogue of her work was published in Germany (Grażyna Briel). The University of Southern California in Los Angeles has a working group, “Friends of Polish Music”, that researches Bacewicz’s life and work, amongst others. Interest in Bacewicz’s work never ceased in her home country. International attention may have focussed mainly on her male colleagues and the following generation: Witold Lutoslawski, Andrzej Panufnik, Krzysztof Penderecki, Tadeusz Baird and Henryk Mikolaj Górecki. However, amongst female Polish composers she is the first – possibly with the exception of Maria Szymanowska (1789-1831), who is however mainly remembered as a pianist – to achieve international fame and recognition. Her name is rarely found in concert programmes outside of Poland today.

It is possible that her compositions are not regarded as representative of particular eras of development in Polish music, and are prematurely characterised as neoclassical. Thus, organisers may not think of her as radical or ‘modern’ enough to be included in programmes meant to showcase new Polish music. When open exchange with the West became possible again (towards the end of the 1950s) there was already a younger generation (e.g. Kazimierz Serocki, Tadeusz Baird, Boguslaw Schaeffer, Wo-
Bacewicz, Grażyna

Jacek Kilar, Henryk Mikolaj Górecki, Krzysztof Penderecki), who dealt with the unknown techniques and expression opportunities more enthusiastically, more intensely, and without any reservation; and who more openly oriented themselves towards the West (Darmstadt, Donaueschingen), which put them in a better position in terms of music industry exposure. Furthermore, Bacewicz died virtually in the midst of her journey. Had she been able to continue her constant development throughout the 1970s her position in today’s concert world might have been very different. However, radio broadcasts with a focus on Polish music do include Bacewicz’s compositions in Germany today. One can but hope that her extensive works will be included in the repertoire of the many European orchestras, chamber ensembles and soloists again in future.

More on Reception

List of Works

Grażyna Bacewicz catalogued her own work in its entirety. The following information is based on the thematic work catalogue by Grażyna Briel (see literature sources). Unpublished compositions can be found as autographs or copies in the Warsaw National Library, in the Warsaw University Library, in the Central Score Library of the Polish Music Publisher in Warsaw, in the Polish Radio library, in the archives of the Warsaw Music Society and in the Jagiellonian University library in Krakow.

More on List of Works

Repertoire

As violinist Grażyna Bacewicz mainly played the virtuosic, romantic repertoire of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, including for example Tchaikovsky, Wieniawski, Szymanowski. She also performed baroque works and, of course, her own compositions. She rarely performed as pianist but premiered some of her own piano compositions, such as her second piano sonata.

Research

The section on Archives and Libraries lists the places where material on Grażyna Bacewicz research is available. Grażyna Bacewicz’s estate is administered by the composer’s sister, Wanda Bacewicz.

Bacewicz’s biography and work catalogue have been edited comprehensively by Małgorzata Gaśiorowska and Grażyna Briel respectively. Her compositions have been edited to a large extent. Summaries regarding individual groups of works can be found, amongst others, in the documents collated for the conference marking the composer’s eightieth birthday and twentieth anniversary of her death “O Grażynie Bacewicz” (see literature catalogue). Steffen Wittig has addressed the question of timbre genesis and evolution in Bacewicz’s music. Wittig also addresses the question of (auto)quotations in her compositions that was raised by Adrian Thomas.

The Polish Music Center (PMC) at the University of Southern California collects manuscripts, scores and recordings of Polish music (Polish Music Center, Thornton School of Music; University of Southern California, 840 West 34th Street; Los Angeles, CA 90089-0851; phone: (+1 213) 821-1356 or (+1 213) 740-9369; fax: (+1 213) 821-4040; URL: http://pmc.usc.edu/PMJ/index.html; email: polmusic@thornton.usc.edu).

The PCM publishes a journal, essays and a series of monographs about Polish music. The Friends of Polish Music at USC apply themselves to the distribution of knowledge about Polish music via presentations, concerts and festivals (http://pmc.usc.edu/ourfriends/friends.html).

Need for Research

An examination regarding the function of auto-quotations in Bacewicz’s compositions, as mentioned above, would warrant intensive and unbiased research. It would have to be taken into consideration that not all edited compositions were intended for publication by the composer.

In-depth analysis of individual works would be of interest not only in this context. Another problem worth detailed investigation is the question what kind of neoclassicism can be found in Bacewicz’s compositions, considering that at least her early and middle work is often regarded as neoclassicism.

A very interesting question, that is extremely hard to answer, concerns the composer’s political orientation (and its potential influence on her works).

Testimonies of contemporaries still alive today could help to answer this.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to investigate what influence her travels had on her work.

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