



Andrzej Czajkowski

fot. / photo: Clive Barda

Andrzej Czajkowski (1935-1982, also André Tchaikowsky) composer of the *Piano Concerto* (1966-1971), was born in Warsaw as Robert Andrzej Krauthammer. He was not quite four years old when the war broke out. Before finding himself in the ghetto with his family, his mother Felicja, an amateur pianist, taught him to play the piano. In 1942 he was taken out of the ghetto by his grandmother Celina and it was thanks to her efforts that he survived the war. She paid for hiding her grandson in various homes and it was she who obtained false documents for "Andrzej Czajkowski" – the name he used until his death. His mother decided to stay in the ghetto and was murdered in Treblinka several months later at the age of 27. His father Karl survived the war in France. The future composer and pianist experienced unimaginable trauma, having to hide for hours on end in a wardrobe. He also experienced cruelty from the hands of those who took care of him. He later recalled: "How long have I stayed in that wardrobe? Seven weeks? Two years? I was going to count the days but I forgot. Either way, there were no days, no hours in that wardrobe. It was always totally dark". This experience had a profound impact on his personality.

After the war he studied the piano with Emma Altberg in Łódź (1945-47) and with Lazar Lévy in Paris (1948-50), where he also made his debut as a pianist. He then continued in Warsaw with Stanisław Szpinalski (1951-1956) and went on to Brussels to study with Stefan

Askenase. He had an extraordinary music memory and a talent for improvisation. In 1955 he was the youngest of the laureates of the Chopin Competition (8th prize) and in 1956 he received 3rd prize at one of the most important competitions in the world – the Queen Elisabeth Music Competition. Artur Rubinstein, who was in the jury of the Competition, wrote: "Andrzej Czajkowski is one of the best pianists of his generation, but he is something more – a wonderful musician." In 1956 Andrzej Czajkowski left Poland for good. Even though he considered himself a Polish pianist and composer, he never came back. He began his great career as a pianist, performing on all continents with the most famous orchestras in the world, including the New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the Los Angeles Symphony Orchestra under the greatest conductors, including Böhm, Giulini, Kletzki, Reiner, Mitropoulos, Davis and Dorati. He recorded 12 albums for RCA Victor and Columbia Records, including Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. At his last concert in Düsseldorf in May 1982, a few weeks before his death, he performed Chopin's E minor Piano Concerto. His greatest passion, however, was composing. When applying for membership to the Polish Composers' Union at the tender age of 15,

he listed his compositions as follows: 10 etudes (manuscript in preparation), piano sonata (lost), concerto for piano and orchestra (in preparation)"... The only complete work was a suite for piano, but it was sufficient for the teenager's application to be accepted. At the time, Zygmunt Mycielski stated: "Andrzej Czajkowski has disclosed an unquestionable composing talent, possessed of an enormous wealth of musical invention, amazing for such a young boy. I am convinced that he possesses a great talent". He first studied composition with Professor Kazimierz Sikorski and then, briefly in the late 1950s, with Nadia Boulanger in Paris. Czajkowski's works include the opera *Merchant of Venice* after Shakespeare, performed for the first time in 2013 at the Bregenzer Festspiele (the performance won the prestigious Opera Award for 2013), two piano concertos (with the famous Radu Lupu giving the first performance of the 2nd concerto), two string quartets, two song cycles to words by Shakespeare (*Seven Sonnets* and *Ariel*), *Trio Notturmo*, a clarinet sonata and *Inventions* for piano. His *Nocturne* (1948), designated by the composer as opus 1, was dedicated to his grandmother. Andrzej Czajkowski died in Oxford at the age of 46. In his will, he bequeathed his skull to the Royal

Shakespeare Company to be used as the skull of Yorick in "Hamlet". A fascinating account of the composer's personality is found in his correspondence with Anita Janowska (...*mój diabeł stróż. Listy Andrzeja Czajkowskiego i Haliny Sander* [...My Guardian Demon. The Letters of Andrzej Czajkowski and Halina Sander], 1997). Biographies of the composer have also been written, the first of which is David Ferré's *The Other Tchaikowsky. A biographical sketch of André Tchaikowsky* (1991). The author has endeavoured to promote the composer for years. Pianist Maciej Grzybowski, who has done much to promote Czajkowski's music, describes his output in the following words: "The music of Czajkowski is a dramatic, desperate self-therapy after having survived the experience of a time of degeneration, bestiality, contempt and darkness, a time of discovery of a scrupulously measured product bearing the ghastly label: 'Death'". Andrzej Czajkowski's dramatic *Piano Concerto* transgresses this trauma in the very first sounds of the *Introduction*, imbued with double notes of the low strings which seem to play the motif of fate, later joined by the timpani. This motif returns in later parts of the work together with piercing, abrupt entries of various groups of instruments which give the

impressions of screams, through a lonely meditation of the piano to ensuing, expressive parts of the work (played without interruption). In the second part (*Capriccio*), the capricious character of the music is fascinating in how it superimposes melancholy, even despairing phrases played by the strings on top of a madly racing piano, which never succumbs to empty displays of virtuosity. The last part confronts brutal driving energy with lyricism, albeit tainted by a feeling of alienation.

As Shevah Weiss said at the ceremony celebrating Jan Karski's 100th birthday – it is not possible to describe in words the suffering and cruelty of the time of war. Maybe only music can somehow render this.

In 2014 – the 70th anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising and the 75th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II, the Sinfonia Varsovia Orchestra thus pays homage to the music that survived, to the people that died, to the culture that was so tragically annihilated in occupied Poland. This is only the first step on this musical road of remembrance. Even though thousands of scores are lost forever, many are still waiting to be taken out of the shadow of oblivion.

dr Katarzyna Naliwajek-Mazurek