

Opening concert of XXIV  
International Chopin &  
Friends Festival

Consulate General  
of the Republic of Poland  
in New York

November 2nd, 2022

7:00 p.m.

## Cracow Golden Quintet

Natalia Jarzabek – flute

Damian Świst – oboe

Tomasz Sowa – clarinet

Małgorzata Wygoda – bassoon

Konrad Gołda – French horn

### Program:

**Marta Ptaszyńska** – 3 Poetic Impressions for Piano and Woodwind Quintet

**Paul Moravec** – Woodwind Quintet

**Jakub Polaczyk** – *Loon* (in memory of Wojciech Kilar) for Woodwind Quintet  
– world premiere

**Huijuan Ling** – *Toward a Rediscovery* for Woodwind Quintet –  
winning composition of the 5th “New Vision Composition Competition”

**Wojciech Kilar** – Quintet for Woodwind Instruments

**Grażyna Bacewicz** – Quintet for flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon  
and French horn

### Program Notes

*Polish music is the most beautiful of all* – this is how a monograph on the history of Polish music, published shortly after the end of the Second World War, was titled by its author, Józef Reiss, a musicologist born back in the nineteenth century. The wording he chose is like a standard – the guiding principle behind the mission to boost the legacy of Polish music in the eyes of the public opinion, including the one in Poland. Why was it necessary?

The whole nineteenth century, the era that gave birth to Chopin, Moniuszko, Paderewski and many other composers, was the time when Polish music was thwarted by the policies of the foreign regimes that occupied the country. It was not until 1918 that Poland regained its independence. After so many years of holding back under the shadow of the partitioning powers, the country was eager to restore its rightful status on the international scene. By that time, the Viennese public had already known the famous *Pierrot Lunaire* by Arnold Schoenberg and Debussy had left behind an incomplete set of six sonatas for various instruments. Headed by Karol Szymanowski, the young generation of Polish artists fought courageously to bolster the status of Polish music, but this progressive situation did not even last for 21 years. In September 1939, Poland was invaded again and Polish people and their culture fell again under the ruthless oppression of the aggressors. Polish composers, who in those days were frequently trained under the watchful eye of Nadia Boulanger in Paris, focused on writing music in the spirit of Neoclassicism, but the legacy of Szymanowski also held sway.

The indicated, or rather barely hinted at, aspects from the above introduction only concern the last hundred years in the history of Polish music (not even that much), but let them serve as a point of reference for the presentation of works written by the successive generations of composers.

**Grażyna Bacewicz** (1909-1969), who would later become the doyenne of Polish music, was born in 1909, a good few years before Poland even regained its independence. In letters she received, some foreign correspondents addressed her as ‘Mr Bacewicz’, thus indicating that, in their opinion, her music could not have been written by a woman. Her talent was spotted by the likes of the above-mentioned Ignacy Jan Paderewski and Nadia Boulanger. The French woman composer, though, was not the only one responsible for Bacewicz’s success. Boulanger admitted that “Grażyna, as most of my Polish students, had a very solid background before coming to me, classical as much as modern”. Bacewicz had received her solid background in Warsaw, where she had studied with Kazimierz Sikorski. Whatever the case may be with regard to her French studies, her stay in Paris brought her her first string of successes. She was the joint first prize winner of the ‘Aide aux Femmes de Professions Libre’ competition in 1933 for her *Quintet for wind instruments* written in the previous year. Perhaps in itself the work was not extremely outstanding, but it already signalled Grażyna Bacewicz’s mastery of combining the classical with the modern. The *Quintet* draws on the classic four-movement model maintaining the expressive contrast between the successive sections of the work. Its rhapsodic *Allegro* introduces two themes that enchant the listener with their lively and emotionally universal melodies combined, in the narrative, with a poignant cantilena. The second movement has a slightly pastoral character, and is followed by a brief and gracefully concise *Allarghetto* leading us straight to the finale. The *Vivo* closes Grażyna Bacewicz’s narrative with a reference to universality that we had already familiarised ourselves with in the opening movement. This time, though, we are even more certain that the composer thinks with the form, seeing as we do how she fills the form with a succession of nuances and details, as if she were painting frescoes. But it is not only the form that determines the detail here as Bacewicz also makes good use of the tonal possibilities offered by the different instruments.

**Wojciech Kilar** (1932-2013) was born in the same year in which Grażyna Bacewicz composed her *Quintet*. His own *Quintet for wind instruments* is also an early work – the composer who would go on to write the music to *The Ninth Gate* was only twenty years of age at that time. It might be significant to point out here that Kilar was never a prolific composer of chamber music, which makes works like the *Quintet* particularly valuable. The composition forms a link in the development of the neoclassical style in Polish music. When the music in Poland, at least according to the official canons, was dictated by the spirit of socialist realism, Neoclassicism was a safe haven, and it was also communicative enough. The first movement of the piece is, again, a clash of two contrasted themes with differing tonal qualities of the individual instruments. In the foreground, we can hear the melody of the cantilena theme. The second movement *Scherzo* is strongly evocative of traditional Polish culture, in which the highlander music is especially prominent. The third movement also points to the future of Kilar’s music in its plainchant-like character – intimate, gentle and moving. The composer rounds off his work like Mozart – with a rondo. The example clearly shows the array of inspirations that the Polish composers had at their disposal before they even started looking for inspiration westwards, in the novelties tried out in Western Europe at the time.

Different aesthetics is represented by *Poetic Impressions* composed by **Marta Ptaszyńska**. Born in 1943, Ptaszyńska completed her studies of music with Tadeusz Paciorkiewicz, who himself was a member of a new generation of Polish teachers. Towards the late 1960s, the composer supplemented her education in France under the care of Nadia Boulanger and Olivier Messiaen. She wrote her *Poetic Impressions* in 1991. In this composition, she brings up the theme of fabulosity, while the work’s poetic character implies vagueness, universality, fabulousness and fantasticality. As the basis for sharing these impressions with the listeners, Marta Ptaszyńska opts for brief motifs, phrases, structures that are only there for a moment. The structures, employed successively, seem to evoke images of a fantasy world, informed by the extra-musical inspirations of Leo Tolstoy (as she herself revealed). Besides these worlds, the listener will find some gloomy fragments here, albeit brief, as they hastily give way to a string of new impressions, spontaneous and natural. It seems that the music of the whole work cannot wait to proceed to the dance-like finale, an equivalent, as the composer declared, of the happy ending found in films or books. Ptaszyńska usually constructs her successive narratives by using a rich palette of musical colours – a trait that characterises her whole output.

All these three composers have been noted and valued on the American continent. Grażyna Bacewicz’s compositions were performed in the United States as early as in the 1950s, and they were warmly received by the audiences and the critics alike. Marta Ptaszyńska tied her career with the American culture in the 1970s. Her works have been commissioned by such establishments as the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and the Cleveland Orchestra. When it comes to Wojciech Kilar – well, he still remains one of the most frequently performed Polish composers in the world. The American listeners are familiar with his film scores, but not only... The figure of Kilar resonates on the intellectual level, too. The artist was capable of expressing himself without pretence or exaltation, which makes his music sincere and personal, as well as modest. Marek Moś recalls: “Even though he produced a large body of fantastic compositions, he perceived his music with great humility. He was aware of the geniuses that came before him, and he looked at their works with admiration and respect, and as a source of inspiration.”

Today, new generations of musicians are inspired by Wojciech Kilar. One of them is **Jakub Polaczyk**, who paid tribute to Kilar in his *Loon* featuring Polish folklore. The work is also notable for its echoes of traditional American music. Sincerity of expression and belief in the positive functional direction of art are evoked in *Toward a Rediscovery* by **Huijuan Ling**, a winner of the International Composition Competition ‘New Vision’. The young artist declares that “in this disintegrating world we are looking for integrity to heal our disintegrated personalities.” His music seems to look for ways to heal disintegrated music which is symptomatic of the human condition. Similar tendencies can be found in **Paul Moravec’s** compositions, including his *Woodwind Quintet*, where frivolous and liberated elements, governed by the logic of form and narrative cohesion, are combined with a solemn and noble sound.

In this context, the music by Moravec and Polaczyk bridges the gap between the oeuvre of the masters, such as Bacewicz and Kilar, with that of the younger musicians, as both of them sat on the jury that awarded Huijuan Ling his prize.

The concert will be complemented by Chopin’s songs, which prove beyond doubt that *Polish music is the most beautiful of all*. These works are sure to echo everything that has shaped generations of composers whose works form the programme of today’s concert.

Karol Stanisław Furtak

Translated by

Adam Zbyszewski

## Polish Music on Stage / US Edition

The project is realized by the National Institute of Music and Dance,  
co-funded by the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage  
as part of the Inspiring “Culture programme”

Presented in partnership with the Polish Cultural Institute New York .