

Constitution Day Concert



Jacek Nowaczyński

Poland's historic 1791 Constitution was celebrated with a gala event on Monday May 4 at the Broad Stage Auditorium in Santa Monica. Paulina Kapuścińska, Consul General of Poland in Los Angeles, began the evening by decorating a number of Polish veterans and delivering remarks on Poland's political past and the present. Following the official part, the Polish Constitution Day Celebration continued with a piano recital by Marek Tomaszewski, who was specially invited for the occasion from Paris, France, where he has lived for several decades.

"Celebration of Springtime" was the theme for Mr. Tomaszewski's program presented to the nearly full house, composed of not only Polish émigré community members, but also representatives of other nations living in the greater Los Angeles area. The personal touch of the soloist was to offer the audience two well-known orchestral works in his own piano transcription, Carl Orff's *Carmina burana* and Igor Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*.

Marek Tomaszewski's long and distinguished career reaches back to the early 1960s, when he began concertizing as a member of a piano duet with his friend, Waclaw Kisielewski. For over twenty years, the two pianists performed with such artists as Marlena Dietrich, Jacques Brel, Charles Aznavour, Mireille Mathieu, and Dalida, among others. Known as "Marek & Wacek," the duo pianists recorded numerous LPs, appeared in countless television broadcasts, and performed at many international festivals. Since Waclaw Kisielewski's tragic death in an automobile accident in the mid 1980s, Marek Tomaszewski has devoted his creative energies to collaborating with ballet companies in Paris and working on transcribing works from the standard repertoire for piano solo. Returning to the stage as a soloist only recently, Mr. Tomaszewski premiered his transcription of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* in Montmorency, near Paris, in 2004. Since then he has returned to Poland with numerous recital programs and made recordings for Polish Television. His two solo piano CDs - *Premiere* and *Rapsodia* - as well as his transcription of Stravinsky, were recently recorded at the Lutoslawski Studio of the Polish Radio in Warsaw.

In his Santa Monica appearance, Mr. Tomaszewski displayed a sure-footed approach to the two large-scale orchestral works on the program, coaxing out of the piano rich orchestral textures and a considerable degree of nuance. Under his hands, *Carmina burana* and the *Rite of Spring* proved to be fascinating virtuoso piano pieces, holding their own even when compared with the highly imaginative scoring of their original orchestral versions.

The rousing finale of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* catapulted the audience to a standing ovation and led to several curtain calls for the artist. Willing to lend an additional patriotic accent to the evening, Mr. Tomaszewski performed his own version of Chopin - a jazzed-up C minor *Nocturne* and a tango-like take on the

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Battle of Monte Cassino

This historic battle happened 65 years ago. It was one of Poland's greatest battles for freedom. It was also a time of unique glory. What happened to make this event unique is that, similar to the Battle of Vienna successfully won by John Sobieski, this too was fought on foreign soil and successfully won. I speak to no one's surprise, I hope, of the famous Battle of Monte Cassino fought on Italian soil.

It all began at 4:45 a.m. on September 1, 1939, when Nazi Germany attacked Poland and thus started the Second World War. When it became clear four days later on September 5 that the French and British would not attack Germany even from the air, Poland alone had to bear the brunt of the total German war machine which consisted of 72 infantry and armored divisions and an air force of 2,600 planes. Historical analysts have indicated that if the French army had launched a major offensive in the first ten days of September, such an attempt would have almost certainly carried the French across the Rhine river and into Germany. The subsequent course of WWII would then have been very different. This, obviously, did not occur.

At that time, Poland was bound with the Soviet Union by five peace and non-aggression treaties. Nevertheless, at the most critical moment on September 17, 1939, the Soviet government, in compliance with the Molotov - Ribbentrop Agreement that it had signed with Germany in August, 1939, and in defiance of 11 pledges and agreements that it had with Poland, ordered the Red Army to cross the Polish frontier. After a short resistance, the Soviet Union imprisoned the remaining units of the Polish Army which had been part of the Allied army. What is left unsaid in many historical instances is that at that point in time, in addition to the imprisoned military personnel, the Soviet Government forcibly sent close to two million civilians to forced labor camps in Siberia.

After the Soviet Union was attacked by their German ally, Hitler, they were forced to grant amnesty to Poles who survived the forced labor camps and prisons. A Polish-Soviet Treaty was signed in July, 1941. The haggard masses of liberated Poles poured out of the labor camps and organized themselves into the Second Polish Corps, which served under the command of General Władysław Anders.

In May, 1944, they participated in the famous assault on the Benedictine Monastery at Monte Cassino, which was occupied by the Germans. The Monastery was constructed of concrete and stone and afforded the Germans an eagle's view of the Liri valley and the road leading to Rome.

The Battle of Monte Cassino was the turning point in the Italian campaign. All told, four assaults were launched against those positions, in January, March, and May, 1944. The first three failed.

Polish troops took part in the fourth. Whether they had to undertake that task is a question which continues to arouse heated discussions to this day. However, what can one do? It is not for soldiers to pick and choose their field of battle. They do not lay down the strategic and political concepts for war. Monte Cassino had to be taken, for unless that key position was forced, the whole German line would have remained impregnable.

The Red Poppies on Monte Cassino

On May 11, 1944, the final assault was initiated by the Second Polish Corps under General Anders. To gain the element of surprise, the assault was not preceded by the usual reconnaissance operations. The Polish Third Carpathian and Fifth Kresowa divisions streamed forward blindly heedless of the heavy

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News from Arizona

Polish Spirit in Arizona

By: *Dariusz Zakrzewski*

Phoenix Metropolitan area can claim the highest number of Polish emigres on the US West Coast, only second to California. Some of the members of Polonia, came directly from Poland, most however, resettled from the Chicago, New York, New Jersey and Detroit areas. A few lured by low real estate prices, moved from the Golden State. In general, Polonia in the Valley of the Sun, is rather affluent. Many came here, after selling their homes, when prices were at their peak. The current real estate meltdown however, dwindled many a fortune and made a dent among those that played the real estate game and got stuck with multiple homes.

Polonia life in the Valley evolves around a few institutions. Most prominent among them, the Polish Parish of Our Lady of Częstochowa, with its John Paul II School, the Pulaski Club, the Vagabond Center and Nicolas Copernicus School. There are a sizable number of bakeries, delis, restaurants and a multitude of other Polish businesses. There is one part time radio station, a local publication and two newspapers, one of which is the News of Polonia. There are two major websites www.azpolonia.com and www.radiopomost.com. Polish Visual Artists in Arizona, LLC and the Polish American Congress, for the most part complete the picture. All in all, it adds up to a rather vibrant and relatively well organized community, with a lot of potential. It is difficult to assess the numbers. In general according to the 2001 US census, 140,541 Arizonians declare Polish ancestry. This figure however, does not take into account, the two big waves of new Polonia members who arrived in the 2004 and 2006 period.

Best positioned to center Polonia's activities, is the Polish Parish. It claims some 800 registered souls, but even that number is difficult to assess. Many occasionally come, that have not registered and perhaps only half of the registered parishioners show up. The church can accommodate 536 people and more if need be, when the parish hall is used on Christmas and Easter days. With the Saturday 5:30 evening mass and Sunday 9:00 and 11:00 am masses, a total of roughly a thousand people attend. To the best of my estimate, it constitutes some 10 % of Polish speaking Polonia in Phoenix. That number may surprise and perhaps disappoint, but there are multiple complex reasons why it is not higher.

It would be accurate to conclude that Polonia in Phoenix is split into three factions. One, that more or less regularly attends the Polish masses and one, that used to, but for a variety of reasons no longer does or wants to. It often centers around the other aforementioned prominent institutions, like the Pulaski Club. Call them rebels if you wish. There is of course, some overlapping between them. The third fraction is simply unassociated. Sadly enough, rather stern antagonisms exist, which effectively prevents local Polonia from using its full potential, to aspire and achieve higher goals. Despite a number of activities occurring throughout the year, organized by the Polish American Congress, like the Polish Heritage Ball or the Annual PAC picnic, the so called Polish Festival, organized annually since 2004 by the Polish Parish, none of them specifically focuses on promoting Polish culture. They are social gatherings, whose main purpose is fund raising, entertainment and bestowing honors on its members. A notable exception is Polish Cultural Events, who strive and often present admirable presentations, limited in scope by lack of funds, proper facilities and inadequate support of Polonia.

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Janek's Corner

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Unsaid truth that hurts

May happens to be a month when everyone is getting quite stressed about their education. Neither wine nor beer is the main drink of every student at that time. With small breaks from books, everyone is looking into the future that is dazzling. Vacation! – everyone seems to have such a concept in their minds before actually immersing into a number of books that need to be read before the final exams are taken.

May starts with a "long weekend," as this period is commonly termed in Poland. It consists of at least three free off-work days commencing on 1st May – Labor Day, and usually finishing on 3rd May – 3rd Constitution Day. The time of sitting exams comes afterwards.

Exam season starts with Matura being the scope of media at the very beginning of May. This year Matura was widely considered too easy. From a perspective, it has been regarded as having been prepared for retards that can just read and copy/paste passages from texts. No efforts to prepare their own discursive essays, no need to think reasonably and coherently in order to pass Matura this year, they say, results in a number of professors tearing their diplomas into pieces claiming that this is not a standard that they wish Polish youngsters would meet when they are on the verge of becoming adults. Let them destroy their academic writings, recent high-school graduates seem to suggest through their behavior.

After the hours of anxiously waiting for their Matura written assignments, they are faced with the freedom that they had been yearning for so long. They happen to celebrate it just after the end of the first day of Matura, the first exam which is just the peak of iceberg they had been obediently studying to reach. Beer and wine are then in their hands. Not only are they happy now that they finally took their first "mature" exam, but they are also mesmerized with the idea of tasting alcoholic beverages.

They are just they. They have had no previous history of achievements. They have never been awarded anything. They have never been. That's the bittersweet story of their generation that happens to be heard from in every corner of Poland. They have been brought into a cosmos that is no longer willing to accept the new open-mindedness, cleverness and individualism. They are therefore forced to get into the pocket – the key. Outside-the-pocket thinking is strictly forbidden. No one would even think of that. Such a thought would never spark in the minds of sane people who would love to start their new life at university in Poland – so long desired, now at their hands. Only those who are curious and eager to try fleeing are able to confront the old-fashioned dogmas and face the never-wanted reality – it's time to emigrate.

Key is their life now. Key is just the only way they can think. Key is the answer. It's the only answer they have to know to pass Matura. In order to know the key, they have been consciously given bits of knowledge that will be then enough to know the key in the right percentage – just so they reach 30% of Matura – Pass is all they want.

Those who stay at home, on the other hand, are enthusiastically looking into their future. They seem to be happy with their upbringing – everything suits them. They are free people with no freedom of thought, conscience and religion. They are the masses that are easily led. They have

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