

CZESLAW MAREK

David Wright DMus

Czeslaw Marek was born in the town of Przemyśl in Eastern Galicia, near Lvov on 16 September 1891, His father was a lawyer who loved music and his mother was a soprano. Czeslaw went to Hildegard Schindler for piano lessons from 1900. Then he went to Fryderyka Morecka and, finally, to Stanislaw Glowacki. He entered the Lvov Conservatory in 1908 where he studied the piano with Narałja Loewehof and harmony with Stanislaw Niewiadomski. He was a good pianist playing music from Bach to Rubinstein.

He was such an excellent musician that from 1909 he was engaged as a piano teacher. He became a friend of Szymanowski, He entered the Imperial and Royal Academy of the Performing Arts in Vienna in 1910. He there became a private pupil of Theodor Leschetizky. He studied composition with Karl Weigl. He left Vienna in 1913 to continue his musical studies in Berlin and hopefully with Humperdinck but the latter's illness prevented this and so he studied with Hans Pfitzner. He was appointed to a Piano Professorship in Lwów in 1914 but, three months later, the German invasion of Galicia and their battles with the Russian armies, forced Marek and his parents to flee to Prague. He had been exempted from war duties due to health problems., where he was assisted by Alexander Zemlinsky who welcomed him.. On 8 January 1915, he travelled to Switzerland and settled in Zürich, where he became friendly with the arrogant Busoni and married the violinist Claire Hofer. From 1916 to 1919 he worked at Jose Berr's Conservatory, Up to 1924, he made a sustained attempt to career as a concert pianist and for twenty years broadcast on Swiss Radio. In the summer of 1929 he became the director of the conservatory in Poznan but resigned soon after. He was made a Swiss citizen in 1936. Though he afterwards withdrew from the concert stage, Marek continued to teach and compose. He died in Zurich in 1985 aged 94. Posthumous interest in Marek's music has grown, and the majority of his works were issued on compact disc in the late 1990s.

He was a first class musician in every field except jazz and yet in many areas of the world he is sadly unknown.

Among his most significant compositions are the fugal Triptychon op. 8 (1913, rev. 1923) for piano, the one-movement Sinfonia, op. 28, for large orchestra, which won first prize in the Polish section of the 1928 International Columbia Graphophone Competition celebrating the centenary of Schubert's death, and two Polish song-cycles for voice and chamber orchestra on folk texts. In the 1930s he produced a number of works for harp, including a transcription of Ravel's Ondine for two harps; he also wrote several works in a jazz style. He ceased to compose during the 1940s but in 1972 published *Lehre des Klavierspiels* on the art of piano-playing. The first part of this work originally appeared in 1961 under the title *Was ist "musikalisch"?*.

The jazz inspired music does nothing for this composer and seems to be inappropriate for a composer of quality serious music.

He wrote a lot of quality music for piano including

Variations on an original theme Op 3

Three pieces op 4

Ballad Op 7

Triptychon op 8

Echoes de la jeunesse Op (

Two Meditations Op 10

Choral and Allegro op 11

Petite valse Op 19

Sarabande and Toccata Op 27
Jazz caprices Op 29
Chant Varie Op 37
Three dances Op 39
Suite Op 48
The major orchestral works are
Sinfonietta in D Op 18
Suite for orchestra Op 25
Sinfonia for large orchestra Op 28
Serenade for violin and orchestra

Other works

Lieder
Sonata for violin and piano Op 13
Berceuse for violin and piano Op 26
Chorale for organ
Serenade for two pianos
Annemaria for two pianos

The Suite op 14 is scored for a small orchestra and was written between 1911 and 1913 and dedicated 'to my teachers ' and is an orchestration of piano pieces Op 4 and Op 10. The Capriccio Op 15 and the Sinfonietta Op 16 were written when Marek was studying with Hans Pfitzner. The Capriccio originally dated from 1913 as the Symphonic Scherzo for orchestra; it is a work that does not appeal to me because it is often waltz like and a little lightweight. The Serenade for orchestra and the charming Sinfonietta owes a little to the great Max Reger. The Serenade for violin and orchestra Op 24 is a four movement violin concerto as such and lasts for about 30 minutes. It is a beautiful work devoid of gymnastics.. The first movement Romance has a fine bassoon solo and the Gavotte which follows may have a touch of Reger in it. The third movement is named Canzone solennelle and the final is a presto.. The Sinfonia op 28 was dedicated to the memory of Schubert on his centenary.. He was still lionized in Vienna. Putting that aside we have a tremendous work. It was premiered on 9 November by the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra under Mlynarski at a time when the composer called it Sinfonia Brevis. It is without doubt one of the most beautiful and compelling Polish works ever written. The composer said it was a departure from Romanticism and it certainly bears a Slavic stamp and does not sound like Schubert. The work has a slow introduction and a finale epilogue with the main section as an allegro in the form of a sonata. The orchestration is magnificent throughout.

Of his piano music Tryptychon Op 20 is probably his finest work. It is his Opus 8 and was written in January and February 1913, revised in 1923 and published in Warsaw in 1929 ; there are six movements of which 2, 4 and 6 are fugues. It has been said that his earliest piano music owes something to Poland's national hero Chopin particularly the Ballade Op 7. but I do not see this and it is odious to compare all piano music with Chopin. The Choral and Allegro Op 11 and the allegro was reworked to be the opening movement of the Sinfonietta although the piano work was entitled Homage to Chopin. The Chant Varie Op 37 is a revision of Liszt's working of a song from Chopin's op 74 but this was composed to emphasize Marek's Polish roots. His Three Dances Op 39 were dedicated to his wife who was always frail and she had to undertake exercises for her weak legs and some of these exercises were dance like. Marek gave up some aspects of his musical life to care for his wife. When his piano music shed the influence of Chopin it was vastly better although some of his pieces such as the Petite Valse Op 19, the Three Jazz Caprices Op 20 and the Two Fox trots Op 35 are a little banal. As Marek was a fine pianist this shows in his best piano music.

Why do we live in a society that elevates some composers at the expense of great ones?

I am grateful to Peter Roy Cook for introducing me to this master musician.

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