

JOSEF HOFMANN

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Josef Kazimierz Hofmann was born on 20 January 1876 near Krakow, Poland.

His father, Kazimierz, was a composer and his mother, Matylda Pindelska, was a singer.

Josef was a child prodigy giving a recital at the age of five in Warsaw, and while still a child, toured Europe and Scandinavia and the USA in 1887-1888. In 1892, Anton Rubinstein took Hofmann as a pupil and arranged his debut in Hamburg in 1894. Over 50 years, Hofmann gave concerts in many venues and, in 1913, was awarded the keys to St Petersburg, Russia. He was a sensational pianist even at a very young age and some of his recordings are still available.

When he was seven, Hofmann played Beethoven's C major concerto in Warsaw. At the age of 12, he was one of the first people to record on Edison's phonograph. His tour of the USA from 1887 paid him \$10,000 dollars and, in recognition of his fragile health, \$50,000 was given to the Society of Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

Hofmann took lessons in composition from Heinrich Urban and piano from Moszkowski. In 1894, he played the magnificent Piano Concerto no 4 by Rubinstein

He also became a composer, many of his works written under the pseudonym of Michael Dvorksy although one wonders why. There is ballet music and two piano concertos and, often, he tried to write modern sounding works, a medium in which he was not successful. However, much of his piano music will be admired by many and should therefore be investigated but, sadly, it is not widely known.

His love of the USA resulted in his becoming an American citizen in 1926, having two years earlier, become the head of the piano department at Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia where he gained a reputation as a teacher. In 1938, he was forced to leave due to financial and administrative problems and he was suffering from alcoholism since 1930 which created many difficulties including domestic and family problems.

Of considerable note is the fact that Rachmaninov dedicated his superb Piano Concerto no 3 to Hofmann who was an exceptional pianist. He played a lot of Chopin, Liszt and Beethoven and was known as the King of Pianists.

Hofmann was also an inventor with some 70 patents including a windscreen wiper, a pneumatic shock absorber for cars and airplanes, a furnace that burned crude oil, a house that revolved with the sun and others. He was a very clever man.

By the age of 60, there was a decline in his piano playing and it was widely reported that his last public recital was an ordeal.

He died of pneumonia on 16 February 1957 in Los Angeles.

The Josef Hofmann Piano Competition was established in 1994.

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