

WANDA WILKOMIRSKA

David C F Wright DMus

My appreciation of the violin began with the playing of the Polish violinist, Wanda Wilkomirska.

Her performances of the Szymanowski's Violin Concerto no 1 was a revelation and when Nicola Benedetti played it. It was simply awful. And yet she won a prize for her performance.

Wanda was born in Warsaw on 11 January 1929 and her first teacher was her father. Then she studied at Lodz Academy of Music with Irena Doubiska graduating in 1947. She further studied at the Ferenc Liszt Music Adacamy in Budapest with Ede Zathurecli who had been a student of Hubay and, after she performed in Paris, Henry Szeryng invited her to study with him.

She won major prizes in Geneva in 1946, Budapest in 1949 and Leipzig in 1950.

She also studied in Warsaw with Tadeusz Wronski preparing for a performance at the Wieniawski's Competition in Poznan in 1952 and where she played Szymanowski's Violin Concerto no 1 for the first time. At this festival, she came third after Igor Oistrakh and Julian Sirkovetsky.

The Warsaw Philharmonic Concert Hall was rebuilt in 1955 and the Polish National Philharmonic Orchestra under Witold Rowicki appointed Wanda to be their principal and regular soloist.

She was introduced to the USA and Canada and in the 1960s and 1970s gave about 100 concerts a year. She was in constant demand and the greatest violinist of her time.

In 1969, she gave 37 concerts in Australia to where she emigrated which resulted in further acclaim and she appeared throughout Australia. She was the first violinist to give a recital in the new Sydney Opera House. This was in 1973. Three years later she helped inaugurate the Barbican in London and, surprisingly, played the Britten Concerto. She was to perform it with Barbirolli but he was a hopeless conductor but fortunately, Erich Leinsdorf took over.

It never ceases to amaze how some bad conductors are elevated to greatness. I remember Sir Arthur Bliss talking to us about a new work he had written and we asked him who was to conduct it. "Anyone but Barbirolli", he replied. Malcom Arnold was asked about Barbirolli and answered, "I do not visit Hackney and I don't like Italian food!".

Political unrest and new laws invaded Poland in 1982 and Wanda announced that she would not return there.

The following year she became professor of music at the Heidelberg-Mannheim School of Music and was highly respected as a teacher. Teaching became her greatest interest and, in 1999, she joined the teaching staff at the Sydney Conservatory of Music and also worked for the Australian National Academy of Music in Melbourne. She regularly visited Europe for concerts and teaching. She has two sons one of who emigrated to Australia. These were with her marriage to Mieczyslw Rakowski who became prime minister of Poland in 1988-9 but, by then, the marriage had ended in divorce.

Her premieres include

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| Bacewicz | Violin Concertos 3 and 7 |
| Baird | Expressions |
| Bloch | Dialogues – this is Augustyn Bloch |

Penderecki Capriccio
Bargieleki Violin Concerto
Bujarski Violin Concerto
Maciejewski Sonata
Kotonski Violin Concerto

Discography

Wanda Wiłkomirska plays Polish music by Paderewski, Bacewicz, Zarzycki und Bargielski, with Paul Dam, fortepiano, Ambitus, amb97830

Prokofieff, Two Sonatas for Violin and Piano, with Ann Schein, piano, Connoisseur Society, CD 4079

Works by Wieniawski, Lipinski and Bacewicz with Jadwiga Szamotulska, Gambit 1003-1

Britten Violin Concerto Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of Witold Rowicki, 1967, Orchestral Concert CDs, CD12/2011

Wanda Wilkomirska plays Moussorgsky, Kreisler, Wieniawski, Debussy, Bartok, Szymanowski and Sarasate, with David Garvey, piano. Connoisseur Society CS2070 (LP) Original release in SQ Quadraphonic sound.

Brahms: Sonata No. 3 Op. 108; Beethoven: Sonata No. 5 "Spring" with Antonio Barbosa, piano. Connoisseur Society CS2080 Stereo

Fritz Kreisler's Beloved Melodies with Antonio Barbosa, piano. Connoisseur Society CS2022 Stereo

Ravel: Habanera; Sonata for violin and piano; Grieg: Sonata No. 3 for violin and piano with Antonio Barbosa, piano. Connoisseur Society CS2038 Stereo

Bach: Music for unaccompanied violin - Sonata no. 1; Partita no. 2 Connoisseur Society CS2040 Stereo

Franck: Sonata for violin and piano; Szymanowski: 3 myths, with Antonio Barbosa, piano. Connoisseur Society CS2050 Quadraphonic

Delius: Three sonatas (complete) with David Garvey, piano. Connoisseur Society CS2069 Quadraphonic

Brahms: Sonatas for violin and piano 1 and 2 with Antonio Barbosa, piano. Connoisseur Society CS2079 Quadraphonic

She is an international treasure and it is hoped that those who do not know her work will remedy this as it will be to their advantage as I found out in the early 1960s.

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