

HENRYK PACHULSKI

by Dr. David C.F. Wright

One of the tragedies in music is that so many composers are forgotten, or they have the misfortune to be contemporary with a composer who has been promoted to the exclusion of others. This creates the impression that only one composer of the period has any value and other contemporaries are has-beens.

Henryk Pachulski was born at Lazy, near Siedice, Poland on 16 October 1859. He was of noble birth since his father was a surveyor and forester on the estate of Nadezhad von Meck, the patroness of Tchaikovsky. In fact, her daughter, Julia, married Henryk's brother, Wladslaw, also a musician, and he died in 1919.



Some people claim that his music was influenced by Chopin which is one of those absurd comments made by people who must make comparisons. The expression “influenced by Chopin” carries with it the thought that Chopin was greater than his pupils and others who were allegedly influenced by him.

In fact, Pachulski’s music is original, although one might be able to detect some minor influences of Tchaikovsky but, even then, it has to be said that Tchaikovsky’s piano music does not lie comfortably under the hands whereas Pachulski’s music is beautifully written for the piano and is well-structured and romantic. At times it is very difficult but the difficulties are the natural progression of the music. It does not indulge in difficulties just for effect as some lesser composers so indulge.

Henryk studied at the Warsaw Institute under Moniuszko and Zelenski and at the Moscow Conservatory from 1880 to 1885 with Michalowski, Pabst, Nikola Rubinstein and Arensky. Pachulski was professor of piano at the Moscow Conservatory from 1886.

Pachulski's main teacher was Nikolay Rubinstein who was born in Moscow in 1835. He was a pianist and composer and was the younger brother of Anton Rubinstein (1829–1894). Nikolay founded the Moscow Conservatory in 1866 remaining the director until his death in Paris in 1881. He gave the first performance of Balakirev’s *Islamey* and Tchaikovsky’s Piano Trio was written in his memory, and yet he was the composer who criticised Tchaikovsky’s First Piano Concerto as unplayable and incoherent.

Anton Rubinstein was a prolific composer of some 20 operas, six symphonies, five piano concertos, a violin concerto, two cello concertos and ten string quartets. Like his brother he was a very fine pianist.

Anton Arensky was born in 1861 and was professor of harmony and counterpoint at the Moscow Conservatory. He composed three operas, two string quartets, two symphonies, a piano concerto, a violin concerto, a piano trio and the gorgeous variations on a theme of Tchaikovsky. Arensky died in Finland in 1906.

When Pachulski was born in 1859, Chopin had been dead for ten years, Glinka was 55, Bruckner was 35, Liszt was 48, Wagner was 46, Brahms was 26, Balakirev was 22, Mussorgsky was 20,

Tchaikovsky was 19, Dvorák was 18, Rimsky-Korsakov was 14 and Moszkowski was 4. Mahler was born in 1860, the year after Pachulski's birth, and Rachmaninov was born in 1873 when Pachulski was 14.

In 1866 Pachulski was appointed professor at the Moscow Conservatory. He was 27. In his lifetime he lived through the rule of the Tsars who refused to have a people's government and democracy, the war with Japan over ownership of territory, the reign of Lenin, who had formed the Marxist Russian Social Democratic Labour Party in 1903, and whose followers were known as Bolsheviks, and who established the first Communist government in 1917.

Pachulski died on 2nd March 1921 a year before Stalin became the general secretary of the Communist Party a post he held until his death in 1953 and whose reign was thirty years of terror in which he killed thousands of his own people and he also killed anyone who stood in his way. Pachulski also lived through World War I when Russia fought the Germans There were obviously more opportunities in music in Russia than in Poland. It must also be remembered that Poland was partitioned between Prussia, Austria and Russia and only became an independent state after World War I and the composer Paderewski became its Prime minister. Russia had a wealth of composers some of which are set out above and yet Russia was a society in decline.

The piano music is beautifully written and is devoid of all the predictability and the ornamental filigree of Chopin and his followers. It is not music for show or showing off. It is pure music in which there are no empty and pointless gestures.

The Variations on an original theme, Op 1, is a very fine work. The 16 bars that make up the theme is in E minor and a very effective theme marked *Andante espressivo*. There is no silly racing up and down the keyboard. The first variation is attractively ambiguous with the conflict between E major and E minor. The second variation continues this conflict with an impressive *allegro vivace* and, all the time, the theme is not lost or swamped by decoration. This is followed an *allegro moderato* and the fourth variation is a stunning *allegro* and a study in sixths. The fifth variation produces the theme in a *maestoso* setting which is followed by a *lento* in the style of an improvisation. Variation seven is a *vivo* marked *sempre forte e marcato* and the next variation, marked *allegro*, displays double octaves and right hand leaps. The key signature changes to E major for variation nine in which the theme is presented in sensible grandeur. This is followed by a march like movement in canon and then a sublime *andante elegivo*. The final variation calls for a cool head, steel fingers and an impeccable technique being a passionate *allegro* which brings the work to a thrilling conclusion. The work should be played without a break, as a continuous whole.

Two pieces make up opus 2, a *Fantasiestück* in E flat with a simple but delightful melody and an substantial *Intermezzo* in D flat which is not a slight piece, as many *intermezzi* are, but a work which develops a strength and purpose.

The *Polonaise*, Op 5, is dedicated to Paderewski and is a brilliant showpiece of contrast with double octaves often prevailing in an *allegro maestoso* and cast in the glowing key of E flat. It is a strong work and totally satisfying.

Opus 6 is a pleasant *Valse-caprice* teeming with memorable melody in which the thematic material is developed with great skill.

Two Concert studies are his opus 7 and are dedicated to Sofanov of the Moscow Conservatory. The first, *Harmonie de Soir* is in F sharp major and very difficult and has another stunning melody. The second, *Fantome* is also difficult and has all the welcome ingredients of its predecessor. The point must be made that these two pieces are not merely gymnastics for the pianist but real music.

The most famous piece is the first prelude in the set of six published as his opus 8. This C minor prelude sometimes comes up in Grade 6 or 7 piano exams. It is the easiest of the set.

This man not only knew how to write for the piano and had a wonderful sense of melody which is never banal and he could certainly construct a piece. His pieces are never just a mood or impression as, for example, you may find in Debussy.

The Piano Sonata in C minor, Op 10, was dedicated to Arensky and is a work of quality. It is cast in three movements. The first benefits from being in sonata form and is logical and coherent containing memorable material and, as with all his work, written magnificently for the piano. The simplicity of the slow movement in A flat major makes it endearing and human and the music is developed to become grand and exalting without being mawkish. The finale, *allegro con brio*, is a brilliant piece, often tricky, but, again, with clear and memorable themes. This is not only the work of a very fine composer but a competent architect.

The death of Tchaikovsky in suspicious circumstances in 1893 inspired Pachulski to write his Symphonic Suite, Op 13, for orchestra in his memory. It is in four movements and scored for a modest orchestra and it is a modest piece.

Much more successful is the Fantasy for piano and orchestra, Op 17, in three movements dedicated to the memory of Nikolay Rubinstein who died in 1881. It is a brilliant concerto in all but name. But it is clear from his music that Pachulski was not a show-off, but a man who, thankfully, did not entertain the demon of pride. It is a very fine work providing you can find a pianist who can perform prodigiously.

Josef Hofmann was a remarkable pianist and was also Polish. He was born near Krakow in 1876 and made his concert debut at the age of six and performed with the Berlin Philharmonic at the age of 9. He made his debut in New York at the age of 11. He became a private pupil of Anton Rubinstein. He was a phenomenal pianist and a composer of five piano concertos, piano sonatas and a symphony. Scriabin, who must be one of the weirdest men of all time, hated Hofmann because Hofmann was a very great pianist.

The mention of Hofmann is because Pachulski composed his Toccata, Op 19, for Hofmann which is a concertante work only possible to pianists of Herculean ability. It is striking original as well, with alternating semiquavers of fourths, sevenths and sixths.

Opus 20 no. 1 is another fine set of variations. The original theme, in G, is simple, direct and undecorated. The ten variations are all purposeful and exploit all the expressive and percussive aspects of the piano.

The Piano Sonata no 2 in F, Op 27, was written for Rachmaninov and is set in four movements, the third being a scherzo. It is a more serious work than the first sonata but none the worse for that. It is so different from the first sonata which shows that Pachulski advanced as a composer and was not content just to write music so similar to what he had written before as to be inconsequential. The slow movement is profound and ends with throbbing D flat heartbeats. The scherzo bounces along with exuberance remaining in D flat major. The finale is fluent and in the section *un poco piu moderato* there is a theme to die for, a theme of exquisite beauty only equalled by the eleventh prelude from Felix Blumenfeld set of 24 preludes.

Pachulski did not write the salon music of endless nocturnes, mazurkas and waltzes so that he could sit at the piano in great houses to play to beautiful ladies of nobility to swoon over him. The other vital point is that he dedicated much of his music to the greatest pianists of the day and not only to

get them to play the pieces, but it must be considered that he would not have dedicated such work to eminent pianists if the music was poor or just adequate.

It is music of excellent quality which makes its neglect totally unjustified. But if any pianist is to take this music up he must have the stamina and skill to make this vital music live.

Pachulski's works include:

Variations on an original theme Op 1 Dedicated to Sergei Taneyev

Two Pieces Op 2 Dedicated to Pauline Erdmannsdorfer

Fantasy piece

Intermezzo Op 2

Piano pieces Op 3

Chant sans paroles

La fileuse

Impromptu

Three pieces for cello and piano Op 4 Dedicated to Charles (Carl) Davidoff (1838–1889)

Polonaise Op 5 Dedicated to Paderewski

Valse Caprice op 6

Two Etudes de concert Op 7 Dedicated to Basil Safonov

Harmonie du Soir

Fantome

Six Preludes Op 8

C minor, F minor, A flat, F, B flat minor, D flat

Two pieces Op 9

Impromptu

Etude

Piano Sonata no. 1 in C minor Op 10 Dedicated to Arensky

Two Pieces Op 11 Dedicated to Madame Marie Badowska

Moment Musicale in B minor

Etude in F sharp

Six Fantastic marches Op 12 Dedicated to Emil Sauer

Symphonic Suite for orchestra Op 13 Dedicated to the memory of Tchaikovsky: Prelude; Scherzo; Momento Lirico; Scene de ballet 2.1.2. 1 2.0.0.0. Strings, also arranged for piano, four hands

March solennelle for orchestra Op 15, also arrangement for piano, and also piano four hands

Feuilles d'album Op 16 Dedications Marie Zaleska, Jaroslav Zielinsky

E flat minor, B flat, D flat, F Paul de Conne, Hubert M Evans

Fantasy for piano and orchestra Op 17; To the memory of a great master Nicolas Rubinstein who died in 1881

Two Mazurkas Op 18

Toccata op 19 Dedicated to Josef Hoffman, completed in Moscow November 1902

Two pieces Op 20 Dedicated to Nicolas Shischkin

Theme and variations

Pastorale antique

Four Preludes Op 21 Dedicated to Paul de Conne, Director of the Vienna Conservatory: B, F sharp minor; C sharp minor, F

Three pieces Op 22 Dedicated to Jaroslav de Zielinski

Moment musicale

Prelude in F

Valse caprice in B flat

Album for the young; 16 pieces, Op 23

Two Pieces Op 24 Dedicated to Lucine Robonska

Esquisses in B

Valse melancholie in D minor
Eight Canonic Studies Op 26 Dedicated to Boleslaus Jaworski
Piano Sonata no. 2 in F Op 27 (1910) Dedicated to Rachmaninov
Three pieces Op 29
Preludes in G flat and B minor and Elegy
Two Etudes Op 31
Etude in octaves in G flat Dedicated to Carl Kipp
Prelude in D flat
Point d'orgue
Etude alla Rudolf Strobl
Exercices speciaux in arpeggios

There are also transcriptions for piano of songs of Moniuszko, Zelenski's Masovienne and Polonaise from the Suite Op 47, pieces by Tchaikovsky, including the Waltz from the Serenade for strings, the fantasy overture Hamlet, the Melodie Op 73 no 2 and the complete Symphonies numbers 5 and 6.

PDF Scores:

[Theme and variations op. 1](#)

[Six Preludes op. 8](#)

[Toccata op. 19](#)

[Sonata 2 op.27](#)

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