

## MICHAL SPISAK

David C F Wright PhD

Michał Spisak was born on 14 September, 1914 at Dąbrowa Górnicza, Poland and died on 29 January, 1965 in Paris.

He studied at the Katowice Conservatory, where, in 1937, he received a diploma with honours for his studies in violin and composition. He continued his studies in composition under Kazimierz Sikorski in Warsaw (1935-37).

In 1937, he went to Paris, as did many Polish composers, where he studied with Nadia Boulanger. He stayed in France until his death, while maintaining regular contact with his native country. That same year, he became vice-president of the Association of Young Polish Musicians in Paris. When he was in Poland, he had appeared as a violinist, but, from 1937, his attention was fixed exclusively to composition. His compositions have been performed throughout the world but, currently, his work seems to be in decline.

Michał Spisak is the holder of numerous prizes and distinctions: twice, he was awarded the Nadia Boulanger Prize (1945, 1946); Premier Grand Prix at the Queen Elizabeth of Belgium International Composers Competition for his Serenade for orchestra (Brussels, 1953) and Premier Grand Prix at the same competition for his Concerto giocoso for chamber orchestra (1957); Grand Prix at the International Competition for the Official Olympic Anthem (Monaco, 1955); Premier Prix at the Henryk Wieniawski International Composers Competition for His Improvisazione for violin and piano (Poznań, 1962). In 1964, the Union of Polish Composers in Warsaw awarded Michał Spisak their annual prize for his whole creative output.

Bernard Stevens points out that his style is European rather than national and highlights his Suite for Strings of 1948 as being effective, powerful writing but rather square and rigid rhythmically.

His Piano Concerto of 1947 is a concise 15 minute work and is impressive but has received some inane criticisms. There is a plethora of people who talk and write about music and show their ignorance. One recalls a popular BBC newsreader who wrote a book about a famous German composer and made no reference to the Violin Concerto thus indicating that he did not write one and yet this BBC personality was so liked that people purchased his book and took it to be definitive and that in this composer's work there was no Violin Concerto. An editor on Music Web International wrote that Liszt was not a good composer and did not understand the piano. There are those who do not appreciate that a Piano Concerto is really a Concerto for piano and orchestra and moan that sometimes the orchestra drowns the piano but they clearly do not understand tutti passages. What is more alarming is that people call the piano a string instrument. It is not. It is a percussion instrument. It was Chopin who, in his two concertos, put the piano too much in the fore and the orchestra parts are feeble and ineffective.

The Suite for two violins of 1953 lasts 15 minutes and is very appealing music, as is the Serenade for orchestra of the same year, although it does not break any new ground. The Concerto Grosso of 1957 is a successful piece.

LIST OF WORKS

## Orchestral Works

- Serenade - 1939
- Aubade for small orchestra - 1943
- Suite for string orchestra - 1945
- Toccata - 1947
- Symphony Concertante No. 1 - 1947
- Divertissement (Musique legere no.1) - 1950
- Ballet "Melos" - 1951
- Symphony Concertante No. 2 - 1956
- Concerto Giocoso for chamber orchestra - 1957
- Allegro de Voiron - 1957 (after work of 1943)
- Works for Solo Instruments and Orchestra
- Clarinet Concertino - 1940-41
- Bassoon Concerto - 1944
- Piano Concerto - 1947
- Divertimento for 2 pianos and orchestra - 1950
- Sonata for violin and orchestra - 1950
- Trombone Concertino - 1951
- Andante et Allegro for violin and string orchestra - 1954

## Chamber Music

- Quartet for oboe, 2 clarinets and bassoon - 1938
- Concerto for 2 pianos - 1942
- Sonatine for oboe, clarinet and bassoon - 1947
- Sonate for violin and piano - 1946
- Wind Quintet - 1948
- Duetto Concertante for viola and bassoon - 1949
- Musique Legere No. 2 for 2 violins, cello, double bass and piano - 1951
- Three Preludes for soprano and flute - 1953
- String Quartet No. 1 - 1953
- Suite for 2 violins - 1958
- Suite for 2 violas - 1959
- Works for Solo Instruments and Piano
- Two Caprices for violin and piano - 1937
- Concertino for clarinet and piano - 1940-41
- Humoresque for piano - 1943
- Suite for piano - 1943
- Concerto for bassoon and piano - 1944
- Sonata for violin and orchestra (reduction for violin and piano) - 1950
- Concertino for trombone and piano - 1951
- Andante et Allegro for violin and piano - 1954
- Improvvisazione for violin and piano - 1962

## Works for Unaccompanied Choir or Choir and Orchestra

- Two Psalms for mixed choir and orchestra - 1938
- Anthem for mixed choir and orchestra - 1947
- Christmas Mass for unaccompanied choir - 1953
- Olimpic Anthem (Pindar) for mixed choir and orchestra - 1955
- Pedrek Wyrzutek, cantata for boy's soprano, bass, reciter and boys' and men's choir - 1962

Didactic Works

Five Studies for string orchestra - 1948

Studies for violin ensembles - 1949-50

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