

Łukasz Borowicz

Field of Expertise: Fine Arts

Domaine: Musical Arts

Artistic Discipline: Conducting

SUMMARY OF PROFESSIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1. Name and Surname: Łukasz Borowicz

2. Titles and degrees obtained:

- 2002 - Master of Fine Arts (Master Degree), Frederic Chopin Music Academy in Warsaw

- 2006 - Doctor of Musical Arts in Conducting. Title of dissertation: *In the search of the Mozart Idiom – Analysis of Compositions of Rimski-Korsakov, Peter Tchaikovsky, Alfred Schnittke, dedicated to Mozart.*

3. Heretofore employment:

1st October 2017 (to the present) – Music Academy in Cracow, Department of Creativity, Interpretation and Music Education, Department of Conducting, Assistant Professor (Adiunkt).

4. Work presented – the cd recording of Felix Nowowiejski's Oratorio *Quo Vadis* (double compact disc album) recorded under my baton with the Poznań Philharmonic Orchestra, Podlasie Opera and Pilharmonic Choir and the soloists (Wioletta Chodowicz, Robert Gierlach, Wojtek Gierlach (issued by German label CPO).

5. INTRODUCTION TO THE WORK SUBMITTED

The documentation submitted as part of the summary is a record of my work as a conductor since receiving the title of Doctor of Fine Arts in 2005. The following years, 2005-2018, had been crucial for my development as a musician and conductor; I managed to formulate main goals, which I began to, and intend to, pursue. The goals are as follows:

1. Development of activity within symphonic music
2. Development of activity within opera music

3. Development of activity within oratorio music
4. Development of phonographic activity
5. Editorial activity and popularization of Polish music
6. Reinstitution of forgotten repertoire into concert life
7. Development of educational activity

The work presented is the recording of *Quo Vadis* by Feliks Nowowiejski made with Poznań Philharmonic Orchestra, Podlasie Opera and Philharmonic Choir as well as soloists Wioletta Chodowicz, Robert Gierlach, Wojtek Gierlach, issued on compact discs by German label CPO.

Below is the discussion of the above points, preceded by chronological description of my artistic development in the years 2005-2018, i.e. since becoming D.F.A.

I CHRONOLOGY

The years 2005-2018, rich in experiences in my professional work, was a long period which I would divide into three stages:

1. Assistantship

The first stage are the years of assistantship at Teatr Wielki (Wielki Theatre) – the National Opera of Poland. I had began my work there after an invitation from the institution's director Kazimierz Kord, who had become my mentor in the field of opera. The invitation came at a very opportune moment, while I had been finishing my three-year-long assistantship with Professor Antoni Wit. The period abounded with experiences – working with one of the most prominent Polish conductors gave me a chance to observe the Philharmonic Orchestra at work, to get to know vast repertoire, frequent opportunity to conduct the orchestra, as well as to assist at recording sessions. Professor Wit introduced me to the world of symphony, arouse my interest in lesser known works of Polish composers, but most of all agreed to be the supervisor of my doctoral dissertation. For the D.F.A exam concert we chose repertoire connected with the music of Mozart (Alfred Schnittke – *Moz-Art a'la Haydn*, Peter Tchaikovsky - 4th Orchestral Suite *Mozartiana*, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov – the Opera *Mozart and Salieri*). By that time I had

already conducted numerous concerts in Poland, I had began conducting abroad, but had been forever intrigued by opera.

Here I would like to stress that operatic conducting and symphonic conducting are nowadays treated more and more as separate fields of expertise, the so called majors. I consider this division erroneous and harmful – conductors lacking operatic practice are frequently at a disadvantage when it comes to accompanying soloists-instrumentalists, and especially soloist singers (e.g. in oratorio music).

With that in mind I had the privilege of accepting the invitation and thus began my experience with opera as Director Kord's assistant. Director Kord had made my opera debut possible quite early on: I conducted spectacles of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* with Mariusz Kwiecień in the title role, which became another fascinating and forming experience. Beside conducting and assisting in opera spectacles I had early on began conducting opera spectacles (my first title was *Swan Lake* by Tchaikovsky). The years at Wielki Theatre – National Opera of Poland had been a period of gaining priceless experience and observations: I had gotten to know ins and outs of stage life, rehearsal organization, and problems of large cast productions. Since then it had become clear for me that the only way of my further development as conductor was in simultaneous pursuing of both, symphonic and operatic, paths. The decision was strengthened by my Mentors' – Professors Madey, Wit and Kord – similar choice in the past.

2. Artistic directorship of Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra

Another breakthrough moment in my work as a conductor was joining the Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra (Warsaw). I became its Artistic Director in March 2007, and left the position in January 2015. The period brought forth many concerts and recordings (28 cds issued). The orchestra expanded its repertoire by adding opera music. We performed operas by Polish composers, among them *Maria* by Roman Statkowski, *Monbar* by Ignacy Feliks Dobrzyński, *Zemsta (The Revenge)* by Zygmunt Noskowski, *Flis (The Raftsmen)* and *Verbum Nobile* by Stanisław Moniuszko, *Zaginioną jaskółkę (L'Hirondelle inattendue)* by Szymon Laks, *The Adventure of King Arthur* by Grażyna Bacewicz. The performances of opera music by foreign composers resulted in an invitation from Ms. Elżbieta Pendercka to participate in the Ludwig van Beethoven Festival in Warsaw, where we presented works of many composers of various periods and origins, unknown or forgotten in Poland: *Lodoiska* by Luigi Cherubini, *Der*



Berggeist by Louis Spohr, *Euryanthe* by Carl Maria von Weber, *Simone Boccanegra* by Giuseppe Verdi, *L'Amore dei tre re* by Italo Montemezzi, *Maria Padilla* by Gaetano Donizetti, *Iphigenie en Tauride* by Christoph Willibald Gluck. I continued my interest in opera through cooperation of PRSO with Polish opera stars such as Ewa Podleś, Piotr Beczała, Mariusz Kwiecień and Artur Ruciński.

Opera music aside, I devoted equal attention to symphony, especially that by Polish composers. We had frequently performed works by: Andrzej Panufnik, Grażyna Bacewicz or Krzysztof Penderecki. The period of my artistic directorship was welcomed favorably by critics and music lovers alike. It is at that time that I received *Passport of the Polityka Weekly Magazine*, *Corypheus of Polish Music* and *Tansman Prize*. I am happy to note that our recordings are frequently broadcast by Polish Radio (Program 2) as well as by foreign radio stations (as part of EBU – European Broadcasting Union).

3. Poznań Philharmonic Orchestra

Looking from perspective at the years 2005-2018 the most important is my cooperation with Poznań Philharmonic Orchestra. We gave our first concert in November 2006, and the cooperation has by now lasted for thirteen artistic seasons. In cooperation with Wojciech Nentwig, the General Director, and Professor Marek Pijarowski, the Artistic Director, I hold the position of First Guest Conductor. The years of my work with the Orchestra have been marked by balance between symphonic and operatic music in the repertoire. From my very beginnings we have continued the cycle World Opera Stars, as part of which I had the privilege to perform alongside Samuel Ramey, Sergei Leiferkus, Piotr Beczała, Ewa Podleś, Sumi Jo, or Pretty Yende. As part of the symphonic music cycle we have presented the core of the symphonic repertoire of the 19th century (the complete symphonies of Felix Mendelssohn) as well as works by lesser known composers (Polish and foreign). Recordings play an important role (they are discussed separately, in the paragraph devoted to phonography). A regular element of my cooperation with Poznań Philharmonic Orchestra are guest concerts, local (Warsaw and other venues) as well as abroad (Milano, Prague, Berlin, Ostrava). Another important element is the presentation of oratorio works by Polish composers – among our special achievements I would name the performance of *Requiem* by Roman Maciejewski and *Quo Vadis* by Feliks Nowowiejski. Since 2016 the Poznań Philharmonic Orchestra has been a regular at the Beethoven Festival where by invitation of Ms. Elżbieta Penderecka we continue the cycle of

introducing unknown operas; thus far we have presented: *Djamileh* by Georges Bizet (with Wojciech Pszoniak as narrator), *Kashchey the Immortal* by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (with the soloists from *Marinsky Theatre Vocal Academy*) and, this year, *Paria* by Stanisław Moniuszko (premiere in Italian version). Another important artistic experience had been conducting (with Professor Marek Pijarowski) the finals of International Henryk Wieniawski Violin Competition.

4. Other Polish ensembles

In the years 2005-2018 I had collaborated with most artistic ensembles in the country. Of special importance were the guest concerts with National Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra. Thanks to this close collaboration I had the privilege of participating in the concert cycle of *Dni Muzyki Wojciecha Kilara (Wojciech Kilar's Music Days)*, where I had the opportunity to perform the canon of the composer's works in his presence. On numerous occasions I had performed with NPRSO abroad (Prague, Budapest), I also took part in the New Venue Opening Festival (special concert with Piotr Beczała). Another important experience were the archival recordings for the Polish Radio: With NPRSO I had recorded symphonic music of 19th and 20th century, and oratorio works. Many of the recordings were issued on cds.

Of great importance is also my cooperation with Warsaw Philharmonic. I had frequently collaborated with both the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir - we presented works from repertoire canon (Beethoven), but also polish music (Panufnik, Palester, Kisielewski).

I collaborate on regular basis also with other philharmonic ensembles. I value greatly the opportunity to work with Baltic Philharmonic Orchestra (Gdańsk), Szczecin Philharmonic Orchestra, Cracow Philharmonic Orchestra.

My activity in the field of opera manifests itself through regular collaboration with Wielki Theatre – National Opera of Poland. Since my debut with Mozart's *Don Giovanni* (at the time of my assistantship to Kazimierz Kord) I have conducted over one hundred sixty opera and ballet spectacles, i.a. the premieres of: *Orfeo ed Euridice* by Christoph Willibald Gluck, *A Midsummer's Night Dream* by Felix Mendelssohn, *The Rite of Spring* by Igor Stravinsky, *Romeo and Juliet* by Sergei Prokofiev and *The Polish Ballets* (with music by Eugeniusz Morawski, Alexander Tansman and Karol Szymanowski). I collaborated also with other Polish opera theaters, staging premieres of: *Die Zauberflöte* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Rusalka* by Antonin Dvorak, *Dido and Aeneas* by Henry Purcell, *Bluebeard's Castle* by Bela Bartók

(Łódź), *Don Giovanni* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Eugene Onegin* by Peter Tchaikovsky, *Halka* by Stanisław Moniuszko and *King Roger* by Karol Szymanowski (Kraków), *Eugene Onegin* by Peter Tchaikovsky (Poznań) and *Maria* by Roman Statkowski (Gdańsk).

5. Activity abroad – symphony and opera

I have collaborated with foreign orchestras since 2010, concentrating on chosen countries. Most frequent is my collaboration with German orchestras. Apart from concerts I have conducted recordings as well as opera performances. I value highly my experience resulting from the collaboration with radio orchestras MDR (Leipzig), NDR (Hannover), and SWR (Stuttgart). I had frequently collaborated with Berlin based orchestras: with Konzerthausorchester Berlin, besides concerts we have recorded the works of Andrzej Panufnik (on five CDs), with Deutsches-Sinfonie-Orchester Berlin we are in the process of registering the complete symphonies of Hugo Alfvén. Of special importance are projects carried out with ensembles specializing in historical performance: Akademie für Alte Musik und RIAS Kammerchor. Our concerts brought forth the recording of music by Anton Bruckner, as well as plans for upcoming concerts (Brucknerfest Linz in October 2019).

My collaboration with British orchestras is closely connected to my phonographical activity.

My collaboration with French orchestras is concentrated on operatic repertoire. Of unprecedented importance in my artistic development and exploration of ins and outs of opera performance was my collaboration with Opera de Paris, where as 2nd conductor I prepared the premiere of *Les Huguenots* by Giacomo Meyerbeer (October 2018). This experience will allow me to work more often with French music and return to work with those ensembles. (So far I have worked in Marseille, Montpellier, Nantes, Angers, Lille and Nancy).

Very frequently I collaborate with Czech orchestras. I repeatedly conducted the concerts of Prague Symphony Orchestra FOK, Prague Philharmonia, Janacek Philharmonic (Ostrava), I performed at festivals (Pražské Jaro). An important experience was a two-week tour with FOK to Japan (January 2013).

My collaboration with foreign orchestras has taken me also to Australia, Korea, China, Uruguay, USA, Norway, Sweden, Russia, Ukraine, Slovakia, Hungary, Austria, Italy, Switzerland and Spain.

II OBJECTIVES FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Following the chronological account of my artistic development in the years 2005-2019, I would like to turn to my objectives for further professional development.

1. Development of activity within symphonic music

The immanent characteristic of my artistic development is constant work on expanding the symphonic repertoire. The repertoire I present in my concerts spans from around 1750 to contemporary works. I make every effort to present the 18th century and Romantic works basing on available research concerning historical performance. From this perspective the collaboration with Akademie für Alte Musik and RIAS Kammerchor seem crucial. I try to propagate and develop the skills and knowledge of historically informed performance during my work with ensembles playing on modern instruments (I particularly value the possibility to work on early music with Poznań Philharmonic Orchestra, where the principles of style were set by Christopher Hogwood, who frequently worked with the ensemble during his last years). Historical reference is important for me also when working on Romantic and Neo-romantic repertoire. In my repertoire choices I do not shun off the classics of the 20th century, as well as contemporary music of today – I had the privilege of conducting several premieres. Thanks to my work in the Polish Radio I managed to register several symphonies of Polish composers: Ignacy Feliks Dobrzyński, Zygmunt Noskowski, Ignacy Jan Paderewski. I also try to promote foreign symphonic repertoire lesser known in Poland (Ralph Vaughan Williams). In the upcoming years I will try to maintain this line of development. The chart listing my concerts gives a view of my repertoire choices of recent years – I would like to stress my effort in expanding the repertoire, repeating certain works only for legitimate reasons (such as new interpretational possibilities).

2. Development of activity within opera music

The turning points in the field of opera music were my premieres in opera theatres in Poland (Wielki Theatre – National Opera of Poland), France (Opera de Paris, Nantes), and spectacles (Narodni Divadlo in Prague). Another important element within this field are opera recitals, frequently connected with recordings. It is my great privilege to have been cooperating for many years with Piotr Beczała, with whom I had performed in Austria, Germany, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland. I have frequently performed with Ewa Podleś, Diana Damrau,

Mariusz Kwiecień, and many other renown soloists. Concerts of this type are an excellent ground for gaining experience – the repertoire and stylistic variety of each concert can be compared to separate opera production. I intend to continue this line of work in the upcoming years. As part of ongoing commemoration of Moniuszko Year, I am currently working on the premiere of *Halka* in Theater an der Wien.

3. Development of activity within oratorio music

Natural consequence of my interest in opera music is my predilection to oratorio repertoire, which constitutes a substantial part of my concert repertoire. The work submitted as part of the habilitation process is an oratorio that has become crucial and emblematic of my development after obtaining the title of D.F.A.: *Quo Vadis* by Feliks Nowowiejski. I have performed the piece with Poznań Philharmonic Orchestra and Podlasie Opera and Philharmonic Choir, and soloists (Wioletta Chodowicz, Robert Gierlach, and Wojtek Gierlach) at concerts in Konin, Poznań, and Berlin. The recording of the oratorio was issued for international distribution by German label CPO. The recording was awarded the prestigious ICMA in Choral Music category. I present the special approach to the piece, the work on its interpretation, and subsequent performance in the paragraph of my summary devoted presented work.

Within the field of oratorio music I am fortunate to have been collaborating with Wojciech Kilar, Professor Krzysztof Penderecki, and Krzysztof Meyer. I make it a point to include their works into concert programmes as often as possible.

4. Development of phonographic activity

Phonographic activity constitutes one of the most important elements of my artistic endeavors. Committed to the idea of recording since my studies I have so far recorded over eighty albums. They have received the following recognition: Diapason d'Or, BBC Music, and ICMA.

The albums include:



-symphonic music (the complete symphonic works by Andrzej Panufnik, awarded ICMA – International Classical Music Award)

-opera music (several opera titles including recording premieres), and forgotten Polish music (19th and 20th century)

-opera recitals (including album by Piotr Beczała recorded for Deutsche Gramophon)

Among labels I have recorded for are NAXOS, Polish Radio, DUX, CD Accord, CPO, Hyperion, Chandos, EDA, Accentus, and others.

In the nearest future I plan to continue the series devoted to the Swedish composer Hugo Alfvén recorded for CPO.

Among foreign symphonic ensembles I have recorded with are the following: BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Konzerthausorchester Berlin, Deutsches-Sinfonie Orchester Berlin.

5. Editorial activity popularizing Polish music

My recording activity resulted in my interest in music edition. Numerous pieces I worked on were not correctly edited – on several occasions I reconstructed, corrected and edited orchestra material. Regular cooperation with PWM Edition in this field resulted in official collaboration during the issuing of Complete Works of Mieczysław Karłowicz (I was responsible for artistic consultation). Currently I assist in the edition of works by Stanisław Moniuszko. I am also a member of Board of PWM Edition.

Popularizing activity should be, in my opinion, the duty of every conductor. Writing texts for programs and giving talks is very important, as it has direct influence on audience engagement. For many years I have written introductions to my concerts; I also do lead ins/overviews. The opinion of the audience confirms my belief that short introductions-discussions of the concert program are welcomed. Clearly, each time it presents itself as a challenge, but also a chance to convince the audience to listen to music they are less familiar with. In addition to that, I have for years participated in radio talk shows with the intention of popularizing symphonic and operatic music.



6. Reinstitution of forgotten repertoire into concert life

Reinstitution of forgotten repertoire into concert life became one of the most important assumptions of my artistic activity. For obvious reasons it is concentrated on Polish music, but is by no means limited to it. The most important projects were, in my opinion, the first contemporary performance of *Monbar* by Ignacy Feliks Dobrzyński, the score adjustment and recording of Symphonies Nos. 2 and 3 by Feliks Nowowiejski, and the score adjustment, premiere (and recording) of ballet *Świtezianka* by Eugeniusz Morawski.

7. Development of educational activity

Since the beginning of the academic year 2017/2018 I have been teaching conducting at the Academy of Music in Cracow. My students are nearing the end of their second year of education. I consider didactic work to be very important and interesting. My mentor Professor Bogusław Madey frequently stressed that getting to know the art and techniques of conducting are crucial for future conductors, as they allow them to convey suggestions to their ensembles in a simple, clear manner (frequently without the use of words, and therefore without the need of constant interruption of rehearsal). The situation of today's artistic milieu is very complicated, frequently we witness concerts conducted by laymen, with technical shortcomings (as well as lack of knowledge in the field). I believe it is the duty of every conductor to pass on the skills they were passed onto by their teachers. In my didactic work I try to continue the style and technique of Professor Madey, who had created his own didactic system. It was based on stressing the technical abilities which had always been employed in service of music.

Besides didactic work with students I frequently conduct youth orchestras. The recording of works by Zygmunt Stojowski and Ignacy Jan Paderewski with Polish Orchestra Sinfonia Juventus received very positive criticism. I also cooperate with the youth orchestra Corda Cracovia. In the past I have frequently conducted opera premieres with the cast consisting of students from vocal departments of Music Academies in Warsaw and Białystok (*Bunt Żaków – Students Revolt* by Tadeusz Szeligowski and *Die Zauberflöte* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart). In the very beginning of my work I taught an orchestra class in State Karol Szymanowski Secondary Music School in Warsaw. Recently, I accepted with great joy an invitation to conduct the Orchestra at a special concert celebrating the 70th anniversary of its founding.

III THE WORK

Quo Vadis by Feliks Nowowiejski

The preliminary works before the performance and recording of the oratorio are an excellent example of my activity in discovering and reinstitution of Polish music into repertoire. The oratorio combines two worlds – that of opera and symphony – and therefore unites my two main artistic interests. The year 2016, celebrated as Feliks Nowowiejski Year, became an opportunity for the presentation of his works. The composer had close ties with Poznań during the last period for his life, hence the initiative to perform and record the work with Poznań Philharmonic Orchestra.

I hereby present the recording of the oratorio as work that represents and summarizes my artistic development since the reception of the title of D.F.A. I believe that the best way to introduce the issues connected with work on the score of *Quo Vadis* is to quote from the text of my authorship, which was included in the Polish edition of the CD. (The album was released in the Polish version by Poznań Philharmonic Orchestra, and CPO label for international distribution). The text presents my main assumptions, and problems I encountered during my work over the piece.

Feliks Nowowiejski's magnum opus

My adventure with Feliks Nowowiejski's music began with a concert performance of his opera *Legenda Bałtyku* (The Baltic Legend) at the Polish Radio. Attracted by the piece's excellent tenor aria (Doman's aria, in whose recording I had had the honour to accompany Piotr Beczała), I resolved to get familiar with the entire score.

Although in recent years, only fragments of *Legenda Bałtyku* have been present on concert programmes (the *Overture* and aria mentioned above), for me the score of the *Legend* proved a revelation. I was captivated by its breadth, inventiveness, composer's individualised, expressive style, exquisite orchestration, and excellently written vocal parts. And if the tenor aria blends in the Italian-opera-derived tradition (with discernible veristic influence), the whole work is evidence to profound knowledge of the then opera, in particular of the works by Richard Wagner (Nowowiejski freely operates the *Leitmotiv* technique). These are also the initial bars of the *Overture* that point to direct influence of German neo-Romantic music. The contemporary listener is bound to associate them with the opening of Gustav Mahler's *Symphony No. 3*, though I find this likeness purely accidental.



Nowowiejski's opera steered my interest towards his symphonic oeuvre. Of the four symphonies, three have survived (the first has not been preserved). Performance of *Symphony No. 4* requires participation of a choir and soloists; *Symphony No. 2* awaits a critical edition. I have had the pleasure of recording *Symphony No. 3* with the Polish Radio's National Symphony Orchestra. Circumstances surrounding composition of the piece explain the mystery of its subtitle, *Białowieża*. It was a token of gratitude to foresters who played hosts to the composer when he visited Białowieża in the late-1930s. The composition is also a great symphonic homage paid to nature. Nature presented in *Symphony No. 3* is a powerful element, and the work is a pantheistic hymn in its praise. Surprisingly, Nowowiejski's style and compositional devices are entirely different from those employed in the composition of *Legenda Bałtyku*. The composer becomes a modernist; deliberate archaisations, remote references to impressionism (instrumentation) do not hamper establishment of a new musical language, which is not indifferent to Karol Szymanowski's, and, above all, French composers' influences (Albert Roussel). Both works described above are irrefutable evidence to stylistic changeability and evolution of Nowowiejski's art. Irrespective of epochs and musical styles, in the history of music I discriminate between composers who cultivate their musical language, and those who frequently change it. The division is not a qualitative one, though frequently the art of the "chameleon" composers appears more interesting (Igor Stravinsky's fantastic changes of style!).

Feliks Nowowiejski's creative life fell on the most violent breakthrough known to the history of music, i.e. the "twilight" of the neo-Romantic stylistics, and the birth of 20th-century music in all its then aspects. Nowowiejski witnessed unprecedented development and decline of German neo-Romantic music, the birth of modernism, of national styles, as well as of varied avant-garde trends. His very abundant compositional legacy is a proof of the composer's active involvement in the transformations, as well as in the establishment of new styles and directions to advance Polish music in close relation to the movements and tendencies current in the world. His quest for new ways of developing organ music in Poland was pioneering, while his organ symphonies are evidence to his utterly individualised approach to the genre (then a novelty in Polish music).

Nowowiejski's works referred to above, the complex process of his evolution as artist, have inspired me to perform his *magnum opus*, i.e. the oratorio *Quo vadis*. The piece's origin is excellently presented by Iwona Fokt in her text below. I, in turn, would like to share my reflections and observations on *Quo vadis*' concert performances, recording, as well as work on its score.

My close interest in the work was a matter of an unusual accident. Going through auction catalogues of a certain antiquarian bookshop, I found a postcard despatched by Feliks Nowowiejski after the 1910 London premiere of *Quo vadis*. I managed to get the postcard, which Nowowiejski sent from London to Krakow on 5 September 1910, to “The Director of the Krakow Choir, B(olesław) Walewski”. The composer writes: *Please accept my cordial greetings, Sir. Albert Hall in London has embraced my “Quo vadis” (twelve-hundred-person choir). Feliks Nowowiejski*. Even though I knew about the piece’s performances and gigantic success at the most illustrious concert halls throughout Europe, I obviously found the sheer number of choristers shocking. I am almost certain that staging such an event would stretch the organisational capacity even of the modern-day BBC Proms festival! One thing was certain: from that very moment, I dreamt about performing this unusual and almost forgotten (particularly outside of Poland) composition. Witnessing the renaissance of the late-19th and early-20th century oratorio music, and the revival for the recording purposes of pieces mainly known for their historical roles, I was convinced that both the Poznań Philharmonic and I faced a major challenge.

The score of *Quo vadis* is written for a large symphony orchestra, choir and three soloists. Although its first edition contains German text, and the first edition of the piano reduction carries German, English and French variants, it was the Polish version (our performances and the present recording were made in the composer’s mother tongue) that was closest to Feliks Nowowiejski’s intentions. I had an honour to learn about it after our Poznań performance of *Quo vadis* on 29 June 2016, in a conversation with the composer’s youngest son, the educator, pianist, and great champion of his father’s work, Jan Nowowiejski (who, unfortunately, did not live to see the record’s release; he died on 6 August 2016).

Composition of the orchestra is typical of monumental oratorio music, though worth noting is the expanded trumpet section (four parts), two harps, as well as inclusion of the organ. The organ part is extensive; in several fragments of the work the instrument sounds solo, and on a number of occasions, in particular in polyphonic choral fragments, it reinforces powerful orchestral *tutti*. An obvious reference to music of earlier epochs, it is also evidence to Nowowiejski’s – virtuoso-organist’s – colouristic thinking about the neo-Romantic orchestra in terms of timbre and tone.

Each scene in *Quo vadis* has a separate timbral character. It is the *tutti* that dominates Scene I; in the introduction, the orchestra captivates the listener with fanfare motifs resounding in



massive instrumental duplications. By evoking the atmosphere and building associations, the character of the music ushers the listener right into the very heart of the story; here, Nowowiejski proves a splendid successor to Giuseppe Verdi (the use of fanfare motifs in *Aida*). The massive sound of the orchestra is contrasted with the first chords of the choir: *Biada!* [*Alas!*]. After a while, the choir changes the texture to a powerful unison: *Kto zbawi nas?* [Who Will Deliver Us?] (a well-trying device to arrive at powerful sound and render text well). Subsequent sections of distinctly polyphonic character follow. It is the brilliant instrumentation, the text (*Sześć dni nie wschodzi słońce*) [The Sun Has Not Risen For Six Days], the subdued tremolos of the strings, the beating of the tam-tam that command attention. Subsequent fugatos and the choir's elaborate polyphonic dialogues with the orchestra are crowned with a truly Verdian male chorus *Na szczycie gmachu* [At The Top Of The Edifice] (of breadth comparable to the chorus in Verdi's *Ernani!*).

Scene I directly merges with Scene II. It opens with the famous (a great number of separate concert performances) *Marsz pretorianów* [*March of The Pretorians*], whose palette of musical hues makes it comparable to Edward Elgar's orchestral marches. Address of the head praetor (bass) begins the phenomenal scene of the dialogue with the chorus (epic breadth, dramatic quality), which closes with the murderous: *Ha, lwu na pastwę* [Ha, To The Lions], the Romans' song of hatred to Christians. In the fragment, we come across a certain paradox. Perhaps it is due to the use of the triple metre and the rotary character of the fragment that an allusion to Polish national dances (of the oberek type) becomes clearly legible. Naturally, it is not stylisation, but creative use of the idiom, a type of neo-Romantic ardour which splendidly inscribes *Quo vadis* in the centuries-old oratorio tradition.

Featuring for the first time the entire body of performers – soloists, choir and orchestra – Scene III is the lyrical centre of the piece. It also contains the most intimate fragments of the work - the orchestra's introduction belongs to the harps, the brightly-sounding strings, the organ, and to the pianissimo-playing wind section. The ensuing *a cappella* of the choir sounds modal and directly refers to liturgical music (for years, Nowowiejski was organist at St. Paulus Church in the Berlin district of Moabit). Musical narration is carried forward by soloists: baritone – Peter, and soprano – Ligia. The clarinet phrase, which heralds Ligia's first words: *Myśmy gotowi* [*We Are Ready*], evokes the best associations with *Siegfried Idyll* by Richard Wagner. The phrase *Więc opuść Rzym* [*Thus Leave Rome*] sinks in. Music gets drawn-out, widespread, amazingly melodious; it sounds outright early-Romantic (another proof of Nowowiejski's abundant palette

of orchestral devices!). The return of the opening motifs, and the chorus' a cappella *Amen*, which freezes in pianissimo, brings the whole of Scene III together.

The opening of Scene IV (Peter: *Jak ciemna noc* [*Dim, gloomy night and fearful silence!*]) is another piece of evidence to point to Nowowiejski's masterful orchestration. Vividness, flexibility of string-quintet-delivered phrases, removed, subdued French horn fanfares introduce a singular mood. Apostle Peter's dramatic monologue leads to the oratorio's pivotal scene. The culmination of the orchestra's *tutti* condenses in the percussion's decrescendo. The question: *Quo vadis, Domine?* is asked against the background of heavenly "Schubertian" strings. Christ's answer (bass) is one of the finest pages in Nowowiejski's entire output. In line with tradition, Christ's phrase is built on a single sound (C sharp): its shape, expressive, melodic quality stem directly from harmony. Here, the full mastery of composer-organist and expert on Baroque music finds obvious exemplification (harmonic accent on the word *crucifigar*). The roundness of timbral colouring, its saturation in the piano, can only be compared to the scene of Wotan kissing and bidding farewell to Brünhilde in Act III of the Wagnerian *Valkyrie*.

Apostle Peter's response is another monologue of the baritone that ends with a spectacular culmination (high G) on the words: *A więc do Rzymu!* [*To Rome, Then!*]. This is how the *Schlusschor*; the final chorus (whose sheer size might make it into a separate cantata) begins. The requirements posed by Nowowiejski to the choir are comparable to those of the greatest works of choral literature (*Missa solemnis* by Ludwig van Beethoven). The double fugue *Gloria Tibi Sancte Petrus/Amen* crowns the whole.

The size of the work (which, I believe, should be performed at concerts without interval) makes *Quo vadis* one of the most powerful Romantic oratorios. I am convinced that its musical value is indisputable, while the international success it enjoyed soon after its premiere puts upon Polish performers a duty to present and promote the composition. With the present recording and accompanying series of concerts (in the Wielkopolska region, in Poznań, and in Berlin), the Poznań Philharmonic wishes to mark the Nowowiejski Year, and pay homage to the outstanding composer.

Lukasz Borowicz

