



Celebrating The Maestro Paderewski

by Jo Louise Winters, PR Chair
American Council for Polish Culture

The theme for the 63rd Annual Convention of the American Council for Polish Culture (ACPC), which was hosted by the Polish American Cultural Center in Cleveland, Ohio was "Celebrating the Maestro", in honor of Ignacy Jan Paderewski (1860-1941).

An afternoon during the Convention was spent at the Polish Cultural Garden located in Cleveland's Rockefeller Park. Chairing the entire agenda of concert music, presentations on Paderewski's life by eminent speakers, and youthful Polish folk dancers was Ben Stefanski, President of our convention host organization, Polish American Cultural Center. Following the moving renditions of the American and Polish National Anthems by Eugenia Stolarczyk and the touching invocation by Rev. Placyd Kon, O.F.M., Mr. Stefanski kept the audience's keen attention as he recited the history of the Polish Cultural Garden, which was dedicated in 1934. It contains a hexagonal sunken court with colorful flowerbeds, shrubs and trees imported from Poland. Originally, six busts of internationally famous Poles were placed in the outer circle of the garden. All of the busts were completely destroyed by vandals in the 1970's. Thanks to the continuing efforts of the Polish American Cultural Society three bronze busts have been recreated and mounted on granite pedestals, namely, Copernicus, Curie, and Sienkiewicz. Unveiled this date, the bust of Paderewski, sculpted by Michael Demin, will join the other



L/R: Ben Stefanski, President Polish American Cultural Center, Cleveland; Ewa Junczyk-Ziomecka, Consul General of the Republic of Poland.

notable Polish figures.

Mr. Stefanski introduced the Mayor of Cleveland, Hon. Frank Jackson and other notable figures in the community and then called upon Ewa Junczyk-Ziomecka, Consul General of the Republic of Poland in New York to address the audience. Ms. Ziomecka's remarks included thanks and appreciation for the very active role of the Polish American society of Cleveland in promoting Polish cul-

ture and heritage.

Keynote speaker for the occasion was Dr. James S Pula, Professor of History at Purdue University and editor of the recently published "The Polish American Encyclopedia". Dr. Pula recited not only the world-wide recognition of Paderewski as a pianist and composer, but dwelt on his highly effective activism and political work for Poland in its most difficult times.

The sizeable audience encircling the garden court thoroughly enjoyed the Musical Tribute to Paderewski which followed. The musical performances included Konrad Binienda, Piano, Artist in Residence at Harvard University's Phorzheimer House; pianist Dongning Yang (recently gave a recital at the Metropolitan Museum in NY) who accompanied soprano Julie-Ann Hamula, ACPC's 2011 Sembrich Vocal Competition winner; and Eugeniu Ceremus, violinist, a Fellow of the Aspen Music Festival and School, and prize winner in various youth violin competitions in Eastern Europe.

The unveiling of the Paderewski bust was a very touching moment and the audience's reaction was quite moving as everyone admired the strength and determination clearly discernable in the sculpted image of the great leader of Poland and the ideological leader of Polish Americans. As the event drew to a close, the audience exhibited its enthusiastic appreciation to Mr. Stefanski for a remarkable and wonderful event. As the audience headed toward the exits onto the street, it found itself being joyously entertained by the Piast Dance Ensemble, a group of skilled and enthusiastic Polish folk dancers.



Pianist Dongning Yang; Soprano Juli-Ann Hamula



Pianist Konrad Binienda



Violinist: Eugeniu Ceremus

Polish Literature

(GAINED, NOT LOST)
IN TRANSLATION

By
Ewa Bronowicz



BY GUSTAW HERLING
Volcano and Miracle (Dziennik pisany noca)
Translated from Polish by Ronald Storm

Penguin Books, New York, 273pp. \$12.95

The Diary and the Writer

In one of his journal entries, Gustaw Herling, known in Poland as Gustaw Herling Grudzinski, recalls what Albert Camus said about art: namely, that it is a dialog. And while Herling, a writer and journalist who died eleven years ago, is best known for his vivid account of the Soviet gulag in *A World Apart*, it is his extensive journal entries, titled the *Journal Written at Night*, that provide us with such literary dialog. The *Journal*, which appeared in the Polish émigré magazine *Kultura*, is the basis for *Volcano and Miracle*, a selection of fiction and prose writing taken directly from Herling's *Journal*. As such, it offers a peek into Herling's take on...well, everything, from literature to politics to Italian architecture.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of this book is that it is a treasure trove of anecdotes about writers, some of them Herling's contemporaries, many of them Russian, and some Polish and Western European ones as well. Herling conveys each anecdote with considerable generosity and joy, like Santa Claus bearing gifts. We learn, for example, that when Nikolai Gogol lived in Rome, where he wrote *Dead Souls*, he had been singing the praises of Italy, during which he compared his compatriots to pigs as opposed to "the beautiful souls of Italy." We are reminded of Franz Kafka's inner conflict in his romance with Felice Bauer, to whom he was engaged for five years, and specifically of "a yearning for 'normal' life and a dread of any form of dependency or domination of one person by another." Not all of the anecdotes, however, are bestowed by the author with admiration or respect for his subjects. For example, Herling expresses his disgust with Thomas Mann's letter to the Union of Soviet Writers in 1937, in which Mann distinguishes between the Nazi dictatorship, which he condemns, and the Soviet one, which he applauds. It turns out that Mann's books, initially banned, become unbanned in Russia, and Herling concludes that Mann is a hypocrite.

In addition to literary anecdotes, there is a dose of everything else: poignant literary criticism on Dostoevsky, Kafka, Camus, among many others; political commentary, and, remarkably, the devastating account of a doctor from the Katyn Massacre grave site in 1940; or, finally, a meeting between Churchill and Stalin on the eve of World War II, with another interesting anecdote squeezed in. Not to forget, of course, Herling's own reflections on Communism and its aftermath. What emerges from *Volcano and Miracle* is a portrait of a man who is opinionated enough to engage others in his opinions and malleable enough to not come across as pretentious.

Even if Herling himself, in one of his entries, defines a good diary as one in which "the author only rarely pokes his antennae out of the shell—and then draws them back at once," and even if Ronald Storm, who both selected and translated the entries for this volume, assures us in his Introduction that the volume "is not autobiography," there are numerous entries that allow us to peek into Herling's life from a more personal perspective than the two men seem to want to admit, including a certain amount of narcissism that comes with that. But perhaps it is better to overlook those idiosyncrasies, as well as a certain incoherence that springs from the very nature of the stylistic form of a diary (as opposed to a narrative, be it fiction or non-fiction). Instead, it might be interesting to ponder where the line lies between autobiography and essay, and to, in this vein, explore Herling's ability to mirror the complexities of art and of human life, and to simultaneously feel sympathy for him when, in a moment of intense patriotism, the writer despairs about the loneliness and emptiness "that can be understood only by someone who has emigrated to an irremediably foreign city."

Any questions or comments for Ewa... You can contact her by visiting her website: www.literatka-nyc.com

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