

Remembering Seweryn Barbag (1891-1944)

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I want to talk about the man Seweryn Barbag, musicologist, composer, music critic and teacher. It is imperative for me that his memory be kept alive, since the Evil of the 20th century wanted to consign it to non-existence. Barbag was active in Lwów (Lviv, Lemberg) in the 20 years between the two World Wars; he died in 1944 in Otwock, a place near Warsaw. The inspiration for this project came from a paper by Hanna Palmon read during a conference in Lwów in 2012. It was dedicated to the Jewish musicians, musicologists and artists living in Lwów before WW II and during the time of the Holocaust.

In my approach to the topic there is still a quite personal, biographical motivation. When I was 8 years old, my first piano teacher was Professor Seweryn Barbag. He introduced me to music, and this is something you never forget.

Lwów's significance can be explained not only for its place in the history of musicology in Poland, but also from the fact that this city lies within "Snyder's Tract", a territory where European civilization met its downfall. The quite extraordinary events of that time have not been sufficiently taken into account even today. Also the consequences of these events have not been properly recognized, events that after WW II often did not even come to light at all. Thus we are confronted with a fragment of the history of an artistic culture, requiring from its historian very peculiar tools of research. For example, the scholar should know the LTI – *Lingua Tertii Imperii*.

I am using the expression "Snyder's Tract" to denote the European territory during the last World War, covering Eastern Europe, including Poland and its neighboring countries, as was described by Timothy Snyder, a historian from Yale University, in his book *Bloodlands. Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (The Bodley Head 2010, 524 pp.).

The biographical data, the scholarly and artistic output of Seweryn Barbag found in encyclopedias, are reduced to bare facts. They are, in addition, quite sparse and have never been the object of interpretation. Barbag completed a double university education in jurisprudence and in musicology. He studied musicology at the University of Vienna with Guido Adler, and was thus at the center of the emergence of academic musicology. He studied composition with L. Różycki, H.

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Melcer-Szczawiński and J. B. Marx in Vienna, piano also with H. Melcer-Szczawiński and J. B. Marx. Subsequently among Barbag's own pupils were the composer and conductor, Stanisław Skrowaczewski, as well as the composer Roman Haubenstock-Ramati. Shortly before World War II, S. Barbag accepted the chair of music theory and history at the K. Szymanowski conservatory in Lwów.

Seweryn Barbag was born in Przemyślany near Lwów on September 4 in 1891, and died on September 26 in 1944, in Otwock near Warsaw. We do not know under what circumstances he left Lwów and how he got through to Warsaw – in “Snyder's Tract” it would be information open to speculation.

After gathering the biographical data, a historian proceeds to available research material. Here quite a surprise awaits us: most of materials referring to Barbag have disappeared, and are probably irrevocably lost. Among the lost materials are all his compositions, which existed only in manuscript and were never published as well as a handwritten theoretic treatise “*Harmonia intertonalna*” (Intertonal Harmony) from 1930. And what's more, the Archive of the University of Vienna, for unknown reason, did not preserve Seweryn Barbag's doctoral dissertation entitled *Die Lieder von Robert Franz* from 1923, although it was written under the supervision of the renowned Professor Guido Adler. Guido Adler died in 1941, and a year later his daughter was deported to Mały Trostiniec in the White-Russian (Belarussian) part of “Snyder's Tract”, where she was then murdered. (What happened to Guido Adler's scholarly estate was disclosed to the public recently as a special cultural and political problem, reported by the Viennese press *Der Standard*, from May 13, 2013.) Consequently, we cannot get to know work written in this famous Viennese scholarly circle. We cannot evaluate the methodological impact of this circle on Barbag's further productivity, which probably would strengthen the identification of his influence on Lwówer musicology, the most important one in Poland of that time. The loss of all of Barbag's compositions has a different meaning. The versatility of his interests and abilities is an important element of his creative personality, and direct knowledge of his compositions would be a valuable contribution recognizing his spiritual world, thus we have suffered a loss that is irreplaceable.

Thanks to Zofia Lissa, I can at least quote the titles of Barbag's lost compositions: Piano Concertos,

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Vox humana (a symphonic poem), *Visions grotesques* (for orchestra), *Symphonia terrestris* (for orchestra), String Sextet, *Kosmos* (for violin and piano), Sonata (for violin and piano), Sonata (for viola solo), Sonata (for violoncello and piano), *Panergon* (for piano), Sonata (for piano), *Trois Poèmes* (for piano), *Jeunesse et nature* (for piano). Vide: Zofia Lissa, MGG, Volume 15, Supplement, the entry “Barbag, Seweryn Eugeniusz”, München-Kassel (1973) 1989, p. 455.

Thus, we have at our disposal only Barbag’s articles published in Polish musical periodicals and his musical studies issued as books.

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Whereas the loss of materials in a normal bibliography almost always has trivial reasons, in “Snyder’s Tract” such a loss becomes a subject open to discussion. The loss of this precious material was itself intended by the perpetrators of the Shoa. On the other hand, one can attach to the situation of that time the fact that the surrounding society was not motivated to protect this treasure, because the appreciation of its value was lost. This treasure belongs not only to the victims, but also to European civilization as a whole. Civilization as such was exposed to a test of the “destruction of values”, accompanying the extermination of nations (the Shoa). That is what we mean when we speak of the late aftermath of the Holocaust.

In the activities of Seweryn Barbag one can discern the following thematic areas:

- (1) The relation of Guido Adler to his postgraduate student; direct reference to the subject matters cultivated at Adler’s Viennese chair of musicology, reference to the systematics and to German and European music culture;
- (2) The interest in Polish music culture as subject matter;
- (3) The connection with the contemporary currents of European musicology;
- (4) The cultivation of musical composition [and performance practice, in this case of the piano music];
- (5) The theory of music;
- (6) The strong connection with the actual phenomena of musical life (sociology of music, cultural history, the theoretical background of music didactics);
- (7) The practical exercise of the pedagogy and of didactics of music;
- (8) Literary interests.

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Attention is drawn to the versatility of the above, obviously an important feature of Barbag's personality.

Seweryn Barbag's achievements in the field of humanities belong to the realm of the emerging Polish academic musicology before WW II. Its subject matter is research in Polish culture, also taking into consideration the share of scholarly inspiration originating in Guido Adler's Viennese chair of musicology at the University of Vienna. The Lwów center of musicology was the best in Polish culture. Before WW II the ethnic origin of Polish musicologists, whether Polish, Jewish, Ukrainian or others was not a criterion of recognition at Polish universities. But in contrast to this, we also encounter the opinion that the notions of a nation and its culture have a primordial character. According to Andrzej Walicki, contemporary Poland is not in a final but in an initial phase of such a development. One cannot deny that this notion corresponds with the tendencies to reject the cultural values that are not considered primordial and damaged by the Holocaust. In other words, in cultural research the Holocaust epoch gave new historic and ethnic meanings to this problem, which had been discussed for years and years. Now it is not easy to overlook them. It becomes a contemporary problem of Polish culture, a methodological as well as an ethical problem, that spontaneously appears in the presentation of Barbag's creative output. Briefly speaking, contemporary culture is dependent on its historical understanding, and this requires, with every new period, a new recognition of its character and of the new tasks that confront it.

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For Ukrainian and Polish nationalism, the cultural creativity of Jews was of no interest during the Holocaust, even more so, there was no tendency to take care of and preserve materials of value for the culture. Under normal conditions such care would be imperative in the face of the values found in them, also in the face of obligations of a state towards its citizens. The part of the material and spiritual goods that Nazism was going immediately to destroy, perished because it was not cared for or saved. From the Hitler period, we know simply nothing regarding Barbag's life, his activities, or his death.

CHOPIN'S SONGS

“Studium o pieśniach Chopina” /A study of Chopin’s songs/, issued by the publishing house Ossolineum in Lwów, was the first book on Chopin’s songs ever published in Poland, in view of the genre, of special merit. The choice of the topic was clearly related to Barbag’s dissertation, dedicated to the songs of Robert Franz, and was a result of the specific preparation to this music genre, acquired during his studies with Guido Adler.

Such an influence is to be seen in the classification of these songs, distinguishing three styles: folk-style, artistic style, and mixed style. This corresponds to Guido Adler’s opinion saying, “Der Stil ist das Zentrum künstlerischer Behandlung und Erfassung. Er ist der Maßstab, nach dem alles im Kunstwerk bemessen und beurteilt wird“ /Guido Adler, *Der Stil in der Musik*, 1. Buch, Leipzig 1911, p. 5/. S. Barbag in his analyses adopted from Adler also such notions as „Stilkreuzung“/style crossing/ and „Stilmischung“/style mixing/.

The last chapter gives us some of Barbag’s general opinions. In his view, analysis serves the aim of recognizing the essence of pieces belonging to a common genre. He says that “most results can be achieved by the analysis of the compositional technique, based on a comparative method” /pp. 49 – 50/. He supports equally the view of K. Szymanowski on the importance of the composer’s “métier”, his “workshop”. And this was one of the main aesthetic problems of the then contemporary Polish music.

All Chopin’s songs, one by one, underwent a traditional formal analysis. Evaluating their historical value Barbag said, “The essential worth of Chopin’s songs can be summarized in the statement that they made up the backbone of later Polish vocal lyric. “ (p. 51).

Not less interesting is the last topic of this quintessential study. It is stated in the last sentence, after proclaiming the historical worth of the songs analyzed, “All these songs have an indisputable e t h i c worth because of their pure and sincere, sometimes even moving, reflection of the composer’s personal experiences”. Among the disciplines connected directly with

musicology, and listed in Barbag's "Systematics of Music", ethics was also taken into account. An ethical value is attributed to a person or to a person's artistic motivations or social activities. Coming to the close, Barbag ascribes a special meaning to this value, independent of style or use in the repertoire of the songs themselves. A subjective impulse is considered, but without neglecting the meaning of music for society in general. Maybe it concerns an undeniable consecration of values, a result of the confrontation taking place between the personal need of an artist-creator and the need of a receiver. When these needs are satisfied, such a dialogue enters into the field of musical ethics. It is why we read that the personal experience of an ingenious artist, being "pure and sincere", acknowledged by a critic, can be counted in the category of ethics.

Barbag's concern with Chopin's songs, with a full consciousness of the peculiarity of this genre, was the earliest in Poland. Characteristic and original is the closing of Barbag's text. Chopin's motivation for writing songs was defined by Barbag as being ethical. Still today, in the huge literary and scholarly writing on Chopin, such a way of thinking is identified by its reference to Barbag because he grasped the center of the problem with only one word. Not in vain does his "Systematics of Musicology" take an important place in the fields of philosophy and sociology.

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SYSTEMATICS OF MUSICOLOGY

In 1928 Barbag published his "Systematics of Musicology". In the school of Guido Adler the theme was obvious, but it was new to such a degree that beyond the domain of the German language it remained unknown. This issue appeared to be unique in the bibliography of the newborn scholarly discipline in Poland: "systematic musicology". And the scholarly merit of this author remains unquestioned, having an essential value not only for his own work, but being a new theme in Polish musicology as well. This field was initiated by the famous work of Guido Adler from 1885, under the title "Umfang, Methode und Ziel der Musikwissenschaft" (VfMw I, 1885, No.1). Already several years thereafter Barbag could write a critical review of it as well as of two other thematically related works by H. Riemann *Grundriß der Musikwissenschaft*, Leipzig 1908 and a review of it by A. W. Cohn. This was the way a new academic discipline developed. It was essential for musicology, which, in this new conception, received features of an "archipelago" of various, but

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chosen disciplines. To secure the unity of the whole field of the theory of music was its first obligation.

In Poland S. Barbag was the first. His studies established a consciousness that music is polyfunctional and that it accomplishes its task thanks to the many factors of its genesis. This inspired the in-depth research of the multilaterality of music. It inspired the multiple unveiling of its essence and function, and at the same time pointed to a responsibly elaborated bibliography of the subject. Barbag's erudition and his way of understanding the phenomenon called music already then led to work on themes that today would take the shape of interdisciplinary or comparative studies. At the same time, the readers were allowed to realize what branches were missing in the scholarly literature and, eventually, what damage it could cause. With his "Systematics of Musicology" Barbag entered the distinguished circle of intellectuals concerned about musical culture, even if the feeling of the existence of such a circle could appear premature. Or else it remained only a virtual entity.

For Seweryn Barbag musicology is not a science of music, but a knowledge of music. And as knowledge it embraces a number of sciences. So the "systematics" gave birth to the objective of further analysis and then of a synthesis. This was the scope of musical systematics as practiced by Barbag, and also of the conviction that he would add a new value to Polish musicology that would subsequently serve its further development. With this in mind, he also proceeded in an evident and practical way. He equipped his book with an excellent foreign bibliography, and even with empty pages, a place to be filled by the interested reader wanting to complete the bibliography with new entries by himself

The systematics helps to order the whole material. Its starting point is to discern phenomena, facts and problems, to protect us against their false recognition. A phenomenon appears without the participation of our will, but it can show itself in our knowledge as a problem. A fact cannot be problematic, but a problem can be transformed into a fact. Systems of counterpoint and harmony are facts, the rhythm of the Gregorian chant is a problem, mensural rhythmic notation in the Middle Ages and in Renaissance become a fact. The content of music, beauty, tragedy etc. in a word,

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categories of musical aesthetics and metaphysics are problems as well as musical ethics. However, these three already mentioned conceptual circles do not create areas excluding one another, instead they cross each other. This has to be recognized.

The systematics has further tasks to fulfill. It should determine the reciprocal relation of theory and practice, which also involves historic knowledge. Individual sciences of music establish specific relations among themselves, therefore it is important to discern direct and indirect relations. The first ones emerge from the purely musical sphere, but with the indirect relations, essential factors also come from other sciences and other arts.

The systematic approach to music is essential for many reasons. It is a necessary and powerful instrument of cognition, useful also for the analysis of the state of music culture. Because, as Barbag writes: "A high level of music culture in a country or a society is to a great extent the result of an equivalent perfection of all the branches of music life" (op. cit., p. 18). The "Systematics" we are referring to focuses the attention on all participants of a music culture; none should be omitted if we want to achieve a full image of musical life. I think that similar negligence happens frequently simply because of a lack of familiarity with musical systematics itself, and sometimes because of political reasons (the case, for example, of musical sociology or musical ethics).

A strong emphasis was laid on the notion of music as a social art. Even an individual musical creation, remarks the author, can get reevaluated into a social property (op. cit. 41). Later in time, the creative output of Witold Lutosławski could be a perfect and extreme example of this thesis. Our author does not forget the organization of musical life, dealing with it also in his own articles.

Generally speaking, "Systematics of Music" became an important theoretical writing of great potential influence on the consciousness of the musical milieu and its opinions on musical culture. It originated in the history of music in Poland by Seweryn Barbag, referring directly to Guido Adler, an initiator of this current in musicological thinking.

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Our conference takes place in the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. The Museum is dedicated to the value of culture, such as the scholarly output of Seweryn Barbag. His achievements should be remembered in this history.

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We are holding this meeting in a splendid, new and very special building. Its huge size already predicts the consciousness of the volume of this cultural contribution to the history of Poland and of the whole world, which will be preserved in this Museum. The architecture of this building says more. The entrance to the Museum does not express the triumphant elevation of the great buildings of Ancient Greece, it avoids proud columns, it does not render the rationality of applied proportions. It tilts, enigmatically dimmed, covered by a shadow, as if wrapped in a pall. Such is the entrance to these treasures of culture, and such it remains also on a sunny day.

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Addenda 1. S. Barbag, Tabela systematyki muzyki, fig. 3 (1928)

PHILOSOPHY OF MUSIC

PSYCHOLOGY - LOGIC - ETHIC - METAPYSICS

SPECULATIVE THEORY

AESTHETICS OF MUSIC

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Phenomenology of Music

Acoustics

Mechanics of the Tone Production Psychophysiology of Music

Comparative Musicology

SCIENTIFIC MUSICOLOGY

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Theory of Art Technique

Synthetic Factors

Works of Art

Notation + Performance

Phrasing

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STYLE

1. Tone

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2. Interval
3. Articulation
4. Melodics
5. Metrics
6. Rhythmics
7. Dynamics
8. Agogics
9. Counterpoint
10. Harmony
11. Form of Composition
12. Instrumentation

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Practice of Music

Realization of Theory

in Respective Culture of a Time

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IV. Pedagogy

(Methodics, Didactics)

III. Criticism

II. Art of Performance

c) Conducting, b) Instrumental, a) Vocal

I. Composing

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SOCIOLOGY OF MUSIC

Explanation and evaluation of versatile phenomena of musical culture, by referring to general laws of sociology. Social organization of musical life: system of education, concert associations, operas, cultivation of the religious music, publishing houses, libraries, archives, trade and production of music, press and periodicals, criticism, public, national and international corporations, agencies, statistics and social politics.

HISTORY OF MUSIC

1. SOURCES: a) monuments of music, b) literature on music, c) instruments.
2. OBJECTIVES: detection of the evolutionary line of single forms and styles, speculative and experimental theory, detection of the norms of musical practice, on ethnographic and sociological bases within spatial and temporal frontiers.
3. METHODS: descriptive, genetic, analytic-comparative, synthetic in the assessment of individual types and styles, hypothetic, retrospective.

Addenda 2. S. Barbag, *Speculum Vitae*, Lwów p. I. 1930, No. 250.

Unearthly is the peace of sleeping without nuisance, nightmares, fear and ghastly howling in your head. The blood murmurs in the veins as a forest brook in the silence of summer. My dreams do not fulfill my desires because I have none. Improbable? But this is true, because I live on gifts of coincidences and momenta. Who has aborted the fighting for tomorrow, does not know the fierce struggling with the monsters of life, but to him is also the joy of a triumphant hero unfamiliar.

In the dream I am often visited by a dignified guest in an armour of human bones, with black glasses on invisible eyes. Each time, he invites me to a game of chess. I hear his deep and firm voice, "Let us play!" With a magical gesture the guest conjures up, on the marble plate of a white table, sixty four fields, green and red, out of which white and black chess-figures are slowly protruding, carved out of bones and knuckles. The heads of these figures are supplied with such gaudy lightning points that I have to close my eyes, and nevertheless I can see. I am not a passionate chess player. A lost game does not irritate my ambition, I am not excessively happy when I win. However, my partner never plays till the end. Suddenly he announces "a draw", stands up stiffly, smiles spitefully and pulls down his visor. Every time I hear the same words: "I will come again. One day you will hear 'check-mate' from me. Then I shall take off my glasses". And he disappears. The chessboard with figures dissolves in fog.

Afterwards, for a long time, I smell a metapsychical scent in my room.

English by Judith Wickström-Haber and Antoni Buchner