

The Jewish Musical Milieu in Lwów between the world wars

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Lviv, Lwów, Lemberg, Lwów, Lvov, Lemberg, Lvov, Lviv – the history of Lwów in 8 alternating words...this multiplicity reflects, of course, the frequent rule-changes along Lwów's history; its longest political chapter in the last millennium was written by the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth, which came to an end with the first partition of Poland in 1772. Even before King Kazimierz took over Halychyna in 1349 – the Polish influence on the Slavic tribes in the region (with their capital in Przemyśl) was significant. The Roman Catholic Christianity arrived to Galicia also from the west, and there are few ruined Roman-Catholic churches which can be seen in the Galician Carpathians.

Since when did Jews live in Lwów? And as for the traces of that winding Galician history – which kinds of them can we find on the pages of Jewish history? And yet more specifically: what can the Galician Jewish music, and the music created/performed by Jewish musicians in and around Lwów, tell us about its artists and its audience? Was it composed in musical isolation or out of a certain conversation with the diverse musical environment? We know that traditional Jewish music in eastern Europe – the music of Klezmer ensembles and the Hassidic music, for example - was “used” for different social or religious “rituals”; the so called “western art music” - which was composed or performed by Jewish musicians in Galicia – was also “used”, but for a less explicit “ritual”: the act of initiating, internalizing and announcing profound changes in Jewish identity – especially during the 19th century; that act was nurtured by the “Haskala” (emancipation) state-of-mind among the Jews of Galicia, and by the shift from strong German-Austrian cultural influence to a strong Polish one around the mid 19th century; but beyond those non-musical functions, did the Jewish musical milieu in Galicia have a truly meaningful musical dialogue with the “hosting” music and musical milieus? Many other questions can be asked.

But first of all, is there a justification at all to speak about the **Jewish musical milieu** in Lwów, instead of simply speaking about the **musical milieu** in Lwów during the city's different historic chapters? This question has a lot to do with a statement made by Zdzisław Jachimecki, a professor at the Jagellonian University, who wrote in his article "Polish Music 1896-1930", in

“Poland. its History and Culture”, Vol. III (published in the 1930’s):

“In the group of composers made up of **Rathaus, Tansman, Klecki, Gradstein, Jerzy Fitelberg and Koffler**, very strong **progressive tendencies** have become manifest, issuing from the **cross-influences of the Russian, German and French schools**. With the exception of the last mentioned composer, all continuously live abroad, and-while emphasizing more or less decisively their belonging to Poland, either by their birthplace being in Poland, or in the sense of being Polish — their activity is connected more with **other music cultures than with that of Poland**. Nonetheless, they **must** be included within the perimeter of Polish contemporary music, since they are **rightfully** entitled to that, and are consistently included in Polish music by **foreigners**”.

Prof. Maciej Gołąb – in his article “Józef Koffler: The First Polish Composer of Twelve-Tone Music” (2003) - wrote, while relating to Jachimecki’s “understatement”: “Is marking off this group of artists - solely for the social and artistic reasons that guided Jachimecki - valid, or does this group perhaps share a common stylistic-aesthetic experience?”

Prof. Maciej Gołąb answered the question:

“It must be strongly stated that these composers participated in the turbulent aesthetic discourses of their time from a "European" perspective, rather than expressing particular artistic stances connected with their distinct cultural legacy. Accordingly, they partook in those characteristic transformations that were the experience of the European avant-garde of the 1920s-30s”.

But, in Prof. Gołąb’s opinion, the Polish Jewish composers – together with two Polish non-Jewish composers (Szymanowski in that specific period of his musical creativity, and Palester) – were, after all, not “traditionally Polish”, because, as Gołąb has phrased it: “They did not cultivate either the **conservative post-Moniuszko traditions** (still alive in Poland between the wars), nor the modernist traditions of the “**Young Poland**”... Some of them - Rathaus, Koffler, Tansman and Palester, for instance - appeared regularly on the musical scene of the **International Society for Contemporary Music**. Along with Szymanowski, they constituted a **group of Polish representatives of new music that was recognized by international European critics**. In contrast, the pressure exerted on them by **conservative criticism** in Poland, especially in **Warsaw**, was massive”.

In this context, we have to remember that:

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1. For the Jewish composers who grew up in Austrian Lemberg at the beginning of the 20th century – Warsaw was far away: Warsaw – first with Polish positivism (in music too), and later with the decadently late romantic, symbolist music of “Young Poland” – was not in the Austrian Empire; the liberal (sometime...) tradition of the Austrian Empire, together with Lwów’s strongly multiethnic character – had something quite unique to offer Lwów’s musicians: a distinct degree of tolerance and artistic freedom; no wonder that the famous music critic Stefania Lobaczewska (a Polish socialist), who lived in Lwów and wrote reviews for “Gazeta Lwowska”, was much less conservative and dogmatic than many critics in Warsaw at that time – as was especially well-demonstrated by the refreshing, open-minded way she perceived contemporary music: as a “preparatory stage towards the formation of a universal 'music of the future' “– as Magdalena Dziadek has phrased it in her article “STEFANIA LOBACZEWSKA AS A MUSIC CRITIC”: “For Lobaczewska, Karol Szymanowski was an artist of truly exceptional caliber, and she adopted a similar attitude to other Polish composers” – including the more or less avant-garde Jewish musicians in Lwow, like Jozef Koffler, Artur Hermelin, Jozef Mund and others.

2. Most of the Jewish musicians in Lwow, at the beginning of the 20th century, grew up in “*maskilic*” (emancipated) families, sometimes totally assimilated; their hunger to be immersed in and adopt western European culture and ways of life was strong, and their new sense of Polish identity was based mainly on the Polish education they received in the Polish schools in Galicia (since the 1860’s the Galician education system went through “polonization”). Still, their parents might have been more identified with Austrian and German culture, while their grandparents or great-grandparents might have been traditional Jews – Orthodox or Hassidic...It is most likely that the music they heard at home was not Polish folk dance-music; for them, the beloved Polish music was what the most eminent created: Chopin and Szymanowski; the first generation of Polish avant-garde composers - who tended to compose in Paris (post-early Karol Szymanowski, Alexander Tansman, Piotr Perkowski, Felix Labunski, Karol Rathaus) – created music that was easily tolerated and frequently loved by Galician Jewish musicians, because it didn’t clash with very rooted Polish musical traditions in their formative background. Besides, most of them had studied in music academies in Vienna or Berlin, not in Warsaw.

If I may, I would like to say some personal words: before starting to look for information about the Jewish musicians of Lwów – most of whom had perished during the Holocaust – I never

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heard of Jozef Koffler, Leopold Munzer, Jozef Mund, Henryk Gunsberg, Eduard Steinberger, Seweryn Barbag, Seweryn Turel, Leon Striks, Marek Bauer... to name a few; I did hear about Moritz Rosenthal, Stefan Askenase, Jakob Gimpel, Zofia Lissa, Eduard Steuermann, Karol Rathaus – the few Jewish musicians from Lwów and nearby who had either passed away before WWII, or fled on time. Of all the musicians who found themselves - in 1941 – coping with the indescribable, unimaginable, life in the ghetto of Lwów and in Janowska death camp – nobody survived. Before their death, those musicians were forced to play and sing in two orchestras (in the ghetto and in Janowska), while crying voicelessly deep inside.

This is, in my opinion, the crucial justification to learn and write and speak about their lives – as **Jewish** musicians, and about their contribution to the music of their time, the 20th century. It seems to me almost meaningless to speculate about their religious, cultural or national identities: Jewish Poles? Ukrainian Jews? Zionists? Yiddishists? None? or all? The fact that they were killed, that their music disappeared with them – overshadows systematic academic research approaches, in my opinion; the “Universal Edition” biography of the composer Roman Haubenstock-Ramati – who studied composition with Jozef Koffler in Lwów in 1920-1923 – strikes the same note, when asking:

“A Polish Jew or a Jewish Pole? After the German fascist troops marched into Poland on 1 September 1939, that rather speculative distinction was no longer of any importance: **Roman Haubenstock-Ramati’s** family had to flee”...

Our urgent task is to try to find, rescue, research and perform the music of the composers whose life and art came so tragically to an end.

What has survived?

Jozef Koffler was a famous composer before the war (mainly out of Poland - in festivals in England and Holland) – although not very widely-popular. His compositional techniques went through very noticeable changes – and we are lucky to have scores which were printed before the war; the pianist Elzbieta Sternlicht has published, in recent years, 2 CDs with his piano music, and there is at least one additional CD with other works by Koffler.

We have scores of Galician/Lwowian composers who, fortunately, were not in danger

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during the war: Kassern, Turel, Rathaus, Steuermann, Barbag, Chajes and some others.

I've been looking for scores and recordings of those Lwów-based musicians who were among the victims of the Holocaust: There is, at least "on the website" – a recording of Leopold Munzer playing Chopin. I'm still looking forward to hear it!

There might be an archival material from the interwar Lwów music academy, which had been called "The Conservatory of the Polish Society of Music in Lwów" during the Polish rule in Galicia. Research in Warsaw (at the Polish Radio archive and the Warsaw Philharmonic archive) hasn't found any such scores or recordings.

There are still possibilities to look for those works – in libraries and archives in Ukraine; I plan to go on searching. It is clear that if there is a small chance to find that lost music – the music which was doomed to death – now is the last minute for giving this chance a chance.

I have found a wealth of precious information about the musical life in Lwów, and especially about the Jewish musicians and music institutes in interwar Lwów, by reading the musical reviews in newspapers from those interwar years in the city: a most important source is the Jewish daily "Chwila", in the Polish language, which started its publication in 1919 and stopped being printed in 1939. Another newspaper which I used as a source – a very surrealistic source, though – is the "Gazeta Lwowska" from 1941 – not the "real Gazeta Lwowska" which had been born in 1811, but the "Gazeta Lwowska" which the Nazis "transformed" and used as a vehicle for their anti-Semitic propaganda.

An almanac from 1937 – called "Almanach Żydowski" – which was published in Lwów (the last of its kind before WWII) – is a main source of information: Alfred Plohn, the music critic of "Chwila", wrote for the almanac a detailed article about the Jewish musical life in Lwów as well as about a group of musicians – composers, performers, musicologists – which, according to Plohn's opinion and taste, were the most outstanding Jewish musicians in Lwów along the 1930's; so he wrote a separate encyclopedic review for each of them.

There are several books which give us a most important opportunity to learn from recent researches: Prof. Maciej Gołąb from the University of Wrocław has written a monogram about Jozef Koffler, which surveys Koffler's biography, analyses his works, and is especially dedicated to tracing the turns in Koffler's musical journey – sometimes in correlation with the historical

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circumstances, sometimes as a reflection of Koffler's profound compositional explorations – before, during, and after his main unique dialogue with Schoenberg's dodecaphonic and later serial works; Katarzyna Naliwak-Mazurek has researched and wrote about the destinies of many Polish composers during the Nazi occupation; Moshe Hoch, Issachar Fater, Willem Toerien – all wrote about music-making – voluntary or forced – in ghettos and concentration camps.

There is also a group of articles about certain Jewish musicians from interwar Lwów; I've found part of them with the help of the marvelous librarians at Biblioteka Narodowa, another part – at the Lysenko music academy in Lviv (thanks to the very kind help of Prof. Kashkadamowa, a historian of piano music), and yet others – at the music library of the university of Warsaw: especially archival documents and letters concerning the “Society of Young Polish Musicians in Paris”, which Prof. Zofia Helman has very kindly told me about.

The Ukrainian book “100 pianists from Galicia”, by Zynowia Labantsiv-Popko, has taught me about Lwów-based pianists, including the Jewish pianists who grew up there, left the city for international tours, were broadcasted by the Polish Radio, taught at the music conservatories and academy in Lwów, and – tragically – perished there.

The journal and the newsletters of the Center for Polish Music in Southern California has also been very helpful: I've learnt a lot from reading them about Jozef Koffler, and moreover: about the Polish composers whose daring music the Jewish musicians from Lwów admired and chose to perform; for example, the pianist Artur Hermelin, from Lwów, dedicated his too short career to introducing the contemporary Polish composers - Karol Szymanowski, Alexander Tansman, Karol Rathaus, Piotr Perkowski and others - to audiences around Europe and America. The publications of the Center for Polish Music have a lot of in-depths articles about those fascinating composers.

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The milieu of the musicians in Lwów – within which the Jewish musicians constituted a sub-milieu – was very diverse – as well as relatively pluralistic: Jewish Klezmers were sometimes invited to play at non-Jewish celebrations; synagogue's cantors who succeeded to deeply move their listeners with their beautiful expressive voices - were sometimes called upon and recruited to the

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opera-house in Lwów; Prominent Armenian and Czech musicians - like Karol Mikuli and Willem Kurz - taught talented and diligent students from all walks of life and ethnic groups in the city; most of Lwów's musicians were studying, performing, composing and teaching for a short or long while at major music centers (in Vienna, Berlin, Prague, Paris, Warsaw, Kyiv and St. Petersburg), and then - back in Lwów ...The members of that Lwów-based milieu – be them Ukrainian, Polish, German, Armenian, Czechs, Jewish - had to struggle quite often with wars, economic crises, historical sharp turns... In that sense, every musical, and personal, event in those musicians' lives – seems to me now like a rare precious moment in time, before their lives were challenged, wounded or taken by history and by people;

The total extinction of the Jewish musicians in Lwów destroyed many aspects of that uniqueness – the uniqueness of the entire musicians' milieu in Lwów.

I would like to draw here a lively “picture” of the Jewish musical milieu of Lwów. I will present several musicians, about whom I've succeeded to find information in several sources. By presenting their musical biographies, I hope that the character of the musical life in their environment: of orchestras, choirs, clubs, music schools, festivals - will hopefully be revealed. The sense of tragic loss - first of all a loss of lives and only after that a loss of music - is here; it must accompany my talk.

The PowerPoint presentation:

First two “frames”:

*** **Bravinsky testimony**

*** **the names' list**

In 1944, the famous Ukrainian composer Vasyl Barvinsky gave an oral testimony, after the atrocities during WWII. There were six names of Holocaust victims mentioned in that testimony, and this is the note which lists those names, as I've found it at the archive of Yad Vashem; the original is kept at the historical archive in Lwów.

These are the names in the list:

1. Prof. Eduard Steinberger

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2. Prof. Bauer Marek
3. Doctor of Musicology Izydor Freiheiter
4. Docent Henryk Günsberg
5. Docent Artur Hermelin
6. Assistant Jakub Mund.

In 1939, Vasył Barvinsky was appointed to direct the State Music Conservatory, or as it was renamed later – the Mikola Lysenko National Music Academy; the musicians on his list were his colleagues at the academy, in 1939-1941, as well as before 1939 - in different music conservatories in Lwów.

*** Gazeta Lwowska 1941

Very ironically, one of the more comprehensive lists of names of Jewish musicians in interwar Lwów is included in a most surrealistic rhymed text – I wouldn't call it a poem - which appeared in 1941 in "Gazeta Lwowska" – one of the stages for the Nazi propaganda.

