



Do widzenia...

Zajęci różnymi sprawami, mamy nadzieję, że jeszcze jest dużo czasu w życiu. Że zdążymy spotkać się z bliskimi, z przyjaciółmi, że jeszcze nie raz porozmawiamy, powiemy sobie o ważnych sprawach. Ale śmierć bywa niekiedy szybsza od naszych planów. A kiedy przytrafia się tuż obok, w jej obliczu każde słowo jest zbyt małe. Była z nami i oto ją pożegnaliśmy – Barbara Bąk. Była częścią polonijnej społeczności i zawsze nią pozostanie, bo jak pisze Ks. Twardowski: „...można odejść na zawsze by stale być blisko”. Odchodzimy, ale i zostajemy we wspomnieniach innych, w tym co z siebie daliśmy, co budowaliśmy, jak inni przy nas się czuli. Barbara Bąk – uśmiechnięta, pogodna, spokojna, wrażliwa, sprawiała, że każdy kto odwiedzał Centrum Kultury czuł się ugostzony i zaopiekowany. Dla każdego miała dobre słowo i czuły uśmiech. I taka z nami pozostanie we wspomnieniach. Pożegnaliśmy znowu kogoś, kto był dla Centrum swoistego rodzaju wizytówką.

Żeby jeszcze bliżej zobrazować postać Barbary Bąk, podpieram się piękną homilią Ks. Jerzego Kusego, który osobiście dobrze znał Panią Basię i w ciepłych słowach podczas mszy pogrzebowej tak namalował jej portret:

„Nie ma jej już z nami, odeszła Basia, nie Barbara, ale Basia; pomimo swojego długiego życia pozostanie już na zawsze Basią, nie dlatego, że była dziecinna, ale dlatego, że miała duszę, charakter dziewczynki Basi, która jest otwarta na drugiego człowieka, która obdarza bliźniego dziecięcym zaufaniem, która ma otwarte serce dla każdego; nasza Basia. (...)”

Gdy odchodzi od nas ktoś bliski; dotyka nas ból, tęsknota; trudno wyrazić słowami uczucia,



smutku, żalu – ludzkie uczucia – bo nie ma już tu z nami Barbary Bąk - tej, która miała ważne miejsce w naszym życiu. Już brakuje żony, mamy, babci, kuzynki, przyjaciółki, bliskiego i serdecznego człowieka; to tak po ludzku... (...) Wszystko jest w ręku Boga, I na wszystko jest właściwy czas, był czas na jej chorobę i nadszedł czas na jej odejście od nas. (...) I Bogu niech będą dzięki za to, że nie od nas zależą narodziny i tajemnicą jest godzina naszej śmierci. (...) Ale od nas zależy nasze życie i to co z nim uczynimy, czym wypełnimy tę przestrzeń pomiędzy narodzinami a śmiercią. (...) Basia starała się żyć życiem Bożym. (...) Zostawiła dobry przykład godnego, chrześcijańskiego życia. Jest już po tamtej, lepszej stronie. (...) Wieczny odpoczynek ...”

W kontekście ostatniego pożegnania Barbary Bąk, rozmyślając o przemijaniu, starzeniu się, odchodzeniu, wygrzebałam niesamowitą modlitwę św. Tomasza z Akwinu, filozofa i teologa, którego olśnienia są ponadczasowe. Jego

myśli i rozważania zawsze uświadamiają mi, że natura ludzka pozostaje taka sama, tylko świat się zmienia i telefony komórkowe zastąpiły gazety, energia elektryczna zastąpiła ogniska w jaskiniach, a człowiek jak i wtedy, tak i teraz boryka się ze swoją przekorną naturą i ciągle pomimo przemijania pokoleń poszukuje odpowiedzi na najtrudniejsze pytania i próbuje oswoić się ze starzeniem a w efekcie, ze śmiercią... Ta modlitwa, umieszczona w Tuluzie na grobie św. Tomasza z Akwinu, może być doskonałą wskazówką dla nas, ludzi XXI wieku, którzy tak często uważamy, że jesteśmy nieomylni i na wszystkim znamy się najlepiej. Jednocześnie jest przejawem pokory wobec własnych słabości i doskonale wpisuje się we wspomnienia o Pani Barbarze. Z jakiegoś powodu kojarzy mi się z jej postacią tak bardzo, że aż postanawiam ją na koniec wykorzystać, życząc nam wszystkim pogodnej, zadumanej, spokojnej, bezpiecznej, pokornej, jak najdłuższej i jak najzdrowszej starości:

„Panie, Ty wiesz lepiej, aniżeli ja sam, że się starzeję i pewnego dnia będę stary.

Zachowaj mnie od zgubnego nawyku mniemania, że muszę coś powiedzieć na każdy temat i przy każdej okazji.

Odbierz mi chęć prostowania każdemu jego ścieżek.

Uczyni mnie poważnym, lecz nie ponurym; czynnym lecz nie narzucającym się.

Szkoda mi nie spożytkować wielkich zasobów mądrości, jakie posiadam, ale Ty Panie wiesz, że chciałbym zachować do końca paru przyjaciół.

Wyzwól mój umysł od nie kończącego się brnięcia w szczegóły i daj mi skrzydeł, bym w lot przechodził do rzeczy.

Zamknij mi usta w przedmiocie mych niedomagań i cierpień w miarę jak ich przybywa a chęć wyliczania ich staje się z upływem lat coraz słodsza.

Nie proszę o łaskę rozkoszowania się opowieściami o cudzych cierpieniach, ale daj mi cierpliwość wysłuchania ich.

Nie śmiem Cię prosić o lepszą pamięć, ale proszę Cię o większą pokorę i mniej niezachwianą

pewność, gdy moje wspomnienia wydają się sprzeczne z cudzymi.

Użycz mi chwalebного poczucia, że czasami mogę się mylić.

Zachowaj mnie miłym dla ludzi, choć z niektórymi z nich doprawdy trudno wytrzymać.

Nie chcę być świętym, ale zgryźliwi starcy; to jeden ze szczytów osiągnięć szatana.

Daj mi zdolność dostrzegania dobrych rzeczy w nieoczekiwanych miejscach i niespodziewanych zalet w ludziach; daj mi Panie łaskę mówienia im o tym.”

Niech pożegnanie Pani Basi nie przygnębia nas, ale niech skłania do refleksji, może nawet buntu w stosunku do tego co nieuchronne, niech nam uświadomi, że czas tak szybko mija, że... trzeba odpuścić. Pożegnać stare. Pozwolić odejść temu, co przeszłe. Nie trzymać się kurczowo, jak tonący brzytwy. To, co uchylone – pozamykać. Zatrzasnąć przed nosem, żeby nie wracało. Nie uwierało, nie kaleczyło, nie smuciło. Trzeba wybaczyć. Sobie. I dla siebie. Dla świętego spokoju i dla spokojnych snów. I ruszyć z miejsca. W nieznanne. Po kolejne doświadczenia, emocje. Po nowe uśmiechy, serca, dłonie. I brać garściami jak swoje. Trzeba żyć. Teraz. Natychmiast. Dziś. By do diabła nie żałować. Bo czas gna. Depcze nam po piętach. Czas się nie wlecze, on ucieka. Wykrusza się. Taki chytry drań.

Agata Wojno

Goodbye...

Busy with various things, we hope there is still a lot of time ahead in our life. We hope we will have time to meet our relatives and friends, that we will have a chance to talk more than once, and be able to tell each other things of importance. But sometimes death is faster than our plans. And when it happens right there, each word is too small in Her face. She was with us and we said goodbye to her - Barbara Bąk. She was part of the Polish community and will always be part of it, because, as Fr. Twardowski wrote: "... you can leave forever to be close at all times." We leave, but also remain in the memories of others, in what we gave of ourselves, in



what we built, in how others felt with us. Barbara Bąk - smiling, cheerful, calm, sensitive, made everyone who visited the Cultural Center feel welcomed and cared for. She had a kind word and a tender smile for everyone. This will remain with us in our memories. We said goodbye to someone who was a kind of showcase for the Center.

In order to describe who was Barbara Bąk even more closely, I shall use a beautiful homily by Fr. Jerzy Kusy, who knew Mrs. Basia well and painted her portrait in kind words during the funeral service:

“She is no longer with us, Basia is gone, not Barbara, but Basia; despite her long life, she will remain Basia forever, not because she was childish, but because she had a soul, the character of a girl Basia, who is open to other people, who gives childlike trust to her neighbor, who has an open heart for everyone; our Basia. (...)

When someone close to us leaves us we are touched by pain and longing; it is difficult to express in words feelings, sadness, regret - human feelings - because Barbara Bąk is no longer with us - the one who had an important place in our lives. There is no longer a wife, mother, grandmother, cousin, friend, a close and affectionate person; it's so human ... (...) Everything is in God's hand, and everything is at the right time. There was time for her illness and it was time for her to leave us. (...) And thank God for the fact that our birth does not depend on us, and the hour of our death is a mystery. (...) But our life depends on us and what

we do with it, how we fill this space between birth and death. (...) Basia tried to live God's life. (...) She left a good example of a dignified, Christian life. She is already on the other, better side. (...) Eternal rest to her... ”

Let Basia's farewell not depress us, but let us reflect, maybe even rebel against what is inevitable, let us realize that time is passing so quickly that ... we have to let go. Say goodbye to the old ones. Let go of the past. Don't cling to a sinking razor. What is ajar - close it. Slam it in front of your nose to keep it from coming back. I have to forgive what made me sad and hurt. Myself. And for myself. For peace and quiet and peaceful dreams. And move on. Into the unknown. For more experiences, emotions. For new smiles, hearts and hands. And take handfuls as yours. You have to live. Now. Immediately. Today. With no regrets, for time is on our heels, prodding on. Time doesn't drag, it runs away crumbling like a sneaky bastard.

Agata Wojno



*Karolina Rostafiński Merk**UNESCO World Heritage Sites
in Poland*

Whenever I travel abroad, I research the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in a given country. Did you know that Poland has 17 sites inscribed on the World Heritage list? UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) World Heritage Sites are selected by virtue of their influence or significance in a global context. The organization designates both cultural and natural sites. Poland has 15 cultural sites and two natural sites. By comparison, Italy has the highest number of UNESCO World Heritage sites with a total of 58, whereas the US has only 24.

Some of the sites in Poland are top tourist destinations; others are more obscure and “off the beaten track.” Amongst the most visited places is *Wieliczka* Salt Mine, in use since the 13th century. Others include the Historic Old Towns of *Kraków*, chartered in 1257, and *Warszawa*, perfectly reconstructed after being 85% destroyed by the Nazis in WWII. Additional popular sites are *Malbork* Castle, a 13th century castle built by Teutonic Knights, and the glorious port city of *Gdańsk*. By contrast, Nazi concentration and extermination camp, Auschwitz-Birkenau, is an insidious place on the list. Its historical relevance, however, is undeniable.

Two other noteworthy cities designated by UNESCO are the Old City of *Zamość* and the Medieval Town of *Toruń*. *Zamość* was founded in the 16th century and is a perfect example of a late-Renaissance town. *Toruń*, established in the mid-13th century, includes the home of mathematician and astronomer *Mikołaj Kopernik*.

The majority of Poland’s UNESCO World Heritage Sites are religious in nature. The Church of Peace in *Świdnica*, dating back to the mid 1600’s, is one of 3 Evangelical churches that were built by Lutherans in the Roman Catholic parts of Silesia. They were made of wood and clay and were prohibited from featuring a tower. In the Carpathian region, there are 16 Wooden *Tserkvas*, half of which are in Ukrainian territory. The 6 Wooden Churches of Southern *Małopolska* represent outstanding examples of medieval church-building. Sponsored by noble families, for whom these wooden churches were status symbols, they were constructed in the Gothic style and are richly decorated. *Kalwaria Zebrzydowska* is a

*Wrocław Centennial Hall*

Baroque-style religious complex and pilgrimage site established in 1600 and modeled on a 1584 map of Jerusalem.

An oddity amongst the Polish sites is Centennial Hall in *Wrocław*. An early Modernist building made of reinforced concrete, it had the largest concrete dome in the world at the time of its construction in 1911-1913. Designed by Max Berg, it was intended to serve as a multifunctional venue: an exhibition space, assembly hall and place to host sports events, concerts and theatrical performances.

Poland is a country of incredibly varied topography, landscapes and of biological diversity. *Bieszczady* National Park and *Białowieża* Forest are on the UNESCO list. Straddling the border of Poland and Belarus, *Białowieża* is one of the last, and the largest remaining part, of the immense primeval forest that once stretched across the European Plain. The area is home to the most numerous free-roaming population of European bison, as well as wolf, lynx and otter. The most recent addition to Poland’s World Heritage sites is *Bieszczady* National Park, an extension to the Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions in Europe, spanning 18 European countries.

I have not touched upon all the UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Poland. Those remain for you to discover!

*Wooden Tserkva**Zamość*



Agata Wojno

Translated by *Julian Boryczewski*

The Blue Dress

The beautiful shimmering blue dress would not be worn for reasons for which it was bought, a birthday party or a company function. My girlfriend groaned that she lacked the motivation to wear glittering high fashion and heels, besides, they should not overdress anyway since it's inappropriate for the celebrant to be too chic. As usual, she found the company's events intimidating, where she would be the talk of, for the winter weight gain. But not to worry, with a little exercise, the weight will come off in spring, and she will go dancing wearing that dress—for sure she thought — but that wasn't meant to be even if the weight was lost.

That dress on that hanger in that closet in that room in that apartment in that city in that country where she lived is no longer. Television showed her building after bombardment, shredded drapes hanging out the busted windows, her unit now a gaping black hole. Looking at the imagery and regretting that the opportunity to wear that dress is now gone.

Quickly collecting some nearby items into a bag and holding the children under her arms she ran out of the building as she was. Her husband has already been gone to defend the country. They tried keeping calm through the parting farewell, while swallowing tears and communicating in a military jargon as not to alarm the children. She loves him more than life as he loves and adores her wearing all the dresses from the wardrobe that's no longer exists. She envisioned their whole life together, he considered the moral dilemma of fighting for freedom or protecting the family. He did as agreed, as it should be, as others did. The country needs him. What about her?

She ran out without him, as military planes roared above, with her ears amplifying the brain shattering fear. People were shouting and crying, with the rubble of their ruined lives falling on their heads. Where to go, what to do? Forging ahead to get away from the sky on fire, away from the beloved city in flames, past her favorite bakery and pastry shop where she loved to meet him for a small sweet treat with aromatic coffee, then complain that

her clothes were getting too tight, recalling a moment from her then quiet ordinary life. She ran past her disliked neighbors and their dog, with which her dog played happily when they met on a walk. She did not have the strength to cry for them, her heart breaking into thousand pieces over dog's suffering and her shattered life, screaming silently — I don't want to run away anywhere!

She did not comprehend how she was able to race through half of the town with two children under the arms and a small dog. He had trouble keeping up and there were moments when she considered leaving him behind. Someone shouted "To the train station!" another "To the shelter!" She kept moving forward, children kept crying and the dog whimpered, probably more frightened than they, she could not leave him... Where? People were screaming, falling down and being trampled, forging ahead, as hard as they could. First day was spent in the subway in a mass of humanity, anxious, hungry and sleepless. Siren warnings sounded every 20 min, the ground was shaking, with the children distressed and the dogs howling. How is it possible that they were not hit so far. She was sure that eventually it will happen and they will be buried under the rubble of life. When the warnings stopped, she resumed running, feeling like a participant in an endless marathon without training. Four days in this struggle passed in the winter weather, on a train, a bus, a car. Dirty, hungry, stressed and tired, without a chunk of bread for them or food for the dog, much less "luxuries" like a pillow or a tooth brush. She tore her children from the secure life of private schools, ballet lessons, soccer training camps and vacations abroad, to wonder on the train stations floors and sleep standing up in the train cars. Someone pressed a blanket into her hand, someone else gave her a roll and a bottle of water, a plush toy for the little one and a pair of colorful socks. Like a beggar, she accepted it all. Now, wearing baggy clothes, resting on a folding bed in the company of hundreds of other women and small children. Spitting out every thought, feeling like all her tears were spent, but no, they are still burning under her eyes and flooding her soul. She is overjoyed with the decision to take the dog, her pupil. Memory of the moment she received that puppy from her husband were flooding back.

She can't imagine how she could live with knowledge of leaving him behind were the bombs were falling. That little dog gives her a spark of relief, wiping her tears with faithful gentleness. In his company she is free to cry, something she can't do in the children's presence, in fear of adding to their trauma. She does not know how to start anew, in a foreign country without knowing the language, without family or acquaintances, husband, roof over her head, means of support, hope and strength, plans and dreams.

And at a moment like this come regrets. Regret that she will never wear again that blue satin dress, which remains in a better world and a different time, when in a moment of naïveté, people believed in peaceful conflict resolution, when the definition of war meant soldiers fighting soldiers, not shooting children or bombing maternity hospitals.

That blue dress time meant having plans and dreams and waking up to concerns regarding the weather, or who is taking the dog for a walk [she or her husband], or will the blintzes be filled with cheese or jam. During that time, a large pile of shoes was an emblem from the painful history never to be repeated. Those shoes were a lesson. Behind the glass in the museum you could imagine the terrifying human drama that had no right to happen again, or did it?

That an individual, an unprovoked madman, cold-bloodedly orders an attack on innocent people under the pretext of lies and fanaticism, in the plain view of most of the world, except his own nation, unfortunately says no. It is ongoing now in the middle of Europe. Packed trains carrying emaciated women with their children and pets, frightened and robbed of their dignity but hoping to arrive where bombs and missiles are not falling from the sky.

[P.S. Now is the time to wear all of your dresses... open your closet with thankfulness, select the fanciest one waiting for that special occasion, then huddle in your — not having to go to war — husband's arms. Consider yourself lucky, here and now, with the wardrobe of silly dresses.]



Stanisław Kwiatkowski

NIENAWIDZĘ WOJNY

Nienawidzę wojny dlatego, że urodziłem się w czasie II wojny światowej. Samej wojny nie pamiętam, ale żyła w nas poprzez opowiadania rodziców, poprzez to, co widzieliśmy dookoła, nasze zabawy i sny. Mama opowiadała mi o swoim ukochanym najmłodszym bracie, który zginął podczas forsowania Odry w 1945 roku. Opowiadała też o tym, jak ją wcześniej, „za Niemca”, aresztowało gestapo za sprawy, z którymi nie miała do czynienia. Takie oskarżenie mogło się skończyć tylko postawieniem pod ścianą albo wywózką do obozu koncentracyjnego. Mówiła, że płakała i modliła się całą noc. Nie dlatego, że bała się o siebie, modliła się o to, żebym ja, niespełna roczny i mój starszy o dwa lata brat nie zostali bez matki. Wypuścili ją rano. Miała szczęście. Przeżyła.

Tata opowiadał nam o swoim bracie, który zginął na Wale Pomorskim na wiosnę czterdziestego piątego roku. Grób jego bracia odnaleźli dopiero w latach siedemdziesiątych. Ojciec opowiadał mi też, jak pewnego dnia obserwował ze strychu naszego domu niemieckie samochody osobowe i ciężarówki zajeżdżające pod pobliski las. Wysiedli z nich oficerowie i żołnierze z automatami przewieszonymi przez piersi i otoczyli kawałek pola pod samym lasem wielkości około 100 na 50 metrów. Z pozostałych ciężarówek zaczęli wyskakiwać mężczyźni w cywilnych ubraniach. Pobrali zwalone na kupę łopaty i kilofy i zaczęli kopać długi i szeroki rów. Po wielu godzinach skończyli. Byli to Żydzi z miejscowego Getta. Później Niemcy dowieźli pozostałych, czyli już razem, kobiety, dzieci, starców i resztę mężczyzn. Po dwudziestu latach od tamtego wydarzenia widziałem zdjęcia z powojennej ekshumacji. Wyglądały podobnie do tych z Katynia.

Moja pamięć potrafi odtwarzać wydarzenia tylko z lat zaraz powojennych. Pamiętam gruzy i wypalone domy, nasze ulubione miejsca wypraw i zabaw, pełne tajemniczych miejsc do schowania się przed dorosłymi, a także znajdowania i chowania różnych, wartościowych dla nas przedmiotów wydobywanych z gruzów. Pamiętam stare miasto nad

kanalem ze zwałami cegieł, kawałami ścian i gdzieś tam sterczącymi fragmentami murów. Niemal w środku tego rumowiska stał kościół, do którego chodziliśmy na niedzielne nabożeństwa. Była to wielka katedra zbudowana w trzynastym wieku. Po wejściu do wnętrza z przyciemnionej kruchty zalewało nas światło. Świątynia nie miała ani stropu, ani dachu.

Pamiętam kolegę, który w wieku siedmiu lat potrafił kilkoma pociągnięciami ołówka wyczarowywać na papierze różne obrazki. Znalazł kiedyś zardzewiały już karabin. Cyngiel ani zamek nie działały. Złapał karabin lewą ręką gdzieś w połowie, a prawą ręką za lufę, przykrywając jej wylot i zaczął uderzać o kamień. Karabin wystrzelił. Prawą dłoń miał potem bardzo zniekształconą. Później wyjechał z rodziną i nie wiem, czy był w stanie trzymać ołówek i operować nim precyzyjnie. Drugi kolega znalazł kiedyś pocisk moździerzowy, taki mały. Rzucił nim i chował się do rowu. Chciał, żeby wybuchł. Rzucił, chyba ze trzy razy. Pocisk nie wybuchł. Podniósł go jeszcze raz, popatrzył na zardzewiały kawałek metalu i odrzucił z pogardą. Pocisk wybuchł. Miał później bliznę na głowie po odłamku, który przeorał mu czaszkę. Drugą bliznę miał na boku po usuniętej nerce. Przeżył. Mój bliski przyjaciel nie miał matki. Zginęła w czasie wojny. Mieszkał z ojcem, który zostawiał go w domu, gdy wychodził do pracy. W wieku sześciu lat potrafił zrobić sobie coś do zjedzenia i posprzątać po sobie. To z nim zacząłem palić pierwsze papierosy.

Tych wspomnień jest więcej, ale nie jest to miejsce na opisywanie tego. Chciałbym tylko uzasadnić Państwu, dlaczego nienawidzę wojny i z tego też powodu nienawidzę tego satrapę siedzącego na Kremlu, tego psychopaty, któremu zachciało się odtworzyć imperium i zostać nowym imperatorem. Nieważne, że destabilizuje ekonomię i układ polityczny na świecie; nieważne, że Europa buduje swój dobrobyt bez poważniejszej wojny przez ponad 75 lat, pierwszy raz w historii. Nieważne, że niszczy kraj, który z trudem budował swoją przyszłość po wielu latach panowania innej satrapii. Nieważne, że ginie dziesiątki tysięcy

ludzi, w tym dzieci i ich matki, ojcowie i starsze pokolenia. Nieważne, że większość mieszkańców w jego kraju żyje w nędzy, bo satrapa musi mieć środki na budowanie swojego imperium. Nieważne, że świat otacza ten kraj murem niechęci i braku zaufania, co na pewno spowoduje wzrost nędzy i pogłębi zapaść cywilizacyjną. Dla niego nic nie znaczy to, że z powodu nieurodzaju i blokowania przez niego eksportu ukraińskiego zboża milionom ludzi na świecie grozi głód.

Temu bydlakowi z Kremla nie pomoże nawet błogosławieństwo patriarchy kościoła moskiewskiego, a w historii znajdzie się w zaszczytnym towarzystwie Hitlera, Stalina i podobnych.

Jestem dumny z mojego Narodu polskiego, że w godzinach próby dla ukraińskich sąsiadów wykazał się empatią, solidarnością i humanizmem aż w takim stopniu.

Świata nie buduje się na bombach atomowych i raketach. Świat buduje się na fundamentach pokoju i dobrobytu.

Ja naprawdę nienawidzę wojen.





Kathleen Maciuszko

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Note: We have copies of all titles, regardless of what the status shows.

Here are a few tips for a more productive search result:

- Start with a keyword search then try subject, author, title
- Be flexible when searching as another approach may be better
- For a subject search for materials on World War II you have to use this format: World War, 1939-1945 (same is true for World War I, add the dates)
- If you use Poland or Polish as the first word in a subject search, it will result in too many hits
- Sometimes inversions work best - for example, if looking for Polish narratives use Narratives, Polish
- Diacritics are not searchable and therefore are not needed; capitalization is not necessary
- Some subject searches use the Polish spelling: Ex. If searching for information on the Solidarity movement, search under Solidarnosc

Yes, There Are Other Polish Composers Besides Chopin!

By **Barbara Betlejewska**, West Salem, Ohio

Until I became interested in my Polish heritage, I could not name a single Polish composer other than Chopin, Paderewski, and Penderecki. Then through the website *culture.pl*, I've discovered quite a few others, including women. What a surprise! One of these is Tekla Bądarzewska-Baranowska (1829-1861), a Polish pianist and composer well known in her time for her most famous composition, *La Prière d'une Vierge*, in Polish *Modlitwa dziewicy*, and in English, “A Maiden’s Prayer.” Surprisingly little is known today about Tekla Bądarzewska-Baranowska (Ban-dah-zhef-skah-Bah-rahn-off-skah). She was born in 1829 in Mława, a town in the Russian partition about 140 km north of Warsaw into an upper middle class family. Her father was a police commissioner with enough money to spend on music lessons for a mere girl. At this time, my own family, living near the mountains of southern Poland under the Austrians, was barely finding sufficient food to eat. Tekla was educated at home, which included piano lessons as well as the French language, and she used French to name her works. I can understand why, since French has an almost irresistible cachet to it. *C'est vraiment une très belle langue*. Like Tekla, I fell under its spell, spending a year in Paris working as an *au pair* and attending the Sorbonne, and I speak French fairly well. Now I'm struggling to learn Polish, studying about 5-10 minutes a day. But even with 5 minutes a day, one makes some progress.....

Tekla was found to have exceptional musical abilities when quite young. She began to not only play the piano, but also to compose. Her first composition was created in 1843, when she was only 14 years old! *A Maiden's Prayer*, published in 1856, gained enormous popularity all over the world. The work has had 80 foreign editions, including in France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, even Australia. Music critics often panned her work, pointing out that the melody was very simple, even sentimental kitsch. In my opinion, they were wrong.

At age 18, Tekla married Jan Baranowski, (meaning someone from Baranów, from Polish “baran,” ram), a captain in the then-Russian army. Poland, at the time, was partitioned into German, Austrian and Russian sections. The Baranowskis eventually had five children. Tekla continued to compose during this time, amazing for a woman living in a country under siege, raising 5 kids, and with an often absentee husband frequently away on Army duties who might never even come back home. That’s a lot of stress. Under those difficult circumstances, I’d compose “sentimental kitsch” myself, and so would the music critics! Anything light and lovely is good escapism from the daily grind of pain and trauma. Bądarzewska died on September 29, 1861 at the age of 32. Her actual cause of death is unknown, but women died young with great frequency in that era of a multitude of causes, often related to childbirth. She was buried in Powązki Cemetery in Warsaw, and her gravestone poetically features a young woman holding a sheet of music entitled *La prière d'une vierge*. Bądarzewska composed about 35 small compositions for the piano, among them “Sweet Dreams” and “Hope.” Think of the musical treasures she tragically took with her to the grave, leaving a widower with 5 small children motherless behind her....



Tekla Bądarzewska-Baranowska

La prière d'une vierge is a short piano piece for intermediate pianists. Some have enjoyed it for its charming and romantic melody, and others have described it as "sentimental salon tosh." One critic described it as a "dowdy product of ineptitude." Another

said it was “tasteless, sentimental, and dull.” Methinks the critics were a bit jealous... a woman outcomposing them! After I watched Paul Ji, age 15, play an amazing version on U-tube (you must watch this!), I decided to try it myself. Even though my family were very modest farmers, my father managed to buy me a piano when I was ten years old. I still dabble at it lo these many years later. Well, the original version was entirely too difficult for me, so I simplified it! Any hard notes I find, I just omit them or substitute easier ones. Miranda Wong also devised an even simpler version called “A Romantic Maiden’s Prayer.” Tekla liked gliding notes and trills and following her example, I glide some extra notes or insert a trill during my very slow page-turnings to avoid disruptive silences. And I am proud to say that I have managed to play a passable, simplified version, practicing about 15 minutes a day. I find it an incredibly beautiful piece of music, equivalent to “Für Elise” by Beethoven, which I also simplify when I play. Why not?! It doesn’t change the beauty of the music. If you play any instrument even a tiny bit, give simplifying a try. Country musician Bob Wills created his own version of this piece in the western swing style in 1935, and later he recorded several more different ones. Bądarzewska also composed a second companion piece, *La seconde prière d'une vierge*, which I hope to tackle later on.

The great popularity of Bądarzewska-Baranowska's works in the 19th century faded in the 20th century. Interestingly, she is now better known outside of Poland than in her home country. And unexpectedly, the renaissance of interest in her work took place in the 21st century in... Japan! In 2007, a CD with her songs titled "Fulfilled Virgin Prayer" was released in that country, and gained considerable popularity in the Land of the Rising Sun. Tekla Bądarzewska-Baranowska was honored by naming a crater on the planet Venus after her. Thus, she is one of the four Polish women who are patrons of the Venusian craters, including Zofia Nałkowska (1884-1954) author, Wanda Landowska (1879-1959) harpsichordist/pianist and Zofia Oleśnicka (1546-1567) first female Polish poet. In the meantime, I’m going to stop writing now and go play this beautiful piece on the piano. Tekla, you go, girl!

Social and Cultural Events at the Center & Slavic Village

Sat. July 16, 12 - 9 PM	Polish Picnic at the Center (6501 Lansing Ave. Cleveland)
Sun. September 11, 11 AM - 1:30 PM	Sunday Lunch at the Center starts after summer brake
Sat. September 17, 2 - 8 PM	Polish Harvest Celebration at the Center
Friday, September 23, 5 - 8 PM	Slavic Village Annual Fundraiser
Friday, October 7, 7 - 9 PM	Performance by a Vocal and Dance Group - Slask The Breen Center, Saint Ignatius High School, Cleveland
Sat. November 5, 6 PM	Reverse Raffle at the Center
Sun. December 11, 12 - 3 PM	Wigilia at the Center



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