Michal Spisak – Symphonie Concertante-Concerto Giocoso-Concerto for Two Pianos

Symphonie concertante No 2 (1956) *1. Grave 2. Allegro 3. Lento 4. Allegro* WOSPR Katowice Andrzej Straszyński – conductor Concerto giocoso (1957)
5. Allegro 6. Lento quasi ostinato 7. Scherzo 8. Andante. Allegro
WOSPR Katowice Andrzej Borejko - conductor Concerto for Two Pianos (1942)
9. Allegro 10. Quatro variation 11. Fuga dopio. Allegro moderato
Jerzy Godziszewski, Alicja Mikusek – piano

Michal Spisak was born on 14 September 1914 in Dabrowa Gornicza, Poland. The young composer's childhood, fraught with health problems, was far from happy. As a child, Michał Spisak suffered from polio, which made him seriously disabled for life. During his difficult childhood, first signs of exceptional musical talent become apparent.

Michal took his first violin lessons in his home town; after some time his mother sent him to their family in Warsaw, where he could start his 'professional' education in M. Karlowicz Musical School. There was, however, another reason for moving to Warsaw: his father had a serious drinking problem. Michał's mother simply wanted to save her son from growing up in such a difficult environment.

Little is known about the boy's formative years, but his fascination with music must have been sufficient to enrol in a musical college. So, as a 16-year old he returned to his home land and in 1930 he was admitted to the Musical Conservatoire in Katowice, majoring in composition and violin. During his studies, Michal Spisak earned the reputation of an exceptionally gifted violinist (his disability did not prevent him from performing such challenging pieces as Karol Szymanowski's Myths) and a very promising composer of extraordinary creativity. As an

ambitious and able student, he was not particularly satisfied with Aleksander Brachocki's composition classes, so he made a risky decision to attend private lessons taught by Kazimierz Sikorski, which might have been seen as a sign of disloyalty. In 1936-37 Spisak made regular trips to Warsaw to meet professor Sikorski, who he saw as the 'real' composition tutor throughout his studies. Having graduated from the Conservatoire, obviously with first-class honours and a distinction, Spisak was awarded a Silesian Musical Society scholarship to a composition course in Paris. This event had greatly influenced his entire life – leaving Poland in 1937, Spisak probably did not realise that France would become his second homeland, a country in which he would spend the rest of his life.

In the Paris Conservatoire, Spisak started education under the tutelage of a renowned teacher Nadia Boulanger, whose classroom witnessed entire generations of Polish composers. She greatly appreciated his talent and inspired his eager passion for the art of Igor Stravinsky. Meetings with Nadia Boulanger as well as his stay in the cultural capital of Europe had a considerable impact on his artistic development. Spisak was a prolific composer and started honing his unique style. In 1939, after the outbreak of World War II, Spisak moved to Voiron, a small town in southern France. Despite uneasy political climate and disturbing news coming from Poland, it was one of the most creative periods in the life of the composer. Before the war Spisak had joined the Society of Young Polish Musicians in Paris to become its chairman in 1939. Apparently, the idea of socializing with Polish musicians was very close to him until the end of his life. After the war he became involved in publicising Polish music in France, organising concerts, participating in discussions on problems faced by Polish music culture, last but not least – by making his door open to his compatriots and offering them help in almost every respect. Spisak kept in touch with people in Poland: in 1947 he became a member of ZKP (Polish Composers' Union), regularly exchanged letters with his friends, including Grazyna Bacewicz, Stefan Jarocinski, Eugenia Uminska, published his works with PWM Edition and, since 1956, was a frequent Warsaw Autumn-goer.

The 1950s brought fame and considerable international renown. His popularity was increased mainly by winning the Grand Prix at the Queen Elizabeth International Competition for Composers in Brussels in 1954 for Serenade for orchestra, a composition written back in 1939. Three years later at the same competition he won another first prize, this time for Concerto giocoso for chamber orchestra. Finally, in 1955 Spisak won the International Competition for the Official Olympic Anthem. His Anthem was chosen out of 392 scores and accompanied the opening ceremony of the 7th Winter Olympics in Cortina d'Amprezzo and at the 16th Olympics in Melbourne in 1956. Notwithstanding his many successes, Spisak's everyday life was dogged with health problems, which frequently rendered creative work impossible. In difficult moments he found a great deal of support in his wife Andree Thibault, a Frenchwoman he married in 1955. Additionally, despite growing recognition in Poland and Europe, the composer was facing financial problems. Growing health problems also proved a hindrance and had negative effect on his state of mind. In the early 1960s Spisak virtually stopped writing music. His presence at the Warsaw Autumn event in 1964 was his last-ditch effort. In the same year, he was also

awarded the annual prize of the Polish Composers' Union. He died in Paris several months later, on 28 January 1965.

Michal Spisak was one of the leading representatives of the neoclassical trend in Polish music. His compositions were published in Poland, but also in France, the UK and Austria. In recent years there is an increasing interest in his art. Two years ago – on the 40th anniversary of his death – a festival was held in Dabrowa Gornicza to commemorate the composer, and a year later – the 1st Michal Spisak Polish Music Competition. In 2007 the name was changed to Michal Spisak International Music Competition. ---spisak.euterpe.pl

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